# 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

As is the tradition of The Asbury Journal, this issue is devoted to papers presented at the 2019-2020 Advanced Research Programs Interdisciplinary Colloquium, held Friday October 11, 2019 at Asbury Theological Seminary. The theme for this colloquium, “Gospel and Culture: A Biblical Theology of Culture and Socio-Anthropological Perspectives on the Bible and Culture” becomes the theme for this issue of the journal. Understanding how we read and interpret scripture in the light of various cultural contexts is vital, both to the work of missiologists and for biblical scholars. Scripture was written in one context, has been translated and interpreted into numerous other cultural contexts over time, and now must be presented in such a way as to make sense in new and challenging cultural contexts of our own day and age. These articles seek to meet these types of challenges.

Esther D. Jadhav starts this issue examining the cultural context of Christian higher education and how it seeks to expand its theological understanding of the growing cultural concern for diversity. Her interpretation of this issue is seen through the lens of Wesleyan theology as well as her work at Asbury University in Wilmore, Kentucky. Shawn P. Behan adds to this discussion by examining how a holistic way of doing exegesis will include serious reflections on both scripture and culture. He approaches this argument through the lens of the work of Bishop J. E. Lesslie Newbigin, who was a master at applying scripture to cultural context within the world of missiology. Abbie F. Mantor explores the text of Job 3 through a lens of modern psychological trauma studies, as a way to better understand Job’s spiritual state and condition. Dain Alexander Smith completes the colloquium papers through examining how Paul in the book of Romans sought to interpret the Gospel message through the lens of the writings in the Old Testament book of Isaiah, especially in terms of his eschatological vision for peace. Much can be gained in understanding the interplay between the Bible and culture by looking at scripture through a cultural lens in Biblical Studies and by looking at culture through a scriptural lens in Missiology and Intercultural Studies. The two fields need
more interaction to further a more holistic understanding of the role both play in the work of the kingdom of God.

In addition to the papers from the colloquium, Kelly J. Godoy de Danielson presents an examination of the Old Testament characters of Rahab and Ruth through the lens of an immigrant Latina. Presented in both English and Spanish, this article seeks to examine how the Old Testament allowed for women outside the people of God to become insiders through oaths of allegiance to God and acts of lovingkindness. This presents a model for seeing how immigrants themselves can see their lives through God’s eyes as opposed to the often-derogatory eyes of those born within a specific culture. Finally, the From the Archives essay celebrates the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Ichthus music festival in Wilmore, Kentucky. From 1970 to 2012 it served as a real-life example of seeking to apply scripture to the needs and concerns of contemporary youth culture in the United States. The influence and power of this move of the Holy Spirit continues to this day in the lives of those who worked the festival as well as those who came to listen to the music.

The intersection of scripture and culture, when done well, results in transformed lives. These lives in turn can lead to a transformed culture. The overarching problem is that culture is never static- it constantly changes with every generation, and the application of scripture in one form may only last for a generation. It is a constant struggle in ministry to keep applying scripture to new concerns and new issues for each generation. The Student Volunteer Movement in 1888 adopted as its slogan, “the evangelization of the world in this generation.” This was an ambitious aim, but it is also almost impossible, because each generation must adapt scripture to fit the culture of each emerging generation in an ongoing cycle. Several Christian writers have adapted Ronald Regan’s quote from his 1967 inaugural address as governor to the Christian faith. Regan noted that freedom was “never more than one generation away from extinction.” Of course, claiming that Christianity is never more than one generation away from extinction ignores the revival power of the Holy Spirit, but the idea that culture and scripture must come together in new ways each generation is important for the ongoing mission of the Church. If we neglect this truth, we do so at our peril.

Robert Danielson Ph.D.
Esther D. Jadhav

The Place of Theology in Diversity Efforts in Christian Higher Education: A Wesleyan Perspective

Abstract:
Theology is essential to diversity efforts in Christian Higher Education. In current culture there are at least two ways in which theology emerges in this work, as an afterthought and as foundational in some instances. In this article the author provides a discussion around the question: Does theology have a place in the work of diversity efforts in Christian higher education? This paper asserts that theology is a critical and, significant contributor in diversity as it relates to these efforts taking place across Christian Higher Education in North America. A Wesleyan theological perspective is utilized to demonstrate how Wesleyan theology can speak into diversity efforts in Christian higher education.

