# The Asbury Journal

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The Asbury Journal publishes scholarly essays and book reviews written from a Wesleyan perspective. The Journal’s authors and audience reflect the global reality of the Christian church, the holistic nature of Wesleyan thought, and the importance of both theory and practice in addressing the current issues of the day. Authors include Wesleyan scholars, scholars of Wesleyanism/Methodism, and scholars writing on issues of theological and theological education importance.

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From the Editor

I write the introduction to this issue of The Asbury Journal in the middle of a global pandemic, the likes of which has not been experienced by most of those alive today. Classes at Asbury Theological Seminary have shifted online, people are under stay-at-home orders, and churches have been unable to meet for over a month. How do we as the Church respond to such a situation? With churches closed during Easter, we had to think about what it meant to be part of the Body of the resurrected Christ in isolation from each other. It was an odd time, and even though we may be beginning to emerge from it, we can expect the ramifications of this time to reverberate through academia within the Church for the next few years at least. This makes it a perfect time to also look back at history and sideways across cultures to gain some perspective about different issues the Church has faced in the past.

Winfield Bevins sets the stage for this volume by raising the reality of church planting accomplished in England during the height of the Victorian era. We don’t often think of that period as a time of rapid church growth in the period of industrialization and rising poverty, but it was. Philip Hardt brings before us the challenges of Methodism at its height in New York City, as it set out to dominate the issue of Catholic schools and the teaching of the Bible in the city, while Samuel Rogal goes back even further to the personal challenges Methodism’s founder John Wesley faced in his own tumultuous marriage. Kim Okesson reveals the passion well-known mystery writer Dorothy Sayers brought as a woman and Christian theologian who sought to bring Christ to the masses through her unique insights into communication. Robert Danielson uncovers the challenges faced by a holiness missionary couple in India, who faced a famine and totally changed the way they understood their mission.

As we move from the history of the Church in the West to a more global perspective on cultural crises, Dwight Mutonono examines the cultural challenge of Christians kneeling before leaders in Zimbabwe and Yohan Yong seeks to understand how a common phrase used in the Philippines can either create powerlessness among people, or be transformed to empower them. Finally, in the From the Archives essay, we explore the relationship between an Asbury administrator and academic and Iva Durham Vennard, one of the great holiness women educators, who has often been forgotten by history, but who struggled to raise others, especially
women, to reach the world for Christ. Without friends like John Haywood Paul, this might have been an impossible challenge in her day, but together they worked to overcome all kinds of educational barriers.

This issue should remind us that crisis and challenges are not new situations in the Church. Rather, every generation of Christians must direct their attention to new issues both cultural and physical. The Corona Virus epidemic is just one of another continuous stream of trials in a long history of difficulties. The Church will always face challenges, some external and some internal, some personal and some decidedly public, some rooted in our identity, gender, or culture, and some rooted in the unavoidable realities we must rise to face. The commonality is that through the love of God, the good news of Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit we can get through such trials. As the Apostle Paul wrote from prison, “…for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:11-13 ESV). As a people, our security is in the person of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, not in the situations or calamities that surround us. While everything around us may seem to be crumbling and falling apart, we have the ability to stand contented and without fear, knowing God is the one who holds the future. We can even face Covid-19 and be more than conquerors (Romans 8:37).

Robert Danielson Ph.D.
Victorian Church Planting: A Contemporary Inquiry into a Nineteenth Century Movement

Abstract:

When people think of Victorian England, church planting isn’t the first thing that comes to mind. However, there was a significant movement that swept across the country in the mid to late 19th century that resulted in the planting of thousands of new churches that was well documented. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that there was a church planting movement in England that helped transform the nation in the 19th century. It will examine the causes, characteristics, and trajectory of this movement, while offering a contemporary application of lessons for church planting today.

Keywords: Church planting, 19th century, England, Church of England, Victorian era

Winfield Bevins is the Director of Church Planting at Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY. He is the author of several books and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland.
A few years ago, Bishop Stephen Cottrell was having a conversation with a priest who was boasting about his churches 150th anniversary. Cottrell replied to him by saying, “So you’re running a church plant?” He goes onto to remind him that, “Every church was planted at some point. Every church owed its existence to the dedicated ministry of a particular group of Christians at a particular time who were seeking to respond to the needs and challenges of their day by establishing some new expression of Christian life.”

I had a similar realization on a recent visit to England while teaching on the topic of “church planting in the 21st century.” As I looked around London, where hundreds of church buildings were built in the early to mid 19th century, I began to think to myself, “Isn’t it ironic that I am teaching on church planting in the 21st century in historic church buildings that had been planted over a hundred years ago.” Surely, there is nothing new under the sun. While church planting may be receiving more publicity now than in years past, it is not a passing fad. As a result, I began to do my own personal research on church planting in 19th century in England and what I found was nothing short of inspiring.

Let’s be honest, when you hear or think of Victorian England, church planting isn’t the first thing that comes to mind. However, as we shall see there was a significant movement that swept across the country in the mid to late 19th century that resulted in the planting of thousands of new churches that was well documented. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that there was a church planting movement in England that helped transform the nation in the 19th century. It will examine the causes, characteristics, and trajectory of this movement, while offering a contemporary application of lessons for church planting today.

19th Century England

The 19th century, also referred to as the Victorian Era, ushered in an era of unprecedented prosperity to England as well as major cultural change and upheaval. There was vast population growth in major cities like London that was the result of migration from other countries and rising birth rates. There was also tremendous economic development that resulted from the Industrial Revolution. This contributed to increased poverty, pollution, and child labor in factories where children as young as six years
old worked hard hours for little or no pay. As towns and cities grew rapidly around factories, problems such as urban crime, poverty, alcohol abuse, prostitution, and high infant mortality increased. It is estimated that nearly 160 babies per 1000 under one-year-old would die each year in England. All of this led to a national concern about the spiritual and moral welfare of England and its future.

The Victorian church responded to the national changes by founding hundreds of religious organizations including church schools, mission, and welfare organizations. Church planting, or church-extension as it was commonly called, was but one solution that the Church of England used to address the growing changes and challenges of the 19th century context. Archbishops of Canterbury William Howley, Charles Longly and Archibald Tate were all supportive and actively involved in the work of church planting in the Church of England in the 1800s. In 1836, Charles James Blomfield, the Bishop of London, issued “Proposals for the creation of a fund to be applied to the building and endowment of additional churches in the metropolis,” making provision for new churches and schools to meet the needs of the rapidly increasing population of London with the goal of “expatiating over the whole metropolis by building fifty churches at once.”

Blomfield aimed to have a church for every 3,000 people and believed that once a church was built that it would have a larger impact on the surrounding community. By the time of his retirement in 1856, 200 new churches were built in the diocese.

On the national front, K. D. M. Snell’s social history of England offers a statistical analysis of the establishment of new ecclesiastical parishes in the nineteenth century. Between 1835 and 1896 there were nearly 7,500 new ecclesiastical parishes formed; with two boom years of 1844 (193 parishes) and 1866 (113 parishes). A fifth of all Anglican churches had been built after 1801. In the second half of the century, Snell estimates that at times during the season from 1835 to 1875 new churches were being completed at a staggering rate of one every four days. The number of Church of England churches and chapels increased from under 12,000 in 1831 to well over 17,000 in 1901, with a net increase of nearly 50% over 70 years. It is also important to take into consideration that alongside the construction of entirely new churches, there was extensive rebuilding, extension, and restoration of existing structures.

This wasn’t just a top down phenomenon, coming from bishops and the highest levels of leadership in the Church of England, but included
a grassroots movement of young emerging leaders. Along with the growing need for church planting, the national context of change and development produced young energetic clergy who were mission minded and open to the work of pioneering new churches not that different from modern day church planters. According to Francis Orr-Ewing,

A new breed of cleric built on the growing energy of nineteenth-century Britain, harnessed the spiritual vitality of an increasingly confident laity, and took advantage of the increasing flexibility within the structures of the Church of England. Together this led to an unprecedented time of commissioning and building new churches, establishing parishes and forming new ministries and mission organizations.

It is also important to note that churches didn’t just build themselves; it required massive amounts of money to be raised for building new churches. As early as 1818, Parliament voted to spend £1 million to help build new churches in areas of population growth, which resulted in a number of new churches in London that included All Souls’ Langham Place, Holy Trinity Marylebone Road, St Mary’s Bryanston Square, and Christ Church Cosway Street. According to Prof. John Wolffe’s calculations, the Victorian Church of England raised something between £3 and £5 billion comparable to 21st century standards just for building new churches, a striking achievement by any standards or time period.

Church planting during this time period was the result of important collaborations between the government, bishops, church planters, as well as donors and key lay people. It could be said “it takes a village to plant a church.” One example is Charles James Blomfield, the Bishop of London who we discussed earlier, who helped raise millions of pounds for church planting for churches to reach the growing masses in places like King’s Cross, Euston, Paddington, and Bethnal Green. Blomfield worked closely with the Prime Minister, Robert Peel, to raise funds for new churches. Peel passed an Act of Parliament by which over the next sixty years very large numbers of parishes were planted and churches built as the populations of the parishes increased including: 19 in Marylebone, 21 in Paddington, 28 in Kensington, 37 in Islington, 22 in Hackney, and 30 in St Pancras. This could only have been possible with deep collaborative relationships and Kingdom partnerships between clergy, lay people in church, and people in the marketplace working together for the sake of Christ.
Contemporary Lessons for Today

The previous section reveals phenomenal statistical growth related to church planting in Victorian England, which are significant by any measure or standards. This article is not about triumphalism of the past; the Victorian Church was not without its faults or errors. Many have criticized the Victorian church for issues related to colonization and the import of British imperialism. However, this is not the purpose of my paper. There are many sociological and cultural factors that contributed to this movement of church planting, so for the limited scope of this paper I will focus on the lessons that we can learn from this movement in history for the church today.12

We find ourselves in another major cultural transition that is no less significant than the industrial revolution. In the United States alone, there are around 180 million who have no connection to a local church, making it one of the fastest growing mission fields in the Western Hemisphere.13 It is estimated that 660,000 to 700,000 people leave the traditional church every year.14 In accordance with this trend, the Pew Research Center has noted that nearly one third of young adults now say they have no religious affiliation. This young-adult group is often called the “nones” because they are disavowing association with any organized form of religion, which makes them North America’s second largest religious group.15 In England, Church membership has declined from 10.6 million in 1930 to 5.5 Million in 2010; from about 30% to 11.2%. If current trends continue, membership is forecast to decline to 2.53 million (4.3% of the population) by 2025. The avowedly non-religious – sometimes known as the “nones” – now make up 48.6% of the British population.16 These are sobering statistics, indicating that massive cultural shifts are on the horizon for today’s church. What lessons and insights can we learn from the Victorian church planting movement for today’s church that is facing an increasingly global, multicultural, and secularized world?

Anglican’s Missionary Heritage

First, traditional churches can and do plant new churches. This case study of church planting in the 19th century reminds us that Anglicanism is an ancient faith tradition that has a rich missionary heritage. Rather than being anti-mission, there is something within the very DNA of the Anglican tradition – rooted in the sacraments – that prepares and
compels believers to join in the mission of God. It could be argued that the history of Anglicanism is the history of missions and that mission and church planting is at the very heart of our Anglican heritage. Many great missionary thought leaders have come out of the Anglican tradition, such as John Wesley, William Wilberforce, Henry Venn, Rolland Allen, and Leslie Newbigin, to name a few.

Anglicans can claim Celtic missionaries like Patrick (387–493), who brought the gospel to Ireland, baptized thousands of people, ordained hundreds of ministers, and helped plant hundreds of churches throughout the British Isles. Christianity continued to spread throughout the British Isles like wildfire under the gifted leadership of men such as Columba (521–597). Using their influence, Columba and other Christian leaders established monastic communities in Iona, as did Aidan in Lindisfarne. The churches and monasteries of this movement became some of the most influential missionary centers in all of Europe. Missionaries went out from Ireland to spread the gospel throughout the world. These Irish monasteries helped preserve the Christian faith during the dark ages.

Anglicans can claim a Benedictine monk named Augustine who was sent by Pope Gregory to evangelize the Anglo-Saxons. Due to his influence, many consider Augustine the “Apostle to the English.” He eventually arrived in Kent (the southeast corner of England) in 597 with a team of monks. Augustine became the first archbishop of Canterbury and established a center for Christianity in Britain. From that time onward, Canterbury became a hub for sending out missionary bishops across England and beyond.

Anglicanism constituted a missionary faith in the 17th and 18th centuries and expanded rapidly through mission organizations of the Church of England such as the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK, founded in 1698), the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG, founded in 1701), and the Church Missionary Society (CMS, founded in 1799). These Anglican mission organizations helped spread the gospel throughout the world and sowed the seeds for what is now the worldwide Anglican Communion.

Anglicans can claim the Wesleyan revival, which was an Anglican renewal movement that started in the Church of England and quickly grew into a worldwide missionary movement. Starting from only a handful of people, Methodism established hundreds of societies in England and the United States. By the time of John Wesley’s death in 1791, the Methodists
had become a global church movement with more than 70,000 members in England and more than 40,000 in the new United States and other mission stations around the world.18 Even though the Church of England could not contain it, the Wesleyan revival stands out as an Anglican renewal movement.19

Anglicans can claim the Anglo-Catholic revival of the 19th century that sought to recover the Catholic thought and practice of the Church of England. Centered at the University of Oxford, the proponents of the Oxford Movement believed that the Anglican Church was by history a truly “catholic” church. In time, the ideas of the Oxford movement spread throughout England and into other provinces planting dozens of new Anglo-Catholic expressions of church. The contributions of the Oxford movement can still be seen in Anglican churches around the world today in a variety of ways including: the use of liturgy and ritual in church worship, the central place of the Eucharist in worship, the use of vestments, the importance of ordained ministry, the establishment of Anglican monastic communities for men and for women, and a strong emphasis on the importance of educated clergy.

Finally, the extensive growth of the global Anglican Communion is a testament to the enduring missionary spirit of Anglicanism. Although it started in England, Anglicanism has become one of the world’s most multicultural and multiethnic churches. Philip Jenkins reminds us, “By 2050, the global total of Anglicans will be approaching 150 million, of whom only a tiny minority will be White Europeans.”20 Located on every continent, Anglicans speak many languages and hail from different races and cultures. Anglicanism has grown into a worldwide family of churches, which has more than 80 million followers in 161 countries making it the third largest body of Christians in the world. In fact, to be an Anglican is to be a part of a global missionary movement. For instance, there are now more Anglicans worshipping in Nigeria than in England, Canada, and the United States combined.21 The explosive growth of global Anglicanism has created many new realities that can only be understood through the lenses of mission and church planting.

Diversity of Styles of Church Planting

Secondly, the Victorian church planting movement was diverse and included both evangelical and Anglo-Catholic church plants. At first, these may seem like opposing extremes, but in many ways these different
streams are symbiotic and belong together. Former Archbishop Michael Ramsey once said, “For the Anglican Church is committed not to a vague position wherein the Evangelical and the Catholic views are alternatives, but to the scriptural faith wherein both elements are of one.” Both the evangelical and Anglo-Catholic streams of Anglicanism were spiritual renewal movements that gave birth to new churches.

Consider the following examples of 19th century church plants. Evangelical church planter Thomas Gaster, was a CMS missionary who served in India and then planted in All Saint Peckham, London in 1867. The church began with about 20 people meeting in the Gaster’s sitting room to over 600 adults in the congregation with a children’s service for 800 children on Sunday afternoons. An example of an Anglo-Catholic church planter was Richard Temple West who planted St. Mary Magdalene, Paddington in 1865. The first church service register from July 1866, shows three Sunday masses and a daily Mass, with 75-100 Sunday communicants, increasing to about 150 in 1867. From the start, West and his members reached out to the local community and eventually established a convalescent home for the poor in Weymouth Street, off Harrow Road. The church continued to grow under West’s leadership and by 1886 the congregation had grown to over 1,000. These are but two great examples of evangelical and Anglo-Catholic church plants in the 19th century.

The different streams of Anglicanism remind us that not everyone looks, acts, or thinks alike. Anglican churches come in all shapes and sizes and are very diverse; ranging from Anglo-Catholics who are more high church, employing a more ceremonial and expanded liturgy, to evangelical Anglicans who are typically more low church, employing fewer ceremonial practices. Regardless of worship styles and preferences, I believe both expressions are vital and can reach people whom the other cannot. We need both working together on mission. Archbishop Justin Welby recently said,

The real issue of the Christian faith, is not whether we worship in a traditional or radically different way but whether we worship God with commitment and passion that opens our lives to His power to change and renew us. Knowing Him is neither traditional or modern—but it is essential. Why does it have to be one or the other? They’re both doing immensely valuable work, and different people are encountering God in each service.
Victorian church planters responded by planting new churches that attempted to meet the pressing needs of their day in innovative new ways, which parallel the current Fresh Expressions movement in a number of ways. Many of the Victorian church plants started in homes, bars, schools, and engaged their local communities in fresh new ways. Many of the planters went into the highways and hedges to go where the church was not, or had not been, such as the slums of the East End of London. Stories abound of the slum priests who ministered to the poorest of the poor and those displaced in society. These were both evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics ministering among the urban poor and the places that needed them most. Many of them utilized nontraditional methods to reach people in their local context.

One story was Reverend Arthur Osborne Montgomery Jay (1858–1945) who had been selected by the bishop of London as Vicar of Holy Trinity, Shoreditch, in late 1886 to reach the outcasts of the Old Nichol district. This district was one of England’s worst slums. Nichol was described by one person as “a district of almost solid poverty and low life, in which the houses were as broken down and deplorable as their unfortunate inhabitants.” When Jay entered the parish there was no church building; instead services were held in the loft of a stable, which smelt of manure. Jay’s first service on New Year’s Eve only had 14 people. However, within ten years he had raised enough money to build a church, social club, lodging house, and gymnasium. Jay became controversial for two things: being a high-churchman and for having a boxing ring where many pugilists got their start. By the late 1880s, Jay and others had come to realize that one of the best ways to engage poor men was through boxing. To combat his critics, Jay once preached a sermon at Holy Trinity, called “May a Christian Box?” Some of the boxers who got their start in Jay’s gym were Jack the Bender, Lord Dunfunkus, Old Squash, Tommy Irishman, Scrapper, and Donkey. Jay’s story shows us that there is no place where the church cannot go to reach people for Christ.

Ancient Faith, Fresh Mission

Let me end this article with a question that is probably already in your mind. “Is spiritual renewal possible for traditional churches or mainline denominations that are stagnant or in decline?” The answer is yes. One of the most exciting examples that I know of renewal is happening, ironically within the Church of England, the very church that we have been
discussing. In the midst of rapid decline in national church attendance, there is a multiplication movement brewing in the Church of England that is bringing renewal to churches and communities across England. In 2015, the former Bishop of London, Richard Chartres, delivered a lecture entitled “New Fire in London” in which he talked about the growth within the Diocese of London through church planting. He shared the following commitment to mission, “We are pledged to establish 100 new worshipping communities in the Diocese in the next five years.” To help accomplish this vision, Ric Thorpe was consecrated as bishop of Islington with a special focus on church planting in London. Ric Thorpe oversees London’s church growth strategy to plant 100 churches in London by 2020 and 200 city-center church-plants around the country by 2030. Ric’s passion is to plant churches in London and across England. “I’m energized by spending time with people who feel God’s call to go somewhere else and do something new,” Ric said. “Just to spend time with them and to help them articulate the plans that God has for them and to work out what they need to do to go to the next level, and to help them think through what might be next on the horizon.”

Ironically, many of the churches that are being planted are in older church buildings that were originally planted in the Victorian era. One example of the churches that Ric helped plant is on the East End of London at St Peter’s Anglican Church in Bethnal Green, which sits just off Warner Place, between Old Bethnal Green and Hackney Road. The church spire stands tall amidst the surrounding housing. St Peter’s has been a place of worship since 1841 and was on the brink of closing its doors just a few years ago. Members cried out, “We don’t want St Peter’s to close after we’ve died.” In 2010, the Rev. Adam Atkinson was appointed to lead the church into a new season. Along with others, Adam helped restart the church with the mantra, “Honour the past, navigate change in the present, and build for the future.” He began not with change, but with prayer, conversations, and building new relationships. As a result, the old members began to become open to new ideas. In a few years, St Peter’s has grown from 20 to over a 100, being highlighted on BBC London News as a model of church renewal and community transformation.

St Peter’s Bethnal Green describes themselves as a “cross-tradition” Anglican church, so they worship God in many styles, encountering God through the scriptures, the sacraments, and the Spirit. “We’re designed to worship and it matters who we give our worship to.” As a church, they...
have traditional liturgy, follow the church year, observe the sacraments, and use traditional vestments in liturgy. They offer both a high-church as well as an informal style, which helps them reach a wide variety of people including young adults and families. While on the surface they may appear traditional, they are also very non traditional in their outreach to the community. They are engaging their local community with various outreach ministries including: a food bank, employment training program, a credit union, and they have given start-up space to two local businesses. They are even making plans to transform the underground crypt of the church into a recording studio to provide young people with another potential escape from gang violence, which is rampant in Hackney Road. Atkinson is engaged with the larger faith community and helps open the church to the wider community, particularly Bangladeshis. Atkinson has also become friends with the head of East London Mosque. Like Jay, the 19th century priest who built a boxing ring to reach people in his local context, Adam is also using innovation and tradition to reach his local context in fresh new ways.

Today, we stand at another major crossroads of cultural change where the church must once again proclaim the faith afresh for a new generation. We are not called to go where the church is, but to follow the example of these Victorian church planters and find the places where the church is not working for the sake of the gospel through church planting. The Church of England recognizes that one size doesn’t fit all, when it comes to church planting and fresh expressions. In 2003, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, called for a “mixed economy” of church that would include both traditional and fresh expressions of church to meet the new challenges of a post-Christian and post-modern context. In his own words, “We have begun to recognize that there are many ways in which the reality of ‘church’ can exist... These may be found particularly in the development of a mixed economy of Church life.” This article reminds us that even an ancient faith with historic roots are over a 1,500 year-old period of time can find fresh new ways to plant new churches for a new generation.
End Notes


3 Archbishops of Canterbury William Howley, Charles Longly and Archibald Tate were all supportive and actively involved in the work of church planting in the Church of England in 1800s. P.G. Maxwell-Stuart, The Archbishops of Canterbury. (Gloucester: Tempus, 2006), 238-245.


6 K. D. M. Snell, Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700–1950 (Cambridge, 2006), 409-414. See also J. Wolfe, ‘What can the Twenty-First Century Church of England Learn from the Victorians?’ Ecclesiology, 9 (2013), 205–222, who offers an alternative to the 7,423 numbered by Snell in the 60 years before 1896: “Between 1831 and 1901 it has been estimated that there was a net increase of 5,485 in the total number of Church of England churches, while many of the 12,000 or so churches already standing in 1831 were subjected to extensive restoration and reordering or even complete rebuilding.” p. 206, citing A. D. Gilbert, Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change 1740-1914 (London, 1976), 28.

7 Wolfe, “What can the Twenty-First Century Church Learn from the Victorians?” project/projects/What_can_we_learn_from_the_Victorian_Church.pdf


9 Cited in a paper by Dr. William M. Jacob, “Church Planting in Victorian England.” All Saints Margaret Street, November 4, 2018. Dr. Jacob is Visiting Research Fellow, King’s College London.

11 Cited in a paper by Dr. William M. Jacob, “Church Planting in Victorian England.” All Saints’ Margaret Street, November 4, 2018.


15 For an in-depth study on the spirituality of youth and young adults, see Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, Soul Searching: The Religious Lives and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) and Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Their findings showed that the majority of youth adhere to a vague understanding of religion, which the authors call “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism” (or “MTD”). For statistics on the overall state of youth involvement in religion among North Americans, the Pew Research Center has observed that about one third of older Millennials—adults currently in their late 20s or early 30s—now say that they have no religion, which is up 9 percent among this age range from 2007. Nearly one quarter of Generation X now say that they have no particular religion, or they describe themselves as “atheists” or “agnostics.” See http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/.  

16 UK Census report on the state of religion in Great Brittan. https://faithsurvey.co.uk/uk-christianity.html.

Bishops of the Church of England on Mission and Church Planting. “Planting new churches is a long-established and effective means of establishing the presence of a Christian community to witness to the gospel in new places, and of enabling that witness to be shared with more people in all places. It is integral to how the Church of England has shown its commitment to apostolicity and sought to express its catholicity (see paragraph 1 above). All our churches were once planted. There have been previous periods in Church history of intensive planting of churches: notably for the Church of England in mediaeval times, Queen Anne's 50 New Churches, the Victorian era, and the interwar period.” http://www.centreforchurchplanting.org/stories/house-of-bishops/.


21 Timothy Tennent, Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-first Century (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2010), 31.


24 The Religious Census of London, reprinted from the British Weekly, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1888, p. 32. I am indebted to Dr. William M. Jacob's presentation “Church Planting in Victorian England” for introducing me to the work of West and his work at St. Mary Magdalene.


29 This is taken from an online interview Ric Thorpe gave with Asbury Seminary. See it in full here https://asburyseminary.edu/voices/26615.

30 Some of this section is from their church website http://www.lovebethnalgreen.com/a-congregation-revived.


32 The phrase “fresh expressions” comes from the preface to the Declaration of Assent, which Church of England ministers make at their ordination to affirm, “which faith the Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation.” The term “fresh expressions” echoes these words and suggests, “something new or enlivened is happening, but also suggests connection to history and the developing story of God’s work in the Church.” Cited in Archbishop’s Council on Mission and Public Affairs, *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions in a Changing Context*. New York, Seabury Books. 2009, 34.

33 According to Travis Collins, a fresh expression is “a form of church for our changing culture, established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church.” Travis Collins, *Fresh Expressions of Church*. (Franklin, TN, Seedbed Publishing. 2015), 5. The key points of emphases within this definition are the ideas of “changing culture” and reaching those not involved in existing churches. The Fresh Expressions movement began in England a little over a decade ago and has resulted in the birth of more than 3,000 new communities alongside existing churches in the United Kingdom. For more information on Fresh Expressions of Church see Winfield Bevins, “Innovative Fresh Expressions of Church.” *Innovative Church Planting: Engaging the Marketplace with Entrepreneurial Church Planting*, Glossa House, LLC, and Digit Oral Publishing Services, LLC, 2018.

Abstract:

During the early 1840s in New York City, prominent members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, both lay and clergy, used four political avenues to oppose Roman Catholic efforts to both secure public funds for their own parish schools and also eliminate the daily reading of the King James Bible. These avenues included participation before the Common Council, “political” editorials in the Christian Advocate and Journal, the election of a strongly pro-Bible Methodist mayor, and appointment of a similarly-minded Methodist superintendent of schools. The questions of what caused the Methodists to take such a strong stand and why some compromise could not be achieved are also addressed.

Keywords: Bishop John Hughes, James Harper, David Reese, nativism, New York City schools

Philip F. Hardt is pastor of Glendale Maspeth UMC in Glendale, NY. He received a Ph.D. in Historical Theology (American period) from Fordham University in 1998. His dissertation was published as The Soul of Methodism.
Introduction

Those who are used to Methodism’s 20th and early 21st century record of generally taking politically liberal positions will be shocked to learn that the Methodist Episcopal Church (hereafter, MEC) of the mid-19th century could easily be described as the “religious right” of its time. Indeed, it may come as a surprise to 21st century Methodist sensibilities nurtured in the ecumenical movement to know that, in the 1840s, many Methodists in New York City (hereafter, NYC) used the existing political process to strenuously oppose Catholic efforts to change the Protestant-oriented school system. Moreover, these overtly political efforts contrast with the standard Methodist narrative of exponential growth during the first half of the 19th century through evangelistic preaching, camp meetings, tract distribution, book publishing, and missions. Indeed, some well-known NYC Methodists, such as Phoebe Palmer, generally avoided all political involvement so as to focus on spiritual concerns. Yet, during the first part of the 1840s, as Irish Catholic immigration surged in NYC, many Methodist pastors and laity had absolutely no hesitation in leading the political support for the increasingly controversial practice of reading the King James Bible (hereafter, KJB) in the “common schools.” This article will show how many NYC Methodists politically supported the Bible issue through their intervention at the Common Council (hereafter, CC), their own editorials in the Christian Advocate and Journal (hereafter, CAJ) editorials, the election of a pro-Bible Methodist mayor, and the appointment of a Methodist superintendent of schools.

Before showing how NYC Methodists practically led the attack, it is necessary to provide the social, political, and religious context for the controversy.

Socio-Cultural Context: Catholic Resistance to Protestant-Oriented “Common Schools”

Denominational “free schools” or “charity schools,” as they were sometimes called, and the Public School Society (hereafter, PSS), a multi-denominational voluntary organization, provided the earliest free education for children in NYC. The Methodist “charity school” had been established in the 1790s and the PSS in 1805 as a way to educate any child who could not afford the expensive private schools. A board of trustees and a president governed the PSS and by 1840, it administered one hundred schools. Denominational schools had ceased to exist in 1824 when the Common
Council voted to stop giving public funds to religious schools. Although the PSS was not sectarian, it did provide moral and religious instruction of a more general type through daily Bible reading, hymns, prayers, and a book of religious exercises based on a question and answer format. This approach, however, was challenged in 1840 as Irish Catholic immigration steadily increased. Due to the Protestant orientation of the common schools, many Irish Catholic parents kept their children either at home or had them attend the eight overcrowded parish schools. Concerned about this problem, Governor William Seward made the education of children a top priority in his annual message to legislators in January 1840 (Bourne 1870: 636-644).

The Political Context

Although this issue began as a strictly local issue, it soon involved three relatively new national political parties: the Democrats, the Whigs, and the American Republican Party (hereafter, ARP). Formed in the 1820s, the Democrats appealed to the working class, welcomed immigrants into their party, and ultimately supported the Catholic cause for change. The Whigs, who began a decade later, had a constituency of businessmen such as manufacturers, shopkeepers, merchants, and ship owners. It also included many conservative Protestant evangelicals since its platform favored such moral issues as temperance and strict observance of the Sabbath. Moreover, its anti-Catholic and anti-immigration positions led it to oppose any change in the Protestant-oriented common schools. The third national party, the ARP, originated in New York City in 1842 with an even stronger anti-Catholic and anti-immigration platform. Unsurprisingly, it also gave vehement support to retaining the KJB in the schools (Reichley 1992: 89-108).

The Intersection of Religion and Politics

From 1840 to 1845, five leading Methodists played critical roles in the “Bible in the Schools” controversy: Dr. Thomas Bond, Rev. George Peck, Rev. Nathan Bangs, James Harper, and Dr. David Reese. In 1840, Bond, Peck, and Bangs, working as a committee, submitted a “remonstrance” to the CC challenging the Catholic petition asking for public funds for their own schools. Bond was a medical doctor from Baltimore and local preacher who had been appointed as editor of the CAJ in 1840. Peck was the new editor of the Methodist Quarterly Review (hereafter MQR). Bangs
had served as the first editor of the CAJ from 1828 to 1832 and editor of the MQR beginning in 1832 (Simpson 1878: 86, 116, 698). The fourth key Methodist was James Harper who was born in Newton, Long Island, in 1795 to devout Methodist parents. At age sixteen, he was apprenticed to Abraham Paul, a printer in Manhattan, who was a fellow Methodist. Six years later, he and his brother John started their own printing company, which became Harper and Brothers in 1833. In early 1844, the ARP nominated him as their mayoral candidate due to his strong support for the retention of Bible reading in the schools, which had become a hotly contested issue since 1840. Due to his sterling reputation as a businessman and a devout Christian, he was elected mayor with strong Whig support in April, 1844. During his one-year term, he reformed the police department, improved municipal services, and hired people based on their ability and not on party affiliation (Caliendo 2010: 256-259, 399-401). Finally, Dr. David Reese played a key role in the administration of the public schools. Reese had graduated from medical school and practiced medicine in Baltimore before arriving in NYC in 1820. Reese was a local preacher, a manager of the Missionary Society of the MEC, and president of the Young Men's Missionary Society (1830-1838). In 1844, he was appointed as the superintendent of schools for the city and county of New York where he championed the reading of the KJB in the common schools.

Review of the Literature

Since the public school issue occurred in NYC and had national implications for both the states and the Catholic Church (which eventually formed its own parochial school system), it has generated a significant amount of scholarship with most of it coming from the Catholic authors. This scholarship can be grouped into four main categories. First, primary source materials include the petitions and remonstrances in the published documents of the Board of Aldermen, William Bourne’s magisterial History of the Public School Society of the City of New York (1870), and Bishop Hughes’ correspondence and addresses. Second, contemporary accounts of the issue can be found in both the religious and secular press of the time and William L. Stone’s History of New York City (1868). Third, three biographies (by Catholic authors) of Bishop Hughes present the issue through his perspective. These include Life of the Most Reverend John Hughes (1866) by John Hassard, the bishop’s secretary; Dagger John (1977) by Richard Shaw; and Dagger John and the Making of Irish America by
Richard Loughery (2018). Finally, Vincent Lannie’s Public Money and Parochial Education (1968) and Gotham, by Edward Burrows and Mike Wallace (1999) provide extremely helpful overviews. To sum up, the primary source materials are abundant and accessible and the Roman Catholic position is thoroughly presented since Bishop Hughes was such a pivotal figure in the development of the Catholic Church in America who also left an extensive amount of letters and other materials. Yet, no scholarly work has yet described the Methodist opposition and attempted an analysis of their efforts.

Methodist Political Involvement (1): The Common Council (1840)

The first way that Methodists engaged in the political process was their three-pronged campaign over eight months in 1840 to persuade the CC to reject repeated Catholic requests for public funds for their own schools and the elimination of both the KJB and Protestant-oriented textbooks. Spurred on by intense frustration with the anti-Catholic bias of the “common schools” and encouraged by a sympathetic governor (Seward), the Roman Catholic leadership sent a petition to the CC in March, 1840, for assistance who then referred it to the Committee on Arts and Sciences and Schools (Lannie 1968: 32). Alarmed at the Catholic petition and Irish Catholic immigration in general, several denominations sent remonstrances (i.e, counter-petitions) to the council including one by the Methodists, which was “signed by Gilbert Coutant and one thousand and seventy-six others” (Board of Assistants 1840: 378). The Methodist remonstrance noted that in 1824 the CC had ended the policy of giving public funds to denominational schools. Although the Methodists had argued against that new law, it had, along with all the other denominations, accepted the council’s decision. The remonstrance further stated its approval of the PSS’s administration of the schools and warned the council that giving public funds to Catholic schools would, “in their estimation, be a perversion of the Public School Funds” (Board of Assistants 1840: 378-80). A month later, the committee on the schools urged the rejection of the Catholic petition based on two reasons: the 1824 law and state and federal constitutions that barred public funds for religious groups in an attempt to keep the church and state separate. Unsurprisingly, the council voted sixteen to one to reject it (Lannie 1968: 32-34, 44-48).

The return, however, of their relatively new bishop, John Hughes, both energized and united the disorganized body of Catholics. Hughes
had been on a fundraising tour of Europe and upon arrival decided that a second more comprehensive petition should be submitted to the CC. During the summer of 1840, Hughes called a series of meetings in which he exhorted his people to stay united and demand their political and civil rights from the council. He also gave a public address explaining the Catholic position to New Yorkers and personally helped draft the second petition. In response, the PSS sent its own remonstrance while “the pastors and churches of the city’s MEC formed a committee of three to prepare a further remonstrance against the Catholic claim.” (Lannie 1968: 51-70).

The Methodist remonstrance was also comprehensive and covered three main areas: the traditional argument against public funds for religious schools; the fear that the Roman Catholic Church would ultimately gain political control and join church and state together as in Europe; and scathing criticism of Hughes for refusing to consider “a book of extracts from the Bible” to be used in place of the KJB. On the second point, the Methodists were not alone as several new nativist political parties were also warning about the threat of Catholic domination (Bourne 1870: 199-201).

Since the CC felt this issue was so important, it held two days of hearings on October 29 and 30, 1840. As in the previous encounter, the three main issues were public funds for religious schools, the KJB, and the anti-Catholic textbooks. After addressing the question of public funds, Bishop Hughes presented two objections to the use of the KJB. First, he felt that the non-denominational approach to the Bible was too generalized since it aimed to be acceptable to all students. Moreover, he believed that the daily reading of the Bible without “note or comment” was dangerous for Catholic students since it lacked the Church’s interpretation and teaching. He also feared that this approach might lead some Catholic students to become Protestants or even “infidels” (Bourne, 1870: 288). In contrast, Dr. Bond, speaking for the Methodists, argued that reading a chapter of the Bible each day was designed only to teach the “purest morals in which all agree” (Bourne 1870: 270-271). Similarly, Nathan Bangs asserted that the Bible readings included only “general doctrines” that all Christians believed such as belief in “one Savior, the Holy Spirit, forgiveness of sins, regeneration of the heart by the Holy Spirit, justification by faith, and a future day of judgment” (Bourne 1870: 275).

More importantly, Bishop Hughes objected to the Protestant principle of “private interpretation” which he said had led to the formation of numerous Protestant churches. Moreover, Hughes reiterated that
“Catholics do not believe that God has vouchsafed the promise of the Holy Spirit to every individual, but that he has given His Spirit to teach the Church collectively, and to guide the Church, and therefore we do not receive as the Bible, except what the Church guarantees” (Bourne 1870: 290). In contrast, Dr. Bond pointed out that the PSS was willing to use a book of extracts from the Bible that some Catholic bishops in Ireland had proposed for use in their country although some other Catholic bishops had asked for the pope’s approval before consenting to use it. Bond noted that Bishop Hughes had not responded to that offer and speculated that he was waiting for the pope’s approval, too, and unable to make the decision himself. Bond felt that since this was an American issue, Bishop Hughes should be able to decide for himself and not depend on a “foreign power” (Bourne 1870: 263-4).

Catholic (Partial) Victory at the State Level

Predictably, three months after the hearing, in January 1841, the CC voted sixteen to one to reject the Catholic petition. Undeterred, and with the open support of Governor Seward, Bishop Hughes and the Catholic leadership sent a third petition to the state legislature. The PSS, too, sent a remonstrance defending their position. Once again, the petition was referred to a committee for study who also sought the opinion of John Spencer, the state superintendent of schools. Spencer also supported some kind of school reform in NYC. Due to its controversial nature, the bill was tabled until the following January (1842).

During the spring of 1842, the committee finally sent its recommendation to the state assembly who passed a version of it and sent it to the senate where it narrowly passed by a vote of thirteen to twelve. The law, however, did not permit public funds for Catholic schools and still permitted the reading of the KJB. At the same time, it put NYC under the statewide “district school system” thereby ending the monopoly of the PSS. Now, each NYC “ward,” or election district, would be treated as a separate “town” in which it would elect two commissioners and one inspector who would supervise its schools. In addition, the commissioners from every ward (seventeen in all) would form a citywide Board of Education (Burrows and Wallace 1999: 631).

Although seriously weakened, the Protestant establishment continued to fight to at least keep the KJB in the schools. It did this on two fronts. The first way was through the municipal elections. Even though
commissioners were now elected in each ward, “Protestant die-hards quickly won control of the new Board of Education and ruled that classroom reading from the KJB was not precluded by the ban on sectarianism” (Burrows and Wallace 1999: 631). Secondly, the formation of the ARP in 1842 in NYC reinforced the efforts of the Board of Education since along with its anti-immigration and anti-Catholic positions, its platform sought “to prevent the exclusion of the Bible from the use of schools” (1844: 8). Similarly, the ARP’s “Address of the General Executive Committee to the People of the United States” stated: “We believe the Holy Bible, without sectarian note or comment, to be a most proper and necessary book, as well as for our children as ourselves, and we are determined that they shall not be deprived of it, either in or out of school” (1845: 10). While the school issue was being debated in the state legislature and before the formation of the ARP, the Methodist weekly newspaper, the CAJ, published two politically tinged editorials condemning not only the Catholic political efforts but the Catholic Church itself.

Methodist Political Involvement (2): The Christian Advocate and Journal (1841)

The second way in which Methodists entered in the political arena was through two strongly worded anti-Catholic editorials. Since Dr. Bond was the editor and had been deeply involved in the earlier CC effort, it seems quite probable that he also wrote these strongly worded editorials. The first editorial, “The Romanists and Common Council of NY,” was published in the CAJ on February 3, 1841 just a few weeks after the CC had rejected the second Catholic petition. It began with praise for the CC for rejecting what it called “the most preposterous and absurd application” and condemnation for what it saw as Bishop Hughes’ political activism. For example, it referred to him as an “American agitator” and an “American O’Connell” referring to a nationalist politician in Ireland. Next, it warned that Catholics would try to get a majority of CC members elected at the next municipal election (in April) who would be favorable to their cause. The editorial lamented that it might be possible since many Protestants seemed uninterested or indifferent due to the high number of “nominal Protestants” and “infidels.” Therefore, it urged readers to vote only for those candidates who signed a “pledge” stating that they would support the PSS. More importantly, it argued that if NYC allowed public funds for Catholic schools, it would embolden Catholics in the other two large cities of Baltimore and
Philadelphia. Finally, after pointing out the danger of Protestant students attending Catholic colleges (a fairly common occurrence at this time), it concluded: “We are not sorry that the bishop has opened our eyes to our own folly in committing the education of our children to our enemies – enemies not only of our faith but of our civil institutions.”

The second editorial in the CAJ, “Romanism in NY,” appeared on November 10, 1841, just two months before the state legislature was to take up the Catholic petition again. This editorial went into even greater depth as to why Catholics should not get public money. The first reason was that the Catholics were asking for too much money. Based on the Irish population being twenty percent, Bishop Hughes had asked for thirty thousand dollars. This amount, however, was not fair since the Catholics, who were generally poorer, paid less in taxes and, therefore, should get less. Second, the editorial voiced concern about those Protestant minority children who would have to attend a majority Catholic school based on the neighborhood population. It warned that Protestant children “…might be inveigled or seduced by Jesuitical artifice, the superstitious dogmas and practices of Popery.” Moreover, these children would be taught that they were heretics, “cursed by God and the church,” and subject to punishment and even burning at the stake if the Catholics ever acquired total political control. Third, the editorial believed that Catholic and Protestant children should go to school together so that they could mix with each other so thereby becoming “useful citizens” through these “social associations.” Moreover, Catholic students who attended the common schools could begin to think for themselves instead of relying on the pope’s pronouncements. Finally, the editorial repeated the familiar concern that a Catholic political majority in America would most likely lead to the kind of persecution that had occurred in Europe. This is illustrated in the editorial’s final sentence that “under their debasing superstition, they are as ready now as ever a Romanist populace were, before or since the Reformation, to shed the blood of Christian martyrs.”

At the same time, not all Methodists believed that the church should involve itself in local politics, even if it was about the Bible. This is illustrated in the period leading up to the municipal elections in April 1842, about five months after the second editorial. Although the state legislature was poised to pass the bill placing NYC schools under the control of the state’s “district school system,” Protestant supporters of the PSS sought to elect candidates who would both repeal the new law, if possible, and retain the...
KJB in the schools. An April 5, 1842 article in the New York Evening Post, a Democrat paper, entitled, “Politics in the Churches,” described what it considered some questionable political activity that had occurred in three Methodist churches: Forsyth Street, Mulberry Street, and Greene Street. According to the article, notices had been read from the pulpits of these churches inviting members to a meeting to discuss “important business.” These notices had come from members who supported the Whigs. At the subsequent meetings “a circular was read requesting that five persons be appointed a committee, to meet in convention this evening, at Constitution Hall, and there to make arrangements for the charter election of next week, with a view to prevent the choice of any candidate for the CC who is supposed to be in favor of a change in the Common School System.” In addition, at one of the meetings, a member who was a Whig called for some Democrats to serve on this committee so as to divide the Democrats who usually supported the school changes. The article noted that the purpose of this convention was to elect a Whig majority to the CC; it also condemned the churches’ political efforts as “a worse example of the profane union of church government with politics, than any we have had yet.” At the same time, it praised the Methodists in those churches who “when they learned the objective of the meeting, they disapproved of it and withdrew. They hold that the church should not thrust herself into ward meetings nor distribute votes at the polls.” Despite this minority view, exactly two years later, in April 1844, the Methodists took control of the highest municipal office with the stated intention of retaining the Bible in the schools.

Methodist Political Involvement (3): A Pro-Bible Methodist Mayor (1844-1845)

The third way that Methodists entered the political arena was through the election of James Harper, a dedicated Methodist and publisher, who was an uncompromising supporter of the KJB. To be sure, Harper was a total political newcomer as he had never sought office before but felt public service was a duty he could not shirk if asked. As the April 1844, municipal elections drew near, the ARP nominating committee met with him and offered him the nomination. He had much to commend himself to their party. His credentials included membership in the “Order of United Americans,” successful businessman, evangelical Christian, and rigid moralist who opposed drinking, gambling, and prostitution. Moreover, these qualities would strongly appeal to the ARP’s constituency of
merchants, ship makers, tradesmen, and shopkeepers who were dissatisfied with both Democrats and Whigs. The election results validated their choice as Harper outpolled the LocoFoco candidate (a more radical working class party) by twenty-four thousand six hundred six to twenty thousand seven hundred twenty six. The Whig candidate received slightly more than five thousand votes. A man of his word, in his short victory speech Harper vowed to carry out his responsibilities as mayor “in conformity with the principles of our party” (Harper Papers; Burrows and Wallace 1999: 632; Caliendo 2010: 399).

During the mayor’s one year tenure, it does not seem likely that Mayor Harper and Bishop Hughes had any direct personal contact although the bishop attempted at least twice to communicate his concerns to the mayor. The first instance occurred in early May 1844, just after Mayor Harper had been elected but before he began his term. During this time, riots had occurred in Philadelphia between nativists and Irish Catholic immigrants. Several people on both sides had been killed and two Catholic churches had been destroyed. A nativist delegation from Philadelphia was planning to come to NYC to join forces with the nativists in Manhattan and parade through part of the city trying to provoke a riot with the Irish Catholics. Before the day of the planned rally, Bishop Hughes called upon the outgoing mayor, Robert Morris, a Democrat. Bishop Hughes warned him of the potential for violence and advised him to call out the militia. In addition, he gave Mayor Morris the following advice: “Moreover, I should send to Mr. Harper, the mayor-elect who has been chosen by the votes of this party (i.e., the APR). I should remind him that these men are his supporters; I should warn him that if they carry out their design, there will be a riot; and I should urge him to use his influence in preventing this public reception of the (Philadelphia) delegates.” It is unknown if Morris contacted Harper, but the leaders called off the rally and violence was averted (Hassard, 278).

The second interaction occurred just a few weeks later when Bishop Hughes sent a long letter (it was later published in pamphlet form) addressed to Mayor Harper but published (!) in The Courier and Enquirer on May 20, 1844. The letter, which was entitled, “On the Moral Causes That Have Produced the Evil Spirit of the Times,” attempted to do three things: vindicate his involvement in the school issue, attack the editors of two pro-Protestant papers, and put Mayor Harper “on notice” or even rebuke or warn him because of his association with the ARP. To be sure, Bishop Hughes viewed the ARP basically as an outgrowth of the intense
anti-Catholic feeling since the controversial Carroll Hall meeting on October 29, 1841, which he blamed on the combination of two factors: sermons and editorials. In his letter, Hughes asserted that many preachers “had entertained their congregations with political sermons on the school question for months before – so also for months after. Whatever might be the text from the Bible, the abuse of the Catholic religion, under the nickname of popery, together with all the slang, and all the calumnies furnished by the New York Herald, the Commercial Advertiser, the Journal of Commerce, and other papers of that stamp, was sure to make up the body of the sermon.” Hughes believed that these repeated assaults had “birthed” the ARP in 1842. Again, he asserted: “By this process the minds of the people were excited, their passions inflamed, their credulity imposed upon, and their confidence perverted. Then came the new party. It is impossible that the training of the pulpits should not have predisposed a large number of persons to join in the movement, which they had been taught to believe as a duty of their religion...Sir, I think I shall be able to prove to you, that these slanders, originating in Bennett's Herald, the Commercial Advertiser, the New York Sun...repeated, embellished and evangelized from many of the pulpits of the City...forming the staple of political excitement, in the association which placed you in the honorable chair you enjoy.”

Although Mayor Harper did not respond publicly to Bishop Hughes’ measured warning about his party, at least two newspapers rose to his defense. For example, the May 22, 1844 edition of the Journal of Commerce chided Bishop Hughes both for deriding the aims and energy of the new party and also for failing to even offer him congratulations on his victory. In a gently sarcastic admonishment, the paper stated: “Considering that the letter was addressed to the Mayor, some little forbearance might have been expected toward the great movement, which overturning everything in its way, has just placed his Honor in the chair. Gentlemanly courtesy, to say nothing of all the Christian graces, of which the bishop is so conscious, requires this.”

James Gordon Bennett also took Bishop Hughes to task in his usual “go for the jugular” way. His immediate response listed three reasons. First, Bennett blamed Hughes for the ARP since he had first injected himself into politics at the Carroll Hall meeting. Bennett mentioned that his editorial the day after the meeting (in 1841) had labeled Hughes a “political agitator” and asserted that this action “has been, not the sole, but one of the chiefest of the causes which have produced the origin of the ARP, and the introduction of
religious animosities into politics.” Moreover, Bennett feared that Hughes’ involvement would lead to two new political parties along religious lines. Second, Bennett felt that, although the ARP had initially been too extremist, it had settled down considerably in the past two years. In the May 22, 1844 edition of the Herald, he assured readers that “the violent, prescriptive, and intolerant declarations of the ‘Native Americans’ are no longer poured forth in this city. The true...ground of the party is now discerned and occupied by its intelligent and influential members. And the excellent message of Mayor Harper assumes this ground and no other. The achievement of city reform – a just and righteous administration of the laws – fidelity in all respects to the Constitution – these are the great principles on which the new CC declare they intend to act.” Finally, Bennett believed that although Harper ran on the ARP ticket, he was a principled man who would not deliberately harm the Catholic population. For example, he related the story of how Mayor Harper had received anonymous letters asking him as a “nativist” and a Protestant to fire one of his female employees who was Catholic. Instead, he promoted her.

In sum, it is not known if the bishop and the mayor had any direct personal contact during his one-year term. The mayor was extremely busy with his mayoral duties and also with his publishing business in his spare moments. He did, however, take one action of immense importance to the school Bible cause: the appointment of Dr. David Reese, a fellow Methodist and close friend of Harper’s, to the position of superintendent of schools for the city and county of NYC on September 10, 1844.

Methodist Political Involvement (4): A Methodist Superintendent of Schools (1844-1845)

The final Methodist political intervention occurred during the energetic tenure of Dr. Reese. In just four short months, Reese made a strong case not only to the Board of Education but also to the general public for required Bible reading which had begun to lapse in certain ward schools since the state had begun to intervene. To his credit, Reese took an even-handed approach to the controversial issue. For example, he encouraged the use of the Douay Bible in schools where Catholics were a majority and, unlike other Protestant critics, did not accuse Bishop Hughes of trying to exclude the Bible from the schools (Hassard 1866: 280-281). Before describing his efforts, it is necessary to relate what had occurred from April 1842 to September 1844, when Reese was appointed.
Although the state law had been passed in May 1842, protests and counter protests had followed. For example, on April 11, 1842, in an apparent defensive measure, the Protestant-majority Board of Education had passed a resolution stating, “no school in which any religious or sectarian doctrine or tenet was taught should receive any portion of the school moneys to be distributed by this act.” It was aimed at perceived Catholic efforts to get public funds but Bishop Hughes interpreted it as referring to Bible reading since, in his opinion, reading the “Bible was teaching a sectarian doctrine and therefore” he “demanded that the schools in which it was read should not be included” in the funding. In response, Colonel William L. Stone, a Presbyterian, a longtime member of the School Commission and current superintendent of schools, opposed Hughes’ interpretation and the two of them carried on a “public discussion,” probably in the press, for some time. Agreeing with Stone, the Board of Education amended its earlier resolution on November 13, 1844, stating that “the Bible, without note or comment, is not a sectarian book, and that the reading of a portion of the Scriptures without note or comment, at the opening of the schools, is not inculcating or practicing any religious or sectarian doctrine or tenet of any particular Christian or other religious sect.” It was into this turbulent and uncertain new situation that Reese made his argument for reading the Bible in the schools and also urged political action to ensure it (Stone 1868: 507-509).

First, Reese published a pamphlet in October just before the November state elections based on his visitation of the seventeen wards entitled, “To the Board of Education for the City and County of New York – Bible or No Bible! That is the Question.” First, he noted the decline of Bible reading in the city’s schools. He cited the example of the two commissioners in the Catholic-majority fourteenth ward who had issued a resolution on April 6, 1843 that the Catholic Douay Bible and the KJB were to be read on alternate days. Yet, a month later, they verbally told the teachers that the Bible was “sectarian” and that Bible reading was to stop. Reese also noted that the second resolution was never recorded in the minute book while the first was contained in the minute book. Five other wards – the first, fourth, sixth (another Catholic-majority ward), eleventh, and twelfth – had followed their example. Reese condemned this action as not only in defiance of his authority but also a gross misinterpretation of the existing state law that permitted Bible reading. He called on the Board of Education to condemn this action and “recommend the use of the Holy Scriptures, without note or comment, in all the schools of the city and the
county” since the Protestant founders of the schools and current parents of the students both wanted the scriptures used. In addition, he reminded them that they had petitioned the state legislature that ward commissioners “shall not be authorized to exclude the Holy Scriptures, without note or comment, or any selections (i.e., textbooks) therefrom, from any one of the schools.” Finally, in a more political vein, he urged his hearers to elect only persons who supported the Bible reading in the schools (1845: 1-6).

Reese’s second effort to shore up political support for the Bible issue occurred in his Christmas afternoon address at the Broadway Tabernacle entitled, “Address on Behalf of the Bible in the Schools,” with Mayor Harper in attendance. First, he again summed up the current situation: Bible reading occurred in three quarters of all schools but not in four wards which included a student population of two to three thousand. He attributed the absence to two factors: Roman Catholic parents who opposed the KJB and anti-Bible parents who saw the Bible as just an ordinary book. Again, he faulted the Board of Education for lacking the resolve to force these schools to include Bible reading. Another concern was that these four ward commissioners had persuaded the Board of Education to still grant them funds to run their schools. Moreover, these ward commissioners had criticized Reese for being “politically motivated.” In response, Reese mentioned that the law permitted “moral and literary” training since the aim of the public schools was not only to educate its youth but also to unify the country. Indeed, Reese argued that the non-sectarian use of the Bible facilitated this since it taught universal morals rather than sectarian doctrine. At the same time, Reese acknowledged that the recent education laws had transferred power from the superintendent to the seventeen ward commissioners making his job more difficult. Nevertheless, he planned to enforce the existing law or cut off their funding. He was ultimately unsuccessful since the Board of Education ruled that he did not have the authority to make Bible reading compulsory (1845: 1-8). Despite his valiant efforts, a new state law (and successful lawsuits) eventually forbade all Bible reading further secularizing the city’s schools.

The Puzzle of Methodist Leadership

Although several other clergy from different denominations spoke at the CC’s hearing in 1840 and also gave addresses in support of the KJB in their own churches, it is abundantly clear that the Methodists were uniquely positioned to take the undisputed leading role. In the four years, from 1840
to 1844, highly accomplished pastoral and professional Methodists and their church members strove mightily in what eventually turned out to be a losing cause. But, the question remains: Why did the Methodists and not one of the other longer-established denominations take the lead?

Three answers seem possible. The first answer is its sheer size. For example, by the 1840s, the MEC in NYC may have been the largest or one of the largest “newer” denominations. From just three churches in 1800, it had grown to thirteen churches in two circuits. Second, the MEC still retained a high degree of evangelical fervor, which manifested itself in the emphasis on personal conversion, class meetings, and revival meetings. This evangelical fervor would have naturally supported Bible reading in the schools as a way of reinforcing what was taught in the home (often through family prayer) and in their churches. This is illustrated in the 1841 CAJ editorials which lamented the lack of support for the Bible issue from “timid Protestants,” “nominal Protestants,” and “religious indifferentism.” To be sure, the other denominations such as the Episcopal Church had their “evangelical wing” but the Methodists always seemed to be at “fever pitch” when it came to presenting and defending the message of the Gospel. Moreover, some of the older Protestant churches had begun to “liberalize” which led them to focus more on social reform issues such as abolitionism.

Finally, and most importantly, NYC was headquarters for practically all of the national Methodist institutions such as the Mission Society, the Tract Society, and the formidable Book Concern. The location of the Book Concern was especially significant since its highly educated and articulate editors of both the CAJ and the MQR were stationed in Manhattan. This significance was apparent when the MEC appointed two current editors, Dr. Bond and Rev. Peck, and a former editor, Nathan Bangs, to the committee to draft the remonstrance to the Common Council in the fall of 1840. To be sure, these men brought impressive credentials to the debate. For example, Dr. Bond was not only an eminent physician who had been offered a medical professorship, but was also well read in both the English and classical authors. On the pastoral side, he was a local preacher, an author of two apologetic works, and past editor of The Itinerant, a Baltimore church periodical which supported traditional Methodist doctrine and polity. Reverend George Peck also had a distinguished background: presiding elder on two separate occasions, author of several theological treatises including “Scriptural Doctrine of Christian Perfection,” and principal of the Oneida (New York) Conference Seminary. Finally, Nathan Bangs had been
a missionary to Canada, presiding elder, General Conference delegate, and the previous editor of both the CAJ and the MQR. These were seasoned veterans who had preached, defended, and articulated the faith. Since the most controversial national issues such as African colonization, abolition, and the administration of public schools were often fought first in NYC, the Methodists had their top spokesmen, both lay and clergy, securely in place (Simpson 1878: 85-86, 226, 698).

The Inability to Compromise

In addition to the puzzling question of the Methodists’ fervent and unrelenting political pressure, another question comes to mind: “How is it that a compromise on the issues could not be reached?” Why couldn't both sides yield somewhat so that both Catholic and PSS-MEC concerns be accommodated? Since we are so used to living in an “ecumenical age” after the Second Vatican Council, we have to ponder more deeply the radically different realities, hopes and fears of 1840s NYC. Four factors seem to explain this complete intransigence, deep mistrust, and mutual hostility.

First, the question of public funds for a denominational school seemed to the Protestant majority a long-settled issue. The PSS and others argued that if one denomination received school funds that it would open the door to all denominations receiving funds. Moreover, state and federal constitutions had explicitly sought to keep the church and the state separate. In contrast, Bishop Hughes believed it was only fair that Catholics who were taxed should receive some benefit from it. Today, that would be analogous to a “tax voucher” for parents who send their children to a private or religious school which some states now see as reasonable. To be sure, in our 21st century pluralistic society, tax vouchers, although a reasonable compromise, are still resisted by a majority of states revealing an enduring antipathy to supporting private or religious schools with public funds. Of course, American public schools today do not have the overt anti-Catholic and pro-Protestant textbooks and condescending attitudes of the teachers. Sadly, no such compromise on funding could be achieved in the 1840s as the persistent Catholic political efforts only led to mob behavior on both sides and extremely vicious attacks on Bishop Hughes in the press. Although Bishop Hughes hoped that American democratic principles and processes would overcome deep-seated prejudices, it was clearly the wrong time and place. Similarly, in his analysis of the public funding issue, Vincent Lannie has written, “regardless of the defects of
the PSS and the validity of certain Catholic charges, the Catholic position seemed sectarian, unconstitutional, and un-American to the majority of the citizens of that day” (1968: 101).

Secondly, Bishop Hughes was unwilling to compromise on the Bible and textbook issues, which could have at least provided a temporary solution while the state government worked out the details. Predictably, this refusal both frustrated and angered the PSS and its supporters. This refusal to compromise was illustrated at the 1840 hearing. Thomas Sedgwick, one of the two PSS lawyers to speak, suggested that the schools use a book of extracts from the Bible that had recently been approved for use in Ireland although some dissenting bishops had asked for the pope’s approval before using it. The following day, at the second hearing, Dr. Bond suggested that Bishop Hughes’ silence so far was due to his dependence on what the “foreign power” (i.e., the pope) would say. Although it is not clear how the pope eventually ruled, if he did so at all, Bishop Hughes refused to even consider that suggestion.

Bishop Hughes also rejected the sensible offer of the PSS to revise their textbooks to eliminate any anti-Catholic bias. Bishop Hughes had apparently indicated a willingness to consider their proposal but after they sent him a number of problematic books, he refused to even review them to the consternation of the PSS. In an address, he gave his reasoning: “As if we have nothing to do but to mark out a passage and it will disappear! Are we to take the odium of erasing passages which you hold to be true? And have you any right to make such an offer? If we spend the necessary time in reviewing the books to discover offensive passages, you give us no pledge that you will even then remove the objectionable matter. After all our troubles, you may remove it or not as you see fit” (Hassard 1866: 238). This is all the more surprising since, at one point, Catholic representatives had indicated their own willingness to make concessions such as allowing the PSS to examine their potential teachers, allowing state officials to inspect their schools and textbooks, teaching Catholic doctrine only after school hours, and avoiding criticism of other denominations. In sum, while reasonable people on both sides were willing to put aside their differences, Bishop Hughes apparently only wanted one thing: separate “Catholic public schools” (Hassard 1866: 238-239; Lannie 1968: 112-117).

The third factor that doomed compromise was the depth of mistrust, hostility, and bitterness that many Protestants, including the Methodists, felt toward the Catholic Church despite Bishop Hughes’ assurances to the
contrary. For example, at the October 1840, hearing, Dr. Bond sharply criticized the Catholic Church for its persecution of Protestants in Europe. In addition, his speech was filled with sarcasm and accusations. Similarly, Hassard noted, “the remonstrance of the Methodists was expressed with a great deal of temper and bristled with sharp epithets” (1866: 235). Put on the defensive at the hearing, Bishop Hughes tried to be conciliatory but also lapsed into sarcasm as well. Later, in an address at a mass meeting of Catholics, he expressed his frustration that the Protestant speakers had ignored the funding issue in order to disparage the Catholic Church. In his address, he said, “No, but the Reverend Dr. Spring, and the Reverend Dr. Bond, and the Reverend Dr. Bangs and company came with an old volume of antiquated theology and exclaimed, ‘What monstrous people these papists are!’ The CC heard them and instead of examining the facts in which the rights of their constituents are involved, entered on the consideration of abstract theological reasoning” (Hassard, 1866: 239). Richard Shaw, however, blamed both sides for the inability to compromise. Referring also to the October 1840, hearing, he wrote: “The frustrating element of the whole debate was that neither side seemed capable of understanding the limits of their own prejudice or of properly addressing the prejudice of the other...What the arguments did present was a potpourri of the religious antagonisms between native and new-immigrant America” (1977: 147).

Finally, the nativist parties included Bible reading in the public schools as one of their major issues along with anti-immigration, which ensured an even deeper polarization. As Irish Catholic immigration increased, nativists feared they would be more loyal to the pope than to American political institutions. In addition, they feared that a future Catholic majority would persecute Protestants as had happened in Europe. Although Bishop Hughes had raised some good points regarding the civil rights of Catholics, he was facing an avalanche of nativist opposition of which the school issue was just one issue among many. Given the tense political climate of the 1840s, moderating some of his school positions might have won him some Protestant friends instead of earning their enduring hatred.

Conclusion

To sum up, after the PSS itself, the MEC in NYC involved itself in a spectacularly overt political way to fight a Catholic-Democrat political alliance which sought to change the way common schools were administered
and, in particular, to eliminate the daily reading of the KJB. This deeper insight of Methodist involvement in one of the great national issues of the day has great significance since it adds more support to the hypothesis that early American Methodism, with its fervent evangelical approach still intact, tended to take politically conservative positions. Some of these included support for nativist political parties, anti-immigration policies (especially against Irish Catholic immigration), African colonization, and opposition to abolition, which was seen as too extreme and divisive. Thus, a majority of early American Methodism, including its leadership and periodicals, can deservedly be seen as the “conservative evangelicals” and the “religious right” of its time.

Yet, more research into Methodism’s social, cultural, and political role needs to be done. One possibility is an examination of Methodist involvement in the school issue in Philadelphia and Baltimore, the other two large cities of the time. Both cities struggled with the issue and the Baltimore conference issued a resolution supporting school Bible reading. Another area to explore would be the political affiliations of Methodists in NYC and elsewhere. It would be helpful to know what percentage were members of the various parties such as the Whig, Democrat, LocoFoco, Abolition, and American Republican Party and if that caused division in the local churches (mainly but not only between the business and working classes) and in the conference which often dealt with these “political” issues. The 1830s and 1840s were a particularly volatile period in American history and many riots over various matters occurred in NYC and other major cities. These in-depth studies will provide a more comprehensive and much-needed understanding of Methodism’s socio-political impact on the early American republic.

A Chronology of the Bible Issue

1805     Free School Society (later, Public School Society) organizes free schools for the poor
1824     Public funds for denominational “free schools” ended
1840     PSS administers one hundred “common schools” in New York City
March 12, 1840  Roman Catholic Church petitions CC for funds for eight Catholic schools
April 27, 1840  Board of Aldermen reject Catholic petition by sixteen to one vote
Sept. 1840    Bishop Hughes sends second petition to CC for funds
Oct. 29-30, 1840  Common Council holds two day open hearing on petition
January 1841  Governor Seward again calls for NYC school reform
Jan. 11, 1841  CC rejects second Catholic petition for school funds (15-1)
February 1841  Bishop Hughes sends petition for funds to state legislature
April 1841  Spencer recommends elected education commissioners for each ward in NYC
Nov. 3, 1841  Democrats in NYC win state assembly and senate seats
January 1842  State assembly takes up education issue
April 1842  School reform bill passes. NYC placed under state’s “district school system”
April 12, 1842  Nativists attack Irish neighborhood and St. Patrick’s after municipal elections
April 1844  James Harper, a Methodist, elected mayor of NYC (one year term)
Sept. 10, 1844  Harper appointed Dr. David M. Reese as Superintendent of Schools
Oct. 1844  Dr. Reese’s pamphlet, “Bible or No Bible! That is the Question,” is published
Dec. 25, 1844  Dr. Reese’s gives “Address in Behalf of the Bible in the Schools”
April 1845  Democrat candidate defeats James Harper in mayoral election
1853  Public School Society ceases existence
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Samuel J. Rogal

John and Molly: A Methodist Mismarriage

Abstract:
While not much is known about Mary (Molly) Goldhawk Vazeille, the wife of John Wesley, her story has been interpreted in many ways, and often incorrectly over time. This article explores the historical evidence of her life as a wealthy widow with children who married the founder of Methodism later in life. This contentious relationship is often little understood because of the lack of solid documentation and the multiple interpretations often overlaying the story, which were added by writers with other agendas. It does seem clear that John’s brother Charles was especially unhappy with this marriage in the beginning, and the subsequent events in the relationship led to divisions between the couple that have been open to numerous interpretations.

Keywords: Mary (Molly) Goldhawk Vazeille, John Wesley, Charles Wesley, Methodism, marriage

Samuel J. Rogal has served in the faculty and administration of Waynesburg College, Iowa State University, SUNY College at Oswego, Mary Holmes College, and Illinois State University before retiring from the chair of the Division of Humanities and Fine arts at Illinois Valley Community College in 1998. He has been a lifelong scholar of the Wesleys, their hymnody, and 18th century British literature.
Perhaps the lowest point, both literally and figuratively, within the long life of John Wesley (1703-1791) occurred on Monday or Tuesday, February 18 or 19, 1751. A week earlier, Sunday, February 10, on his way, on foot, to preach to the Methodist congregation at Snowsfields chapel, the forty-eight-year-old Wesley proceeded to cross London Bridge, where he suffered a hard fall on the ice, “the bone of my ankle lighting on the top of a stone.” Several unidentified persons helped him to the chapel, where he managed to endure through the delivery of a sermon, after which a surgeon bound his leg and “made a shift,”\(^1\) enabling him to stumble to the Methodist chapel in West Street, Seven Dials, where he preached again. From there he took a coach to the home of his friend and financial adviser, Ebenezer Blackwell (1711-1782) in Change Alley, then by chair to the Foundery, Upper Moorfields. However, the sprain and the pain worsened, forcing him into a week of rest, prayer, writing,\(^2\) and conversation at the Threadneedle Street\(^3\) home of forty-one-year-old widowed Mrs. Mary (Molly) Goldhawk Vazeille (1710-1781). Whatever the substance of the conversation, the two of them united in marriage a week later, with Wesley struggling down the aisle on his knees—that fact supported by the Methodist leader noting in his journal for Monday, March 4, 1751, that “Being tolerably able to ride, though not to walk, I set out for Bristol.”\(^4\) The exact aisle proves a matter for debate: Luke Tyerman\(^5\) and Nehemiah Curnock\(^6\) determined that the ceremony went forth at the church of the Rev. Charles Manning,\(^7\) a mutual friend of the couple, at Hayes, Middlesex, while John Telford\(^8\) opted for Wandsworth, a section of London where Mrs. Vazeille owned a country house. Although the groom soon would recover, the marriage would remain in a predominately crippled state until, three decades later, the bride passed on to the higher world.