Keywords: diversity, higher education, Wesleyan theology, Christian education, intercultural studies

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Introduction

Does theology have a place in the work of diversity efforts in Christian higher education? This paper asserts that theology is a critical and significant contributor in diversity as it relates to these efforts taking place across Christian Higher Education in North America. A Wesleyan theological perspective will be utilized to demonstrate how Wesleyan theology can speak into diversity efforts in Christian higher education. Literature indicates that the work of diversity in Christian higher education has gained prominence in the last fifteen or so years; it has gained significant momentum due to the cultural changes we experience in race relations across North America today.

Recent establishments in the CCCU (Consortium for Christian Colleges and Universities) for the support and resourcing of this work have come in the form of the Commission of Diversity and Inclusion, which was formed in 2015. In intercultural Studies, the area of contextualization has highlighted the importance of attending to cultural contexts as they inform the practices and experiences of individuals and communities. For the purposes of this paper, the focus will be placed on diversity as it relates to creating a space for persons of different cultures and ethnicities in our institutions of higher education. While this notion may appear unnecessary because the common understanding is that all people are welcome here in essence, while the written understanding of our practices may reflect differently. Noel B. Woodbridge in his article “Living Theologically” writes,

“Living theologically” sounds like a contradiction in terms, rather like constructive criticism or servant-leadership. The question arises: What has theology to do with everyday life? Stevens (1995:4) claims that, in general, people today do not have any idea of what theology has to do with everyday life. Theology is often considered an abstract discipline. It is rational, reducible to propositions and capable of being categorised (liberal, conservative, evangelical, Reformed, liberation). It is not usually thought of as practical. People in business, law, the professions and the trades often regard the study of theology as a process of becoming progressively irrelevant. In the context of contemporary theological education, many educators at universities and seminaries are concerned that today’s theological students are leaving theological institutions and entering the ministry with a fragmented theology instead of an integrated theology. At these institutions there is a tendency to deal
with theology in an abstract and fragmented manner, rather than in a way that integrates theology into everyday life.¹

With increasing pluralism, we experience theology being questioned. One must understand that pluralism is the existence of multiple and multiplex cultures, ethnicities, philosophies, ideologies, practices etc. As an individual who grew up as a Wesleyan in a pluralistic cultural context, I come to this work with the understanding that the existence of pluralism does not minimize the place of theology, however it shares the platform with other religions, cultures, ethnicities so on and so forth. As Woodbridge has very plainly explained that people in the fields of business, law, the professions and the trades often regard theology as irrelevant, my observation is that the people who believe in this theology are questioning its relevance as well, as they see theology being questioned and critiqued for being irrelevant to everyday life. Is theology able to speak to the current culture we are experiencing in North America? Woodbridge brings to our attention the concern that many of our institutions tend to deal with theology in an abstract manner rather than in a manner that addresses its relevance in everyday life. Woodbridge concludes in his article, “theology and life are linked in praise (orthodoxy), action (orthopraxy) and passion (orthopathy).” The importance of theology in everyday life must gain our attention otherwise it will truly become progressively irrelevant as Woodbridge claims.

In our North American context pluralism challenges, us in ways that causes us to either defend our beliefs or shut ourselves to the world, so we are able to maintain our beliefs with little to no dialogue with each other amidst deep cultural, religious, philosophical, and ideological differences. John Inazu in his book Confident Pluralism claims,

Our shared existence is not only possible, but also necessary. Confident Pluralism offers a political solution to the practical problem of our deep differences. Instead of the elusive goal of E pluribus unum, it suggests a more modest possibility—that we can live together in our “many-ness.” That vision does not entail Pollyannaish illusions that we will overcome our differences and live happily ever after. We will continue to struggle with those whose views we regard as irrational, immoral, or even dangerous. We are stuck with the good, the bad, the ugly of pluralism. Yet confident pluralism remains possible in both law and society. Confident
pluralism takes both confidence and pluralism seriously. Confidence without pluralism misses the reality of politics. It suppresses difference, sometimes violently. Pluralism without confidence misses the reality of people. It ignores or trivializes our stark differences for the sake of feigned agreement and false unity. Confident pluralism allows genuine difference to coexist without suppressing or minimizing our firmly held convictions. We can embrace pluralism precisely because we are confident in our own beliefs, and in the groups and institutions that sustain them.²