Molly Vazeille Wesley, of Huguenot descent and a resident of London, had been, at some point prior to her marriage to the Methodist leader, a member of a Methodist society in that city. Her union to Anthony\(^9\) Vazeille the elder (?-1747), an affluent London merchant, also of Huguenot descent, had produced four children: Anthony Vazeille the younger (1740?–1754?) appeared to have died prior to his mother’s passing in 1781, since her will provided that his younger brother, Noah Vazeille (1746?–?), then residing in Stratford, Essex, receive the house in Threadneedle Street. A third son, not identified by name, died in 1754, while a daughter, Jane (Jeanne) Vazeille Matthews Smith (1736-1820), had married, first, John Matthews (?-1764) of London, and they produced two children—John Matthew the
younger and Jane Matthews the younger (1760-?), the daughter having been baptized by John Wesley in 1760). Jane Matthews Smith then married William Smith (1736-1824), a native of Corbridge, Northumberland, and eventually a steward of the Newcastle-upon-Tyne Methodist circuit—the marriage resulting in the births of Jane Smith (1770-1849) and Mary Smith (1769-1795). In addition to children, Mary Goldhawk Vazeille brought to her second marriage the sum of £10,000 (according to John Telford) settled upon her and her children by way of the departed Anthony Vazeille the elder, that yielded £300 yearly from the Three per Cents—money invested in British government securities and yielding 3% per year. However, later editors of Charles Wesley’s correspondence reduced that total sum to £3000.

At this point, before the discussion of this “mismarriage” can go forward, one must be aware of the problems concerning the evidence available. First, there exists nothing in the way of primary sources from Molly Wesley, herself, which, of course, prevents her from offering any defense of her actions. One must remain content to view her through the eyes and minds of others. Secondly, the same holds true for her son, Noah Vazeille, who plays a minor role in the drama. Thirdly, the published editions of John Wesley’s journals, as thorough as they might appear, represent extracts—volumes issued years after the actual events and edited by Wesley for publication, but revealing omissions of and gaps in matters that he did not wish to share with his readers. Indeed, the entries for February 18-20, 1751 of those published journals contain no references to the marriage, while entries for February 21-23 simply do not exist. John Telford, who edited eight volumes of John Wesley’s correspondence, did not have access to, or chose not to include, all of the letters, while the most recent and thoroughly improved edition of those letters, currently crawling its way to finish line, extends (as of this writing) only to 1765. Finally, Charles Wesley plays no small part in the affair, but the fairly recent two-volume publication of his manuscript journal, which he never intended for others’ consumption, comes to an abrupt halt after November 1756, and even that collection has serious gaps. The first volume of the most recent edition of his correspondence extends from 1728 to 1756, and (again as of this writing) demonstrates no evidence of a second birth in the near future. One should approach the Wesleys’ biographers with caution, and certainly need not bother consulting nineteenth-century editions of the works by either brother.
In any event, Mary Goldhawk Vazeille’s introduction to the Wesleys came by way of the brothers’ friend, Edward (Ned) Perronet (1721-1792), a native of Sandridge, Kent—the Perronet family themselves of Huguenot descent. The cryptic journal comment by Charles Wesley, entered for Thursday, July 20, 1749, seemingly establishing the tone for the entire affair: “At Ned Perronet’s met Ms. Vazeille, a woman of sorrowful spirit.”12 That same summer, the family of Marmaduke Gwynne the elder (1694?-1769), Charles Wesley’s father-in-law, beset with financial problems, removed from Garth, Brecknockshire, Wales, to a house in Brand Lane, Ludlow. Sarah Gwynne Wesley, in February 1750 traveled to Ludlow to be with her family. One suspects that Mrs. Vazeille had intensified her Methodist interests and activities during the fall and winter of 1749-1750, both in London and Bristol, for on Tuesday, May 15, 1750, Charles Wesley “set out [from Bristol] with Mrs. Vazeille, &c., for Ludlow, and the next day saluted our friends there. During our nine days’ stay, they showed her [Mary Vazeille] all the civility and love that they could show, and she seemed equally pleased with them.” From Ludlow, the group, including Mrs. Vazeille, made their way to Oxford, then on to London, and on Saturday, June 2, 1750, Charles and Sarah Gwynne Wesley “took up our quarters for eight or nine days at Mrs. Vazeille’s house in Threadneedle Street.”13 Thus, for the remainder of the year, Mrs. Vazeille found herself upon a number of occasions a welcome member of Charles Wesley’s Methodist circle.

The question now arises as to when John Wesley entered upon the stage. Unfortunately, specificity does not always have a part in this drama, and one must be prepared to engage in speculation. John Wesley might easily have met Mrs. Vazeille upon one of six occasions, either at London or Bristol, prior to his journey to Ireland in June 1750: July 20, August 1, 1749, at Bristol; August 1-28, 1749, London; October 28- November 8, 1749, Bristol; November 10, 1749- January 29, 1750, London; February 3-27, 1750, London; March 2-20, 1750, Bristol. Thus, his initial letter to her from Dublin, Ireland, dated June 19, 1750 and addressed to her home in Threadneedle Street, could not be considered an initial step upon virgin ground, epistolary or otherwise. Further, the tone and the substance of that letter suggest strongly that the two had met and had exchanged words—conversations that had absolutely nothing to do with the romantic throbings of the heart. What wended its way through the primitive eighteenth-century British postal system proved nothing less than an epistolary homily:
My Dear Sister

I am glad to hear that you have been with my brother at Ludlow. Sally Perrin\(^{14}\) sent me a little account of what passed there, and of her proposal to you of taking a longer journey together, if the way should be made plain. I believe riding, so far as your strength will allow, will much confirm your bodily health. And the conversing with those in various parts who know and love God will greatly strengthen your soul. Perhaps, too, he who sendeth by whom he will send\(^{15}\) may make you useful to some of them. If it be so, I trust it will humble you to the dust: you will so much the more be vile in your own eyes,\(^{16}\) and cry out, ‘Not unto me, O Lord, but unto thy name give the praise!’\(^{17}\) O let us work for our Lord while the day is: the night cometh, when no man can work.\(^{16}\) I have gone through calms and storms,\(^{15}\) rough weather and smooth, since I came into Ireland. But all is good while he walks with us\(^{20}\) who has all power in heaven and earth.\(^{21}\) I hope you have some time daily for meditation, reading, and prayer. My dear sister, peace be with your spirit! Next month I hope to be in Bristol…\(^{22}\)

—which, most likely, will provide an opportunity for another meeting. Indeed, John Wesley arrived in Bristol on Tuesday, July 28, 1750, remaining there until Monday, the 30\(^{th}\) of July.

If there exist portraits of Mary Goldhawk Vazeille before or after her marriage to John Wesley, few have been blessed to locate and gaze upon them. Among the fortunate, Mrs. G. Elsie Harrison, among the corps in the between-the-wars parade of biographers of John Wesley,\(^{23}\) described, after her own fashion, one of those portraits:

At the Methodist Mission House [London] today [c1937-1938] there hangs a picture of the lady. She [the portrait] is discreetly disposed of behind a door in the room which gives the pre-eminence to large representations in colour of John Wesley escaping from the fire [at Epworth rectory, Lincolnshire] and escaping to heaven from his death-bed. Her station is not far removed from Threadneedle Street, which she might glimpse over the head of the modern Methodists as they administer Wesley’s World Parish\(^{24}\) in that great Committee Room. There is a certain dash about her carriage and a look in her eye as of Mona Lisa’s enigmatic glance,\(^{25}\) but the prevailing face is the face of a shrew.\(^{26}\)

Unfortunately, after reading those lines, one still has not a clear vision of Mrs. Vazeille’s physical qualities. Consultation with additional biographers
of John Wesley requires one to consider the idiosyncrasies and agendas of each, and then to tread carefully through the observations that will follow. According to Henry Moore (1751-1844), Methodist itinerant preacher and one of the three of John Wesley’s literary executors, Mrs. Vazeille, whom he likely knew and observed, “appeared to be truly pious, and was very agreeable in her person and manners. She conformed to every company, whether of the rich or of the poor; and had a remarkable facility and propriety in addressing them concerning their true interests.”

Richard Watson (1781-1833), formerly president of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference, an historian of Wesleyan Methodism, and a defender of John Wesley, portrayed Mrs. Vazeille as “a woman of cultivated understanding, as her remaining letters testify;” and that she appeared to Mr. Wesley to possess every other qualification, which promised to increase both his usefulness and happiness, we may conclude from his having made choice of her as his companion.”

Thomas Jackson (1783-1873), Methodist itinerant preacher and eventually chair of Divinity at the Theological College, Richmond, Surrey, cast a dark shadow over the character of Mrs. Vazeille, claiming that, “Neither in understanding nor in education was she worthy of the eminent man to whom she was united; and her temper was intolerably bad. During the lifetime of her first husband, she appears to have enjoyed every indulgence; and, judging from some of his letters to her, which have been preserved, he paid an entire deference to her will. Her habits and spirits were ill adapted to the privations and inconveniences which were incident to her new mode of life, as the travelling companion of Mr. John Wesley.”

In reviewing the entire affair, Rev. John Hampson the younger (1753-1819), rector of St. John’s Church, Sunderland, Durham, and not always a friendly biographer of John Wesley, nonetheless sought a middle ground when he declared, at the outset that,

The connection was unfortunate. There never was a more preposterous union. It is pretty certain that no love lighted their torches on this occasion; and it is as much to be presumed, that neither did Plutus preside at the solemnity. Mrs. Wesley’s property was too inconsiderable, to warrant the supposition that it was a match of interest. Besides, had she been ever so rich, it was nothing to him; for every shifting of her fortune remained at her own disposal; and neither the years, nor the temper of the parties could give any reason to suppose them violently enamoured. That this lady accepted his proposals, seems much less surprising
than that he should have made them. It is probable, his situation at the head of a sect, and the authority it conferred, was not without its charms in the eyes of an ambitious female. But we much wonder, that Mr. Wesley should have appeared so little acquainted with himself and with human nature. He certainly did not possess the conjugal virtues. He had no taste for the tranquility of domestic retirement: while his situation, as an itinerant, left him little leisure for those attentions which are absolutely necessary for the married life.

Two to five years later, John Whitehead (1740-1804), Methodist itinerant preacher turned Quaker and physician, then returned to Methodism, underscored Hampson’s observations:

Mr. Wesley’s constant habit of travelling, the number of persons who came to visit him wherever he was, and his extensive correspondence, were circumstances unfavourable to that social intercourse, mutual openness and confidence, which form the basis of mutual happiness in the married state. These circumstances, indeed, would not have been so very unfavourable, had he married a woman who could have entered into his views, and have accommodated herself to his situation. But this was not the case. Had he searched the whole kingdom, he would hardly have found a woman more unsuitable in these respects, than she whom he married.

“In no respect was she a helpmeet for him,” complained John Wesley’s principal nineteenth-century biographer, Luke Tyerman (1820-1889). “At home she was suspicious, jealous, fretful, taunting, twittering, and often violent. Abroad, when itinerating with him, it too generally happened, that nought could please her.” Tyerman also found, in his subject’s unfortunate marriage, an opportunity for an adult Sunday school lesson, the subject—marriage: “Was there ever a marriage like John Wesley’s?” he asked the class.

It was one of the greatest blunders he ever made. A man who attains to the age of forty-eight, without marrying, ought to remain a bachelor for life, inasmuch as he has, almost of necessity, formed habits, and has acquired angularities and excrescences, which will never harmonize with the relationships and the duties of the married state. Besides, if there ever was a man whose mission was so great and so peculiar as to render it inexpedient for him to become a benedict, Wesley
was such a man. His marriage was ill advised as well as ill assorted. On both sides, it was, to a culpable extent, hasty, and was contracted without proper and sufficient thought. Young people entering into hurried marriages deserve and incur censure; and if so, what shall be said of Wesley and his wife? They married in haste and had leisure to repent. Their act was, in a high degree, an act of folly; and, properly enough, to the end of life, both of them were made to suffer a serious penalty. It is far from pleasant to pursue the subject; but perhaps it is needful. In a world of danger like this, we must look at beacons, as well as beauties.

In the century following, the agendas of Methodists clerics’ reactions to the marriage had given way to the dreams and fantasies of writers who found the distinct line between fiction and biography extremely difficult to locate. For one example, the prolific historical novelist and writer of children’s fiction, Gabrielle Margaret Vere Campbell (1886-1952), publishing as “Margaret Bowen,” tried her hand at biography in 1938 and produced a *Life of John Wesley*. Bowen obviously had read Henry Moore and at least had skimmed the pages of Samuel Richardson’s epistolary novel *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740-1741), and someone, perhaps, had schooled her on the details of eighteenth-century widow’s garb. Further, as with a number of psychologists and social historians who have admired John Wesley, Bowen joined with her nineteenth-century predecessors in expressing her displeasure at John Wesley having failed to secure for himself the hand of Grace Norman Murray (1716-1803), the woman he should have married, chose, on the rebound, as it were, to settle for Mrs. Vazeille. Thus, Bowen adorned her pages with this overly dramatic image of John Wesley’s mate:

She was middle-aged, seemed of a quiet disposition, meek and pious; she was neither well-educated nor intelligent and had less than the usual share of feminine tact and duplicity; though she was ‘able to accommodate to any company in which she found herself.’ Molly Vazeille was like Pamela, a servant who had married her master, but she had not the virtues of that fictitious heroine; her husband had pampered her and she had been put to no test of character. She was well off and pious, because a widow could be little else without causing a scandal, and Molly was orthodox with the orthodoxy of the stupid female who thinks her dignity is one with respectability. She had joined the Methodists, as so many women did, for the pleasure of cosy tea-drinkings
with fellow-sinners, and that delightful meddling with other people’s businesses which is so delicious to her type when glossed over with religion. John [Wesley] stayed at her house, found her cosy deferential, ardent in good works, a not unworthy successor to his other diaphanous\textsuperscript{44} loves. How familiar was that widow’s garb worn by his mother\textsuperscript{45}, Lady Huntingdon,\textsuperscript{46} and Grace Murray\textsuperscript{47}. Mary’s bland features looked out from a high pleated cap; she was modestly swathed to the neck in crape, with black robes and sad-coloured shawls. In this attire, suggestive both of the grave and of the angelic garments of the heavenly hosts, women surely looked their best. John [Wesley], who dreaded fine ladies and painted belles, found these meek, drab widows the acme of feminine perfection.\textsuperscript{48}

Mrs. G. Elsie Harrison’s “study” of John Wesley—another fictional recreation under the guise of biography and published in the same year as Mrs. Bowen’s effort—emphasizes the women in John Wesley’s life.\textsuperscript{49} She presented a different portrait of Mary Goldhawk Vazeille—a woman possessed of a keen degree of perception and fully capable of engineering the machinery of villainy, of manipulating Charles Wesley, and of seizing the advantages to be gained from John Wesley’s inherent human weaknesses. “Molly Vazeille was ever in the habit of calling a spade a spade,” claimed Mrs. Harrison, never one to avoid a cliché. “She had once reigned in Threadneedle Street as a banker’s wife,\textsuperscript{50} and she was at home in that region of hard currency, of obvious cash and clear-cut values. With the clearest of clear eyes, she saw those early Methodists just as they were and not at all as they fondly\textsuperscript{51} hoped they were in the recesses of their own minds.” Mrs. Harrison, perhaps more upset at Charles Wesley and his outspoken opposition to his brother’s marriage than had been Mrs. Vazeille, harps long and loud as she filters the younger Wesley through the eyes and mind of her character, Mrs. Vazeille. In contrast to John Wesley’s hard work and self-sacrifice on the Methodist itinerancy, she sketches Charles Wesley within the context of “the fat, rounded face of the complacent and well-fed. . . . The Methodists must still see the haloes on their saints, but it is more likely that the picture of Charles Wesley is as clear as Molly Vazeille saw him.” Insofar as concerns John Wesley and the constant bickering that came with their marriage, Mrs. Harrison maintained, simply, that “Mrs. Vazeille saw John Wesley as a man and a husband and not at all as God’s messenger of salvation.”\textsuperscript{52}
Actually, biographical and critical perspectives have not undergone radical changes over the more than eight decades following the publications of Mrs. Bowen and Mrs. Harrison. Writing in 1990, Professor Henry Abelove strained his imagination to view the diminutive John Wesley through a gay stereopticon, focusing upon the notion that “with Wesley, religion retained its libidinous and even sexual component.” Nonetheless, through whatever the instrument, Abelove cast no new light upon Mrs. Vazeille, generating the currents of his arguments from the usual antiquated fuses: Hampson, Moore, and Jackson, with a generic spark or two from such surveys as Lawrence Stone’s *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (1972). Thus, in the language of the 1990’s, Professor Abelove could only inform his readers, as writers before him had conveyed to their readers, that prior to the marriage, Mrs. Vazeille had been on the fringes of the Methodist movement, “Now she observed close up the love that his followers felt for him, and like many others, she could account for a love so deep only on the supposition that Wesley was misbehaving sexually. She grew fretful and jealous, opened his mail, spied on him, forbade him to meet his women followers in private, beat him, and, eventually after seven years of marriage, left him.”

A year later, a more reasonable and more informed critical eye appeared to have placed the entire matter into proper context. W. Reginald Ward, an *emeritus* professor of modern history and one of the editors of John Wesley’s journals, contended that

On the surface, Mrs. Vazeille looked to be a suitable candidate for John Wesley’s hand. She was past the age at which she might be accused of evoking a juvenile passion in the great man; she was comfortably provided for, and, by arranging for her property to be settled upon her and her children, JW avoided the reproach of marrying for money encountered by George Whitefield; she had no connection with the gossips of Bristol or Newcastle; and JW repeatedly assured Henry Moore “that it was agreed between him and Mrs. Wesley, previous to their marriage, that he should not preach one sermon less on that account. ‘If I thought I should,’ said he, ‘my dear, as well as I love you, I would never see your face once more.’” (Moore, *Wesley*, 2:173) This was a rash undertaking on the part of a woman who, unlike Grace Murray, had no first-hand experience of the rigours of itinerant life, and one which casts a curious light on JW’s commitment to the union. In any case, the marriage began under the worst possible auspices.
Unfortunately, this survey of contemporary and later reactions to the “mismarriage” will come to its end with a statement relative to “beauty,” set upon a page of a biography published in the bicentennial year of John Wesley’s birth. Rev. Ralph Waller, a Methodist minister described as “a leading authority on the Wesleys,” simply and cryptically, and without documentation, described Mary Goldhawk Vazielle as “an attractive woman.”55 Obviously, the well-intentioned Reverend might easily fall into line among those of his predecessors who had, as he, taken their eyes away from Luke Tyerman’s “beacon.”

If biographers and historians agree, at least, to interpret the marriage between a Mary Vazeille and John Wesley as social tragedy, they should, as quickly and easily, identify the preliminaries to that union as something akin to stage-like humor. By at least January 1751, if not before, John Wesley most probably had reached a decision to marry. Now, in the natural ways of a well-ordered world, two approaches to reaching such a decision appear most expedient:

(1) man meets woman, they love each other, they marry;
(2) man or woman determines to marry, he or she consults a catalogue of available potential candidates with whom to unite, selects a mate, proposes marriage, and they marry.

However, English Methodists of the eighteenth century, led and encouraged by John Wesley, complicated the process considerably, particularly as concerned its preachers, by establishing rules. Initially, the preacher had to consult the leadership of the society within his circuit, then with the London Methodist society, and, at some point, seek permission of his intended’s parents. In John Wesley’s case, he, as a Methodist preacher, also needed to send a letter to all of his preachers and to all of the Methodist societies, stating his reasons for the marriage and asking them for their prayers. Two years earlier, such a bureaucratic labyrinth had delayed, and then presented Charles Wesley with the opportunity to destroy John Wesley’s prospect of marriage to Grace Murray. Therefore, the Methodist leader, on January 26, 1751, while at Oxford, circumvented his own process and wrote to his friend Vincent Perronet of Shoreham, Kent, concerning his marital intentions. Returning to London, Wesley noted in his journal for Saturday, February 2, 1751, “Having received a full answer from Mr. Perronet, I was clearly convinced that I ought to marry. For many years I remained single because I believed I could be more useful in a single than in a married state. And I praise God, who enabled me so to do. I now as fully believed
that in my present circumstances I might be more useful in a married state, into which, upon this clear conviction, and by the advice of my friends, I entered a few days after.”56 Note that the journal extract entry failed to mention the name of Wesley’s intended bride—a strange but not entirely surprising omission. The published journal Extract did not reach the press until 1756, at which time relations between John Wesley and his wife had not yet reached the uncomfortable stage.

In any event, on that same Saturday of February 2, 1751, John Wesley sent for Charles Wesley, informing him that,

...he was resolved to marry! I [Charles Wesley] was thunderstruck, and could only answer he had given me the first blow, and his marriage would come like the coup de grâce. Trusty Ned [Edward] Perronet followed, and told me the person was Mrs. Vazeille! One of whom I never had the least suspicion. I refused his [Edward Perronet’s] company to the chapel and returned to mourn with my faithful [wife] Sally [Sarah Gwynne Wesley]. Groaned all the day, and several following ones, under my own and the people’s burden.57 I could eat no pleasant food, nor preach, nor rest, either by night or by day.58

Edward Perronet, in all probability, had received his information from his father, Vincent Perronet, that in the letter to the elder Perronet in late January 1751, John Wesley had mentioned the name of Mrs. Vazeille as his intended wife. It also means, without the same degree of probability that Mrs. Vazeille had agreed to marry John Wesley prior to his seeking advice from Vincent Perronet. No matter who had mentioned what to whom, nor when, the effect of the news upon Charles Wesley proved considerable, particularly in view of having succeeded in having thwarted his brother’s efforts at matrimony at Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 1749. Further, he found his already expressed burden intensified by an excessive cough and a severe sore throat, his wife accompanying him with her own expressions of sympathy. On Wednesday, February 6, 1751, John Wesley “met with the single men [of the London Methodist society] and showed them on how many accounts it was good for those who had received that gift God to ‘remain single for the kingdom of heaven’s sake’ 59 unless where a particular case might be an exception to the general rule”—the general rule being his own.
For more than an entire month, even before the marriage actually occurred, Charles Wesley could not free himself from the reality of his brother’s marriage to Mrs. Vazeille, fearing that it would impose severe limitations on the Methodist leader’s activities and reduce his stature and effectiveness as the leader of the Methodist organization. For example, on Sunday, February 3, 1751, he “Gave the Sacrament, but without power or life. No comfort in it, no singing between, no prayer after it.” Two weeks later, on Sunday, February 17, he “Dragged myself to the [Methodist] chapel, and spoke in those words, ‘Thy sun shall no more go down,’ etc. The whole congregation seemed infected by my sorrow. Both under the word, and at the Sacrament, we wept and made supplication. It was a blessed mourning to us all. At the Foundery heard my brother’s lamentable apology [for his forthcoming marriage], which made us all hide our faces. Several days afterwards I was one of the last that heard of his marriage.” Following administration of the Sacrament on Sunday, February 24, Ebenezer Blackwell “fell upon me in a manner peculiar to himself, beating, driving, dragging me to my dear sister.” That action on the part of Ebenezer Blackwell might have been an attempt by the Wesleys’ friend to reconcile Charles Wesley to his brother’s marriage and, at least, to recognize his new sister-in-law. However, Charles Wesley’s journal entry for that day ends abruptly, followed by a gap of four days. On Friday, March 1, a Miss Hardy, a London resident and undoubtedly a member of the London Methodist society meeting at the Foundery, related to Charles Wesley “my brother’s apology that ‘in Oxford he had an independent fellowship, was usually honoured, etc., but left all for the people’s sake, returned to London, took up his cross, and married; that at Oxford he had no more thought of a woman than any other animal upon earth, but married to break down the prejudice between the world and him!’ His easily won lady sat by. He said, ‘I am not more sure than God sent his Son into the world, than it was his will I should marry.’” By Saturday, March 9, Charles Wesley evidenced signs of improvement, stating that he “Felt great emotion in the word, both morning and evening,” and on Thursday, March 14, he “Saw the necessity of reconciliation with my brother, and resolved to save the trouble of umpires.” Finally, and mercifully, on Saturday, March 16, 1751, Charles Wesley “Called on my sister; kissed and assured her I was perfectly reconciled to her, and to my brother.”

A principal problem underlying this marriage began to appear almost immediately following its outset, the source being none other
than John Wesley himself. On Tuesday, March 19, 1751, he left Bristol for London, having been “desired by many to spend a few days there before I entered upon my northern journey.” Thus, he arrived at London on Thursday the 21st and remained until Wednesday the 27th. “I cannot understand,” he opined, “how a Methodist preacher can answer it to God to preach one sermon or to travel one day less in a married than in a single state. In this respect surely ‘it remaineth that they who have wives be as though they had none.’” Arriving on that same day at Tetsworth, Oxfordshire, approximately forty miles from London, Wesley attempted to compensate for the separation of time and distance between his wife and him. “My dear Molly, do I write too soon? Have not you, above all the people in the world, a right to hear from me as soon as possibly I can? You have surely a right to every proof of love I can give, and to all the little help which is in my power. For you have given me even your own self.” However, John Wesley, at age forty-eight, cannot play extended chords upon the linguistic strings of romance. He quickly falls back upon what he knows best—the sound and the sense of Holy Scripture. “O how can we praise God enough for making us help meet for each other!” For the remainder of this letter—three of its four paragraphs—Wesley directs his wife to matters of Methodist business that he has left to his wife’s charge. The epistle might just as well have been directed to a Methodist itinerant preacher or to a Methodist society elder. How would it have been received by a woman their union, more time on the back of his horse than in their marriage bed?

One cannot cite often enough those qualities that dominated the marriage of Molly Vazeille to John Wesley: misunderstanding, jealousy, and outright incompatibility. For example, on Wednesday, January 13, 1771, at London, John Wesley noted, “For what cause I know not to this day, [Mary Wesley] set out for Newcastle [to stay with her daughter, Mrs. Jane Vazeille Smith], proposing ‘never to return.’ *Non eam reliqui, nn dimisi; non revocabo* [I did not desert her; I did not put her away; I will not recall her.]” However, more than a year later, according to Wesley’s journal entry for Tuesday, June 30, 1772, Mrs. Wesley had returned to her husband, residing with him in their residences at Bristol and London, and even traveling with him. Then followed six more years of haggling and bickering before Mary Wesley departed from her husband a third time (the second instance in
1775), apparently without informing him in advance of her plans. Thus, he wrote to her one last time, from Bristol on October 2, 1778:75

As it is doubtful, considering your age [68] and mine [75], whether we may meet any more in this world, I think it right to tell you my mind once for all without anger or bitterness. . . .Ever since (and, indeed, long before) you have made my faults the constant matter of your conversation. Now, suppose an husband has many faults, is it the art of a prudent wife to publish or conceal them? You have published my (real or supposed) faults,76 not to one or two intimates only (though perhaps that would have been too much), but to all Bristol, to all London, to all England, to all Ireland. Yea, you did whatever in you lay to publish it to all the world, thereby designing to put a sword into my enemies’ hands. . . .If you were to live a thousand years, you could not undo the mischief that you have done. And till you have done all you can towards it, I bid you farewell.77

Interestingly enough, Molly Wesley might not always have acted alone in the display of her “mischief.” Late in the game, Noah Vazeille, her youngest child, at some point prior to his mother’s death in 1781, assumed residence in Stratford, Essex. Should readers wish to embrace all or parts of Elsie Harrison’s soap-opera dramatics within her biography of John Wesley, Noah Vazeille rises as one of the villains of the piece, a devious associate of his equally devious mother. Unfortunately, in scoring the few pages of information about the children of Anthony and Mary Vazielle, one must consider what one discovers and sift it critically through an especially fine strainer. Mrs. Harrison, however, tended to rely upon a process of threading the few crumbs of such facts through her highly charged imagination and projecting before her readers such scenarios as this:

The whole of the Miss Sophy episode78 was conned over79 by Mrs. John Wesley in the company of her son, Noah Vazeille. Together they decided it would make fine printed matter for the papers, and looked for more incriminating manuscripts in the fastness of his [John Wesley’s] private desk. The bureau in Wesley’s room was broken open and his papers stolen, and there, as one glorious find, the whole of that long treatise on Grace Murray came to light.80 Noah Vazeille took possession on the instant and carried it in triumph away from the Foundery.81 Later he gave it to a friend, and later still it found its way into the British Museum. It is from that old manuscript with its corrections in the well-known
hand of [John] Wesley that the evidence comes from the friendship of this man and this woman with the background of Alexander [Murray, Grace Murray’s husband] the sea captain and wonders of the Grace of God in that unemotional museum collection of England’s treasures this strange document holds its place. It is right that it should be there with Diana’s Temple and the relics of primitive man, for it is eloquent of the ageless love of man and woman and of their unconquerable faith in the love of God.

After wiping away her own tears of sheer emotion, Mrs. Harrison provided her readers with yet another snippet of Noah Vazeille’s chicanery, reporting that Molly Wesley “died in 1781 and was buried without Noah Vazeille informing Wesley of the event.”84 True. John Wesley’s journal extract entry for Friday, October 12, 1781, reads, “I came to London and was informed that my wife died on Monday [October 8th]. This evening she was buried, though I was not informed of it until a day or two after.”85 Perhaps Noah Vazeille never extended any effort to inform his stepfather of Mary Wesley’s death, but he certainly would not have been the only person aware of that event. Nonetheless, Mrs. Harrison proved herself not content to let the dog sleep. “There is a suggestion,” she wrote, “of a blow given and received even at the very last by that angular woman [Molly Wesley]. . . . Well the plotters knew that the leaders of the Methodists ought to have been at his wife’s funeral, for was he not known as the apostle of holiness?”86 The “suggestion,” of course, places Noah Vazeille among the plotters. The only problem, insofar as concerns Mrs. Harrison’s story, points to the fact that no plot really existed.

Turning to the issue of John Wesley’s manuscript account of his relationship with Grace Murray, Mrs. Harrison proved correct, but only on her own terms. Another among her bothersome biographical practices concerns her ignoring the specificity of such mundane items as names and dates. Not wishing to impede the swelling tide of her readers’ tears, she clings to generalities—“Later he [Noah Vazeille] gave it [John Wesley’s manuscript] to a friend, and later still it found its way into the safe keeping of the British Museum.”87 According to the editors of the Dictionary of National Biography (DNB), Noah Vazeille retained Wesley’s autograph account until some time prior to 1788; for in that year it proved to have been in possession of a friend of his, one Naphtaly Hart, who retained it until bequeathing it to the British Museum in 1829.88 Umphrey Lee
(eventually president of Southern Methodist University), who printed a transcript of the manuscript in his 1928 biography (republished in 1954) of John Wesley, differed from the DNB account: “The one who gave the manuscript to the museum in 1788,” declared Lee, “certified to the fact that Noah Vazeille of Stratford, Essex, had been the original owner, and to the fact that some verses appended to the book are in the handwriting of John Wesley himself.” Mrs. Harrison, proclaiming to the last the villainy of Noah Vazeille, maintained that in Grace Murray’s last years, she “wanted to get the story of her life which Mr. Wesley had written down from her mouth, but Noah Vazeille had been at his thieving work and that old manuscript found its way into the British Museum instead.

The details of the “mismarriage,” upon the vehicles of fact, anecdote, and pure fiction finally ground its way to its obvious and only conclusion. John Wesley provided no evidence of his concern as to when or where his wife would be laid to her final rest. The Gentleman’s Magazine for October 1781 (51:49), however, most conveniently provided all interested parties with the information: “Died Mrs. M. Wesley, aged 71, wife of Mr. John Wesley, the celebrated Methodist, Oct. 8, 1781,” with burial in Camberwell churchyard. Thus, in death, she remained firmly affixed to John Wesley and to Methodism. The inscription on her stone described her, simply and generically, as “a woman of exemplary piety, a tender parent, and a sincere friend.” Mary Vazeille Wesley bequeathed to her son, Anthony Vazeille, her money—the sum of which had been reduced from the original £5000, left to her by her first husband, to £5000. To John Wesley she left a ring!

What came of all of this? From one perspective, not much. Mary Goldhawk Vazeille Wesley managed a leading role in a single scene within the long dramatic narrative of John Wesley’s life and work. Their eventual separation deposited her into the deepest bowels of historical oblivion. John Wesley—married, separated, and widowed—continued to lead Methodism as a principal participant in the eighteenth-century evangelical movement; he continued to travel, to preach, to write, to edit, and to educate. He sought to ease poverty, to advance his views on politics, on war, on revolution. He held fast to his determination “to live and to die in the Church of England.” Nineteenth-century biographers of John Wesley managed to enlarge their volumes by a chapter, while later biographers and historians of eighteenth-century Methodism extended their works anywhere from a paragraph to a single sentence. From a more significant perspective, perhaps, the
“mismatch” of Mary Goldhawk Vazeille to John Wesley would provide a significant essay by a broadly educated sociologist or psychologist in a large anthology of “mismatches” between the notables of world history. If nothing else, it would satisfy the insatiable appetites of those who feast upon the failures of others.

End Notes

1 “Shift” here equals “an expedient device necessitated by circumstances.”

2 The writing consisted of work on the eleven-page A Short Hebrew Grammar (1751) and the eighty-two pages of thirty-five Biblical Lessons for Children, Part IV, which would not reach the press until 1754.

3 Threadneedle Street initially recorded in 1598 as Three-Needle Street, then as Thred-Needle-Street in 1616, as Thridneedle Street in 1656, and Three Needle Street in 1666. Possibly named from the “three needles” that appear in the arms of the Needlemakers’ Company, or, more likely, from the thread and needle in the arms of the Merchant Taylors’ Company, particularly because the Merchant Taylors’ Hall has stood on this street since the fourteenth century. See A.D. Mills, A Dictionary of London Place Names (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001): 227.


7 Charles Manning (1714-1799), B.A. Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge (B.A, 1736); vicar of Hayes, Middlesex (1738-1756); sympathetic to the Wesleys and the Methodist cause; John Wesley preached in Manning’s church on at least fifteen occasions. See Ward and Hetzenrater, Journal and Diaries III, in Works, 20: 263, 321, 487.


10 Ward and Heitzenrater, Works, 5:369.


13 Kimbrough and Newport, Manuscript Journal, 2:594.

14 Sarah (Sally) Perrin (fl. 1735-1780), initially a resident of Bradford, in the West Riding of Yorkshire, and a Quaker evangelical, moved to Bristol, Gloucestershire, where she eventually became John Wesley’s housekeeper. She married John Jones, one of John Wesley’s preachers, corresponded consistently with Charles Wesley, and became a leader within Methodist women’s bands and prayer meetings.