John Inazu draws an important conclusion, confidence without pluralism misses the reality of politics, it suppresses difference, sometimes violently. Pluralism without confidence misses the reality of people. It ignores or trivializes our stark differences for the sake of feigned agreement and false unity. In essence Woodbridge and Inazu help us understand that culture and theology share an important integrated relationship not a fragmented one. An emphasis on one at the exclusion of the other can prove to be dangerous akin to the words found in James 2:14-17 (NRSV), “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,’ and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So, faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.” Theology and culture can work together to benefit the common good. Thus, pluralism is not an elimination of theology from the marketplace but an acknowledgement of the existence of multiple and multiplex cultures, ethnicities, philosophies, ideologies, practices, etc. and an opportunity to become confident in our own beliefs, and in the groups and institutions that sustain them as Inazu states. I am able to confirm such a position due to my experience of growing up in Mumbai. I grew amidst friends from a plethora of religions. This did not minimize or diminish the value of my religious belief, but only enhanced my understanding and embracing of it. When we encounter difference, whether cultural or religious, we are overcome with fear largely due to the unknown nature of the difference we experience. Instead of beginning with fear we should consider taking the first step as understanding the lived reality of the other.
Diversity in Christian Higher Education: A close encounter

With the theoretical framework of near theologizing, this section will discuss a close encounter with diversity in a Christian higher education institution. Near Theologizing derives its origin from the anthropological understandings of experience-near and experience-distant.

Near and Far Theologizing is based on the anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s understanding of two primary ways for understanding other cultures—experience-near and experience-distant. Geertz explains,

“An experience-near concept is, roughly, one that someone—...in our case an informant—might himself naturally and effortlessly use to define what he or his fellows see, feel think, imagine and so on, and which he would readily understand when similarly applied by others. An experience-distant concept is one that specialists of one sort or another—an analyst, an experimenter, an ethnographer, even a priest or an ideologist—employ to forward their scientific, philosophical or practical aims.”

When I began my work at Asbury University in 2002 2.7% of the student population reflected cultures and ethnicities other than Caucasian. Now in 2019, 17% of the student population reflects cultures and ethnicities other than Caucasian. In The Christian Post, an article titled, “Christian Higher Ed Becoming Less White, More Diverse in Effort to Reflect God’s Kingdom” it is said,

While most Christian colleges in the United States have been predominantly white institutions, there is an ongoing movement within Christian higher education to diversify student and faculty bodies to ensure that the diversity in God’s Kingdom is reflected in His schools. More than eight out of 10 students (82.2 percent) who attended schools affiliated with the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities in 1999 were white. But today, the white students on the nearly 140 campuses affiliated with the CCCU in the United States only account for about six out of every 10 students (62.2 percent in 2016).

What does this mean? It means Asbury and other Christian higher education institutions must work to cultivate a climate that is hospitable to its members both from home and around the world. There are needs particular to the intercultural student community. An intercultural student
community is comprised of international and U.S. ethnic minority students. International students have particular needs as it relates to moving to another country for education such as housing, employment, etc., while the needs of U.S. ethnic minorities vary in regard to having a sense of belonging at predominantly white institutions. The U.S. ethnic minorities are insiders, but experience life as outsiders to their own home context in North America. In his book, *Neither Jew Nor Gentile*, George Yancey states,

The relative lack of students of color within these institutions of higher education indicates that these institutions are potentially sites that are not welcoming to [students of color]. If this type of de facto rejection is an accurate reality for these students of color, then they may have fewer educational choices than majority group students. Those who desire a Protestant educational experience in an atmosphere where they perceive racial acceptance have to find a racially diverse Protestant institution, which is relatively difficult.

Often times the lack of a hospitable campus is due to the lack of intentional efforts in creating such a climate for all students. It cannot be assumed that places of Christian higher education are automatically hospitable. Often times it is quite the contrary. In my work in Christian higher education I have discovered nice people does not equate to people who understand cultural and ethnic differences. Not seeing color or the culture of the other does not translate to what we commonly think it does, *we all are valued*, it is quite the contrary, not seeing or recognizing the color or the culture of the other actually means we do not value the other as an integrated individual made up of their culture and ethnicity, rather we view them as fragmented as Woodbridge points out in the case with students who are leaving theological institutions and entering ministry with a fragmented theology. Often this reality is regarded or even understood as being colorblind, but being colorblind does not eradicate racial prejudice. More often than not being colorblind is dangerous and a great threat to our ability to value the other in our midst. We deal with culture and ethnicity in an abstract and fragmented manner rather than recognizing that people are a sum of their cultural contexts.

Miroslav Volf in his book, *A Public Faith* acknowledges the malfunctions of theology when it comes to relating with others from cultures and ethnicities other than our own. He states,
In the course of Christianity’s long history—full of remarkable achievements by its saints and thinkers, artists and builders, reformers and ordinary folks—the Christian faith has sometimes failed to live up to its own standards as a prophetic religion. Too often, it neither mends the world nor helps human beings thrive. To the contrary, it seems to shatter things into pieces, to choke up what is new and beautiful before it has a chance to take root, to trample underfoot what is good and true. When this happens, faith is no longer a spring of fresh water helping good life to grow lushly, but a poisoned well, more harmful to those who drink its waters than any single vice could possibly be—as Friedrich Nietzsche, a fierce critic of Christianity, put in his last and angrily prophetic book, The Anti-Christ. True, some of faith’s damaging effects can be attributed largely to differences of perspectives.

Such a malfunction is quite likely when we have an abstract approach to theology rather than one rooted in lived reality. Approaching people apart from their lived reality does not give us a comprehensive understanding of who they are, instead it allows us to think of them from our perspective rather than theirs. Theology has valuable contributions to make in diversity efforts in Christian higher education. The place of theology in diversity efforts in Christian higher education becomes more important as theology can serve as a corrective to cultural malfunction and vice versa, a corrective to theological malfunction we experience in our world today. Over the years I have witnessed several instances that indicate the lack of cultural awareness and understanding. Adel S. Abadeer in his article, “Seeking Redemptive Diversity in Christian Institutions of Higher Education: Challenges and Hopes from Within” claims,

Christian institutions should apply the biblical redeemed foundations of implementing diversity: diversity that welcomes and celebrates with the redeemed spheres in other cultures. They should be proactive in reforming their cultures and engaging with other worldly cultures, since the world itself belongs to God (Plantinga, 2002). They should implement diversity that is transforming, leading by example in response to their new creation as collective units of faithful servants and active agents of renewal. Such diversity should be integrated in their mission statements, curriculum, education, training, employment, leadership, membership, and community services, in addition to concerts, exhibits, galleries, choirs, public lectures, and conferences, as an ongoing process/ journey that
is associated with a significant learning curve effect, which in turn deepens and enriches the institution’s diversity. Furthermore, Christian institutions should revisit and evaluate their existing diversity programs, practices, and progress on a regular basis, to build on their achievements and learn from their short-comings so as to enhance their effectiveness in the future.  

Abadeer points out that, Christian institutions should apply the biblical redeemed foundations of implementing diversity: diversity that welcomes and celebrates with the redeemed spheres in other cultures. For the most part we could all agree on the non-redeemed spheres in cultures such as slavery, and political and economic corruption to name a few. How do we get to a place where we can welcome and celebrate the redeemed spheres in other cultures? I remain perplexed at the words found in Matthew 22: 36- 40 (NRSV), “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” The emphasis on loving our neighbors as ourselves is second to loving the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind. There is no exception made to loving our neighbors; loving God is followed by loving neighbors. Celebrating the redeemed spheres of other cultures includes celebrating the other in these redeemed spheres of cultures.