15 Exodus 4:13—“And he [Moses] said, O my Lord, send, I pray thee, by the hand of him whom thou will send.” (KJV)

16 Psalms 15:4—“In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord. He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not.” (KJV)

17 Psalms 115:1—“Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give the praise: for thy loving mercy, and for thy truths sake.” (BCP) “Not unto us, Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy and for thy truth’s sake.” (KJV)

18 John 9:4—“I [Jesus Christ] must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.” (KJV)

19 Luke 8:24—“And they [Jesus Christ’s disciples] came to him [Jesus Christ], and awoke him, saying, Master, Master, we perish, then he rose and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water: and they ceased, and there was a calm.” (KJV)

20 Galatians 5:25—“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.” (KJV) Philippians 3:16-17—“Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing. Brethren, be followers together of me [Paul], and mark them which walk so as ye have us an example.” (KJV)

21 Matthew 28:18—“And Jesus came and spake unto them [the disciples], saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.” (KJV)


23 Son to Susanna, The Private Life of John Wesley (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1938), by G. Elsie Harrison, daughter of Dr. J. S. Simon,

24 “I look upon all the world as my parish: thus far I mean, that in whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty, to declare unto all that are willing to hear the glad tidings of salvation.” John Wesley, Monday, June 11, 1739 (Ward and Heitzenrater, Journal ad Diaries II, in Works, 19:67). See, also, in the Book of Common Prayer (BCP, 1662 edition), “Communion,” Exhortation 3: “To him [Jesus Christ] therefore with the Father, and the holy Ghost, let us give (as we are most bounden) continual thanks, submitting our selves to his body will and pleasure, and studying to serve him in trust holiness and righteousness all the dayes [sic] of our life. Amen.” (Brian Cummings [ed.], The Book of Common Prayer. The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662 [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011], 398-399)

25 Mona Lisa, the portrait by the Florentine painter, sculptor, architect, engineer, and scientist, Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), in the Louvre, Paris, France (stolen in August 1911, recovered in December 1913); reportedly represents “La Gioconda,” the wife of the Florentine Francesco del Giocondo.

26 Harrison, Son to Susanna, 318-321.


30 Who knows where those letters might be preserved?


32 Plutus, in Greek mythology, the personification of wealth; a son of Iasion and Demeter, and intimately associated with Irene, goddess of peace; she often represented in art as holding the infant Plutus; supposedly blinded by Zeus so that he might not bestow his favors exclusively on good men, but should distribute his gifts without regard to merit; by a number of accounts, however, Plutus received a cure and thus gave wealth only to those whom he could perceive as being honest.
Technically, eighteenth-century Methodism under John Wesley cannot be termed a “sect,” for Wesley never separated his loosely entwined religious organization from the Church of England, nor himself from the priesthood of that Church. Hampson, and a large majority of his clerical colleagues, assumed a contrary view, even though he had embraced Methodism prior to his episcopal ordination.


John Whitehead, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A., Collected from His Private Papers and Printed Works; and Written at the Request of His Executors, To Which Is Prefixed, Some Account of His Ancestors and Relations; with the Life of the Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A. Collected from His Private Journal, and Never Before Published* (London: S. Couchman, 1793-1796), 2:263. Dr. Whitehead attended the dying John Wesley, his patient refusing to allow any other physician to come to his bedside.


“Angularities” here means relating to one’s manner and acquired habits, particularly stiffness, formality, and lack of accommodation.

“Excrescences” here means natural outgrowths or appendages.

“Benedict” here means a newly married man; a confirmed bachelor who marries.

“Assorted” here means suited, matched.


“Marjorie Bowen” being but one (yet the best known) of her several pseudonyms.

Suggesting comparisons and contrasts between Molly Vazeille and Samuel Richardson’s Pamela Andrews suggests one’s total ignorance of both.

“Diaphanous” here means permitting light and vision to pass through; perfectly transparent or translucent; vague or insubstantial.

Susanna Annesley Wesley (1669-1742).

Selina Shirley Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon (1707-1791), patroness of George Whitefield and the Calvinist Methodists.

Grace Norman Murray Bennet (1716-1803), John Wesley’s second serious love, who, also for the second time, hesitated in a direct
proposal of marriage and thus lost (through a concerted effort by brother Charles Wesley) the game to a rival.


49 Henry D. Rack referred to Mrs. Harrison's “overblown style and cavalier treatment of facts” (*Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, 3rd ed. [London: Epworth Press, 2002]:x), while Richard P. Heitzenrater (*The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, 2nd ed. [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003]:382-383) considered that in Mrs. Harrison's *Sons to Susanna*, the writer “manipulated historical facts rather loosely to fit her own psychological preconceptions in her somewhat sensationalist view of Wesley's relationship with his parents. It seems the psychohistorians have always been better psychologists than historians...”

50 Scholars generally have agreed upon Anthony Vazeille's occupation as a merchant (and an affluent one at that), not a banker.

51 “Fondly” here means foolishly.


57 Numbers 11:11—“And Moses sad unto the Lord, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? And wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all the people upon me?” (KJV) See, also, Numbers 11:17.


59 Matthew 19:12—“For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother’s womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.” (KJV)


61 Isaiah 60:20—“Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.” (KJV)
1 Samuel 13:12—“Therefore said I [Samuel], the Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the Lord: I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering.” (KJV)

“Apology” here means a justification and/or explanation.


Matthew 16:24—“Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” (KJV)

John 3:17—“For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.” (KJV)

“Umpire” here the word has not changed in meaning since its introduction into the English language in the middle of the fifteenth century. It continues to refer to one, in government or law, for instance, who serves as a mediator between or among contending parties. In the United States, one rarely sees the word outside of the gates of a sporting arena. The English poet William Cowper found room for the word early in his lengthy poem, “Tirocinium; or, a Review of Schools (1785)—

For her [the soul] the Judgment, umpire in the strife
That Grace and Nature have to wage through life,
Quick-sighted arbiter of good and ill,
Appointed sage preceptor of the Will. . . . (29-32)


Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journal and Diaries III*, in *Works*, 20:380. See, also, 1 Corinthians 7:29—“But this I [Paul] say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; . . .” (KJV)

Genesis 2:18—“And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I shall make him a help meet for him.” (KJV)

One might raise the question as to why the couple simply did not seek divorce early in the marriage and be done with it. The answer is even simpler: until 1857, a divorce in England could be obtained only through a private Act of Parliament—although in Scotland divorce proved easier to secure. In 1857, the English Divorce Court eased access to divorce, granting separation to men who could prove their wives’ adultery, and to women on grounds of their husbands’ adultery, as well as to husbands’ cruelty. The Court also assessed a cost. In 1968, an Act significantly liberalized the divorce laws.
Wesley omitted his wife’s name from the published extract (1777) of this entry.


In a brief article, “John Wesley’s Ordination of Dr. [Thomas] Coke As Bishop for America,” Methodist Recorder, December 8, 1898, 4, the London publisher, Rev. Charles H. Kelly, referred to a letter by John Wesley that sold at a London auction on November 4, 1898 for £12.10s. “Is this a part of that letter?” inquired John Telford.


John Wesley’s abortive love affair with the teenage Sophia Christiana Hopkey in Savannah, Georgia, during his equally abortive mission there in 1735-1737.

“Conned over” here means studied, learned, inspected, investigated, examined. The editors of the Oxford Universal Dictionary cite a most apt statement from Jonathan Swift—“Conning old topics like a parrot,” while William Shakespeare’s lines from Julius Caesar fit as well: “All his faults observ’d, /Set in a notebook, learn’d and conn’d by rote.” (4:3:95-96).


The reason for Noah Vazeille’s state of “triumph” has never come to light. Again, one becomes hard pressed to distinguish between reality and Mrs. Harrison’s imagination.

More than likely from West Street Chapel, London, where John Wesley had established his residence.

Harrison, Son to Susanna, 329-330.

Harrison, Son to Susanna, 331.


Harrison, Son to Susanna, 331-332.

Harrison, Son to Susanna, 329.


90 Harrison, *Son to Susanna*, 355.

91 Camberwell, London, south of Walworth, east of Brixton, west of Peckham, and north of Herne Hill—currently within the London borough of Southwark; in the eighteenth century, a village surrounded by fields and known for its flowers and fruit trees; the parish church, in Church Street, dedicated to St. Giles, patron saint of cripples and mendicants, destroyed by fire in 1841. “In the churchyard,” announced either Weinreb or Hibbert, “now [c. 1983] cleared as a public open space, are buried John Wesley’s shrewish wife, Mary, who died in 1781; Miss Lucy Warner, who was 32 ins. high and ran a local school; and James Blake, who sailed the world with Captain [James] Cook.” See Ben Weinreb and Christopher Hibbert (eds.), *The London Encyclopaedia* (London: Macmillan, 1983; rpt. Bethesda, Maryland: Adler and Adler, Publishers, Inc., 1986): 114.
Kim Okesson

Dorothy Sayers, Communication and Theology: A Lifetime of Influence in British Society

Abstract:
This paper examines the writings of Dorothy Sayers through the lens of transportation theory and feminist communication theory. Dorothy Sayers’s early childhood and educational years are considered in light of their impact on her work as an adult. Her role as a writer and a lay theologian is discussed. The role of women in England during the first part of the twentieth century is considered. Attention is given to Sayers’s writings across multiple literature genres and the strength this brings to her communication of theological truth.

Keywords: transportation theory, feminist communication theory, England, women, theology, creeds

Kim Okesson is the Director of Admissions and an adjunct professor in the School of Communication Arts at Asbury University, Wilmore, Kentucky. Kim is in her final year of coursework as a PhD student at Regent University, studying communication.
Introduction

Dorothy Sayers, an author, theologian, and playwright, moved in the same intellectual circles as C.S. Lewis and J. R. Tolkien. She was not one of the original ‘Inklings’ but she was already a successful author by the time she engaged in philosophical discussions and debates with that influential group and enjoyed their friendship (Carpenter 1979: 189). She was a gifted communicator and knew the power of narrative to teach spiritual truth. She wrote sixteen novels in her lifetime and twenty-four non-fiction books.

Sayers was known for her ability to wordsmith and was “the author of plays, letters, essays, lectures, and a highly regarded translation of Dante’s Divine Comedy” (Cart 2018: 12). The gospel themes evident in her work include “conscience, sin and grace, covetousness, pride, despair and hope, and much more (Cart 2018: 12). She made important contributions to the church and society through her writing, yet few, according to Simmons (2005) have explored it in depth. Simmons (2005: 17) attributes this to the huge volume of her writing and the massive variety in her writing. Her writings include poems, short stories, plays for radio and the stage, children’s books, novels, letters, literary reviews, essays (theological, political, creative commentary) and translations (most notable her translation of Dante) (Simmons 2005: 18).

Her impact as a female scholar during her lifetime, as a peer of male scholars still viewed as giants today, is significant. She not only had a place at the table, but she led the way for many women who would make their careers in the academy and in scholarship, years after her death. “By almost any measurement, Dorothy Leigh Sayers was one of the giants of the first half of the 20th Century. As a scholar, writer, and a public speaker, she excelled” (Tischler 1980: 1). She was masterful at indirect communication. As she sought to display the gospel in her writings, she wrote almost as much fiction as she did non-fiction. Similar to G.K. Chesterton, she wrote mysteries. Unquestionably, Dorothy Sayers contributed to both our understanding of theology and communication. The aim of this paper is to illustrate how Dorothy Sayers was a national leader in England and used her profound communication skills to influence British society both inside and outside the church, through her effective communication of the gospel to a nation that believed it was Christian.
Biographical Background

Dorothy Sayers was an only child, born in Oxford in 1893. Her father, Henry Sayers, was a chaplain and her mother, Helen Mary Sayers was the headmaster at Christ Church Choir School (Reynolds 1993: 1). Dorothy was taught at home, but her lessons were alternately taught by governesses, her father, and her mother (Reynolds 1993: 13). Her father taught her Latin and started her lessons when she was only six. Her parents were known for their love of theater and took her to London annually to see a production. She also was encouraged to play-act and Sayers regularly identified herself with her favorite characters in books (Reynolds 1993: 8). As she grew, she also produced plays, made costumes, props, and programs as well as authored long narrative poems, which she illustrated (Reynolds 1993: 22). An artist of her caliber, from a young age, naturally turned her everyday life experiences into art (Tischler 1980: 8).

Before she became a teenager, her parents predicted her attendance at university and chose Oxford as the best university for her (Reynolds 1993:27). They planned her high school years accordingly, choosing an elite boarding school for her preparation. She did eventually enroll at Oxford, even though at the time Oxford only admitted female students but did not confer degrees on them. In 1920, when Dorothy Sayers was 27, Oxford University “had consented to regularize the position concerning degrees for women. Up until then they had been eligible for the title to a degree that were not official graduates” (Reynolds 1993: 97). Dorothy Sayers was one of the first female graduates of Oxford University: she was awarded with B.A. and M.A degrees.

After her graduation, Dorothy Sayers went on to a lifetime of writing. Although her writings included both fiction and nonfiction there was nothing frivolous about her personality or her publications. Simmons (2005: 9) describes her as both a participant and an observer in society, which afforded her a unique perspective. She was a writer, not a formal academic, although she had advanced degrees. She was not a member of the clergy, although she wrote theologically and spoke to gatherings of clergy. She was a lay person in the church, yet she was not an average lay person; she was a creative intellectual who was masterful at communication. Sayers was a very intentional author; she sought to communicate foundational truths about God and humanity in all of her works.
Theoretical Framework

In this paper, Dorothy Sayers’ works are analyzed through the lens of two communication theories: feminist communication theory and transportation theory. Feminist communication theory has three primary characteristics. First, it is political. “Feminist communication theory assumes that the world we know is unjust and requires change” (Rako & Wackwitz 2004: 6). This theory focuses on those who have been marginalized because of gender and exists out of the need to make that marginalization stop. According to Rako and Wackwitz (2004: 6), the very nature of it being political makes it personal, as well as encouraging and producing “multiple understandings and reimagining of our world.”

Secondly, feminist communication theory is explanatory. It validates experience and speaks through experience. This allows it to, “help groups and individuals make sense of their everyday lives and meanings that shape our very identities and experiences” (Rako & Wackwitz 2004: 6). Thirdly, it is polyvocal; the voices that contribute to this theory are varied, as individuals and in ideals. It speaks to and from the margins. “It allows for the exploration of individual stories, complex relationships, personal interpretations, and multiple realities” (Rako & Wackwitz 2004: 6).

Feminist communication theory gives voice. It allows women to speak, gives the respect to be heard, and access to areas previously or consistently denied to women. There are communicative forums throughout society which have historically, and some currently, which deny women voice. This denial is evident in interpersonal, group, organizational, and mediated communication. Allowing the voice of any marginalized group to come out of the margins is a primary focus for feminist theory (Littlejohn, Foss, & Oetzel 2017: 449).

Transportation theory was developed by Melanie Green and Timothy Brock to explain the effect of one being, “transported into the narrative world” (Littlejohn, Foss, & Oetzel 2017: 167). The idea of transportation in communication is when one becomes “so enmeshed in the story you are experiencing that you are swept away from your world and into the world of the story” (Littlejohn, Foss, & Oetzel 2017: 167). When a person experiences this, they commonly lose track of time, space, and can commonly picture themselves in the story. Interestingly, transportation frequently results in a person being unaware of events happening around him or her and experience strong emotions, both positive and negative (Littlejohn, Foss, & Oetzel 2017: 167).
Transportation theory depends on narrative, however fiction and non-fiction can be equally effective and the medium is not restricted to stories in print. Plays, musicals, films, story festivals, television shows, etc. can all result in transportation of the listener, reader, or observer. Essential to transportation theory is the result of the reader or viewer making a change in his or her real life, based on what he or she experiences while transported into the narrative world. According to Green and Brock (2000: 703), literature written for the popular audience, detective or romance novels, may be criticized by scholars as not being the highest class of literature, yet have proven to be particularly effective in transporting the reader. Both transportation theory and feminist communication theory are evident throughout Dorothy Sayers’s writings. Her writings were also thoroughly theological, despite her protests that she was “just” a writer.

Writings and Theology

Sayers was a contemporary of Lewis and she was prolific in her writing, yet she is much less studied, and in particular rarely called a theologian (Simmons 2005: 12). Few have examined her important contribution to the church in this regard (Simmons 2005: 17). “Her vocation as a writer was a vital part of what equipped her to be an especially effective lay theologian” (Simmons 2005: 19). Her skills in communication were a gift to the church and she sought to use them to bring the church into right relationship with the God it claimed to worship.

Dorothy Sayers was not an ordained member of the clergy; she was considered an intellectual member of the laity in the church. She was regularly invited to write letters and plays to help explain Christianity and make it accessible to the common person. James Beitler (2019: 62) praises Sayers for her ability to illustrate and teach hard truths realistically through drama, which had a profound impact on the church. In 1940, Sayers had taken the clergy of England to task over their lack of ability to teach the creeds, and in some instances their lack of teaching the creeds at all, in a way that people understood them to be relevant to their everyday lives. According to Sayers, the clergy failed to view Christianity rhetorically and by doing so, made no effort to communicate to the audience in a way the audience could understand (Beitler 2019: 62). Her exasperation was expressed in her statement, “They’ve got the most terrific story in the world and they don’t tell it” (Beitler 2109: 62). Beitler (2019: 65) brilliantly states, “. . . the stage was at one and the same time Sayers’s workplace and her
Sayers stewarded her gifts and talents to use art to communicate spiritual truth.

Transportation of the audience was a goal for Sayers as she wrote. According to Beitler (2019: 68), her work showcases Quintilian’s concept of *energeia*. Energeia is the realistic depiction of an event, done with such excellence, persuasion, and emotion, the event seems real to the audience (Beitler 2019: 68). Sayers was an author and playwright who gave much time and attention to the poetics of space. For example, in her greatest mystery novel, *The Nine Tailors*, she hired an architect to draw the parish church, so she could realistically set scenes in the space through her writing. Through her dramatic works Sayers sought to connect with her audience in ways the traditional teaching in the church could not.

The central question Fred Craddock (1978), author of *Overhearing the Gospel: Preaching and Teaching the Faith to Persons who have Heard it All Before*, asked was how does one person communicate the Christian faith to another? This question was one that Dorothy Sayers asked as well, as she saw the church in England not communicating the gospel or the doctrines of the church effectively. She spent much of her career writing and speaking towards that end. Craddock stated that many an author and rhetor has had to face the truth about the Truth, “is being available does not mean it will be appropriated” (Craddock 1978: 15). “There is no lack of information in a Christian land; something else is lacking, and this is a something which the one man cannot directly communicate to the other” (Craddock 1978: 9). Even though Sayers wrote broadly and across numerous genres, she was singularly focused and committed to honoring people and the message by seeking understandable avenues of communication.

Dorothy Sayers knew her stories were theological, even though she did not attend a seminary or have an official position in the Church of England. This idea is supported by C.S. Song (2011) in his book, *In the Beginning were Songs, not Texts: Story Theology*. All people, all over the world, from all time were and are storytellers. Song (2011: 18) states, “A story worthy of its name grips you in the depths of your heart and mind, forces you to look deeply into yourself and into human nature, and compels you to examine relations between you and other human beings, between human beings and the world, nature and creation, and relations between human beings and God. If this is what story does, it is profoundly theological.” Hauerwas and Jones (1997: 5) argue the value of narrative by defining it as an invaluable conceptual category for understanding.
methods of argument, “displaying the content of Christian convictions,” and articulating personal identity.

Sayers believed that creative work was of the highest order. “She discovered that the statements in the creeds concerning God the Creator were an exact description of the human mind when engaged in an act of creative imagination” (Reynolds 1993: 311). All of humanity bears the image of God, therefore all creating is in the image of the divine act of creating (Harrison 2004: 253). The doctrine of the Trinity, the three in one, represented for her the creative process as a three-fold work (Reynolds 1993: 310). This three-fold work of human creation includes idea, power, and energy (Harrison 2004: 253). Idea, power, and energy are all part of the same creative conceptualization process; they are one, like the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Beitler 2019: 83). “Idea,” analogous to the Father, is the creative concept that starts in the mind of the artist. “Energy,” analogous to the Son, is the process of making the conceptual material. “Power,” analogous to the Spirit, is the effect this materialized concept has on the audience.

Sayers’ work was all the more valuable to the church in England as she understood the myths, concerns, and questions of the society around her. She knew British culture. The process of understanding a culture or an audience involves knowing the myths present in the society. Song (2011: 18) speaks to the importance of theology being the matrix in a story, thus myths give the rhetor insight into what a community believes about the big issues of life: birth, death, creation, good, evil, right, and wrong. Through understanding the myths in a culture, the rhetor or author can craft stories with the same concerns or values, which then also communicate ultimate Truth.

**Writing Genres and Theology**

Dorothy Sayers’ writing in advertising, detective fiction, translation, and play-writing are the genres through which her theological voice was heard the strongest. Each of these four genres had a particular characteristic or set of characteristics which illustrated her gift for “speaking” theologically through text.

**Advertising.**

Her early career was in advertising. A successful advertiser must know and understand the culture he or she is selling to and must also have a writing ability which is succinct, yet meaningful. Sayers was
notable for her economy of words (Simmons 2005: 46). There were three ways her experience in advertising helped her write theologically. First, Dorothy Sayers was trained to identify unclear writing (Simmons 2005: 47). If an advertisement in the newspaper left the public wondering what it meant, the advertisement was useless. Similarly, clergy who spoke and wrote using lofty theological sentiment or antiquated language, left the public wondering what it all meant, rendering the message useless. Sayers could not tolerate this kind of ambiguous and ineffective communication. Secondly, advertisers were attentive to the details of the ordinariness of life, how people thought, and what was tolerable. Sayers wrote, *Creed or Chaos* to address the very common misunderstandings people in England had about Christianity. “In this, she took the traditional teaching of the church and put them into dialogue with the understandings and misunderstandings the average person has about Christianity” (Simmons 2005: 48). Lastly, her experience in advertising improved her own clarity of writing and the impact of her religious works (Simmons 2005: 48).

**Detective Fiction.**

Detective fiction was a common genre in the early 20th century. Interestingly, the skill Sayers developed in writing detective stories aided her in communicating the gospel. In a detective story, the author must map out a story with enough logical sequence so the plot is believable for the reader. Her play, *The Man Born to be King*, was an incredible artistic labor as she translated it from the original Greek and created her own synthesis of the four Gospels. She then wrote the play in such a way as to make the story coherent (Simmons 2005: 49). This play showcased her writing capacity and ability. She wrote one coherent story, to be performed as twelve radio segments with each segment capable of standing on its own, in and of itself.

Authors of detective fiction also craft arguments. The clues along the way must lead to a logical conclusion. This is evident in Sayers’ *Creed or Chaos*? In this essay, “she anticipated the responses of the uninstructed person to the various doctrinal assertions of the Christian faith” (Simmons 2005: 50). It also requires research. Crafting this type of argument or plot requires research on the part of the author to create realistic settings both architecturally and geographically, lifelike relationships between characters, historical accuracy, and attention to details of language and dialect. Sayers studied campanology, the art of bell-ringing, for two years before she wrote her novel, *The Nine Tailors*. The story of *The Nine Tailors* opens with a nine-hour pealing of the bells. Additionally in the plot, a lost
and then discovered document, which must be decoded for the mystery to be solved, required the main character to have knowledge of bell ringing and bell towers.

Finally, good detective fiction allows the author to present the same story or the same situation from the perspective of many different people. This grants the author the opportunity to gift the story both a richness and a depth (Simmons 2005: 51). Sayers was concerned with what was being proclaimed from the pulpit in the church as well as what the person in the pew heard. This dual perspective allowed her the unique position of “explaining theology from the inside out” (Simmons 2005: 51). This is evident in her novel, *The Documents in the Case*, in which the case is told from multiple perspectives. Lastly, her creativity and artistic ability in writing detective fiction employed her imagination. She created people and places, conversations and concerns, destiny and dynasties, all from within her own mind. She lived in this creative space and had no tolerance for people and institutions of influence who had a platform for proclamation yet were utterly lacking in imaginative ability to communicate with their audience (Simmons 2005: 52).

**Translations and Plays.**

Similarly, her work in translation helped her hone skills which were useful for communicating theologically. Translation work from antiquated language to modern language assists the public to hear a timeless message in a new light. The Church of England still used the King James Version, which although it had beautiful Shakespearean style English, was largely unrelatable to the average person in the twentieth century. When she translated the Gospels to write *The Man Born to be King*, she used modern language, which shocked and impressed her audiences (Simmons 2005: 53), the effect she hoped it would have. As traditional language had lost its meaning, her goal was to have people hear doctrine and theological truths for the first time in a way they could understand and perceive as relevant to their lives (Simmons 2005: 65).

As a playwright, Dorothy Sayers brought history and theology to life. She was convinced that a play would have more impact on society than volumes of theological texts (Simmons 2005: 56). Sayers was persuaded that the majority of the people in the church “are exceedingly surprised to discover that the creeds contain any statements that bear a practical and comprehensible meaning” (Sayers 1978: 41). She believed the incarnation was the most wondrous part of Christianity, yet tragically the incarnation
was also one of the least understood doctrines in England. Determined to address this, Sayers allowed the dogma to “speak for itself” by putting it on stage (Simmons 2005: 55). She was passionate about her plays. She read the story of Jesus’ life through the lens of great drama and it thrilled her soul (Simmons 2005: 56).

In *The Dogma is the Drama*, she chastised the church for making scripture boring: stating, “Somehow or other, and with the best intentions, we have shown the world the typical Christian in the likeness of a crashing and rather ill-natured bore – and this in the name of the One who assuredly never bored a soul in those thirty-three years during which he passed through the world like a flame” (Simmons 2005: 67). In response to hearing one of her plays on the BBC, one listener stated, “We quickly felt the wild, unruly, unfriendly atmosphere of the inn and as the play progressed and as we followed each sidelight on the environment of the little family the whole scene became amazingly vivid . . . None of us realized before how much we had just accepted the story without properly visualizing it” (Beitler 2019: 82). Audience members who attended her play, *The Man Born to be King*, responded to it with statements that included: *enthralling, deeply moving, made it come alive, better than dry as dust sermons, real humanity, the scene and people came alive, it took me back through all the ages to the cave at Bethlehem* (Beitler 2019: 82).

**Women and Feminism**

Dorothy Sayers was a strong, out-spoken advocate for women. She had lively debates with C.S. Lewis as to the ordination of women in the Church of England, after he initiated a dialogue with her about her thoughts on the issue in 1948 (Simmons 2005: 145). Through her life, she modeled the impact a woman could have stewarding her gifts with excellence for the building up of society and the church.

Dorothy authored, *Are Women Human?* In this text she rebuked the common rhetoric of human rights and human issues consistently attributed to men, while women’s rights were another category altogether. At this point in history, men’s choices defined human choices (Simmons 2005: 148). Women were still denied opportunity to vote and were denied access to certain careers. Although Sayers had earned her degree from Oxford and had the distinction of being one of the very first to be granted her degree, she had to wait ten years after completing her coursework before Oxford determined it was acceptable to confer degrees on women.
Her graduation was an unforgettable, life-changing moment for all that it symbolized, both for her intellectual achievement but also for what the “delay said about the life of womankind” (Tischler 1980: 21). For forty years prior to Sayers enrolling at Oxford, women had been fighting for equality in opportunity, education, degrees, and professional life (Tischler 1980: 15). Women were prohibited from many professions and marriage was considered the highest goal for all women. To Sayers, this was a profound waste of human potential and resource (Tischler 1980: 61).

Sayers used her fiction writing to illuminate the tragedy of the wasted lives of women. In Unnatural Death, she illustrated the “right kind of feminism” as her characters were strong women, devoted to their faith, capable in their work and fulfilled (Tischler 1980: 62). Sayers insisted that work was given to humanity by their Creator, not just to men, or just to women. Conversely, God gave each person gifts and abilities; those gifted for the work, should do that particular work. Gender, according to Sayers, was not a qualification for work. “The purpose of work must be found in the value of its product, which must be of the quality that it glorifies God. As creators, people must make themselves subservient to the work for which they are best suited, in order to bring into being that which they were created to create” (Harrison 2004: 240). Humans were made to work; Her perspective was that work is not something one must do to live, but rather what one lives to do (Harrison 2004: 257). Work was not discriminatory based on gender; work was God-given (Fletcher 2013: xvii).

Sayers did not see a distinction between men and women for work or any other aspect of life. Again, from her book Are Women Human?, she had strong words for the “imbeciles” who asked her to speak about the topic of detective fiction, “from a woman’s perspective” (Norlinger 2015: 28). Her response to such a question was, “Go away and don’t be silly. You might as well ask what is the female angle on an equilateral triangle” (Norlinger 2015: 28). Her goal for all women was for them to think of themselves as human, equal, not inferior or superior, to all other humans (Norlinger 2015: 28). Gaudy Nights, one of her detective novels, also illustrates this belief. In this novel, Sayers placed the main character, a woman, in a university as a leader and an intellectual, who used her intellectual skills to solve the crime (Tischler 1980: 62). This was the first novel, in the genre of detective fiction, to highlight a woman (Johnson 2015: 23).
Communication Theories

Through the above overview of themes in Sayers’ writing as well as her own commitment to writing well, it is evident that transportation theory is supported by her endeavors. She painstakingly spent her career writing and creating so as to connect with her audience or readers, to open their eyes to what seemed unknowable, yet was able to be known. In her plays, she desired complete transportation, such that the experience would be all-encompassing for those in the audience yet also create real, persistent life change. This is the very definition of transportation theory. It is noted that Sayers’ fiction works displayed a keen sense of space and time. The year, season, day of the week, phase of the moon, the history, the people, local customs, language, and even dialects are all evident and appropriate throughout her fiction works. “Her novels, for all their activity, are firmly rooted in immediate reality” (Tischler 1980: 36). Whether she was writing a fiction novel or a play for BBC radio, her goal remained consistent, engage and educate the general population through realistic writing.

Similarly, Dorothy Sayers was a champion of people, all people, at a time in history when women were fighting for equal rights on many levels. The reality of World War II substantially changed the role of women in society, which caused many to realize, for the first time, that women could fulfill roles outside of the home. Feminism communication theory radiates from her writings. From the time her father took great care and attention to teach her from a young age, she knew the inherent value of women. She also personally experienced the marginalization of women in her college years and professional life. According to Tischler (1980: 15), at the time Sayers was in university, no woman could attend Oxford without confronting dominant masculinity. She was confounded by the societal dance of “role by gender” and used her fiction and nonfiction writing to champion humanity, the image of God in all humanity, and the ability of all of humanity to contribute to society through meaningful, God-given work.

The Craft of Writing

If Dorothy Sayers were alive today, most certainly she would be spoken of as one who had a calling on her life to write and create. She worshiped God through her work, and as a result, could not do her work half-heartedly, sloppily, lazily, or for her own glory. Sayers, raised by her clergy father, understood the role of the church in society as well as the profound truth of the creeds of the church. She knew the church
had a primary role in educating the masses about Jesus. Through her active participation in the church as a lay person, she also knew the church was failing at the sacred task of bringing Jesus to the people. Dorothy Sayers was an author who lived in a society where many people claimed to be Christian, yet in her interactions with them she knew they did not understand what they claimed to believe. This resulted in the church and Christianity being the object of “bad press” (Sayers 2004: 1). Those who attended church were complaining of dull drama (Sayers 2004: 1).

In her book, *The Whimsical Christian: 18 essays*, she makes the profound call to the church to “Let us, in heaven’s name, drag out the living drama from under the dreadful accumulation of slipshod thinking and trashy sentiment heaped upon it, and set in on an open stage to startle the world into some sort of vigorous reaction” (Sayers 1978: 27). It was in this setting she made her famous statement, “it is the dogma that is the drama” (Sayers 1978: 27). The dogma was indeed the drama for Dorothy Sayers and she would not allow the ineffectiveness of the church to dissuade her from honing her own skill to communicate the divine message. One avenue of honing her skill was her formation of the “Mutual Admiration Society” (Tischler 1980: 19). This was a group of like-minded women she initially met at Oxford. They became lifelong friends. They met together to share ideas, collaborate on writing, and support each other as female intellectuals in a male-dominated society (Tischler 1980: 19).

She held herself to high standards, as is evident in her relentless research which informed the background of her work. She also held others to high standards. When asked to speak to clergy or to answer letters about theological questions, she was direct and frank about how the church was not communicating well and needed to view theology rhetorically, as something which must be communicated in ways the reader or listener understood (Beitler 2019: 62). Work was definitively worshipful for Sayers. She bore witness to her Creator through her work, her commitment to being faithful to her calling as an artist, and her devotion to her vocation (Beitler 2019: 62). Sayers’ commitment to excellence in her writing is evident through the fact that her mystery novels have never gone out of print (Armstrong 2005).

Lord Peter, one of Sayers’ main characters in detective fiction, was a keen observer of human behavior. Sayers developed his character as one who was convinced “people act out of their deepest religious, philosophic, and emotional commitments” (Tischler 1980: 45). Sayers, of course, held
this belief herself. Through her observation of people’s behaviors, she was able to discern the worldview of her community, her readers, and her audiences. According to Sayers, the creative mind was the one most able to tell the story of God, as it was astute in both intellect and in understanding humanity” (Sayers 2004: 273). She was keenly aware England claimed to be Christian, yet the observable behavior revealed a complete lack of real understanding of what people claimed to embrace. Human behavior reveals the fundamental beliefs and values held by the individual or the community. Therefore, she took the mantle of properly communicating the gospel, the creeds, the life of Christ, and the mystery of God, in her writing. As she grew in her writing ability, she became adept at using the mode of communication and the literature genre which would best communicate her message to the masses. “Sayers the lay theologian modeled the ability and the desire to bring her faith to bear on ‘week-days’ as well as Sundays” (Simmons 2005: 158). She accomplished this through addressing doctrine in addition to topics such as hobbies, work, and economics (Simmons 2005: 158). She was motivated and thrilled by ideas, therefore at the core of her being she could not tolerate a church that produced wrong thinking or fuzzy logic (Tischler 1980: 10).

Transportation theory posits that to the degree a person is “absorbed into a story or transported into a narrative world, they may show effects of the story on their real-world beliefs” (Green & Brock 2000: 701). Sayers used her understanding of the real world to expertly author believable stories that transported people. She sought change in the real world, in both belief and behavior, which motivated her to write with excellence. Her detective fiction novels have been compared to Conan Doyle and found superior. She maintained the chronology of her stories for twenty years, during which time she wrote eleven novels, twenty-one short stories, and an eleven-part weekly series in a periodical (Tischler 1980: 36).

Feminist communication theory gives voice to the marginalized, particularly women. Sayers had a powerful voice during her lifetime and used it to speak for herself and on behalf of others who were marginalized. Importantly, her perspective on feminism was based in her theological understanding of humanity. She did not exalt women above men, nor base her argument on a particular characteristic of women. Rather, she argued for women based on the work of the Creator in endowing all of humanity with his image. Therefore, there is no space for any human to be marginalized. She used her novels and her nonfiction texts to illustrate the
full humanity of women, which challenged society on many levels in the early and mid-twentieth century.

**Conclusion**

Most of the authors who have written on Sayers mention the lack of scholarship surrounding her life and work. Simmons’ (2005) book, *Creed Without Chaos: Exploring Theology in the Writings of Dorothy L. Sayers*, is one of the first to present research on Sayers as a theologian. This is a definite area in which more research is needed. It is evident Sayers’ writings effuse theology. Her life was theologically informed, as was her thinking and writing. She may have been overlooked because she was female scholar or it may be that Simmons was correct in attributing it to the vast variety and volume of her work. There seems to be enough theological material in her fiction work alone, however, that a lifetime of study could be done to reach the depths of her theological themes and instruction.

Dorothy Sayers “had a unique combination of talents: a keen theological sense coupled with tremendous writing skill and a concern for how ordinary people understood Christianity. In an increasingly complex and fragmented world, we need these gifts more than ever”(Simmons 2005: 12). Although Dorothy Sayers wrote in the twentieth century, tempting one to discount her work as irrelevant for a modern audience, her mastery of transportation in teaching Christian doctrine is as important today as when she originally wrote. Her passion for the reality of the *imago dei* and the life-altering ramifications of this reality for all of humanity is a relevant example of God’s perspective and intentions for humanity, even in the 21st century. Christian communication scholars can learn a tremendous amount from the example of her life and writings. Her commitment to excellence, her love of doctrine, her incredible attention to detail, her expansive knowledge of her culture and society, her insatiable appetite for learning, and her humility in continually working to become a better writer, and therefore a more effective communicator, are all characteristics which made her an effective and influential communicator and are qualities worth emulating for any communications scholar.
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Abstract:
In the 19th century, holiness missions spread to various parts of the world, including India. Ernest and Phebe Ward were part of that movement. They went as faith missionaries, but were also recognized as the first missionaries of the Free Methodist Church. In the course of their mission work in Central India, their traditional radical form of holiness mission was transformed into orphanage work by a severe famine. Through their holiness connections and orphanage work, they became associated with the Pentecost Bands and with Albert Norton, a close partner with Pandita Ramabai. This paper raises the potential importance of these connections in terms of the influence of holiness connections on Ramabai and the Mukti Revival of 1905, which led to the growth of Pentecostalism in India.

Keywords: Ernest Ward, Phebe Ward, Pandita Ramabai, Free Methodist, missions, India
Introduction

In January of 1881, Ernest Freemont Ward and his wife Phebe arrived in Bombay (Mumbai), India as the first missionaries of the Free Methodist Church. With a radical view of Wesleyan-Holiness teachings, the Wards set off to evangelize Hindus and Muslims in Central India. By 1892, they were in Raj Nandgaon. In 1897 a major famine struck the area forcing the Wards to reevaluate their missionary goals and establish an orphanage to handle the crisis of abandoned children. In December 1897, a small band of Free Methodist workers arrived in Raj Nandgaon to form the first Pentecost Band in India. Bringing the same passion for Wesleyan-Holiness teaching, they too became involved in the orphanage, adding a school and chapel to the mission work.

In 1898, about 600 miles away near Bombay, Pandita Ramabai was establishing her own missionary school and orphanage in Kedgaon—the well-known Mukti Mission. While her primary goal was to support child widows, the massive famine also expanded her mission to include female famine victims. In Pentecostal studies, Pandita Ramabai is known for a 1905 revival (including the speaking in tongues), which predated the Azusa Revival by two years (when the Pentecostal Movement is traditionally accepted as being established).

This paper explores primary source documents from E. F. and Phebe Ward and highlights records of interactions between Pandita Ramabai and these Free Methodist missionaries, as well as potential influences their Wesleyan-Holiness teachings and mission work may have had on this early outbreak of Pentecostalism in India.

The Wards Go to India

In 1878, Ernest Freemont Ward, the son of an abstractor of titles in Illinois, had a sanctification experience in a Free Methodist camp meeting and his ensuing passion for holiness led him to join the Free Methodist Church the following year. In October of 1880, Ward was made both a deacon and an elder at the same conference in Freeport, Illinois and he also married Phebe Cox, a teacher three years his senior. On November 15, 1880, using money Phebe had saved, the couple left for India. As an account of Free Methodist missions, written in the mid-1930’s notes, “Ernest F. Ward announced to the conference that he and his wife were called to India and were going soon. They did not offer themselves to the organized Board that already existed. They did not ask for support. They did want the...
authorization and prayers of the church.

However, Ward did not just step into a vacuum. He was encouraged to go to India (and even to marry Phebe!) by Albert Benjamin Norton, a missionary sent out in 1872 by the Foreign Mission Board of the Methodist Episcopal Church in response to an urgent need by Rev. William Taylor. Norton becomes a very important person in Ramabai's story and the history of the Mukti Revival. Norton was close to Ramabai and was asked by her to establish a boy's orphanage in Dhond (Daund) as a complement to the Mukti mission's focus on girl orphans or widows. It is Norton who early on reports on the Mukti Revival in one of the first issues of the Apostolic Faith, the official paper of the Azusa Revival. A group of Pentecostal missionaries join his work in December of 1908, and Norton reports on his own experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues on March 5, 1909.

There is also evidence of early contact between the Wards and Pandita Ramabai. During their early years in Ellichpur (Achalpur), the Wards had taken in an Anglo-Indian girl, named her Theodosia and raised her with their daughters. Since they were self supporting, the Wards sold their house in Ellichpur to pay the costs of their first furlough in 1892. Because they could not afford to take Theodosia with them, Phebe had to find a place for her. Ethel Ward writes,

Mrs. Ward took a hurried trip to Poona (Pune) too before they sailed. She went to a fine Children's Home orphanage there where she left her adopted girl, Theodosia. The separation was keenly felt by both of the sisters, but funds did not permit their taking her to America, and later the way opened for her to finish high school and take a medical course in North India. Later Dr. Scudder found her and chose her to help in their big Mission Hospital in Vellore, South India, where she worked many years with this famous Dr. Scudder. On this trip to Poona, Mrs. Ward visited Pandita Ramabai’s Widows’ Home and saw Mrs. Sorabji and daughter. She was much impressed with these fine women, the noblest of India’s daughters, splendid types of womanhood.

For the most part, the early ministry of the Wards focused on evangelistic preaching in the bazaars, selling literature and tracts, and working to save souls. This was at the core of most holiness missions. In line
with this approach, the Wards, while in Bombay waiting to sail for their first furlough in 1892, met two young women who had arrived from America as representatives of the Pentecost Bands, a holiness-based evangelistic group loosely connected to the Free Methodist Church. These two young ladies were Laura Douglas and Bessie Sherman. Along with the Wards they held some tent meetings and established the first Free Methodist society in India in Byculla, Bombay. It is not clear if the Wards joined the Pentecost Bands at this time or after their return to the U.S., but they are listed in *The Pentecost Herald*, the main paper for the Pentecost Bands, in 1894 with Ernest Ward as the leader of Band no. 12 and Phebe Ward as the leader of Band no. 22 with Bessie Sherman as the Assistant Leader.

**The Famine of 1897 and Mission Changes Direction**

After their first furlough in 1892, the Wards returned to India to a new location—Raj Nandgaon in present day Chhattisgarh state on the border with Maharashtra state. Ward’s journals show a missionary passionate for saving souls and the holiness teachings of the Free Methodist Church, but in 1897 a major famine struck the area and the Wards begin to help by burying the dead and taking in abandoned children, creating an orphanage out of necessity. Much of this activity is recorded in the Wards’ book, *Echoes from Bharatkhand*. The situation was getting desperate and overwhelming the physical and emotional resources of the Wards as independent self-supporting missionaries. In one account Phebe Ward sends a letter in September of 1897 (before the arrival of the Pentecost Band) in which she is clearly exhausted,

> I love the way of the cross this morning, by which I am crucified to the world and the world unto me. I presume you have heard of Bro. Ward’s and Louisa’s serious illness with cholera. God loosened our hands by the singular providence and let me get a breathing spell, from where I was living at high pressure speed. The change was much needed; I might say imperative. Bro. Ward is improving now but it has been a veritable fight with death. A less stronger man would probably have succumbed, Louisa too though not so ill, has had a long pull. Blood poisoning set in which has kept her from getting on her feet... Some of our loveliest ones (orphans) have gone to heaven. I have sat and watched them leave us, when it seemed as if this famine was a giant hand, stealing away our jewels. I can never describe the awfulness of this famine! I have grown old
in eight months and can wear Bessie Sherman’s clothes
easily, I am so thin. We shall be glad to hear the out
coming party have left America.17

It is interesting that this letter is published right next to the first mention of
Pandita Ramabai in *The Pentecost Herald*, an account written by Alfred S.
Dyer, the editor of *The Bombay Guardian*.

The Pentecost Bands, which had split from the Free Methodist
Church in 1895 over issues of denominational authority and their radical
holiness stance, answered the need by sending a group of workers led
by Frank Hotle, along with his wife Della and daughter Eliza, William
McCready, and Elizabeth Tucker. This group arrived in Bombay November
28, 1897, where they proceeded to set up an orphanage in Nagpur and
gather orphans locally.18 In the Pentecost Band’s account for May 25,
1898,19 it notes,

Bro. Ward came today to get his daughter Louisa, who
has been here for a two weeks change. We were all very
glad to see him and we had a real breaking through
time at prayers. Bro. Ward feels his heart is with us and
that the Lord would be pleased to have him cast his lot
among us. We told him to pray much about it, and if
he still felt his place was in the bands, we would gladly
welcome him.

In the account for May 27th, 1898 (two days later), the Pentecost
Band’s account notes, “Bro. Ward returned home today; but before going
he gave us his name to be sent to the *Pentecost Herald* to be enrolled
among the workers.” The Wards position in regards to the Free Methodist
Church is unclear at this time. In Burritt’s history of Free Methodist missions
it lists the Wards as beginning their service in 1880 and records them in
the list of Free Methodist Missionaries from 1885-1895, however they are
missing from the list from 1895-1905, and then reappear on the list from
1905-1915 as beginning their service in 1906.20 Since the Pentecost Bands
withdrew from the Free Methodist Church in 1895, Ward’s move to the
Pentecost Bands in 1898 may have been seen as a move away from the Free
Methodist Church. However, since the Wards were always self-supporting
and independent, their denominational affiliation may have always been a
bit flexible.
On June 21, 1898 (less than a month after Ward joins the Pentecost Band in India), the decision is made to combine the orphanages at Nagpur and Raj Nandgaon. The account records,

After prayerful and careful consideration, we decided that it would be profitable and pleasing to God for the two orphanages at Nagpur and Raj Nandgaon to be united as our forces thus concentrated would enable us to more properly adjust matters so as to lessen or more fully equalize the burdens of each worker. The decision seems to be met with the favor of God as the railroad company gave us free pass for over fifty children and we took them from Nagpur to Raj Nandgaon today. Our family of children number up to one hundred and eight now.

The Wards may have remembered this event differently. Ethel Ward wrote,

Then they (the Wards) learned that a party of four missionaries from the Pentecost Band work had begun a Mission in Nagpur which was nearer than others. “Let us invite them,” said Mr. Ward, and his wife consented. So the letter of invitation was written. “Yes, we can come,” was the reply, “and it is surely an answer to our prayer because we have had to pay such a high rent here that we have been contemplating moving elsewhere.”

Raj Nandgaon and The Pentecost Bands

After joining the Pentecost Bands and formally following under the leadership of Frank Hotle, some problems began to emerge. The initial problem most likely came with Ernest Ward being a 16-year veteran missionary in India, fluent in the language and culture of the people, who had done all of the hard work to build the mission at Raj Nandgaon putting himself under the leadership of Frank Hotle, a newly arrived missionary with no knowledge of the language or the culture, and with no sweat-equity in the mission. Hotle decided that Ernest and Phebe needed to be sent back behind in India. Ethel Ward related this event as follows,

Adjustment! That was the great problem now. That has ever been the perpetual problem on every mission field. Hundreds of years before, the prophet Amos knew this and wrote, “Can two walk together except they be agreed?” And here were six to “walk together.” Mrs. Elizabeth Tucker and Mr. Wm. McCready were two of
the band from Nagpur but Mr. and Mrs. H____ were the “leaders” and they “determined” (Acts 15:37) that it would be best for the Wards to take a furlough to America now and leave Louise in India to save expense and insure the Wards returning to Raj Nandgaon again. The rest “agreed,” so it came the decision was that they should go on furlough.22

If Ethel Ward presents the family’s views accurately, it can be seen that there was a great deal of frustration with the Hotles for this decision (since Ethel chooses to not even use the Hotle name in her book and refers to them as “leaders” in quotation marks). While articles in *The Pentecost Herald* and accounts in the journals of the Pentecost Bands are silent on this relationship, and Ward and Hotle seemed to continue working together, the strain of being forced to leave a five-year-old child for over a year in a place which has just experienced massive famine and death must have been immense.

In September of 1898 the Wards returned to the United States without five-year-old Louise. They were able to reunite with their daughters Ethel and Bessie who had been left at the “Reaper’s Home” in Virginia during their previous furlough in 1892. The Wards set out to speak at churches and camp meetings, raise funds, write articles for *The Pentecost Herald*, and promote the work in India. Because Pandita Ramabai was involved in dealing with orphans from the same famine in the same region of India, it is not surprising that her name begins to be mentioned in connection with the Wards’ speaking. It is interesting to note that in an article about one of the Wards’ speaking engagements by Fannie Birdsall, she concludes with a brief plug to “Send 5 cents for the illustrated sketch of the life of Pandita Ramabi (sic).”23

Even while the Wards are in the United States, Frank Hotle makes a special trip to Kedgaon in April of 1899 to visit Pandita Ramabai and visit her work.24 The main goal here was to get ideas for similar work the Pentecost Bands hoped to start with child widows in a new mission station in Gondia.

**Connections with Pandita Ramabai**

While Raj Nandgaon is roughly 600 miles (almost 1,000 km) inland from Kedgaon, the site of Pandita Ramabai’s Mukti Mission, missionaries had to frequently travel near Kedgaon on their way to Bombay.
to both travel home and to pick up other missionaries coming back to India. This allowed for more interaction between the areas than distance might normally account for.

The leadership tensions in the Pentecost Bands continued to grow, culminating in a situation at the Harvest Home camp meeting in 1901. Phebe notes in her diary on October 7, 1901,

Harvest Home camp meeting began Sept. 25, Wed. About Sat. morn. Ernest objected to some teaching of the Bands in the holiness meeting. His manner displeased the workers and upon holding to his position, he was forbidden to take part in the meetings. He fainted away while standing in the eve. meeting which was construed by the workers to be the judgment of God. I could not quite see it as he was able to attend the meetings the next day. If Bro. Hotle had not previously forbidden him to speak it would have looked more reasonable to me... I was much distressed about things as I truly loved the Bands and felt that God was with them. But when Bro. Ward withdrew from the Bands, I felt God wanted me to stand by him. I can see things in the Bands that I know is not of God, such as forcing workers to take convictions from leaders as from God, and there was a relief in my heart when we left Raj Nandgaon. I was much tossed about during the trial, sometimes thinking I could not get through to heaven without the severe dealing of the Bands with me. But when I think of things that have happened in dealing with different workers and the severe and harsh treatment used, I cannot but contrast it with the spirit of Jesus and it makes me more sure that this sudden and extraordinary move is from God. For Ernest did not think of severing his connections with the Bands when he went to H.H.

While the Wards are no longer listed as members of the Pentecost Bands in India in the Pentecost Herald after February of 1902, their daughter Ethel remains with the Bands until the end of 1904, and this becomes a matter of great concern for the Wards. Forced to leave the mission they had founded, the Wards were taken in by their old friend Albert Norton, who ran the Dhond boy’s orphanage, which was a partner mission to Ramabai’s Mukti Mission in Kedgaon.

From December of 1901 to April of 1902 the Ward’s worked with Norton and had contact with Ramabai’s work. Ernest took Methodist missionary C.B. Ward to visit Ramabai in February of 1902, and from an account in her diary from Friday, March 28, 1902 we know Phebe and
her daughters Bessie and Louisa visited Pandita Ramabai along with Bessie Sherman’s father C.W. Sherman well before the 1905 Mukti revival. Part of her account notes:

Bro. Sherman, Bessie, Louisa and I started at 4:15AM for Kedgaon. Found a S.A. officer, Mr. Lewis, bound for the same place, so we all went together. Ramabai’s tonga27 waiting there when we arrived. Only a short ride, and we were in the grounds of the famous Mukti Mission. Everything looked so substantial, from the fine rooms we were ushered in to the great fat bullocks that took us in. Trees and plants everywhere...

The church is a large building seating three thousand. It is a long building with two rounding sides capable of holding a large number. They have school in this building. She (referring to Maribai, the head nurse) took me to the small room where they had their first school room- they have prayers there every morning at four with the teachers. At 9:00 AM they had a special service for Good Friday. It was a sight to see that large body of girls and young women in the immense building. The floor is of wood- narrow boards. The pulpit a raised wooden platform, with a seat running around its four sides, which serves for a step for the platform. Bro. Sherman preached in English about the resurrection morning. Bro. Gadre interpreted into Marathi. I was struck with this thought, that those women when they went with the message, Jesus met them. When we are going to preach the Word, Jesus will meet us.28

Despite the close connections with both Norton and Ramabai, both missions did not seem significantly instilled with the holiness teachings for Ernest Ward. He writes to Phebe on April 7, 1902 about the possibility of working with either Norton or Ramabai,

I have very little hope of a permanent affiliation with this work (he is writing from the Nortons’ work in Dhond). Both sides of the house are neither in harmony with our teaching nor our practice on thorough holiness lines if we are at all aggressive, and until they radically change will continue to head us off in our work among the orphans. I think it should be exactly the same at Khedgaon if they had invited us there and I don’t see why Bro. Sherman has any hope in that direction. I don’t see a bit for true holiness with the advisors P.R. (assumed to stand for Pandita Ramabai) has about her now (or) P. herself unless she shows a desire to shake loose of
everybody unspiritual who have a controlling voice at home or abroad.

The Wards go on to Sanjan to join up with the work of Sherman’s Vanguard mission, until they ultimately return to the Free Methodist Church and its work in Yeotmal in June of 1904. Their daughter Ethel leaves the Pentecost Bands at this time and joins them in their work for the Free Methodist Church.

The Wards and the Radical Holiness Movement

Within the context of understanding the Wards’ mission, it is important to address their theological position as part of the radical side of the Holiness Movement. As Howard Snyder points out, the Free Methodist Church in part defined itself as a “radical” holiness group, “Though maintaining some irenic contact with the broader Holiness Movement, its leaders and writers often warned against too low a standard of holiness: an experience that did not go deep enough, was not sufficiently world-denying, and compromised particularly with the amusements and ostentations of the age.”29 The Wards were aligned with this way of thinking. This can be seen in part from Ernest Ward’s rapid acceptance of the Pentecost Bands’ ideas in India, even after the Pentecost Bands had split from the Free Methodist Church. In addition, Ward entertained a number of radical holiness figures in India. Both William Godbey30 and E.E. Shelhamer31 visited with E.F. Ward in their various trips around the world. It is also exhibited in his involvement with the formation of a Holiness organization in India as well as his involvement in helping establish the Harvest Home Camp Meetings in India as part of the Pentecost Bands work.

Despite this close relationship in terms of a radical approach to holiness, the Wards seemed to move back into a more formal relationship with the Free Methodist mission effort by 1906. Ethel Ward writes,

The Wards truly felt like pilgrims and strangers going from pillar to post with no settled abiding place, but they never forgot their church home—the Free Methodist Church... But now the Pentecost Bands which Rev. Dake had started as the young people’s organization in the church, as well as the Vanguard Mission were both independent organizations outside the church. Hence it was with great joy that they received word from the Yeotmal District (the Free Methodist Mission), “Come home. We need you. Four of our missionaries have gone
on furlough and we have an empty bungalow for you to occupy.”

It seems that the Wards did leave the umbrella of the Free Methodist Church to formally align themselves with the Pentecost Bands in 1898 for a short period, but then returned in 1904.

**The Mukti Revival and the Free Methodist Mission in India**

It is natural at this point to wonder if the Wards had a close relationship to Pandita Ramabai, as I am suggesting, then where is the evidence of the influence of the Mukti Revival on Free Methodist missions in India? Such evidence clearly exists. First, it must be remembered that Ernest and Phebe Ward seem to have broken with the Pentecost Bands about 1902, and were in Yeotmal by the time of the Mukti Revival in June of 1905. According to Helen Dyer’s account of the Mukti Revival, it began in late June 1905 and quickly spread to other areas of Pune including Soonderbai Powar’s Zenana Training Home and the Methodist Boy’s School in Pune, then the Boy’s Christian Home in Dhond (run by Albert Norton), then,

Longing for Revival, the Free Methodist Mission at Yeotmal, Berar, was in the right attitude for blessing. Schools were closed in order that missionaries, teachers, and pupils might wait on the Lord. This was the last week in August 1905. On the Saturday night of this week of prayer the answer came. The meetings were over, but twenty were still “tarrying” when at 10:30 p.m. the Holy Spirit came like a shock of electricity; some shouted the praises of God, some danced, some ran, and some fell to the ground, under the power of God. All present were Christians with one exception, and she was converted. The others were all baptized with the Holy Spirit. Then the work spread to the unconverted in the orphanages. There was true conviction of sin, which resulted in confession followed by forgiveness and great joy.

Only after the revival in Yeotmal does Dyer note the revival was then taken to Bombay and other areas. Burritt also notes in passing, “During the cool season of 1905 there was a mighty outpouring of the Spirit on our district (Yeotmal) as well as other parts of India. The revival that followed will ever be remembered by those who were privileged to witness it. The results still abide.”

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**First Fruits**

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While such evidence is not conclusive, the early days of the Mukti Revival seem to indicate a spread through networks of people close to Ramabai and the Mukti Mission. The fact that this revival spread to Yeotmal and the Free Methodist Mission, while Ernest and Phebe Ward are there, just one month after the revival starts, indicates some level of relationship, even if that connection is primarily through Albert Norton of the Boy’s Christian Home in Dhond and the five months the Wards lived and worked there in 1902. How the Wards may have personally impacted Ramabai with their holiness views can probably never be determined.

Concluding Thoughts

The common Pentecostal narrative of the origin of Pentecostalism tends to emphasize speaking in tongues (or glossolalia), the particular sign of the Pentecostal experience of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, which began in Charles Parham’s Bible School in Topeka, Kansas on January 1, 1901. One of his students, William Seymour, led revival meetings on Azusa Street in Los Angeles in April of 1906. These revivals led to an explosion of people taking the Pentecostal message throughout the world. Two prominent stories from outside of the United States tend to create problems for this narrative. One is a Pentecostal revival in the Methodist Episcopal Church in Valparaiso, Chile under the direction of Rev. Willis C. Hoover in 1902 (four years before Azusa Street). The other is the Pentecostal revival in the Mukti Mission at Kedgaon, outside of Bombay (present day Mumbai) led by its founder Sarasvati Ramabai (more commonly known by her title, Pandita Ramabai) in June of 1905 (one year before Azusa Street).

Often in these narratives, even in some academic circles, the role of the Wesleyan-Holiness Movement is overlooked, minimalized, or simply missing from the narrative. This paper seeks to add new insight into the Wesleyan-Holiness influences on the Mukti Revival and Pandita Ramabai by examining primary source materials from the papers of the first Free Methodist missionaries, Ernest F. Ward and his wife Phebe, as well as documents from the first Pentecost Band in India, which joined with Ward in his work. Previous narratives of the Mukti Revival have linked it to the influence of the Welsh Revival under Evan Roberts from 1904-1905, which influenced similar revivals in India from 1905-1906. To my knowledge, linking the Mukti Revival with the influence of Ward and the Pentecost Bands in India has not been suggested before.15
In his article, *Inventing Pentecostalism: Pandita Ramabai and the Mukti Revival from a Post-Colonial Perspective*, Suarsana raises important questions about Pentecostalism’s claim to incorporate the history of Pandita Ramabai and the Mukti Mission into the global history of Pentecostalism. The revival at the Mukti Mission among child widows in India began in 1905 with claims of speaking in tongues one full year before the Azusa Street Revival from which Pentecostalism normally records its founding. Suarsana notes the inclusion of Ramabai’s mission in Pentecostal history is more of a colonial rewriting of history than actual fact. Minnie Abrams (who worked with Pandita Ramabai) wrote personal narratives making herself a central figure in this revival, while Helen Dyer (a personal friend of Ramabai’s) wrote from the “Higher Life” and Keswick Movement’s Holiness perspective crediting the influence of the Welsh Revival carried by Welsh missionaries to the Khasi Hills. Both perspectives tend to neglect the voice of Pandita Ramabai herself in the process. Pentecostalism and the Holiness Movement have both tried to claim the Mukti Revival by controlling the historical narrative. Suarsana’s argument is persuasive and encourages scholars to take a closer look at the story of Pandita Ramabai and the Mukti Revival, as well as the outside connections that may have impacted its development.

This paper is not an answer to the problem of understanding what actually occurred in 1905 in the Mukti Mission in Kedgaon, India (Maharashtra state). If anything, this paper will add more fuel to the fire by adding a new potential list of characters to the story. It is hoped that more information gathered from primary sources about the Holiness mission work in the area will add to understanding the influences that may have played a role in the 1905 Mukti Revival. One voice left missing from this conversation is that of the missions of the Free Methodist Church, and two influential sources that may have played contributing roles to understanding this revival, both the Wards and the Pentecost Bands.

**End Notes**

1 Much of the material relating to the lives of Ernest and Phebe Ward come from the Ward family papers held by the Archives and Special Collections of B.L. Fisher Library at Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY and microfilm of the Papers of Ernest F. Ward held by the Marston Memorial Historical Center and Free Methodist Archives in Indianapolis, IN.


The Apostolic Faith (Los Angeles, Cal.), vol. 1, no. 7 (April 1907), p. 2.


Cornelia Sorabji (1866-1954) was the first female graduate from Bombay University, the first female advocate in India, and the first woman to practice law in India and she was also a social reformer and friend of Pandita Ramabai. She was a major advocate of education for women and helped establish several girls’ school in Pune.

Ordered Steps or the Wards of India by Ethel Ellen Ward, Winona Lake, IN: Light and Life Press, 1951: 69-71.

Bessie Sherman was the daughter of holiness leader C.W. Sherman of the Vanguard Mission of St. Louis, MO, and she would be a friend and supporter of the Wards, especially Phebe during their time in India.

Ordered Steps or the Wards of India by Ethel Ellen Ward, Winona Lake, IN: Light and Life Press, 1951: 69-71.

Published in 1908, Chicago, IL by the Free Methodist Publishing House.

The trip of this group is reported quite extensively in *The Pentecost Herald*, vol. 4, no. 14 p. 2 (October 15, 1897), vol. 4, no. 15 p. 3 (November 1, 1897), vol. 4, no. 17 (December 1, 1897), vol. 4, no. 18 (December 15, 1897), and vol. 4, no. 20 p. 6 (January 15, 1898).

All references and quotations from the Pentecost Bands of India come from the *Records of Pentecost Bands in India*, microfilm at Asbury Theological Seminary, ARC1010 1989-006 reel 1. This microfilm contains the records of three bands: Band #1 at Raj Nandgaon (1897-1905), Band #2 at Gondia (1899-1905), and Band #3 at Dondi Lohara (1899-1949). The originals are kept at the Marsden Memorial Historical Center in Indianapolis, IN. The quotes used in this paper are from the records of Band #1 unless otherwise specified.


The trip of this group is reported quite extensively in *The Pentecost Herald*, vol. 4, no. 16, (whole no. 71), November 15, 1897, p. 3.

The Pentecost Bands of India ministry brought over from the United States. These annual camp meetings focused on holiness teaching to encourage the Pentecost Band workers.

In her letter to Ernest in April 22, 1902, reflecting back on their experience, Phebe writes of even more extreme events emanating from the Hotles’ leadership:

You know that Bro. Hotle wanted me out of the way so they could run things as they pleased and they thought they saw in me a formidable foe. You remember the day you and he locked me up as he thrust me in that little room, he said “Your power in Raj N- is broken,” because I insisted on knowing the state of my own soul. He told Sr. Vail I had to be taken to America to get me out of the way. How sad! Instead of utilizing the God given power in me- they would not have it when it ran
counter to their opinions. That was the secret of your being taken from Khairagarh. They could not handle you so well there.

27 Or *tanga*, is a light carriage used in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, which is traditionally pulled by a horse and has two-wheels.

28 While this is from Phebe Ward’s journal held in the Ward Family Papers at the Archives and Special Collections of the B.L. Fisher Library, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY. The full extended quote has also been published in Robert Danielson, “From the Archives: Ernest F. Ward: The First Free Methodist Foreign Missionary,” *The Asbury Journal* (2015) Vol. 70:1, p. 172 - 180. Available at: https://place.asburyseminary.edu/asburyjournal/vol70/iss1/11.


31 There is a photograph in the E.E. Shelhamer Papers in the Archives and Special Collections of B.L. Fisher Library of Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY that shows Ernest and Phebe Ward and other missionaries in India, which was taken of E.E. Shelhamer’s trip. This gives evidence to their meeting, which would not be unusual given some of the early connections both share with the Pentecost Bands.


35 This is not to suggest that the Wards and the Pentecost Bands in India were primary drivers of the revival, or to suggest that they were the only influences. Stanley M. Burgess’ 2001 article “Pentecostalism in India: An Overview” in the *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 4(1): 85-98 demonstrates that there are plenty of contenders for Pentecostal influence in India, both before and after the Mukti Revival. The goal here is to simply introduce the Free Methodists as serious additional potential influences in the region prior to the Mukti Revival.


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Dwight S.M. Mutonono

The Leadership Implications of Kneeling in Zimbabwean Culture

Abstract:

This paper considers the implications of public officials and church members kneeling to their leaders as a cultural expression of honor. Zimbabweans, like many Africans, kneel or crouch when interacting with people in authority. In traditional culture children are socialized to kneel to elders, and this becomes a deeply ingrained part of their way of life. While the practice of kneeling, even in private, is not as prevalent as it used to be, recently high-level Zimbabwean public officials have been recorded kneeling before authority figures. They justify their behavior based on culture. Church members do the same to their leaders and similarly justify their conduct as cultural behavior. This paper analyses and critiques this conduct, considering cultural changes to assess the leadership implications of continuing this practice in modern day Zimbabwe.

While the continued private practice of the culture is the prerogative of individual Zimbabweans and cannot be legislated against, the public expression of kneeling is now counter-productive. It is not achieving the original intentions of honoring the behavior’s recipient. Because of abuse and possible interpretive misunderstandings, it should be stopped. Recommended ways of transforming the culture are given.

Keywords: leadership, honor, kneeling, Africa, Church

Dwight Mutonono is from Harare, Zimbabwe. He has a Masters in Leadership and Management from Africa Leadership and Management Academy (ALMA) in Zimbabwe, a Doctor of Ministry in Transformational Leadership for the Global City from Bakke Graduate University in Seattle, Washington, and is working on a Ph.D. in Intercultural Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary.
Introduction

A strong part of Zimbabwean culture and socialization is the honoring of elders or those in power. The visible expression of this is to kneel in the presence of such people. The phenomenon of high officials, such as ministers of state or Supreme Court judges, publicly kneeling to their superiors in the social hierarchy is disconcerting, as is the same practice being done within the church.

This paper will analyze the possible effects of the phenomenon of kneeling before elders in the context of public leadership spheres and worship in the church. First, as a background to the issue being analyzed, specific instances of the occurrence of this phenomenon will be presented. The main content of the paper is divided into three parts: the cultural background and rationalization of the practice, the modernized Western view of the practice, and a discussion on what is an appropriate way to honor elders publicly. The implications of public kneeling will be considered before concluding with recommendations regarding the practice for the Zimbabwean context.

Cultural Background and Rationalization for Kneeling

A 2017 newspaper article named several government ministers and senior officials who have publicly knelt before former President Robert Mugabe and his wife Grace. The ministers and officials named in the article, and in some instances recorded and shown on television doing so are: Patrick Chinamasa, the late John Nkomo, Martin Dinha, Ignatius Chombo, Didymus Mutasa and Rita Makarau.1

Rita Makarau, a Supreme Court judge, was the chairperson of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission at the time that she was pictured kneeling before then President Mugabe. When asked, she defended her actions, saying,

“I have been brought up to say that when you are speaking to someone older than you kneel down. That’s who I have been brought up [sic] and it was difficult for me to change just like that when he called me to his side,” Makarau said, adding that she also finds herself kneeling when conducting her duties as a Supreme Court Judge.

“I find myself kneeling to the chief justice if I have to speak to him. I can’t get rid of that upbringing like I said. Even at work I find myself kneeling, maybe I need to go for training (to get rid of it).”2
The last sentence in Makarau’s quoted words seems to indicate that kneeling is something she does reflexively, perhaps without even consciously knowing that she is doing it. This would be something deeply ingrained in her psyche and culture. In her view, stopping it would probably require training of some kind to change the behavior.

The phenomenon of kneeling in public is not limited to the political sphere. I have seen it on numerous occasions in religious gatherings. Women often kneel when serving food to their leaders, and as a pastor I have been a recipient of this kind of treatment. Though I have felt some discomfort, refusing the treatment might cause unnecessary offense and distract people’s attention from the worship event. I have also felt inadequately prepared for the inevitable questions about why I am reciprocating a respectful action with a public insult if I try to change the behavior. I have seen the extremes of this when visiting a fellow pastor’s office. The office culture, which they had established, is that the personal assistant does not speak to the pastor standing, she must be on her knees. Congregants of some mega-churches have publicly knelt to some of their prophets in places like airports or out in the streets. Gunda and Machingura relate one such instance, “Those who managed to evade the human wall made by Prophet Angel’s bodyguards would kneel on the tarmac before greeting him.”

It is important to attempt to better understand the cultural background that results in such public behavior.

Zimbabwe has a number of different ethnic groups. These include the Shona, Ndebele, Tonga, Korekore, Ndau, Venda and Kalanga and other smaller groups. The cultures, in as far as the phenomenon of kneeling is concerned, are culturally similar within Zimbabwe, and though a Shona or Ndebele or other ethnic group might be mentioned in various sections of this paper, the ethnic group should be read as representative of Zimbabwean culture in general. This practice of kneeling in the presence of elders is deeply ingrained in all of Zimbabwean culture, and it is taught from childhood. Nicolson, in his review of Michael Gelfand’s *African Background: The Traditional Culture of the Shona-Speaking People* says,

Within the family, respect for seniority and for the ancestral spirits are overriding concerns. Respect is shown by submission and the customs of avoidance, handclapping, kneeling or sitting at the appropriate times. In the kinship system as a whole, and in particular in the three types of procedure—the use of a third party (mediation), the giving of presents (reciprocation) and
the payment of money or possessions (compensation)—Professor Gelfand shows how the concern for maintaining protocol is almost obsessive. This perhaps explains the well-known Shona characteristic, avoidance of hasty decisions. He suggests that the slower tempo of life is deliberate and designed to prevent falling into error.4

Kneeling is therefore part of a broader scheme of showing respect for seniority and ancestral spirits. When the prophet is understood as a mediator between this world and the spirit world (replacing the position of the spirit medium or diviner in the African religious scheme),5 then kneeling in his or her presence is understandable. This is also the case, of course in the instance of kneeling before Presidents and the like as alluded to in the introduction.