As we review the writings of George Marsden in, The Soul of the American University, Glanzer, Alleman and Ream’s, Restoring the Soul of the University, or Karen Longman’s edited work, Diversity Matters we discover institutions of Christian higher education struggling to discover their moral and ethical compass as they navigate the winds of cultural change, not that theology cannot withstand these winds of cultural change. Our interpretations and applications of the very theology we embody are being challenged by the cultural changes as they relate to race relations. An important question is raised in the work of Glanzer, Alleman and Ream, they state,

According to the common telling of the history of the university, the early universities in Europe and then in America supposedly always had a singular soul- an identity and story that held them together and gave a coherent unity. In fact, scholars discussing what it would mean for a university to have singular soul usually refer
to the older medieval universities as an example. In this view, God supplied the soul, or more particularly, the study of God—theology—supplied it. In contrast, we argue that the mistake of many Christians is the belief that since universities in Europe and colleges in America began in a dominant Christian era that the early structures of how the soul of theology informed the university were somehow closer to the ideal of what a university should be. We wonder if the recent growth of classical education seems to reflect this assumption. We thus contend that Christians need to think critically about past educational structures and institutions they helped to build and perhaps where they were wrong.10

Glanzer, Alleman and Ream identify an important task that needs our attention, we must think critically about past educational structures and institutions they helped to build and perhaps where they were wrong. We simply cannot assume that since universities in Europe and colleges in America began in a dominant Christian era that the early structures of how the soul of theology informed the university were somehow closer to the ideal of what a university should be. The foundations for diversity initiatives in Christian higher education have their strongest support in theology however, to uncover this support one must be willing to struggle with lived reality (culture) and theology simultaneously. Shirley Hoogstra says, “those working in Christian higher education understand the theological imperative of viewing diversity as a gift to be celebrated through our common commitment to Christ and his kingdom. Though we might come from different denominations and experiences, we share a bold and historic belief that unites us: Christ crucified and resurrected.”11 Did our past educational structures and institutions view diversity as a gift to be celebrated through our common commitment to Christ and his kingdom? Perhaps we did in part, and mission history could demonstrate so? I went to St. Xavier’s College a Jesuit institution for undergraduate studies. I remember my experience being a rich one. My education was rich because I got to study authors from all around the world including India, unlike the experience of many students in North America who do not receive exposure to scholars from around the world. A significant majority of the educational experience in North America is Eurocentric, from pedagogy to authors whose books are the primary texts for classes.
A Wesleyan View

Campbell and Burns begin their work, *Wesleyan Essentials* with the following understanding,

We are challenged “to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” in the context of a multicultural society. It is a daunting challenge. Beliefs we once thought universal, and authorities (like the Bible) to which we once appealed as givens, cannot be taken for granted. It is also an exciting challenge. Christ has called us to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). This challenge no longer requires a passport or a visa: “the nations are at hand.”

Cultural and ethnic diversity in North America is advancing at a rapid pace. We are living in a multicultural society and working alongside individuals from a myriad of cultures and ethnicities. This requires that we learn to engage with the cultural and ethnic differences without compromise on the confident or the pluralism as identified by Jon Inazu; confidence without pluralism misses the reality of politics. It suppresses difference, sometimes violently. Pluralism without confidence misses the reality of people. It ignores or trivializes our stark differences for the sake of feigned agreement and false unity. Confident pluralism allows genuine difference to coexist without suppressing or minimizing our firmly held convictions. We can embrace pluralism precisely because we are confident in our own beliefs, and in the groups and institutions that sustain them.

In Wesley’s ministry we observe a twofold emphasis, his unrelenting commitment to the Christian faith and Christian living. Randy Maddox in his book, *Rethinking Wesley’s Theology for Contemporary Methodism* states,

The place to begin discerning Wesley’s approach to theology is with his conception of its purpose. Wesley understood theology to be intimately related to Christian living and the proclamation of Christian faith. Theology is actualized in authentic living and true proclamation. He had little interest in theology for its own sake. Rather, theology was for the purpose of transforming personal life and social relations. This was his “practical divinity.” For Wesley, theology was not so much for the purpose of understanding life as for changing life; theology should help effect the love of God and neighbor.
Does our theology help effect the love of God and neighbor? Sometimes it does and sometimes it doesn’t. Culture and Theology are not mutually exclusive but are mutually inclusive. When one becomes a Christian, they do not automatically lose their cultural identity. Over time they discern those parts of their cultural identity and practices that do not align with biblical understanding. I am a fourth generation Christian from India, one of the cultural practices that immediately ceded upon conversion for my great grandparents was idol worship. What continued on was their respect for their parents and elders, which is congruent with scriptures. Exodus 20:12 (NRSV) states, “honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.” While Hebrews 13:17 (NRSV) states, “obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with sighing—for that would be harmful to you.” We live in a creative tension of upholding both theology and culture however, if we do it right, we will find ourselves honoring both God and neighbor. The wrong will correct itself as long as our interactions with the culturally and ethnically other are genuine and authentic because theology is actualized in authentic living and true proclamation.