The practice of kneeling is deeply ingrained, particularly among women who are supposed to kneel for men. Men would generally crouch in the presence of elders, but women kneel in the presence of men. My wife does not kneel when she gives food that she has cooked to me, but many of my friends who are culturally modernized in many other respects will have their wife kneeling as she gives them food. Omoregie describes the practice at the kurova guva (to beat the grave) also known as kugadzira mudzimu (to prepare the spirit)6 ceremony, a practice that also happens in burial rituals,

When the varoora [daughters in law] walk on their knees as they approach the grave, it is a sign of their respect both to the deceased and all members of the family. It can therefore be said that this action is symptomatic of their “inner feelings and attitudes” (of respect). This links well with what happens in everyday Shona life. When a young girl talks to an elder, she kneels down while young men crouch as a sign of respect.7

Children are socialized to kneel or crouch in the presence of elders. In a traditional Zimbabwean home, this is normal and expected. Not kneeling is showing deep disrespect to the elder. Given this context and background, the behavior described in the background section of this paper is perhaps more understandable. However, we are also living in a globalized environment in which the dominant culture is shaped by ideas from modernity and the ubiquitous attitude of Western superiority, that has prevailed since the time Africa was colonized, Christianized,
and encountered the Western world. Hiebert describes such prevailing attitudes this way,

Roughly from 1800 to 1950 most Protestant missionaries in India, and later in Africa, rejected the beliefs and practices of the people they served as “pagan”. ...**tabula rasa** the missionary doctrine that there is nothing in the non-Christian culture on which the Christian missionary can build and, therefore, every aspect of the traditional non-Christian culture had to be destroyed before Christianity could be built up... To become Christian one had to accept not only Christianity but also Western cultural ways. ... One reason was the emergence of colonialism with its belief in the superiority of Western cultures. ...Colonialism proved to the West its cultural superiority. Western civilization had triumphed. It was the task, therefore, of the West to bring the benefits of this civilization to the world... Christianity, civilization and, later, commerce (the three Cs) went hand in hand. Western civilization was spreading around the world, and it was assumed that people would become both Christian and “modern.”

The attitude of Western superiority and tutelage of the uncivilized is still with us, and in instances like those being described in this paper can result in condescending narratives about African backwardness. Nevertheless, it is vital to focus on how some of these attitudes play out in the public arena.

**Kneeling as Seen from the Widespread Western Modernity Perspective**

Zimbabweans who are more modernized in their thinking, or are still traditional but non-conformist, will find the public kneeling displays by high officials abhorrent. I once had a discussion on this topic with a Masters level class in Harare and the exchanges became so heated and explosive I had to control the class. Some will tenaciously hold on to this part of their culture and nothing will change that position, even after shifting from their traditional cultural practices in many other respects. Culture changes to suit and adapt the new needs and values that come from mixing with other cultures. Some practices in any given culture, which were practiced a hundred years ago, are no longer compatible with today’s norms and values and therefore get dropped in time, others survive even though their usefulness is questionable. In addition, it is important to note that Zimbabwe went through a colonization that was far more than a cultural exchange between equal parties.
As the quote above from Hiebert shows, many Christian missionaries and colonial powers saw nothing of value that could be built on in indigenous Zimbabwean cultures; the existing culture was to be destroyed and English culture would replace it. Cultural imperialism occurs when one party is stronger than the other and the stronger party coerces the weaker one to adopt its culture. In the public sphere this is especially true. Zimbabwe adopted Western ways of governance and protocol wholesale. Their structures are exactly the same as in the United Kingdom. However, in instances like showing honor and respect, the subdued Zimbabwean cultural instincts sometimes pop up and are judged according to expectations of the imposed colonial structures that they are at variance with.

The British Broadcasting Corporation had this perspective on the respectful behavior of Zimbabwean leaders towards past President Mugabe,

As in much of Africa, respecting your elders is ingrained in Zimbabwe’s culture. And 93-year-old Robert Mugabe, a liberation fighter who became the country’s leader at independence in 1980, is seen as the father of the nation. It explains the respectful tone used by opposition leader and bitter rival Morgan Tsvangirai when calling for President Mugabe’s resignation. “He said Mr [sic] Mugabe should step down “in line with the national expectation and sentiment, taking full regard of his legacy and contribution to Zimbabwe pre and post-independence.”

The respect shown to Mugabe even while he was being removed by a coup was fascinating. It was a very polite and respectful coup. Mugabe was publicly deferred to throughout. The army that removed him refused to say at any point that they were removing him, instead they were dealing with some criminal elements surrounding the president. The actual words that were used to describe the military intervention, as they called it, are,

Fellow Zimbabweans, following the address we made on 13 November 2017, which we believe our main broadcaster, ZBC and The Herald, were directed not to publicise [sic], the situation in our country has moved to another level.

Firstly, we wish to assure the nation that His Excellency, The President, of the Republic of Zimbabwe, and Commander in Chief of the Zimbabwe Defense Forces, Cde R.G. Mugabe and his family are safe and sound and their security is guaranteed.
We are only targeting criminals around him who are committing crimes that are causing social and economic suffering in the country in order to bring them to justice. As soon as we have accomplished our mission we expect that the situation will return to normalcy.  

The world will find the respectful behavior of Zimbabweans in public spheres to be counterproductive and unexpected. Opposition leaders are expected to be confrontational and candid, not respectful and deferring. Ministers of state should show respect, but this should be done in a manner that does not make the president unquestionable or look monarchical. How can a person who is submissive to the extent of publicly kneeling before a president then be able to differ with him? As for Supreme Court justices kneeling to a president, that would be scandalous and threatens the whole governance of political institutions, specifically separation of powers, in the country. This behavior is misaligned to the expected Western norms of a functional democracy.

When it comes to kneeling before a church leader, most Western churches would throw their hands up in horror at the thought of someone kneeling before them in a worship service or at a church related activity. While the idea of respecting elders and leaders is generally universally acceptable; the Zimbabwean tradition of kneeling, especially publicly to show respect needs closer critique, which is what this paper is attempting to do. The Zimbabwean Church needs to engage in the process of self-theologizing and contextualizing. To lead the way in terms of handling culture, the Church needs to think clearly about how the Bible affects culture.

To recognize that theologies are done by humans in their contexts means that we must study human contexts deeply to know how they shape our thinking, and to seek the biblical message not through the eyes of our culture, but as it was understood by those who recorded it. We need to study human cultures to build understanding among them and to communicate the gospel in them in ways that transform them in the light of God's truth, beauty and righteousness.

To contextualize the idea of kneeling as a sign of respect, it is important that it be examined under the overarching question of how Zimbabweans today should show respect to leaders and elders.
What Appropriate Ways Can Zimbabweans Find to Honor Elders and Leaders?

Here I need to first describe the cultural factors underpinning the practice of public kneeling before leaders. After understanding these factors, the possible ways in which the same meaning intended by the outward action can be explored. I will then consider the meanings that the outward act of public kneeling has, first for the participants, then second for the various observers, before discussing the most appropriate ways to show honor in today's context.

Cultural Factors Behind the Act of Kneeling

There are cultural factors at play in the observable action of kneeling in Zimbabwean culture. Anthropology helps to better understand what brings about such a phenomenon as that being discussed in this paper. Robbins talks about what he calls “the cultural construction of identity and social hierarchy.” Social hierarchy and/or gender identity are at play when people feel the need, even instinctively, to kneel in the presence of certain leaders.

Americans can move from one status to another and one relationship to another with different people, but in their minds remain essentially the same person. This is not the case with the Japanese, for example, who change the way they refer to themselves depending on the speaker’s relationship to the listener. This influences how Japanese advertise on television. It is rude for Japanese, depending on who is speaking, to give an imperative like “drink coke!” “Japanese advertisers have a problem with keigo because actors should not give imperative commands (e.g., “drink Coke”) for fear of offending people. They solve the problem by using low-status people who are nonthreatening (such as clowns, coquettish women, or children) to issue the commands.” Robbins goes on to describe how traditional societies are organized,

In traditional societies, kinship is the central organizing principle—the main determinant of a person's social identity. Anthropologists working with traditional societies are often “adopted” by a family. This act, although also a signal of acceptance, serves the practical purpose of assigning an outsider a social identity through which others can approach him or her. To have no kinship label or designation in such societies is to have no meaningful place in the social landscape.
Zimbabwe is a typical traditional society as described by Robbins. Most Zimbabweans in influential leadership positions grew up in a rural traditional environment, or are one generation from the rural-urban migration; that is, if they were not born in the rural areas, their parents were. Whether in church or society, leaders are referred to by kinship terms, such as fathers or mothers in Zimbabwe today. The conduct in the presence of these “fathers” and “mothers” is parallel to the cultural prescriptions regarding how one treats kin. Kneeling in the presence of a father or mother is appropriate, and as far as cultural expectations go, expected. Therefore, similar behaviors are expanded beyond the traditional kin group to other political and religious leaders.

Former president, Mugabe was referred to as the “father” of the nation. His wife, Grace when she entered politics as the leader of the ruling party women’s league, a position from which she attempted to eventually become the president after Mugabe, which resulted in the coup that removed Mugabe, took on the title “mother” (amai) of the nation. She was generally referred to as “Dr. Amai” in that period. What is notable is how she perceived that position and her role, even before publically angling for the presidency.

... Muchemeyi said: “Grace told an executive meeting that she is “already the President” and would not want to be appointed VP, as it was a lower post. “The First Lady said I’m the wife of the President, I’m the president already ... I plan and do everything with the President, what more do I want, for now the position of the women boss is enough.”

Last year, Grace said Vice-President Emmerson Mnangagwa and Phelekezela Mphoko took instructions from her.17

In Grace Mugabe’s mind, based on the traditional society’s kingship related stratification as described by Robbins, she was a “mother.” The next step in that process of thinking is to see the rest of the nation as her children, which is exactly what she did, placing herself above the Vice-Presidents in that stratification. She would expect people to kneel before her; publicly making high officials do that, and referring to them publicly as her children.

The emic and etic approaches that were first developed by linguist Kenneth Pike and used by anthropologist Marvin Harris are useful analysis
tools to interpret the effects of Grace Mugabe’s thinking and conduct. They distinguish between meanings understood by actors (the people themselves, and in this case, Grace Mugabe) calling them *emic*, and *etic* which is what independent observers interpret as really happening. In her mind, as she went about her business, she was a mother to the nation and expected people to culturally treat her as that with all the protocols that go with it. Some probably did reciprocate in the expected manner and from the heart complied with cultural procedures like kneeling before her. However, though people publicly complied with culturally expected norms, the political events that transpired, culminating in the coup and the public utterances of these same people after the coup, reveals that perhaps outwardly people were kneeling, but inwardly they were not. If not at the level of the participants, then certainly in the eyes of observers, like the media, the interpretation (*etic*) of the meanings associated with the act of kneeling was not the same as Grace Mugabe’s. In this sense, we must consider the meanings associated with the outward action of kneeling, especially in public spaces today.

**Meanings Associated with Kneeling**

A 2011 newspaper article recorded then Minister of Mines and Mining Development, Obert Mpofo responding to a question concerning the way he signed one of his letters to President Mugabe. He had signed it by describing himself as Mugabe’s ever-obedient son,

> “President Mugabe is my father, he is my father and the signing off as ‘your ever obedient son’ was not a mistake. When I go to see him I refer to him as baba (father),” Mpofo said amid laughter from journalists. “I don’t drink (alcohol) and any decision I take is sober. I do things knowing they are good. I regard President Mugabe as my father,” he said. Mpofo (60) said he also referred to his seniors and bosses as his fathers...”

While the newspaper article accused Mpofo of “bootlicking,” his expressed motivation in doing what he did is that he genuinely regarded Mugabe as his father. So, if he was to kneel for Mugabe, it would be an outward expression of a heartfelt respect that a son gives to a father. Robert Strauss says,

In 1936, Ralph Linton introduced the terms *form*, *function*, and *meaning* to the field of cultural anthropology.
in his book, The Study of Man. Years later, anthropologist Charles H. Kraft ...rekindled interest in these concepts as he addressed communicating across cultures. He argued that the form/meaning distinction, if not the most important skill in cross-cultural communication, is one of the most important skills...

How are these terms conceptually defined?
- **Form** refers to any cultural element – a material object, word, idea, pattern, or ritual.
- **Function** is the intended purpose of that form in a society.
- **Meaning** is what the forms convey denotatively and connotatively... the associations which any society attaches to it.20

Using this framework to analyze kneeling, it can be established that when done according to the cultural construct, the practice of kneeling (form) has an intended purpose of conveying respect (meaning). Zimbabwean journalists as shown so far in this paper are now questioning the practice at two levels. First, is the form still conveying the same meaning it did originally? While kneeling might be a show of respect in the heart of the one who does it, and the recipient of the action understands it that way; when done in public, the meanings that others associate with that act might be very different to what is going on in the hearts of the people who are directly involved. The world and even some Zimbabweans have very different understandings of what is happening. The contexts in which this is being done give very different meanings to the form than might be intended, thus the outcry from more modernized Zimbabweans, Zimbabwean journalists, and media from other parts of the world. The imported Western structures of governance that Zimbabwe has adopted interpret the kneeling of public officials to a President or other high office as dysfunctional governance systems. They see values like the need for accountability, impartiality, and justice, which drive the establishment of the structures that Zimbabwe adopted, at risk. How can a person who is showing such public displays of subservience possibly ask the tough questions to those in authority as their jobs expect of them?

Second, the journalists are questioning whether the form is still really aligned to the meaning in the hearts of those who ostensibly show respect in public, whether through kneeling or other outward forms of honoring. The second question is behind a critique of The Herald,
a newspaper that is widely regarded as a Zimbabwean government mouthpiece,

In August, the paper ran a typically fawning portrait of Grace under the headline “A Loving Mother of the Nation.”

“Loving mother, compassionate philanthropist, astute businesswoman, perceptive politician, remarkable patriot, these are all adjectives that can be used to describe the First Lady Dr [sic] Grace Mugabe,” The Herald gushed.

Less than three months later and in the wake of a coup that threatens Mugabe’s presidency and has seen both he and Grace expelled from ZANU-PF, her Herald portrayal was starkly different.

“Grace Mugabe lacked grooming and true motherhood as shown by her foul language,” the paper quoted the ZANU-PF’s youth wing as saying.

“We take exception to the vulgar language which had become part of Mrs [sic] Mugabe’s vocabulary,” it quoted a Youth League cadre as saying.

Zimbabweans, many of whom are devoutly religious and culturally conservative, often take offense at profanities.

The piece featured an unflattering picture of an unsmiling Grace - a sharp departure from the “loving mother” portrayal that included photos of her smiling and holding infants.21

The accusation is therefore that kneeling and other forms of ostensibly honoring leaders like writing glowing newspaper articles, or calling them mother or father, is nothing more than selfish and insincere attempts by those doing it to curry favor from the leaders. They do not really respect the leaders; they are duplicitous flatterers, sycophants or “bootlickers” as the newspaper quoted above describes it. The observed behavior not only of The Herald, but also those around the first family in the period just preceding the coup and just after was revealing. For some of them in the previous week were literally and publicly singing the praise of the Mugabes, and then they publicly denigrated them a week later. The sycophant narrative becomes difficult to deny.

**Appropriate Ways to Show Honor**

Having considered the cultural factors behind the act of kneeling and the possible meanings associated with it, I will conclude with recommendations of culturally appropriate ways that Zimbabweans can
show honor, especially in the public arena today. Changing the way people are socialized cannot be legislated, however the process of interacting with other cultures drives change, and a natural process is already happening. Many Zimbabweans no longer kneel in their homes as was done in the past. The practice may slowly be dropped as a natural process through interacting with other cultures and their alternative meanings of the behavior. It will however, continue in some homes and where parents choose to continue it, they must instill the value of true respect that lies behind the form.

Public ways of showing honor must truly serve and respect the leaders towards whom the public action is performed. What kneeling in public does to the image of the leader towards whom a person kneels should be considered. Is the act achieving the intention that should be at the heart of preforming the action? That is both showing respect and honor to the recipient and making them respectable and honorable in the process? If the leader accepts this kind of public acclamation, the reciprocation should be to lovingly serve and honor those who humble themselves. It becomes a big podium, which is perhaps too big for a mere mortal human to climb.

The metaphor of leader as “father” and/or “mother” is likely not going to change much within the Zimbabwean leadership psyche. The question should therefore be, if leaders are like “fathers” and “mothers,” how can they be best honored in that role?

Kelley’s followership theory identifies five possible followership styles. The ideal follower is what he describes as the effective follower, who is loyal but holds leaders accountable to agreed vision and ideals. There are four other less ideal, yet possible ways to follow:

* Passive followers who uncritically do whatever the leader says.
* Conformists who are overly loyal to the point of sycophancy, pampering to the whims of the leader and culture.
* Alienated followers who were once loyal, but because of some conflict have become offended and cynical. They may still follow, but not wholeheartedly, perhaps even forming their own factions within the system.
* Pragmatic survivors are more concerned about personal interests than the vision. They do whatever is necessary and expedient for their own interests.
Kelley’s model makes the vision and shared ideals of the leadership effort the final determinant of appropriate follower behavior. So, in the instance of holders of public office, the shared vision, which is the prosperity of Zimbabwe, should be the goal towards which all involved aspire. In the Church, the concern should be how the behavior brings glory to God and helps advance the Kingdom vision. Honor is an attitude that does not necessarily need the physical display of kneeling to be communicated. It can be shown in the following ways:

1. To loyally and consistently put in the best effort possible towards the success of the vision.
2. To lovingly and respectfully (even while kneeling if necessary) point out to leaders the dangers of some practices and how they deviate from the expressed vision and ideals.
3. Even within the parent/child leadership relationship, highlight, as a mature child within Zimbabwean culture would, leaders’ wrong behavior and point out their error in culturally appropriate ways. It may be necessary to work with mediators as is done within Zimbabwean family structures.
4. Cultural practices must not take precedence over what is good for the family. Where kneeling is counter-productive and rather than bringing honor to leaders invites ridicule diminishing their public standing, it should not be done. If it is more honoring not to kneel in such environments, followers must not dishonor the leaders by kneeling.

The above suggestions would describe effective follower practices in the context of appropriate ways to show honor to those in public leadership, whether in church or society in Zimbabwe. The cultural practice of kneeling will likely fall away eventually and be replaced by Western influenced ways of behavior. To try to introduce or propose a new culture might be a possible solution, but because of the dynamics and ever changing character of culture, it will only be temporary. However, the cultural value of honoring leaders should be preserved, and these ways of showing honor, which are largely attitudinal and can be outwardly expressed in whatever way seems appropriate, should be the purpose or meaning behind the forms adopted. In the light of this discussion, these recommendations will be expanded as the implications are considered.
The Implications of Public Kneeling

Before speaking to public officials in society, the Zimbabwean Church needs to do a self-critique on the appropriate ways to honor elders and leaders in Zimbabwe. Is the practice of kneeling to leaders acceptable conduct especially during a worship service or in the general conduct of church life? The Bible generally has a negative view of people kneeling before humans, and even angels would not accept humans kneeling before them. Kneeling is linked to worship, and God is the only one worthy of such honor.

Religion has a very important role in shaping culture. Beliefs play a very important role in influencing practice, and any change of cultural practice should be informed by evaluating the intended meanings associated with the practice, as well as assessing whether the practice is still serving its original purpose. Morals for the Christian, that is, the understanding of what is good or bad, right or wrong, should ultimately come from what God says is right or wrong, good or bad. This makes the Zimbabwean Church central to giving guidance and shaping culture in this matter. The choice that the Church has made to accept people kneeling to leaders, especially in public worship sends a big message to the larger culture approving of the practice. If the church maintains this position, then she cannot do anything else but silently watch as society follows with the behavior.

If public kneeling in society in general continues, it places the society in a bad position when considered from the biblical perspective. The acceptance of this kind of conduct exalts leaders to a demi-god status and puts a heavy load on them because they are human beings, with shortcomings like everyone else. Stress comes because they know that the image they portray in public is far different from the reality of their human frailties, which they often know all too well. The feelings of superiority or being other, different, and exalted above everyone else, specially chosen and belonging to the realm of the gods can easily creep into the psyche. The more this happens, the higher the pedestal they are put on, and the inevitable fall from grace is just a matter of time.

Missiologically this practice should be understood as people dabbling in areas that biblically do not belong in the realm of mere mortal humans with all of their frailties. The Church should critique this culture and this requires maturity and self-theologizing. The Zimbabwean Church should seek to come up with relevant contextual theologies to give guidance to the nation in this area of kneeling before public figures.
Conclusion

This paper has analyzed the leadership implications of the practice of kneeling in Zimbabwean culture. The contexts of public leadership spheres and worship in the church were specifically analyzed. Kneeling to leaders and elders is a deeply ingrained part of Zimbabwean culture with the intention of honoring and showing respect to leaders. While the practice will probably not quickly cease in private practice, especially in the home, it is likely that even in private, it will become less prevalent due to influences from other cultures. Respect can be shown in many ways, and the paper has demonstrated that the outward practice of kneeling is not necessarily indicative of an inner attitude of respect.

After analyzing the issue, the following recommendations about the cultural practice of kneeling are suggested:

1. The Zimbabwean Church needs to lead the way in critiquing this cultural practice. As a mature Church, it should self-theologize and contextualize to address this issue and guide the society in biblically appropriate ways of showing honor.
2. The private practice of kneeling will probably not stop, but will gradually change, with more and more people no longer kneeling because of interaction with other cultures. The private practice should be left to the discretion of individuals.
3. The public practice of kneeling in church worship services or church-related activities should be stopped. The biblical precedent is that kneeling is reserved only for God. It is therefore inappropriate for people to kneel to church leaders and they should teach this and then refuse it, at least during public worship or church-related activities. Private practice of kneeling should be discouraged for the same reasons, but cultural sensitivity is needed in some environments. The discretion of the leader should be guided by the possible misunderstandings that this paper presents.
4. The practice of kneeling in public by high-ranking officials should be stopped. Though the intention may be right, and both the person who is doing it along with the recipient may have the same understanding of the form and meaning; the ideals of the cultural construct in which they are operating can be considered at risk due to their public behavior. How can a person who is so subservient hold the leader accountable, remain impartial, ask tough questions and
ensure justice is done? That kind of conduct belongs to a traditional or monarchical form of governance. It also puts stress on the leaders who are placed on a pedestal too high for human beings. Once on that pedestal, the eventual fall from grace is inevitable.

5. The hierarchical stratifications that go with showing respect need to be critiqued and a more egalitarian society should be the goal. Issues like gender roles, distribution of wealth, and the tendency to see a group of people like those with prominent leadership positions as better than others, need to be critiqued.

6. If Zimbabweans insist on maintaining traditional practices like showing respect through submission, avoidance, handclapping, kneeling or sitting at the appropriate times, then it may be necessary to consider another form of governance that is more suited to the culture. The adoption of colonial systems of governance was inherited, but may not fit well with the culture in which it is being practiced. A new method of governance would need to be developed. This would be Ph.D. thesis level kind of work and is beyond the scope of this paper.

7. Finally, it may be necessary to train public officials so that they desist from kneeling in public as they might instinctively want to follow this practice. The training should primarily be based on biblical teaching and/or the emic/etic approaches and understandings of the concept of form, function, and meaning in cultural studies.

End Notes


2 Machamire.


6 Bourdillon, *The Shona Peoples*, 209. This ceremony is designed to officially bring the spirit of the deceased person back home.


12 Ott and Netland, 307.


14 Robbins, 220.

15 Robbins, 222.

16 Robbins, 223.


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Yohan Hong

*Powerlessness and A Social Imaginary in the Philippines: A Case Study on Bahala na*

**Abstract:**

This paper calls attention to the sense of powerlessness of everyday people in the Philippines, and to the missional agency of US-based Filipino Protestants for the transformation of the Philippines. This research has been a journey to discover what kind of power is in play, how the fallen powers can be named and made visible, and then ultimately the ways through which power should be restored. In this process, I referred to the voices, perceptions, stories, and insights of US-based Filipino Protestants in Texas, in order to explore the causes of powerlessness. This paper focuses on how *Bahala na* as a Filipino cultural value, functions at some mythic level in relation to a social imaginary in such a way to cause and perpetuate a sense of powerlessness.

Furthermore, the missional agency of Filipino American Protestants has been seldom investigated in the academia of Diaspora Missiology and Intercultural Studies. This paper concludes that Filipino American Protestants have re-interpreted *Bahala na* in transforming ways through the power of their spiritual discipline and Protestant faith so that this paper shines light on the potentiality for them to be change agents who can help bring about the transformation in the Philippines.

**Keywords:** Powerlessness, Social Imaginary, *Bahala na*, Filipino American Protestants, Diaspora Missiology

Yohan Hong is a graduate from Ph.D. in Intercultural Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary and senior pastor of Oxford First United Methodist Church in the North Alabama Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.
Introduction

The issue of powerlessness is too complicated to be defined by one factor. I argue that a sense of powerlessness functions in relation to its underlying social imaginaries in the Philippines. This paper unveils powerlessness by investigating the social imaginary embedded in Bahala na in which a sense of powerlessness could be implicit. To explore whether a sense of powerlessness functions as a social imaginary, I will first introduce definitions of social imaginary by several sociologists and then present how Bahala na functions as social imaginary causing and perpetuating a sense of powerlessness in the Philippines.

What Is A Social Imaginary?

The social imaginary has been widely discussed in recent years by scholars like Charles Taylor, Benedict Anderson, Arjun Appadurai, and Cornelius Castoriadis. The topic of social imaginaries ranges “from the capitalist imaginary to the democratic imaginary, from the ecological imaginary to the global imaginary.” It is Charles Taylor who is usually credited with the definition of social imaginary. In Modern Social Imaginaries, Taylor defines social imaginary as “the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations.” Moreover, social imaginary “incorporates a sense of the normal expectations we have of each other, the kind of common understanding that enables us to carry out the collective practices that make up our social life.” In other words, this means a way that everyday people imagine their social surroundings. In a social imaginary people perceive the common understanding, conduct the common practices, and discern a sense of legitimacy. It is through the social imaginary that people have “a sense of how things usually go, of what missteps would invalidate the practices.”

A social imaginary is distinguished from a social theory in that “a social imaginary is carried in images, stories and legends rather than theoretical formulations.” For this reason, a social imaginary refers to “a culture’s wide-angle and deep background of understanding that makes possible common practices, unarticulated understandings and relevant sense-giving features.” In this regard, it is appropriate to explore Filipino cultural values in order to unveil social imaginaries.
There are some other definitions of a social imaginary. According to Alberta Arthurs, the social imaginary is “the common understanding that makes social practices both possible and legitimate, which provides the backgrounds that makes sense of any given act in daily life.” For Manfred Steger, a social imaginary is a “deep-seated mode of understanding that provides the most general parameters within which people imagine their communal existence,” so that it creates “an implicit background that makes possible communal practices and a widely shared sense of their legitimacy.” Simply put, a social imaginary provides a platform on which everyday people perceive the common understanding, conduct the common practices, and discern a sense of legitimacy. In what follows, I investigate a sense of powerlessness embedded in cultural values as a form of social imaginary.

Social Imaginaries and Powerlessness

In the circle of development studies, no one seems to be using the term social imaginary in relation to the concept of power. Instead, some scholars mention several different terminologies that designate “mentality and attitude” as one of the main factors that bring about development. Lawrence Harrison in Underdevelopment Is a State of Mind uses the term “the creative capacity to imagine and solve the problems” to underscore the role of mentality and attitude in development. According to Harrison, despite the existing structural cracks in a system of society hindering human progress, human beings have achieved tremendous progress throughout history because of creative capacity. In a broad concept, I would say that a social imaginary is partially equivalent to mentality and attitude. Moreover, meaning the capability to decide actions and carry them out.

Here I see the interrelatedness between social imaginaries and power or powerlessness.

Some similar concepts to social imaginaries are found in the circle of sociology. Max Weber in Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism stresses that at the root of achievement is a set of values and attitudes that are associated with Protestant ethic: hard work, thrift, honesty, rationality, and austerity—in sum, “asceticism.” Weber points out values and attitudes as a determinant to overcoming a sense of powerlessness and bringing about achievement. In The Sacred Canopy Peter Berger presents that the religious beliefs and meanings held by individuals construct “plausibility structures” in which members of society legitimate social practices and orders.
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contribution of Berger is to pinpoint a significant role of religion in society to form plausibility structures. In the same sense, social imaginaries are birthed, shaped, and practiced by the influence of religious soil embedded in cultural values. Religion tremendously impacts the formation of social imaginaries and then consequently the mentality and attitude of everyday people, including a sense of powerlessness, because it often uses symbols and other means that tap into the power of imagination. For what follows, I will introduce one cultural practice that connects the psycho-social powerlessness as embedded in Filipino social imaginaries.

Powerlessness and Bahala na Mentality

Rolando M. Gripaldo states that Bahala na has become “a philosophy of life, a cultural trait that has strongly developed into a significant core of Filipino attitude.” Then, the first question is likely to be, “What does Bahala na mean? And how do people use this expression in everyday life?” To answer these questions, I need to start with a quote from Teodoro A. Agoncillo’s article:

Can you go through that wall of fire? Bahala na. This is the last morsel we have; where do we get tomorrow’s food? Bahala na. Don’t gamble your last money: you might go home with pockets inside out. Bahala na. Such fatalism has bred in the Filipino a sense of resignation. He appears indifferent in the face of graft and corruption. He appears impassive in the face of personal misfortune. Yet this “Bahala na” attitude prevents him from being a crackpot.

As the quote above suggests, Bahala na is literally translated as “Leave it up to God,” “Come what may,” “What will be will be,” and “I don’t care.” Bahala na is one of the phrases that Filipinos use most often. As a matter of fact, this phrase appears to have “a nationwide linguistic acceptance from more than 80 major languages.” Thus, Bahala na is widely shared by large groups of people and seems to be the kind of common understanding and normal expectation in which everyday people carry out the collective practices that make up their social life. This fact qualifies Bahala na to be a social imaginary.

Despite its popularity, Bahala na is an idea that defies definition or explanation because it can be applied in various situations responsibly or irresponsibly. Nevertheless, many Filipino scholars like Jaime Bulatao,
Rolando M. Gripaldo,18 Tereso C. Casiño,19 and José M. De Mesa20 point out the fatalistic attitude that is deeply embedded in Bahala na. In everyday life, Filipinos say Bahala na when they are confronted with challenging situations and hardships which they are not able to handle and overcome. For this reason, Bahala na tends to be recognized as a fatalistic expression. Some other people argue that it can be also used in positive ways as “the spirit to take risks”21 and “shock absorber”22 in the midst of insurmountable situations. According to Casiño, “a Filipino toys with fatalism as a means of easing the pain of his or her circumstances, as well as lessening the burden of his existence. In such a case, Bahala na functions as a convenient theodicy for Filipinos.”23 De Mesa points out its positive aspect as well: “Bahala na provides Filipinos the capacity to laugh at themselves and the situations they are in. It reflects, in addition, the oriental philosophy to be in harmony with nature. While it may appear passive, it is nevertheless dynamic without being coercive.”24

No matter what its interpretations are, I would like to give an emphasis on the religious connotation deeply embedded in Bahala na. I argue that this is not just a cultural expression but also a religious concept even though many Filipinos are ignorant of this. It is important to recognize its religious origin because religion has tremendous impact upon Filipinos’ lives. When it comes to ethnic traits of Filipinos, two major things are usually mentioned: trust in God and family-centeredness.25 Thus, Filipinos are known as one of the most religious peoples in the world. For this reason, it is critical for Filipinos to correctly understand the meanings of Bahala na and discern them in such a way as to overcome a sense of powerlessness.

The Religious Origins of Bahala na

Bahala na is rooted in traditional Filipino spirituality in which people believe that “a cosmic force (not necessarily a Supreme Being) controls the flow of the events in the universe.”26 Then, in what kind of religious soil did this expression originate and become rooted in Filipino culture? As some Filipino scholars like Lynn Bostrom and F. Landa Jocano assert, it is believed that the word Bahala was derived from the word Bathala in Tagalog that literally means God.27 In this sense, Bahala na reasonably has a religious origin in its usage. Interestingly, Casiño argues that throughout Philippine history, Bahala na had been nurtured and established in four different religious soils: animism, Hinduism, Islam, and Catholicism.28
The first soil was animism. It may be controversial to state that \textit{Bahala na} originated from animism because there seems to be no strong interrelatedness between animism and \textit{Bahala na}. Ancient Filipinos worshipped celestial beings, nature, and ancestral spirits. Then, how can we relate animism to \textit{Bahala na}? Casiño points out the broad influence of animism manifested even today in the form of Folk Catholicism, and in Philippine society as a whole.\textsuperscript{29} In the Filipino psyche, according to him, “the world is a series of karma, an ethical pre-deterministic system of cause-and-effect.”\textsuperscript{30} Therefore, in this animistic worldview, anything that happens to someone is attributed to a cause, that is, “an impersonal force known as suwerte (luck), tsamba (chance), or kapalaran (destiny).”\textsuperscript{31} Casiño tries to explain the ancient spiritual soil for Filipino spirituality. In this sense, the cosmology of Filipinos might function as the essential spiritual soil nurturing the birth of \textit{Bahala na}.

The second religious soil was Hinduism. In the 900s A.D, the religious ideas of Hinduism reached the Philippines through Hindu traders from India. A Filipino anthropologist, F. Landa Jocano, asserts that the word \textit{Bahala} originated from the word \textit{Bathala} literally meaning God, but more specifically \textit{Bathala}, known as the highest deity in the folk religion of the Philippines, is of Hindu origin.\textsuperscript{32} According to Casiño, Filipinos were able to have the “risk taking and adventuresome trait” because of their faith in \textit{Bathala} who is known as “a powerful yet benevolent deity,” consequently believed to “lend, assist, and help regardless of whatever circumstances they have.”\textsuperscript{33} This interpretation of \textit{Bathala} has greatly influenced Filipino’s religiosity in that they not only take a risk in the midst of adversity, but also tend to be fatalistic in waiting for this powerful and benevolent deity. The ambivalence of \textit{Bahala na}, fatalistic and agential, originated from interpreting the meaning of \textit{Bathala}, a Hindu deity.

However, some people might argue that it is problematic to assert a direct cause-and-result relationship between Hinduism and the fatalistic consciousness of ancient Filipinos regardless of the assumption that Hinduism is originally fatalistic. As I explore Filipino history, however, there are some considerable evidences that early Filipino culture with the fatalistic bent of Filipino’s religiosity came under the influence of Hinduism in areas such as languages,\textsuperscript{34} folklore, arts, and even literature written during pre-colonial period.\textsuperscript{35} In effect, religion does not exist by itself. Rather, it is birthed, formed, practiced and melted in cultures, life style, and worldviews of everyday people. Therefore, based on these evidences, I would say that
Filipino religiosity had been greatly influenced by Hinduism, particularly its fatalistic bent.

The third religious soil was Islamic faith, which first arrived in 1380 A.D. through the visit of a Muslim missionary named Mukdum. The Islamic influence upon the fatalistic mentality of Filipinos looks more obvious because of Islam’s pre-deterministic consciousness that allows people to “resign themselves to fate (kismet) according to the will of Allah (Insha’Allah).” Casiño asserts that Bahala na “reinforces the belief that every event and circumstance in the universe emanates from the will of Allah.” However, his argument falls into inaccuracy in that he did not distinguish between these two words in Arabic: Tawakkul (توكل) and Tawakul (توكل). Tawakkul (توكل) means “to rely [sic] on Allah and do your best to reach your goal” while Tawakul (توكل) signifies “complete dependence on Allah without making any effort, thinking in a fatalistic way.” In the latter, Muslims tend to think that if Allah wills, it will happen and there is no need for any effort. I think Muslims are expected to believe in the former, but in reality many of them tend to believe and live in the latter. In effect, it is well-known that the pattern of their saying Insha’Allah or according to the will of Allah has a fatalistic connotation. In this sense, I think that Casiño points to the latter when he explains the fatalistic mentality of Filipinos that might have been caused by the Islamic faith. These two different understandings of the will of Allah have greatly influenced Filipino Christians’ perceptions of God’s will. In sum, animistic religiosity of ancient Filipinos was cultivated in the spiritual soil of fatalistic Hinduism, and then Filipino folk spirituality became more inclined to fatalism under the pre-deterministic attitude of Islam.

The fourth religious soil was Catholic Christianity in the 1500s. When Spanish Catholic friars arrived in the archipelago, they discovered that “Filipinos already had existing religious representations” so that the friars “simply assimilated Filipinos’ folk religious expressions in their missionary works.” It resulted in “the baptizing of local deities with Christian names.” Casiño asserts, “Folk Catholicism developed by giving local deities equivalent functions and powers with patron saints.” However, one question arises: “In what specific ways did Spanish Catholicism affect the fatalistic bent of Bahala na?” Due to the Spanish friars’ strategy of religious assimilation, over the centuries folk religious concepts including Bahala na had been accepted without critical objection by Filipino Catholics and then later even many Filipino Protestants. As a result, Bahala na seems to
be regarded as the equivalent of “Thy will be done” in the Lord’s Prayer. Jaime Bulato asserts that this practice of combining Bahala na (fatalistic worldview) with “Thy will be done” (faith worldview) has led to the Filipino experience of “split-level spirituality.” This syncretistic tendency posed by Bulato and Casiño needs to be further investigated through the eyes of contemporary Filipino Christians through ethnographic research in the Philippines. Interestingly, my interviews with U.S.-based Protestant Filipinos in Texas proved that they rarely use Bahala na in a fatalistic way, and do not interpret this expression as the equivalent of “Thy will be done.” However, my interviewees hinted at the high possibility that this syncretistic tendency could be true in the case of everyday Christians in the Philippines.

**Bahala na as a Product of Filipino Religiosity**

On the basis of these four religious soils mentioned above, the Bahala na attitude had been birthed, nurtured, and rooted into Filipinos’ mindsets and cultures. Then, another question arises. Why and how do Filipinos in the Philippines continue to say Bahala na? Casiño has one answer to this:

> Bahala na evolves as a religious tool or device in which a Filipino practically copes with the adverse demands and circumstances of life. In order to survive, a Filipino toys with fatalism as a means of erasing the pain of his or her circumstances as well as lessening the burden of his existence. In such case, Bahala na functions as a convenient theodicy for Filipinos.

This fascinating interpretation of Bahala na in a way pinpoints its religious characteristic. When they say Bahala na in adversities and crises, Filipinos tend to be consciously or unconsciously reminded of God or a Supreme Being or a cosmic force or even suwerte (luck) or kapalaran (destiny), which is believed to “control their lives based on a fixed blueprint.” I believe that this religious origin of Bahala na enabled it to pass down from generation to generation and take roots in Filipinos’ mindsets. Filipinos’ religiosity has reinforced this expression to continue to exist and function as a social imaginary. Moreover, as an idea or a story is embedded and passed down in a religious form, a social imaginary is also carried in a similar way to this. Taylor explains this point, that social imaginary “is carried in images, stories, and legends.” Thus, Bahala na is a religious product of different
images, stories, and legends of different spiritual soils throughout Filipino history.

Then, if Bahala na functions as a social imaginary in the context of the Philippines, in what way is Bahala na related to a sense of powerlessness or powerfulness? This question is important because if it is just fatalistic, it feeds upon powerlessness, but if agential, then it is possible to see it as a resource to gain power over a powerless situation. To answer this question, we need to first investigate how Filipinos interpret and practice Bahala na in everyday lives.

**Bahala na as a Fatalistic Mentality**

The most popular interpretation of Bahala na is to see it as a fatalistic mentality. As mentioned above, this fatalism has been influenced by traditional religious soils. Casiño pinpoints that in daily practice, “Bahala na is considered undesirable because Filipinos tend to use it as a negative psychological justification for their failure to take up human responsibility and accountability in times of hardships and crises.”49 According to Casiño, “The downside of Bahala na lies in its fatalistic bent where a Filipinos leaves everything up to kapalaran (destiny).”50

This proves true by the empirical data collected from my ethnographic research. Jerico, an interviewee, states this point:

*Bahala na* is something like “Who cares about tomorrow?” Let’s leave it to luck or destiny. But the word Bahala comes from the word Bathala, which means God. So the good meaning of Bahala na is “leaving it to God. And God will take care of it.” But the downside of it is just saying Bahala na, meaning to say, leave it to God without doing anything, sitting down, and just leaving it to destiny. So that’s also the problem of many people who stay in poverty status. That is a mentality that means “Whatever we do is because we are like this already.” They created that mentality that “I’m already this and there’s nothing that I can do about it.”

Jerico interpreted Bahala na as a fatalistic mentality and related it to the issue of poverty. He articulated that people in poverty tend to use this expression in a fatalistic way. This statement alludes that the Bahala na attitude might contribute to perpetuating poverty by justifying frustrating situations without doing their best to overcome them.
This fatalistic interpretation of *Bahala na* is supported by another tendency of everyday people, with a lower economic status in the Philippines, to blame the rich and the government for their circumstances. Here are the words of Jerico:

If you will only depend on the government or other people for your needs, your sustainability will be a problem. You will remain in that condition. In the Philippines, we always hear people blaming the rich. They say, “We are like this because of the people who are rich. We are like this because of those politicians who’ve been corrupt.” But, then, my question is, “Have you done something really for yourselves? Aren’t you just entertaining that mentality that we are like this and we will remain like this?” I think we have a lot of people in the Philippines who have that kind of mentality.

Thus, *Bahala na* can be used as an expression of the poor people to blame the powerful like the rich and the politicians. As a result, they identify themselves as powerless. *Bahala na* might not represent cosmic fatality, but the fatality of structure. The lack of agency inside people is definitely interrelated to the asymmetric structure of power. Precisely, lack of agency is a by-product of an unjust structure and the structure is reproduced and perpetuated by lack of agency.

In the same alignment, Teresa, an interviewee, explains *Bahala na* in the concept of power-within or personal self-confidence: “*Bahala na* is more of powerlessness. Okay, whatever will be will be. That is when you don’t have any power. If you feel like you are powerful, you don’t say that. If you are confident, you will do everything that you can do. If you want to give up, you want to say *Bahala na.*” To Teresa, those who say *Bahala na* in the midst of challenges and hardships beyond their capability communicate their low power-within or low self-confidence. My ethnographic interviews verify that Protestant Filipinos in the US believe this to be the correct interpretation of *Bahala na*. In other words, only those who recognize agency inside them do not say *Bahala na*. Rather, they take up their responsibility and accountability in times of hardships and crises.

In conclusion, *Bahala na* is more used as a fatalistic expression rather than agential, consequently feeding upon the powerlessness of everyday people in the Philippines.
Bahala na as an Optimistic Spirit

One lingering question is whether or not Bahala na can be used as agential in a certain way. Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino pose an optimistic spirit of Bahala na. According to them, Bahala na defies definition or explanation because it can be applied variously depending on how one perceives circumstances, life, power, and even faith in God. As a result, they argue that Bahala na is not “fatalism” but “determination and risk-taking.” In their point of view, in saying Bahala na, Filipinos are “telling themselves that they are ready to face the difficult situation before them, and will do their best to achieve their objectives.” In fact, Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino assert that Filipinos are believed to “have probably done their best to prepare for the future situation” even before they have uttered Bahala na. This interpretation foregrounds the more agential nature of Bahala na, and implies an ongoing process for contemporary Filipino psychologists to re-interpret and re-construct Filipinos’ cultural values and ethnic identities.

US-based Protestant Filipinos in Texas are a case for this. They usually do not utter Bahala na; the only time they might say Bahala na is when they do their best for the good and then wait for God’s guidance. Roland pinpoints this:

My Bahala na is, “I’m going to do something good and whatever happens I’m going to stand for it. That’s my Bahala na. I will leave it to God because I know that God will not leave me. It’s going to go through. He’s going to help me. If it will fail, I’m still confident because I will get the help of the Lord, because it was just not His will. I guess it is personality and culture. The common Bahala na is negative. I don’t believe in that Bahala na. I believe in Bahala na only when it’s positive.

Surprisingly, my interviewees in Texas seem to interpret Bahala na differently from what everyday people do in the Philippines. As a matter of fact, almost every interviewee answered in such a way that whereas everyday people in the Philippines tend to utter Bahala na as a fatalistic mentality, Filipino Americans in Texas tend to use Bahala na only in positive ways.

What brought about this difference in its interpretations? What I found from the interview with Roland is that he as a Filipino American Protestant does not believe in destiny, but rather believes in God’s will helping those who help themselves. His case demonstrates how theology...
or faith in God plays a significant role in its interpretation of Bahala na. This is aligned with the assertion of Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino, which says that the definition or explanation of Bahala na can be applied variously depending on how one perceives circumstances, life, power, and even faith in God.\textsuperscript{56} For Filipino American Protestants in Texas, Bahala na seems to be not “fatalism” but more of “determination and risk-taking.”\textsuperscript{57} Thus, those in Texas repackage the concept of Bahala na, mainly because they theologize its meaning.

How can this same expression as a social imaginary be used and interpreted differently depending on perception of situation, life, power, and faith in God? How should we understand the ambivalence of Bahala na in its interpretation and application? To explore the answers of these questions, I found out another aspect of a social imaginary, that is, social imaginary’s susceptibility to change.

**Susceptibility of Social Imaginary to Change**

Noticeably, the social imaginary can change. Jeffery Buckles maintains, “Although the social imaginary explains and reproduces human interaction, it is not static, and is susceptible to change as human knowledge changes, meaning that how humans know, interpret and live in the world is not a constant”\textsuperscript{58} Since social imaginaries can change, they “enable humankind to make sense of the world in which they live, as current knowledge is used to interpret the domains.”\textsuperscript{59} In this regard, Bahala na is susceptible to change. That is why there is the ambivalence in interpreting Bahala na: a fatalistic mentality and an optimistic spirit. Throughout my ethnographic research, many participants stated that everyday people in the Philippines tend to use Bahala na as a fatalistic mentality, whereas Filipino American Protestants in Texas do not. As a matter of fact, almost all my participants answered that they do not say Bahala na as a fatalistic mentality, and also have rarely heard this expression among Filipino Americans in Texas. As mentioned, I argue that theology or faith in God played a crucial role in making this difference.

Then, what other factors brought about this difference between Filipinos in the Philippines and Filipino American Protestants in Texas? Based on my ethnographic research, the impacting determinants are social location, education, and time focus.
Social Location

First, their social location in Texas seems to affect their religious reading of Bahala na. Jerico demonstrates:

I’ve never heard the word Bahala na among Filipino Americans in Texas. Everything is accessible in the US. Those who are not rich also eat what the rich eat here. But you have to work. You have to do something. So, for the Filipinos who migrated in the US, Bahala na system does not work. God will help those who help themselves. Manna will not just drop from the heaven. You can always do something to better your life.

According to Jerico, Filipino Americans in Texas seem to not stay in a sense of fatalism. Rather, they appear to believe in God who helps those who help themselves. To them, relying on God does not mean just waiting for God’s help without doing anything. Trusting in God requires their responsible actions accordingly. Although theology is still guiding their actions, I would assert that a shift in social location precipitates a shift in theological distinctive.

Nevertheless, I do not believe that all Filipinos in poverty in the Philippines say Bahala na in fatalistic ways. I do not also believe that all Filipinos in Texas interpret Bahala na with an optimistic spirit. In the words of Buckles, as Filipinos interpret their domains (the Philippines and Texas) in different ways, the interpretation of Bahala na changes. On one hand, everyday people under the asymmetric structure of power in the Philippines tend to perceive their frustrating realities in fatalistic ways. On the other hand, Filipinos in Texas believe that they can overcome their circumstances and everything is possible as long as they work hard in the USA where socio-political-economic structures of power appear to be more supportive to the well-being of everyday people. Thus, the interpretation of Bahala na is susceptible to change depending on its social location.

Education

Second, education plays a crucial role in forming, legitimating, and perpetuating social imaginary by enabling the development of persons. Through education, persons develop a form of consciousness, for “to be conscious of things requires some set of concepts through which experience is ordered and made sense of and through this ability to make sense of the world.”

First Fruits
The participants in my research evidenced that many of them overcame poverty and a sense of powerlessness through education. The interviewees stated that their continuous education even under the disempowering structures of the Philippines made them self-confident and finally enabled their dreams to come true in the States. Here is one example for this case from my interviewee, Patria:

When it comes to low socio-economic status, they just accept that we are poor, and cannot go to school. For me, it is all about my self-goal and self-motivation. My husband and I came from a poor family, not an elite one. My parents were teachers. So they had a little money. But my parents taught us that education is your best tool to improve yourself. We were not trained to depend on the wealth that our parents might have. Not depend on our family. They taught us that you have to desire to be somebody someday. They taught us that we had to study hard, and study well. They told us that once you study hard, you would know how to reach your goal. So it was an individual choice instead of depending on the government or assistance. My husband and I had our goals.

Some people assert that the power structure is the most crucial factor that determines whether people become powerful or powerless. As a matter of fact, many of my interviewees stated that the poor people in the Philippines tend to be fatalistic because of the disempowering structures. However, other people like Patria assert that education motivated her to be successful and organized in her life so that, in the words of Richard Pring, she has been able to develop a form of consciousness. Patria delivered some insights on how people overcome situations and are also overwhelmed by situations. It is dependent upon the mentality of people. In her words, it is an individual choice, and an individual’s self-motivation, not structural evil. This connotes how she made a difference by exercising her self-confidence or power-within under the asymmetric power structure where power-over dominates. In the words of Harrison, she maximized her “creative capacity” to imagine a better future, and solve problems she faced. It turned out that the poverty and lack of resources around her life paradoxically reinforced her to keep on seeking self-confidence to improve her life by education. In this sense, it is noticeable that education plays a significant role in awakening people’s agency and developing the creative capacity of human beings for progress.
In addition, her story also demonstrates how her power-to or self-confidence was wielded to make a decision for her own destiny instead of remaining in powerlessness. In the words of Harrison, power-within and power-to of Patria conquered “a paralyzing and self-defeating mythology” deeply embedded in people’s mindsets where powerlessness might take root. The case of Patria illustrates how education can affect the change of a social imaginary by the intricate interplay between agency and structure.

Time Focus

Third, time focus appears to affect the interpretation of *Bahala na* between Filipinos in the Philippines and Filipino Americans in Texas. Time focus has been one of the significant issues in development studies. Harrison maintains that the worldview’s time focus like past, present, or future is of crucial importance for development. He states:

>If a society’s major focus is on the past–on the glory of earlier times or in reverence of ancestors–or if it is absorbed with today’s problems of survival, the planning, organizing, saving, and investment that are the warp and woof of development are not likely to be encouraged. Orientation toward the future implies the possibility of change and progress.65

Harrison points out that more potential for development lies in orientation toward the future, not the past, and today. His assertion hints at why everyday people in the Philippines are more focused on today and tend to interpret *Bahala na* as a fatalistic mentality. June, an interviewee, pinpoints that Filipinos in the Philippines are more focused on present survival.

>They are more focused on surviving on a day-to-day basis. You know, they focus on themselves like “we need to survive.” They say, “We need to find a way to get food in our mouth today. I don’t care much about what’s going on in the local community or in a bigger picture.” I think a lot of people in the Philippines are focused on “We need to get through one day at a time.” You know, people here in the US have more of the vision for the future. They say, “I can see tomorrow what I want to happen.”

In June’s view, everyday people in the Philippines might be apt to remain powerless and delay development in their lives because their time focus
is on the present. That is the reason why they do not plan for the future. Here the new alignment is presented between time focus and plan. The challenges and hardships in their lives might cause people to say Bahala na which hinders them from dreaming of and planning a better future. This demonstrates how everyday people with a lower socio-political-economic status could become fatalistic.

In the same vein, several interviewees in Texas mentioned the phrase “plan for the future” when they were asked to explain Bahala na. It seemed that time and Bahala na are interrelated in some ways. Here are the words of Luz: “Bahala na is not a good attitude. When you say this, it is because you do not plan ahead of time. If you do not plan, you will fail.” Ruth, an interviewee, also states: “People who are not more into planning use this expression. I am more of a planner. You would rarely hear that word from me. I would draft a plan. I am more of an organized person.” Patria, an interviewee, asserts: “Bahala na is like whatever comes. No! I don’t like whatever comes. I would like to have a plan. I would like to have steps. I write down if I have two things to decide. I write what is good of this and what is bad of that. Then I’ve never been down to Bahala na. I plan my life.” Interestingly, those in Texas who are focused on planning their future do not say Bahala na with a fatalistic mentality. In summation, the different perceptions on time focus of everyday people demonstrates why Bahala na as a social imaginary is susceptible to change and why the interpretation of this social imaginary ended up being ambivalent between fatalism and optimism.

Bahala na and Split-level Christianity

As discussed above, Bahala na has a multi-layered background from different religious traditions. From these religious soils, Filipinos in contemporary Philippine society confront two frameworks for understanding God’s will: “either a God who predetermines one’s destiny or a God who is interested in and cares for everyday people.”66 In the former, Filipinos “leave themselves to fate” and “simply wait passively on their fortunes or misfortunes.”67 In the latter, Filipinos “live a life of faith, guided in a personal relationship with God.”68 Moreover, Spanish Christianity in the Philippines did not transform the traditional fatalistic concept of Bahala na to a Christian way of understanding God’s will.69 For this reason, according to Casiño, many contemporary Filipino Christians have tended to “combine faith with fate,” and to equate “Thy will be done” and Bahala na “without
critical reflection and theological objection,” which results in a syncretistic form of spirituality.70

In my ethnographic research with US-based Protestant Filipinos, almost every participant replied that they neither believe in nor use Bahala na in a fatalistic way. As described earlier, the causes for this difference come from various factors such as social location, education, and time focus. Nevertheless, I would like to underscore their faith in interpreting God’s will as the major cause of that difference. In the interviews, they communicated an awareness of the agency inside them, which is based on interpreting God’s will in such a way that God helps those who help themselves. Their understanding of God’s will does not exclude a sense of personal responsibility and of trust in Divine Providence. They show a good example of how to overcome the syncretistic form of Bahala na.

Conclusion

In this paper, I investigated one major Filipino cultural value, that is, Bahala na, which produce negative social imaginaries that generate and perpetuate a sense of powerlessness in the Philippines. My interviewees and some scholarly writings show that this cultural value functions at some mythic level in relation to social imaginaries in the Philippines, and that there seems to be strong interrelationships between this social imaginary and a sense of powerlessness. Furthermore, a sense of powerlessness results from a lack of agency inside people, and this agency is also strongly affected by social imaginaries in a society. In addition, these social imaginaries are birthed, nurtured, fortified, and practiced under the influence of the social system. For this reason, a sense of powerlessness is not only a matter of social structure, but also of social imaginary. Such cultural values should be explored as the main causes for a sense of powerlessness.

My interviews discovered that Bahala na, on one hand, tends to be recognized as a fatalistic expression rather than agential. When people are confronted with challenging situations and hardship that are beyond their control, they utter this expression and consequently feed upon powerlessness of everyday people in the Philippines. This paper explored the fatalistic religious background embedded in Bahala na, which had birthed, nurtured, and established Bahala na: animism, Hinduism, Islam, and Catholicism. On the other hand, some people argue that Bahala na can be also used in positive ways as a “shock absorber” in which people are willing to face their hardships and do their best to achieve their own
goals. My interviews found that Filipino American Protestants in Texas do not utter Bahala na and they do not believe in destiny or fatalism. Rather, they view God as the One who helps those who help themselves. Two factors made this difference: their perspective in interpreting God’s will and the awareness of agency in themselves.

End Notes:


4 Ibid., 24.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid., 23.


10 Lawrence E. Harrison, Underdevelopment is a State of Mind, (Lanham, MD: 2000), 2.


19 Tereso C. Casiño, “Mission in the Context of Filipino Folk Spirituality: Bahala na as a Case in Point,” in Seoul Consultation, Study Commission IX.

20 José M. de Mesa, And God Said, “Bahala na!”: The Theme of Providence in the Lowland Filipino Context, Quezon City, the Philippines: Publishers’ Printing Press, 1979.


22 Tereso C. Casiño, Seoul Consultation, Study Commission IX, 86.

23 Ibid.


26 Tereso C. Casiño, Seoul Consultation, Study Commission IX, 85.


28 Casiño, 83.

29 Casiño, Seoul Consultation, Study Commission IX, 84.

30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., 86.


33 Casiño, 84.

34 About 25% of the words in many Philippine languages are from Sanskrit and Tamil, which are all of Hindu origin. Refer to Postma, Antoon. (1992), “The Laguna Copper-Plate Inscription: Text and Commentary,” Philippine Studies, 40(2): 183-203.

35 Maria Halili, Philippine History (Quezon City, the Philippines: Rex Book Store, Inc., 2010), 46-47.

36 Tereso C. Casiño, Seoul Consultation, Study Commission IX, 84.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.


40 Tereso C. Casiño, Seoul Consultation, Study Commission IX, 84.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 Casiño, 84.

44 Ibid.


46 Casiño, 86.

47 Casiño, 86.


49 Casiño, 86.

50 Ibid.

51 Power-within means personal self-confidence, often linked to culture, religion, or other aspects of collective identity, which influence


53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino, 55.

57 Ibid.


59 Ibid.

60 Jeffrey J. Buckles, 26.


62 Pring, 12.

63 Lawrence E. Harrison, *Underdevelopment is a State of Mind* (Lanham, MD: 2000), 2.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid., 6.


67 Ibid.

68 Ibid., 86-87.

69 Ibid., 86.

70 Ibid. 86-87.
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From the Archives: John Haywood Paul and Iva Durham Vennard- Holiness in Education

John Haywood Paul (1877-1967) was a gifted preacher and writer, but he was also an educator and administrator. He taught at Meridian College in Mississippi (1909-1914), Asbury College in Kentucky (1916-1922) and served as a vice-president of Asbury College and then president of Taylor University in Indiana from 1922 to 1931. He went on to become the president of John Fletcher College in Iowa (1933-1936) and then returned to teach at Asbury Theological Seminary (1941-1946). He served on the Seminary’s Board of Trustees from 1941 to 1962. He also worked as an editor with Dr. H.C. Morrison on The Pentecostal Herald, and then became the associate editor of The Herald for 25 years, until his death at 90 years of age. But in looking at his papers in the archives, the correspondence that stands out the most is with Iva Durham Vennard (1871-1945). This remarkable holiness evangelist would become the founder of the Chicago Evangelistic Institute, later Vennard College, which she led from 1910 until her death. The correspondence reveals a close friendship and respect between these two educators, who each influenced higher education in the Holiness Movement in different, but equally important ways.

Iva Durham Vennard became a Methodist at a young age at a revival, and while still a teenager experienced entire sanctification. She attended Wellesley College and then Swarthmore College, but did not complete a degree due to a call to be an evangelist. As an evangelist she sang and preached at revivals, but when she heard about the emerging deaconess movement, which opened many doors for women in Christian service, she trained as a deaconess in the Deaconess Home in Buffalo, New York. She continued on with her work as a deaconess evangelist for a number of years, when in 1902 she founded the Epworth Evangelistic Institute in St. Louis, Missouri to train deaconesses in evangelism. While fervent in
her holiness and evangelism, Vennard also emphasized humanitarianism. Her deaconesses were trained in nursing and education. They had practical experience working in jails, juvenile courts, individual homes, and in the red-light district of St. Louis. In 1910, Vennard resigned as the principal of Epworth, because the Methodist leaders in St. Louis would no longer permit her to maintain a focus on entire sanctification and holiness in her deaconess work, and wanted the social action part of the work to take precedence.\(^3\)

John H. Paul (second from the left), with Dr. H.C. Morrison (on his left) and Dr. Andrew Johnson (on his right) with another unidentified man. This picture was taken circa 1920, when Dr. Paul was a young professor at Asbury College. (Image courtesy of Asbury Theological Seminary Archives and Special Collections.)

In one of the earliest letters in the correspondence from the Asbury Theological Seminary Archives and Special Collections, Vennard writes to Paul, then the vice president of Asbury College with concerns about her lack of a degree. She writes, “Dear Friend and Brother: At the considerable risk of consuming a considerable amount of your time I am writing this
morning for your advice. I wish to call your attention to the fact that I have no degree, having never completed my college work for a B.A.” She goes on to outline her work at Illinois State Normal University, Wellesley, and Swarthmore. She then writes, “It was at this juncture that the Lord called a radical halt. My supreme renunciation struck the depths when I yielded all my plans for higher education. I do not regret my choice for I think I see the providence of it...I might have lost my spiritual vision. But at the time my consecration was so thorough that I put the thought of finishing up and taking my degree entirely out of all my plans and launched wholeheartedly into Evangelism.” After detailing her work since that point she concludes the letter, “I shall greatly appreciate any counsel you can give me in regard to this matter, for I begin to see that as the Principal of this Institution a Degree might help us in getting recognition and standing for the work here.” Dr. Paul responds positively, suggesting the option that if she wanted to try getting a graduate degree, “I am in a position to write you a letter which would get you a rating as one whose education is equivalent to the A.B. degree.”

As Vennard continues this correspondence, she is interested in the possibility Dr. Paul suggests, but she is concerned because such a letter would work at Chicago University, but “I would hesitate to have my name associated with the Divinity Department of Chicago University.” She also notes, “I do not wish to take it to Northwestern for the Methodists have opposed me so many years, and the Faculty at Garrett are so prejudiced against our Institute work that it would only be giving them another opportunity to humiliate me by refusing.” While the correspondence does not reveal the results of this discussion on her own educational degree, Vennard is frequently referred to as Dr. Vennard and is credited with having a doctor of divinity by Dr. Paul in his obituary.

In 1922, Vennard writes a long letter to Dr. Paul detailing a number of concerns she has for the Chicago Evangelistic Institute and also the vision for a seminary. She closes the letter by commenting, “let me urge again what you and I have both talked of before, and that is that if God wants an orthodox seminary in America at this stage of the Kingdom interests, then Chicago is the logical location for that seminary, and as I see it at present, Bro. Paul, I do not feel that I could possibly undertake this unless you were coming to be its President. If you feel free to assume that responsibility you can count on me for team work to my limit.” Paul’s response is rather vague, but notes, “I have some data and facts which I am sure you will both
be willing and competent to consider at the right time.” This might be in reference to his taking the position of president of Taylor University in 1922, or to the formation of Asbury Theological Seminary in 1923. Whatever the case, Vennard is full-heartedly behind his work in Taylor in a letter from 1923, “I am standing by Taylor in every way I can,” Vennard wrote, “My opportunities this summer have been in the way of recommending it to students.”

The confidence between the two educators continued in 1924, when Dr. Paul wrote Vennard for help in possibly hiring Robert Stewart, who had resigned as the vice-president of Asbury College. He wrote, “A few weeks ago Dr. Morrison wrote me a long letter giving a systematic list of my faults, some of which were very grievous. I think about all of them originated in his imagination and that I could prove an alibi in every case. Among the number was a conspiracy with you to move the seminary to Chicago. I thanked him for his frankness and wrote an explanation after each item, undertaking to disabuse his mind.” While she could not help him in that particular moment, she later wrote in 1926, “As I have gone through the years I have been studying people and institutions, and have come to the conclusion that both individuals and institutions that are really vital meet a supreme crisis somewhere along the line. It looks to me that this is one of those times of challenge, both for you and for Taylor. But God will surely see you through. I would like to repreach to you the sermon you preached to us, based on the Lord’s message to the Philadelphian Church. It was a great comfort to me and my soul has been feeding on it ever since: ‘Because thou hast kept my word and hast not denied my name, I will keep you.’ I am claiming it both for C.E.I. and for Taylor.”
Dr. John H. Paul taken in 1966 at Asbury Theological Seminary. Dr. Paul served on the Board of Trustees of Asbury Theological Seminary from 1941 to 1962.

Dr. Paul apparently revealed his plans to leave Taylor in 1930 to Vennard before almost anyone else. He wrote, “I am exceedingly tired of administrative duties and would almost any day lay them on the rested shoulders of Dr. Stuart and turn myself into a channel where I could exercise my spiritual gifts if providence should open the way.” Vennard replied, “I thoroughly respect Dr. Robert Stuart, and I have no doubt he will make a very fine president, but I cannot refrain from saying that I am happy my own son has had his years at Taylor under your administration. From his early boyhood you have been his ideal in many ways, and he will remember...
Taylor with you at the head. I shall keep your confidence and no one will get the information from me first hand.”

In 1931, John H. Paul wrote an appeal to Mr. Jamison who he served with on the Board of Trustees of the Chicago Evangelistic Institute. He wrote, “I am writing you with regard to a matter which has been upon the heart of some of us for several weeks… As you know, Sister Vennard has given the prime of her life to this kind of work for only a nominal allowance; just enough, I may say, to cover her living and current personal expense. After some years of broken health, and with no earning power, Brother Vennard is dead. Their little farm has virtually no value for her support and she is rapidly going over the hill in her physical strength. I am wondering if you could agree with me in the suggestion that the Board vote a life-time allowance of one hundred dollars per month to Mrs. Vennard…”

In a letter from Vennard in 1933, when she is congratulating Dr. Paul on becoming the President of John Fletcher College, it becomes clear that he and his family had been renting an apartment at the Chicago Evangelistic Institute and living there since his time at Taylor. The two had become close colleagues in terms of discussing holiness education and the issues of their various institutions. Paul was also on the Board of Trustees of the Chicago Evangelistic Institute. In a hand written note on her official congratulatory letter, Vennard adds in her own handwriting, “We must keep in touch so that we can continue to compare our ‘sore thumbs.’” In a draft for a response to another letter to Vennard in 1933, Dr. Paul, wrote, “And may I say that the perfect fellowship and trusted friendship that has marked our way in life is of more value then all the professional interests combined.”

The tone of the letters becomes more personal over time. In 1940, Vennard writes to Paul speaking of the death of her longtime secretary, Miss Swartz, when she writes, “Am lost without her, but am trying to pick up the threads and have my work in hand by the time school opens. How many of them I have laid away. Sometimes I feel like a lone tree standing where once a forest had been. And Whittier’s lines come back to me again and again, ‘How strange it seems with so much gone of life and love, to still live on.’” Her final note to Dr. Paul before her death came in 1943 and was handwritten, she writes,
Dear Brother Paul,

Miss Hibbard brought me your gift and greeting. Thank you so much. The gift was most generous and I shall use it for an extra as you suggested. But much as I appreciate the money and shall enjoy what it brings, the words of loyal friendship meant even more to me.

As the years slip away the old friends tried and true become fewer and more precious.

I feel Brother Paul that I am pulling back to life from the gates of death, but I am encouraged to believe that I am going to be well again and perhaps may have several years more.

They tell me how much everybody enjoyed and was profited by your message at the Convocation. I am so glad. But now, good-bye for now. God bless you and yours,

Faithfully, Iva Durham Vennard
A beautiful young deaconess with a winsome full-gospel message preached for a mission conference in the far South when I was a ‘boy preacher.’ Ever since, I along with many mutual friends, have had the privilege to observe her career.

Later I came to Louisville to make my headquarters, and a certain architect named Vennard was in charge of the construction of what was then to be the South’s greatest hotel, the Seelbach. I never learned the details of how an eminent spiritual builder became acquainted with a prominent material builder, but the news reached me that my favorite lady preacher was now Mrs. Iva D. Vennard.

I began to watch the career of the two and to admire the self-effacing manner in which the talented Mr. Vennard strengthened the hands of his wife in the educational program to which the Lord had called her, and finally in deep sorrow I shared in laying this man in the grave. That I was out of reach when Sister Vennard was called Home is a regret to me; but the fact that I had one last session with her not many weeks before, in which we shared our memories and hopes, is a sweet recollection.

So far as I know, Mrs. Vennard was the first woman in the United States to be a doctor of divinity. Among this nation’s Christian education leaders, none has made a better record in business integrity, in administering consecrated finance entrusted to her, in featuring Christ as an uttermost Saviour, avoiding all tangents and training talent for all fields in kingdom service.

Iva Durham Vennard, besides being an educator and holiness evangelist, was also part of one of the most moving and unusual love stories of her time. She married Thomas Vennard in 1904. They had met in 1901 as Iva Durham was planning the opening of the deaconess school in St. Louis. She did not feel she could give up her call to evangelism, but others wanted her to be solely focused on the school, feeling marriage would get in the way. Thomas Vennard assured her that he would wait for her. Pope-Levison wrote that her interest in Vennard stemmed from this relationship,

I was further hooked when I discovered the love story of her courtship with Thomas Vennard, who wrote a letter in the early 1900s in which he pledge to be her “background of support” if she would marry him. The hook dug even deeper when I read his words, “I may be the janitor of an institution of which you are principal founder and controlling head.” His comment turned out to be prophetic. True to his word, Thomas sacrificed his
successful architectural career in the Chicago Loop in order to oversee, at minimal cost, building renovations at her school, the Chicago Evangelistic Institute.\(^5\)

Thus, Iva Durham Vennard was able to continue in ministry with a supportive husband who played a constant background role in the relationship, which was highly exceptional for the time. When Vennard had to resign from the Epworth Evangelistic Institute, Thomas encouraged her to not give up and reaffirmed his desire to stand behind her and support her work.\(^6\)

During the time she was beginning to organize the Chicago Evangelistic Institute, Vennard was also involved in creating the National Holiness Missionary Society as a part of the National Holiness Association. But in 1910, Vennard launched her life’s work, the Chicago Evangelistic Institute, a co-educational school focused on evangelism with a solid core rooted in the doctrines of entire sanctification and holiness. Vennard would die on September 12, 1945, leaving behind a solid holiness educational institution, despite the usual types of conflicts and concerns over finances and maintaining support. In 1951 the Chicago Evangelistic Institute moved from Chicago to University Park, Iowa and it was renamed Vennard College in 1959. In November of 2008 the school closed due to declining enrollment and financial difficulties. Yet, Vennard’s passion for holiness and the doctrine of entire sanctification clearly stand out in her contributions to education and evangelism.