Campbell and Burns examine three reasons why they find Wesleyan theology relevant for multicultural society. The reasons include the following:

Wesleyan understanding of Christian faith involves a rich understanding of God’s gifts to the whole world. Wesleyan understanding of the gospel involves the claim that our own culture and society, as well as others, stands under God’s judgement. Wesleyan understanding of the gospel makes a clear distinction between what is essential for the Christian faith, and what is nonessential.  

Wesley understands God’s grace was for all people everywhere. Therefore, a Wesleyan theological approach would call on a careful consideration of other cultural traditions including our own. It would also affirm that all cultures, societies and ethnicities of the world stand under God’s judgment including our own. Finally, a Wesleyan theological understanding distinguishes between essentials and nonessentials of the Christian faith. They are identified as, “belief in the in the final authority of scripture, and belief in the Holy Trinity. Particular customs of worship,
he held to be “opinions” rather than essentials.” Where we miss the mark when it comes to diversity efforts is that we use our cultural and ethnic archetype as the cornerstone by which to compare all other cultures and ethnicities.

**Conclusion**

Christian higher education in North America stands at the crossroads of navigating the relationship between culture and theology as it relates to diversity efforts, specifically as it relates to creating a space for persons of different cultures and ethnicities in our institutions of higher education. While this navigation is challenging work, it can be done. This paper sought to assert that theology is a critical and significant contributor in diversity efforts in Christian higher education. With the use of the theoretical framework, experience-near, and significant contributions of scholars, a discussion on diversity in Christian higher education sheds light on the reality that persons of different cultures and ethnicities must be understood in light of their cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Culture and ethnicity cannot be dealt with in an abstract and fragmented manner as it is an integral part of one’s identity. Outside the chapel at Asbury University are the famous words of E. Stanley Jones, graduate of the school and missionary to India, “here we enter a fellowship, sometimes we will agree to differ, always we will resolve to love and unite to serve.” Diversity may require that we sometimes agree to differ, but not at the expense of dehumanizing the other simply because they are culturally and ethnically different. This is where theology is absolutely critical as it beckons us to love our neighbor as ourselves in the midst of our differences.

A few key reminders we can take away towards this end are: the understanding that the Christian faith involves a rich understanding of God’s gifts to the whole world. Understanding that the gospel involves the claim that our own culture and society, as well as others, stands under God’s judgement. Understanding the essentials and nonessentials of the Christian faith. I was recently at a store in Lexington and came across the Special Time Edition magazine, it caught my attention because on the cover page a few of the articles were mentioned. One of the articles mentioned was, What Makes Us Moral. Primarily the idea that being good, even altruistic, is something all societies value. As I read through the article, I started to reckon with the discussion that was laid out in it because it dealt with our capacity as human beings to be altruistic as well as atrocious.
one breath we would run into danger to help the other and in another we would turn around and harm or destroy the other. Why is this so? David Buss, a professor of psychology at the University of Texas is quoted in the article as saying, “the stuff that makes us who we are ---our capacity for kindness and generosity, as well as for greed and violence—exists in each of us because these abilities conferred some reproductive advantage on our forebears. Our inherent human nature has adaptations that evolved to be beneficial not from a moral sense, but from a fitness sense” referring to the concept of the survival of the fittest. When we experience danger, we turn to atrocious behaviors in dealing with others, this is compounded when we are dealing with the other, who is culturally and ethnically different from the self. The culturally and ethnically different is seen as the enemy. Scripture has something to say about this, the words in Luke 6: 27-31 (NRSV), “But I say to you that listen, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.” Theology, our understanding of God and God's word has immeasurable significance in providing a corrective to our atrocious malfunctions.

Scott J. Jones, in his book John Wesley's Conception and Use of Scripture highlights the importance of the text speaking to the context and the context speaking to the text. He says, “what a person says about scripture is one thing. What that same person does with scripture is a separate matter. It is not enough simply to quote a theologian’s words about scripture without asking whether his or her use is congruent with those stated views. The words about scripture are called the ‘conception,’ and what is actually done with scripture is called its ‘use’.” Wesley relied on experience in addition to scripture, reason, and tradition in the interpretation and use of scripture however, the way Wesley used experience in scriptural interpretation is helpful for our purposes. Jones states, “Wesley relies on experience to describe the physical world. Second, Wesley occasionally makes a survey of the religious state of the world, third, he appeals to experience to give us knowledge of our own spiritual states.” We must not encourage theology to go on as fragmented as though it has no implications on our everyday life. Theology has significant implications for our everyday living if we believe theology is for the purpose of transforming personal life and social
relations. Moving forward, theology must include the understanding of the physical world, a survey of the religious state of the world and the knowledge of our own spiritual states. Integrated theology should include a survey of the other as well as a survey of the self. When we engage in integrated theology, we will recognize the valuable insights theology can provide in the diversity efforts in Christian higher education.

End Notes

1 Noel B. Woodbridge, “Living Theologically.”

2 Jon Inazu, Confident Pluralism, 6-7.

3 Clifford Geertz, Local Knowledge, 57.

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Shawn P. Behan

*Exegeting Scripture, Exegeting Culture: Combining Exegesis to Fulfill God’s Calling*

**Abstract:**

Seminary has separated biblical exegesis from cultural exegesis, teaching them in different programs and seldom requiring them for those outside of those programs. Yet, to fulfill either of these exegetical processes we need both – they are mutually building and supporting entities that only make sense when combined with the other. As teachers, preachers, and leaders of God’s Church, it is essential that we learn how to combine these two exegetical processes in order to faithfully live out our calling in God’s kingdom. Thus, we must study both biblical and cultural exegesis and learn how to combine the two; for one without the other is knowledge, but combined they form knowledge with the wisdom of how to apply that knowledge. While this seems like a Herculean task, it has been accomplished by many in the history of the Church, often when they did not even know they were doing so. One such previous leader and teacher in the Church is Bishop J. E. Lesslie Newbigin, who’s exegetical life made him a renowned name in his own day and continues to challenge us to “do likewise” in our lives.

**Keywords:** biblical exegesis, cultural exegesis, anthropology, Lesslie Newbigin

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“Indeed, to know is a thing that pleaseth talkers and boasters; but to do is that which pleaseth God. Not that the heart can be good without knowledge, for without that the heart is naught. There is, therefore, knowledge and knowledge - knowledge that resteth in the bare speculation of things, and knowledge that is accompanied with the grace of faith and love, which puts a man upon doing even the will of God from the heart: the first of these will serve the talker; but without the other, the true Christian is not content. ‘Give me understanding, and I will keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart’ (Psalm 119:34).”

- John Bunyan, The Pilgrim’s Progress

Bunyan arrived at this point over three hundred years ago, that knowledge is useless without the wisdom found in the grace and love of God to use it appropriately. This is what has brought all of us to higher education (particularly seminary), to gain both knowledge and wisdom in order to serve God to the fullest of our abilities with the entirety of our lives. God has made all of us seekers of knowledge, but we know intuitively that we will never be satisfied with knowledge unless we also gain the wisdom to use knowledge appropriately in service to God’s mission. One of the first lessons we learn in seminary is the fact that we will never learn everything we need to know to fulfill God’s calling on our lives; so we break knowledge into compartments and discuss the ones we think are most relevant to the futures we envision. While this is good educational practice, it is not good for gaining knowledge and wisdom for the purpose of serving God’s mission. Thus, in this paper I will be discussing two major pieces of seminary education that have spent many generations separated from each other, but in gaining wisdom we come to understand that they actually need each other - biblical exegesis and cultural exegesis.