The archives of the B.L. Fisher library are open to researchers and works to promote research in the history of Methodism and the Wesleyan-Holiness movement. Images, such as these, provide one vital way to bring history to life. Preservation of such material is often time consuming and costly, but are essential to helping fulfill Asbury Theological Seminary’s mission. If you are interested in donating items of historic significance to the archives of the B.L. Fisher Library, or in donating funds to help purchase or process significant collections, please contact the archivist at archives@asburyseminary.edu.

**End Notes**

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Book Reviews

Ecologies of Faith in a Digital Age: Spiritual Growth Through Online Education
Stephen D. Lowe and Mary E. Lowe
Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press
2018, 250 pp., paper, $25.00

Reviewed by Matthew Haugen

With the increased prevalence of online education, Stephen and Mary Lowe beg the question as to its viability in Christian higher education. Although seminaries are increasingly capable of facilitating online mediums of education, should they offer education in this medium? Lowe and Lowe utilize sociology, biblical, theological, and educational studies to explore spiritual growth through online education.

Ecologies of Faith in a Digital Age is organized into three sections and thirteen chapters. Lowe and Lowe argue that 1) there are overlapping and interacting ecologies, 2) online education is one among many other ecologies, and 3) the online medium facilitates a space for seminarians to grow spiritually with one another through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Section one shows the ecological dimensions found in scripture. In these varying ecosystems are interconnected and interactive ecologies. Lowe and Lowe see these ecologies through the entirety of scripture, but more specifically in Genesis, Jesus’ parables, and Paul’s theology of the Body of Christ.

Section two extends the conversation of ecologies to online education. Online platforms of all varieties allow for social networks. Social networks entail individuals and groups of people participating in reciprocal interactions. Although education does not necessitate disembodied
learning, I am suspicious of their overly optimistic approach to an online medium of education and formation. In short, there was little to no defense on how digital mediums are neutral tools. For instance, Sherry Turkle describes many of the drawbacks of digital social networks on de-forming people in subtle but important ways.¹

Lowe and Lowe’s defense of digital mediums being capable of formation after the likeness of Christ, however, is well defended in section three. Although the learning is not disembodied because it is online, intentionality of students and professors alike allow for environments conducive for mutual spiritual growth between students. They do admit that embodied realities (i.e., local churches) facilitate the most spiritual growth for students while online education facilitates the greatest construction of knowledge.

Lowe and Lowe’s unique contribution in Ecologies of Faith in a Digital Age are their concepts of overlapping and interacting ecologies in the fields of education and formation. The primary critique that I have for this work is the overly optimistic portrayal of online mediums. I admit, however, that Lowe and Lowe provide ample examples and counter-examples to provide a more satisfying defense for the capacity of online mediums for educating seminarians. This book contributes to the field of online education studies from a Christian perspective. I recommend this book to online Christian educators, Christian higher education administrators, and to those interested in the cross-section of Christian formation and online education.

Ever Ancient, Ever New: The Allure of Liturgy for a New Generation
Winfield Bevins
Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan
2019, 208 pp., paper, $16.99
ISBN: 978-0-310-56613-7

Reviewed by Michael Whitcomb-Tavey

In this book, Winfield Bevins argues for the implementation of a more robust liturgical existence within the walls of the Church. Titled Ever Ancient Ever New, he argues that the tried and tested measures of established Church liturgical exercises and practices throughout the centuries is more effective at growing the Church both numerically and spiritually than any other means currently practiced. These forms are sometimes referred to as “ancient,” for the majority of them were established many centuries ago, with some of them established millennia ago. This premise essentially stands as an implicit critique on current Church models and practices, which he often refers to as “Church entertainment.” His overall concern is that higher forms and uses of liturgy are of more value to the Christian than neglecting them. Throughout his book, he references three traditions that stand as paragons of ancient worship expression: Eastern Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Anglicanism.

The book is more than argument, however. It is no surprise that there is a growing movement toward older forms of worship amongst younger generations. Many books have been devoted toward analyzing this trend. Those books tend to approach this phenomenon through statistics and objectivity. Winfield stands out in that he approaches this trend from a more subjective perspective, providing multiple case studies and personal examples of people moving toward ancient forms of worship. His book is more reporting than scientific analyzing, in that he cites the reasons many people have personally given him for moving toward a more robust liturgical experience. In fact, he quite often quotes the people he has interviewed. From these interviews, he infers persuasive positions that are both logical and convincing.

His book is separated into three sections. The first section, titled, Foundations, argues for the use of liturgy within the Church. This section explores the many reasons why younger generations are shifting toward these ancient forms of worship, and how those forms have inherent power,
by the grace of God, to strengthen the faith and Christian identity of both
the individual and the community. Although it may be surprising to some,
younger generations are not seeking entertainment, but rather robust liturgy.
This section naturally leads into the second section, Journeys, where he
discusses two essential components that drive younger generations toward
these forms of worship, and how they are implemented in new and fresh
ways in our modern age. This section also introduces the reader to the
many interviews he has conducted with people that explain the allure of
liturgy. The first component is the allure of Eastern Orthodoxy, Catholicism,
and Anglicanism. More specifically, it analyzes the allure of the worship
expressions of these three traditions. The second component examines the
appeal of community, and how these traditions help foster it. The next two
chapters detail how these components are being implemented throughout
the spectrum of Christian branches and denominations, including
Charismatic congregations. The final section explores liturgy from a more
individualistic perspective, and how these forms of ancient worship can
also be implemented in one’s personal life, as well as for the family home.
This section is both insightful and practical. Not only does he argue for the
use of liturgy within the home, but also provides examples of how it can be
implemented. The book concludes with a short epilogue encouraging the
reader to embrace ancient forms of worship.

Winfield’s book will provide teachers, students, pastors, non-
pastors, and others with a challenging call toward liturgy. This is especially
ture for Church leaders, where they have the power to make worship
changes within their services.

Old Testament Ethics: A Guided Tour
John Goldingay
Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press
2019, 250 pp., paper, $28.00
ISBN: 978-0-8308-5224-6

Reviewed by Theresa Lieblang

What is ethics? John Goldingay answers this question, based on
principles founded upon the Old Testament, in his newly released book, Old
Testament Ethics: A Guided Tour. He divides ethics of the Old Testament
into four broad topics for the basis of his discussion which are: what sort of people we are; how we think; what sort of things we do; what sort of things we do not do. Within these four broad topics Goldingay creates five main parts for the discussion of ethics: Qualities, Aspects of Life, Relationships, Texts, and People. These five main parts comprise a total of forty-three short chapters that can be read in any order with no accumulating argument.

Within each chapter Goldingay incorporates biblical text from his own translation that he elaborates for the sake of discussion. Each chapter ends with a few insightful “Reflection and Discussion” questions that is geared for personal or group study. In the conclusion he compels the reader to reread the Old Testament to better understand the ethical lives of the many biblical characters involved and how God revealed himself through each situation. Goldingay ends with a postscript that gives a brief explanation to the ethics behind the Israelites slaughtering the Canaanites. This explanation briefly elaborates on the historical realities and beliefs of these two nations for the reader who may not be familiar with the pagan worship of the Canaanites and the disobedience of the Israelites.

In his introduction, Goldingay illustrates a few references from the New Testament where Jesus or a disciple is questioned regarding certain ethical issues. The answers to these types of questions always refer back to the Torah or the Prophets. One example is when the Pharisees ask Jesus about divorce and he responds with, “What does it say in the Torah?” In order to better understand Old Testament ethics Goldingay uses three guidelines from Jesus: ask how the implications of the Old Testament’s teaching need to be spelled out; ask how its teaching expresses love for God or love for neighbor; ask how far it is laying down creation ideals and how far it is making allowance for our hard-heartedness.

It is within these three guidelines that forty-three succinct chapters are developed to cover the qualities that comprise a community that also entail work ethics and legal issues. He expounds on relationship issues from the broad perspective of nations to the more narrow perspective that addresses the ethics of family members and the household. Goldingay elaborates on the ethical matters found in essential chapters like Genesis 1 and 2, Leviticus 19 and 25, Deuteronomy 15 and 20, Ruth, Psalm 72 and the Song of Songs. He shifts to discuss the lives of some biblical characters to help answer ethical questions which include: Abraham, Sarah and Hagar, Joseph, Shiphrah and Puah, Samson, David, Nehemiah, Vashti, Esther, and Mordecai.
This book is an excellent resource to have for a quick guide on any subject of Old Testament ethics.

The Lost World of the Flood: Mythology, Theology and the Deluge Debate
Tremper Longman III and John H. Walton
Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic
2018, 192 pp., paper, $20.00
ISBN: 978-0-8308-5200-0

Reviewed by Brian Shockey

_The Lost World of the Flood_ is the latest in a series of books written by Walton, either alone or in collaboration with other scholars, aimed at reading the Old Testament within its ancient Near Eastern context. In this volume, Walton enlists the help of Tremper Longman III as well as geologist Stephen O. Moshier, who contributes one chapter. This volume, like others in the series, is built around a series of propositions made by the authors, which are intended to guide the reader to a certain conclusion. The book presents itself as an academic resource designed for a more popular audience, and as such, is very accessible. Although Longman and Walton note at the beginning that they plan to introduce the reader to a variety of interpretations, they do so mainly in the service of their own argument. This is likely, in part, an effort to reduce the complexity of the topic for the more casual reader.

The book itself is well written and the argument clearly articulated. While the authors assume some familiarity with previous books in the series (particularly those discussing Genesis 1-3), the footnotes are sufficient to allow the reader to engage the material without having read the other books. After outlining some of their strategies for biblical interpretation, Longman and Walton proceed to argue that modern readers have missed the rhetorical shaping of the flood narrative. They affirm that a historical event lies beneath the account in Genesis but suggest this event has been written as theological history. As such, we should expect the author to employ rhetorical methods to emphasize the key interpretive elements of the story. Longman and Walton suggest that our inability to reconcile modern scientific data with a literal account of the flood should lead us to consider whether we have accurately understood ancient concepts of
genre and style. They argue that the global flood and description of the ark are hyperbolic in nature, a fact that would have been plain to the original audience. It is the theological interpretation of the flood event and how it relates to the broader context of Genesis that is of chief importance. They further suggest that reading the Genesis account beside the other ancient flood accounts helps to clarify the theological emphasis of the biblical text.

The reader should be aware that Longman and Walton assume a degree of continuity among sources in the ancient Near East (of which the Bible is one), which affects the way they use comparative data. Although they are not interested in arguing for direct literary borrowing from one source to another, they do presuppose that the Bible shares in the broad "cultural river" of the ancient Near East. Little attention is given to the specifics of the relationship between the Bible and the ancient Near Eastern sources and issues of chronology and geography are not discussed. The extent to which one agrees with this presupposition will largely determine how well one receives Longman and Walton's argument. In either case, the book is thought provoking and an excellent addition to the Lost World series.

**Displaced Persons: Theological Reflection on Immigration, Refugees, and Marginalization**

Matthew W. Charlton and Timothy S. Moore, eds.
Nashville, TN: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, the United Methodist Church
2018, 210 pp., paperback, $39.99
ISBN: 978-0-938162-26-1

*Reviewed by Zachariah S. Motts*

We are in a global situation where it is imperative for people of faith to reflect upon how they are called to respond to immigrants, refugees, and those who are marginalized in our societies. For that reason, I was cheered to see this title in print and hoped that this book would be an addition to the ongoing conversation and an impetus to response for those who read it. At times, *Displaced Persons* rises toward the occasion, but, on the whole, it takes on too many issues at once and ends up being an erratic collection of essays.
Probably the most frustrating and misleading part of this collection is its subtitle. That may seem like an odd complaint, but simply *Displaced Persons* without *Theological Reflection on Immigration, Refugees, and Marginalization* would have been closer to the mark. The subtitle, within our current milieu, quickly brings to mind the images that are flooding the news of scenes at the US-Mexican border, forced migration from Syria, and boats of migrants crossing the Mediterranean. That is an important topic that should be met with theological reflection and action. However, that is not the thread that binds all of these papers together. There are some papers that do reflect on that topic, but, if you are looking for a focused collection of essays on current human migration, this is not that.

So, skip the subtitle and note that this is a United Methodist (UM) book, and the discussions inside come from people involved in UM student ministry on college and university campuses. Already, one can tell that this is a highly contextualized discussion. That, in itself, of course, is not a mark against it. The topics, though, are free-ranging enough that the best replacement subtitle I could think of was *Marginalized People and the United Methodist Church*, but you still almost have to say something about college and university ministers. There are essays on being an American missionary-pastor-immigrant in Germany, perspectives of emerging adults, hospitality to marginalized people on campus, Native American young people’s sense of belonging in the UM, homosexuality and the UM *Book of Discipline*, as well as essays on current human migration issues. It is very difficult to pull all of these essays together under one title.

There are times that, from the perspective of someone who is not a United Methodist, the conversations seem like shots fired in an internecine struggle. A case in point is the essay on homosexuality, “Out of Joint: The Dislocation of Our Bodies from the Church’s Sexual Ethic” by Timothy S. Moore (119-142). The starting point of this essay is the language UM *Book of Discipline* and the anthropology implied in that language. Moore then strenuously argues philosophically and theologically against that anthropology, but, for someone outside the denominational struggles, this seems like a rather narrowly focused, intramural debate.

So, in the selection of the essays that appear, the collection feels overly broad. At the same time, the UM specificity of many of the essays seems overly narrow for a wider audience. Perhaps all of this could be forgiven if some of the essays stood out as important pieces, but critical quality is generally lacking. There are interesting essays, well-written...
essays, but nothing really rises to the level of opening new paths for scholarship or advancing the conversation around immigration, refugees, and marginalization.

**Fearfully and Wonderfully, the Marvel of Bearing God’s Image**
Paul Brand and Philip Yancey
Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press
2019, 272 pp., paper, $25.00

Reviewed by Michael Whitcomb-Tavey

In *Fearfully and Wonderfully, The Marvel of Bearing God’s Image*, Philip Yancey and the children of Dr. Paul Brand have updated this edition for those who live in the context of our modern age. Dr. Brand was a renowned medical orthopedic doctor who served leprosy patients in India from 1946 to 1966, and as the Chief of Rehabilitation at the National Hansen’s Disease Center in Carville, Louisiana until 1986. Afterward, he taught at the University of Washington as emeritus professor of orthopedics. He is best known for discovering that leprosy was not a disease of the tissue, but a disease of the nervous system, whereby nerves lose the ability to communicate sensations to the brain. He was a pioneer in surgical techniques of the tendons, and specialized in repairing broken and damaged tendons and nerves in the hands of leprosy patients. He also performed many other surgical procedures, including brain surgery.

Over his many years of service in India, he journaled about his experiences. In addition he wrote about his perspectives concerning leprosy and how it relates to the Church. Much of his insights are analogous. He relates how the body of the Church ought to function according to how an ideal human biologically functions. Those insights eventually were compiled together, and with the help of Philip Yancey, he published several books. Two of his most renowned works of publication are *The Gift of Pain*, and *Fearfully and Wonderfully*. Sadly, Dr. Brand passed away in 2003. As a result, this updated version was produced by Yancey and Dr. Brands’ children.

In this book, Dr. Brand discusses how the Church can gain insight into how the Church ought to function by viewing how the human body
functions. He explains the ways in which the body functions correctly, and then uses those insights to inspire the Church to function correctly. He also explains the dangers the body experiences, as well as the potential threats it faces. Using that knowledge, he instructs the Church of the dangers and threats that the Body of Christ will encounter.

His book is separated into six sections. The first and second sections discuss how each individual within the body of Christ functions like individual cells within the body. When working together in harmony, the Church can accomplish amazingly redemptive tasks. Such knowledge also forces the Church into a place of acceptance and love for all people. The third section explores Skin and Bone. The sense that garners the most sensation is touch, which is communicated through the skin. In relation to the Church, Dr. Brand explains the need for the Body of Christ to expand their care for other people, from a place of mere financial support to a more meaningful and intimate form of caring, whereby the people of God suffer with those in need and actively engage with such people in both relationship and fellowship. In this way, those in need experience the sensation of “Divine touch.” Moreover, just like the skin protects vital and fragile organs, the Church has a duty to protect the most vulnerable, which includes the newly converted. In reference to bone, the human skeleton is both extremely durable and flexible. Based on this knowledge, Dr. Brand exhorts Christians to be both strong in Christian conviction, passion, and commandment, and also flexible enough to adapt and change according to the times in which they live. In doing so, the Church will avoid both legalism (a rigidity that can never adapt to changing times) and licentious progressivism (lacking in structure resulting in an inability to stay grounded during times of change).

Section four explains how blood and oxygen work together, and how they are essential to life. Dr. Brand reveals that the Church also needs vital components for its continued sustenance and life. According to him, this sustenance is found in the blood of Christ, which is communicated to the Church in a mysterious way through communion, and also the life of Christian liturgical practice, which is the “oxygen” of the Church. Section four also details the muscular system, and how it works properly within the human body. As an analogy, the Church grows its muscles when we stretch beyond ourselves to help other people.

The last two sections explore the nervous system and the brain. As has been noted, Dr. Brand discovered that leprosy is the disease of the
nervous system. This means that nerves become apathetic toward pain, which can result in bodily harm. It may even result in death. This becomes metaphorical for the Church. One of the greatest dangers to the Church is the threat of apathy, and how it causes inaction. The Church functions best when it both listens to the needs of others and is willing to experience the pain of other people. Finally, in relation to the brain, the reader is taught how the brain commands the body, and how it delegates the different functions of the body. In a similar fashion, Jesus Christ is the Church’s head. He commands and delegates its functionality. When the Church listens to and obeys Christ, it functions properly.

In conclusion, this book is deeply insightful. The depth of Dr. Brand’s wisdom on these matters is both profound and impressive. Fearfully and Wonderfully will provide teachers, students, pastors, non-pastors, and others with a challenging reflection on the status of the Church, and how it should properly function as the Body of Christ. This, then, will affect how each one of its members operates individually in relation to the whole of the body, and also how the whole body grows into an incarnational redemptive force within the world.

Cosmology in Theological Perspective: Understanding Our Place in the Universe
Olli-Pekka Vainio
Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic
2018, 224pp., paperback, $24.99
ISBN: 978-0-8010-9943-4
Reviewed by Logan Patriquin

Suppose we—the human race and all other potential embodied conscious agents (ECAs)—inhabit an inflationary universe. That is, a universe that perpetually expands and then, theoretically, collapses and then produces new universes. Think, Big Bang —> Big Crunch —> Big Bang, ad infinitum. Of all multiverse theories this option has the most empirical grounding to date. Suppose then our current universe’s iteration isn’t the first or the last. What implications might this have on Christian doctrines like: incarnation, human uniqueness, and creation itself? While each chapter title is a science fiction reference, Dr. Vainio sets out in
Cosmology in Theological Perspective to add his seasoned voice to some contemporary theological debates for which the label “science fiction” is markedly less tenable nowadays.

The reader of, Cosmology in Theological Perspective, will observe an informal, two-part structure. The first three chapters serves as a judicious, interdisciplinary introduction to the material, sweeping through ancient - though not solely Christian - cosmological conceptions, enough Patristic philosophical engagement to provide a historical tie to the discussion, and then a quick review of major, broadly cosmological challenges that historic Christian orthodox has already endured. The second section, then, consists of chapters that individually tackle material from budding discussions in contemporary scientific and cosmological circles.

Take this question for example: does the sheer enormity of the cosmos warrant a theological crisis for Christianity? Not according to Vainio. The text’s fruitful theological engagement with multiverse theory, cosmological peripheral locality, and the vastness of space is tethered together by two theological/philosophical premises:

(a) “Humans were made for the cosmos” (41).
(b) “As the greatest conceivable being, who is good and loves things that are good, God is more likely than not to create good things in abundance” (82).

Premise (a) may sound fairly tame at first but frame it against the popular conception that “the cosmos was created for humans” (x), and a deeper discussion emerges. Vainio does not pit these claims against one another. Rather, he suggests affirming (a) to get to (x), not vice versa, in order to have a richer discussion on human uniqueness and value despite our lack of cosmic centricity (41). Premise (b), labeled the Theistic Principle of Plentitude (TPP) by the author, deals more with the material end of the discussion. He wagers that Christians shouldn’t be surprised or threatened by a great universe, nor the potential of other ECAs. For, it ought not be shocking that a God with infinite resources would create in plenty. Embracing both (a) and (b) gets us to an intellectocentric cosmology rather than an anthropocentric one (69).

Let us see how accepting Vainio’s cosmological presuppositions may help Christians dispense with a commonly articulated objection to stereotypical, populist Christian cosmology by atheists.
1. If God exists, he would create a human-sized universe.
2. Our universe is not human-sized.
3. Therefore, God does not exist (112).

What is at stake, biblically, theologically, philosophically, or from a scientific perspective that Christians would need to commit to premise 1? The author is quick to wield (a) to challenge the conception that cosmic centricty is necessary to ascribe value to human beings, thus also dismantling, in turn, the connected claim that our peripheral locality, cosmologically speaking, denotes insignificance for our species and planet. He opts instead to affirm that human value is not rooting in axiological categories like spatial location, size, or distance (115-119). Human value and uniqueness rest instead in the fact that out of the void of space, God chooses to call and pursue us. Human value, therefore, is fixed in God’s saving action not cosmological conventions. As such, very few scientific theories about the vastness or multiplicity of our universe offer genuine theological challenge on this particular front.

Additionally, TPP (b) is also an excellent counter to premise 1. Why ought Christians believe that an omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good God would even desire to create a “human-sized’ universe? Instead, one ought to expect a universe potentially teaming with beings capable of comprehending it (99). To say that humans bear the image of God doesn’t necessarily entail that nothing else does (102). Jettisoning premise 1 with (a) and (b) undermines the entire argument.

One area where committing to (a) and (b) gets tricky for Vainio is in his discussion on incarnation. TPP most naturally lends itself to the conclusion that, “We are not alone; one or more extraterrestrial races [of embodied conscious agents] exist” (158). The author outlines a number of soteriological possibilities for these speculated ECAs but seems to gravitate to his option d—“Ets are fallen, but their nature is assumed by God in an act of incarnation on their worlds” (159 & 161). In short, a commitment to (a) and (b) seems lead one to embrace, at least the possibility, of multiple incarnations.

Classic, Trinitarian, Christian orthodoxy, as expressed in the great creeds, professes belief in the bodily ascension of Jesus Christ, and consequently the assumption of human nature into the Godhead via the hypostatic union of Christ. Vainio appears to believe that the possibility of adding additional wills to the nature of the Son of God, for every presumable
race of ETAs, ought not be a notion too quickly dismissed (162). While he spends about a page and a half trying to present Thomas Aquinas as a theological ally in this endeavor, even the author admits that much more constructive work would need to be done on this point (165). I, for one, concur.

Baker Academic’s, *Cosmology in Theological Perspective*, is a dense but worthwhile read. In Lewisian fashion, Dr. Olli-Pekka Vainio implores us to engage our imagination in some of these speculative discussions about the nature of the cosmos and humanity’s unique, or not so unique, relation to it. He argues in his conclusion, along with Lewis, that:

> It would be foolish, and obviously false, to think that Christian faith has sailed smoothly through history without ever encountering serious objections and challenges. However, it is equally foolish to think that science and new discoveries somehow necessarily, like a tide, force the Sea of Faith to withdraw from these shores. (180)

Readers will be hard-pressed to disagree.

**The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity and Diversity**

Second Edition  
Roger E. Olson  
Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic  
2016, 396 pp., paper, $37.99  
ISBN: 978-0-8308-5125-6

*Reviewed by J. Russell Frazier* - Nairobi, Kenya

Roger Olson (Ph.D., Rice University) is Foy Valentine Professor of Christian Theology and Ethics at George W. Truett Theological Seminary, Baylor University. He has served as the president of the American Theological Society (Midwest Division) and co-chair of the Evangelical Theology Group of the American Academy of Religion. He is a prolific writer, having authored or co-authored over 20 books and numerous journal articles and other publications. He is well qualified to write a book of this nature. *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity*
and Diversity was first published in 2002; the work under review is the second edition of this work. The author describes the word “mosaic” as “a metaphor for this mediating approach that seeks to emphasize both Christian unity and Christian diversity in terms of belief” (12).

Olson sets out the aim for this work in the introduction entitled “The Need for a ‘Both-And’ Theology.” His work is characterized by mediating theology, which attempts to reflect the consensual tradition as reflected in the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Protestant branches of the Church. His goal is stated as follows: “to explain to uninitiated readers what that common tradition includes in terms of unity, what it allows in terms of diversity and what it excludes in terms of heresies...” (12). Another characteristic is that Olson’s project is intended to express “the best of evangelical Christianity” (13) and by this, he means a gospel which is centered upon the grace of God. His project makes an attempt to be “irenic in spirit and tone” (14). Olson identifies his work as non-speculative; he purposes not to speculate about controversial doctrinal matters but keep the focus on “the rough unity and colorful diversity of Christian belief” (16).

The last characteristic is that of simplicity for the novice (17). With these characteristics, Olson attempts to counter the folk theology and to provide a balance between believing and experiencing within a post-modern culture that has leaned to a subjective spirituality. Olson’s antidote is to develop a “both-and” theology, which avoids the errors of the pendulum swing effect rather than an “either-or” theology (23). Olson admits of several influences. He is a Baptist in the “broader evangelical free-church tradition” but has been “spiritually and theologically nurtured” by Pentecostals and Pietists (27). Yet, he learned to value “the wider catholic tradition” of the early church fathers and self-identifies as a progressive evangelical and ecumenicist that respects “his own tradition’s distinctives” (28).

Chapter one of Olson’s work is entitled “Christian Belief: Unity and Diversity” in which he further reveals the agenda for his project. Against the meaninglessness of an indefinite definition, Olson proposes the identification of “the core of essential Christian beliefs that all mature, capable Christians must affirm in order to be considered truly Christian” (30). Yet, Olson wants to avoid an intolerant dogmatism. The criterion for discerning this core of Christian beliefs is expressed in the Vincentian Canon: “What has been believed by everyone (Christians) everywhere at all times” (34). Olson further clarifies that the Great Tradition entails the agreed upon beliefs of the early church fathers as well as the sixteenth-century
Reformers (36). Though recognized as a secondary, relative authority, the Great Tradition “deserves great respect and should be ignored only with fear and trembling” (44). Olson differentiates between the following three categories: 1) dogmas that he considers essential to the Christian faith; 2) doctrines that are distinctive of a particular faith community; and, 3) opinions that tend to be the reflections of Christians about which there is no consensus (45). Having set out his agenda, Olson proceeds in the remaining chapters of the book to articulate the various theological categories of the Christian faith.

In the remaining chapters of the book, Olson presents a polarity in each chapter. The chapter titles reveal the polarity. Chapter 2 is entitled “Sources and Norms of Christian Belief: One and Many.” He identifies scripture as “the major source and norm” of authority for the Christian faith (51); the many sources include tradition, reason and experience. Chapter Three is entitled “Divine Revelation: Universal and Particular.” Olson attempts to achieve a balanced view between the two polarities; however, he may be too Barthian for some readers. “Christian Scripture: Divine Word and Human Words” is the title of the fourth chapter. Olson attempts to maintain a balance between the polarities of divine word and human words. Along the way, he discusses themes of inerrancy, infallibility, and inspiration. In the fifth chapter, Olson argues for a balanced view between the transcendence and immanence of God. The chapter is entitled: “God: Great and Good.” Chapter six is entitled: “God: One and Three.” Therein, Olson argues with classic Christianity as the subtitle suggests that God is one substance and three persons.

Olson in his chapter on “Creation: Good and Fallen” endeavors to avoid certain issues within the theological currents of the day: “…our theme [in this chapter] will be that Christian belief about creation has little to do with specific scientific theories about the age of the earth and the natural processes that led to the emergence of life” (158-159). The fallenness of creation is emphasized, while one side of the polarity is not given equal treatment in this chapter. In chapter 8, Oden discusses the doctrine of providence and his polarities are “Limited and Detailed.” He affirms that God is in charge of nature and history, but raises questions about the extent of the providence, particularly in the light of evil. In the section on the diverse Christian visions of God’s providence, he discusses meticulous providence, limited providence, and open theism (193-199). He doesn’t consider open theism heterodox as many theologians have (199), but holds
that some view of limited providence holds the most promise for the unity of the Christian faith.

Chapter 9 is entitled “Humanity: Essentially Good and Existentially Estranged.” Olson attempts in this chapter to balance the Christian idea of the value and dignity of human beings with the fallen nature of humanity. The author attempts to provide a unifying Christian perspective and finds hope in Emil Brunner's distinction between the “formal image” and the “material image;” the former defines the image of God within terms of “responsible freedom,” and the latter is humanity’s righteousness before God (224-5). The polarities of Christian belief about Jesus Christ are the subject of the next chapter. Olson articulates the Chalcedon faith, that is the union of the two distinct natures – human and divine – in one eternal, hypostatic union.

“The Holy Spirit: Divine Person and Power” is the title of chapter 11. The crucial issue here is that most Christians in their practice emphasize either that the Holy Spirit is a divine person or a divine power (251). The disagreements about the doctrine of the Spirit center around either the status of the Holy Spirit within the Trinity, or the operations of the Spirit within the Church today. Olson appeals for the Church to maintain “and even strengthen” its belief in the personhood of the Holy Spirit and the equality of the Holy Spirit with the other two persons of the Trinity (271). He also calls for greater stress upon the activity of the Holy Spirit without falling into fanaticism. The next two chapters, twelve and thirteen, both deal with the doctrine of salvation. Chapter 12 focuses on the objective and subjective aspects of the atoning work of Christ. Olson expresses concerns for views of the atonement that overstress the polarities and asserts, “No one explanation does justice to all that happened on the cross” (emphasis of the original retained, 292). The next chapter discusses salvation as gift and task. Olson argues that salvation is both a gift of divine grace and, at the same time, entails human agency.

The Church is the subject of Olson’s chapter 14, which is both visible and invisible. Olson employs the four universal marks of the Church as the unifying consensus on the doctrine of the Church; he discusses in this chapter the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist. The fifteenth chapter is entitled “Life Beyond Death: Continuity and Discontinuity.” Olson points the direction in the balance between continuity and discontinuity with the present life and the life to come; however, he acknowledges much work to be done on this doctrine to reaching a consensus (360-1). The last chapter
addresses an eschatological theme: “The Kingdom of God: Already and Not Yet.” Here Olson attempts to navigate between the extremes of radical realized eschatology and of adventism.

Olson’s work represents a solid introduction to consensual theology or a paleo-orthodox theology that places great emphasis on the theology of the first five centuries of the early Church. His work of course differs from paleo-orthodoxy in that he holds in high regard the magisterial Reformers of the Church. *The Mosaic of Christian Belief* provides a good, solid introduction to Christian theology and would serve well as a textbook for a course in the field. Olson doesn’t allow his focus on the consensus to cause him to have myopic vision; he recognizes the on-going tensions and disagreements among theologians in the Church. However, he attempts to point the way forward to consensual thought when possible. The issue with developing a consensual theology is that the author has the responsibility of choosing the polarities. When the polarities are ill chosen, the attempt to balance the polarities is ill conceived. However, Olson has done the Church a service in developing a consensual theology that is well balanced. However, one wonders if the consensus would satisfy those of the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions.
Books Received

The following books were received by the editor's office since the last issue of The Asbury Journal. The editor is seeking people interested in writing book reviews on these or other relevant books for publication in future issues of The Asbury Journal. Please contact the editor (Robert. danielson@asburyseminary.edu) if you are interested in reviewing a particular title. Reviews will be assigned on a first come basis.

Ashford, Bruce Riley and Heath A. Thomas

Bevans, Winfield

Bouma-Prediger, Steven

Brown, Sherri and Francis J. Moloney, SDB

Campbell, Douglas A.

Chatraw, Joshua D. and Karen Swallow Prior

Chilcote, Paul W.
Colyer, Elmer M.  
2019  
The Trinitarian Dimension of John Wesley’s Theology.  
Nashville, TN: General Board of Higher Education and  

Duvall, J. Scott and J. Daniel Hays  
2019  
God’s Relational Presence: The Cohesive Center of  

Ensminger, Charles D.  
2019  
Crafting the Sermon: A Beginner’s Guide to Preaching.  

Gehring, Michael J., Andrew D. Kinsey, and Vaughn W. Baker, eds.  
2019  
The Logic of Evangelism Revisited. Eugene, OR: Pickwick  

Georges, Jayson  
2019  
Ministering in Patronage Cultures: Biblical Models and  
Missional Implications. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity  

Gorman, Michael J.  
2019  
Participating in Christ: Explorations in Paul’s Theology  

Gupta, Nijay K.  
2019  
1 & 2 Thessalonians. Zondervan Critical Introductions to  
the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan  

Gupta, Nijay K.  
2020  

Hardy, H. H., II  
2019  
Exegetical Gems from Biblical Hebrew: A Refreshing  
Guide to Grammar and Interpretation. Grand Rapids,  
$19.99.

Heetland, David L.  
2019  
Happy Surprises: Helping Others Discover the Joy of  
Holtzen, Wm. Curtis

Johnson, Adam J. and Stanley N. Gundry, eds.

Keener, Craig

King, Roberta R.

Kirkham, Donald Henry

Kreider, Glenn R. and Michael J. Svigel

Long, D. Stephen

McNall, Joshua M.

Merkle, Benjamin J.
Ott, Craig  
2019  

Ovey, Michael J.  
2019  

Parker, Margaret Adams and Katherine Sonderegger  
2019  

Rhodes, Ben and Martin Westerholm, eds.  
2019  

Robert, Dana L.  
2019  

Sider, Ronald J.  
2019  

Treier, Daniel J.  
2019  

Tyson, John R.  
2019  

Volf, Miroslav  
2019  
W., Jackson (pseudonym)

Walker, Andrew G.

Waltke, Bruce K. and James M. Houston

Wray Beal, Lissa M.

Wright, N.T. and Michael F. Bird