I propose that it is necessary to combine these two exegetical tasks in order to fulfill God’s calling on our lives and live out our pilgrimage with knowledge, wisdom, and a joyful heart for fulfilling God’s desire. To do this, I will lay forth two main questions: what is the telos of biblical exegesis and why does a Christian need to exegete culture? In answering these questions, I will bring up a third question about the possibility of maintaining both exegetical projects in our ministry of teaching and leading in God’s Church. This question will be addressed in the example of Bishop J.E. Lesslie Newbigin.
Exegeting the Gospel

One of the first things taught to aspiring pastors and ministry leaders is the appropriate way to interpret scripture. Often in a class like “Inductive Bible Study” we learn about the process of biblical exegesis, as opposed to eisegetical interpretation. Exegesis is the method by which we discern the meaning of the text through the study of the text itself (and its biblical context), and then apply that meaning to our own contexts. Eisegesis, then, being the reading into the text what we want to get out of it for our context. While exegetical interpretations of 2 Kings 2:23-25 (Elisha cursing the boys who mocked him with a bear mauling) would be much tougher than an eisegetical interoperation of these verses, biblical exegesis has served the church well for centuries. While biblical exegesis may have become second nature to many of us, before we get into the heart of this paper it is necessary to take a quick refresher course in biblical exegesis.

A Basic Outline of Exegetical Method

The history of biblical exegesis is a complicated one, with various forms that reach back centuries, its modern methods are relatively new and recently have received renewed interest (Cahill 2000). Within the more modern phenomenon of exegetical studies many methods have been developed. It may be helpful to think of a tree; with biblical exegesis being the trunk, three main branches, and then many stems and leaves sprouting from each of those branches. With this being an overview of exegetical method, we will only identify those branches and briefly discuss their relevance to the overall concept of merging biblical and cultural exegesis.

Biblical exegesis, according to Michael J. Gorman, can be broken down into three main branches or approaches - synchronic, diachronic, and existential (Gorman 2009: 13). The synchronic approach tends to look most explicitly at the text, with some cultural scope of the original writer's culture factored into its analysis; utilizing methods of literacy criticism, narrative criticism, rhetorical criticism, lexical/grammatical/syntactical analysis, semantic or discourse analysis, and socio-scientific criticism (ibid.: 13-14). This approach tends towards a more literary focus of interpreting scripture within its own historical context. Then there is a diachronic approach, which tends towards more analysis of the development of the biblical text over time, as well as the development of its interpretation and includes: textual criticism, historical linguistics, form criticism, tradition criticism, source criticism, redaction criticism, and historical criticism (together
this approach is often referred to as the historical-critical method) (Ibid: 15-16). Lastly there is the existential approach, which focuses on reading scripture “as something to be engaged” for the purposes of some end - often an encounter with the reality beyond the text itself - and includes the methods of: theological exegesis/missional interpretation/spiritual reading, canonical criticism, embodiment, and ideological criticism/advocacy criticism/liberationist exegesis (Ibid: 18-19). This approach is often used in less formal settings than the classroom or the pulpit. Each one of these approaches can be used to teach the Gospel to a culture, but the exegetical approach alone does not necessarily mean that the Gospel will be understood by the receiving culture.

No matter which approach you prefer, the reality of the necessity for biblical exegesis does not escape us as we search to fulfill our calling as teachers of the Word of God. While these approaches give us the modes for which to approach scripture, exegesis as a whole provides the foundation to our approaching of scripture for the goal of teaching scripture. Thus, it is necessary to also look at biblical exegesis as a whole, not just its methodological parts, in order to start to gain the needed wisdom to appropriately apply the various exegetical methods.

*The Foundation of Our Biblical Study & Interpretation*

In its most basic form, “[E]xegesis may be defined as the careful historical, literary, and theological analysis of a text,” particularly a specific text of Christian scripture (Gorman 2009: 10). This definition seems simple enough, but those with experience in biblical exegesis will tell you that it is much more complicated when you actually approach the exegetical task. There are many methods and approaches to biblical exegesis (as seen above) that complicate the learning and application of this interpretive process. As Christians, we also cannot deny the spiritual reality of biblical exegesis as well. Matthew Levering discusses biblical exegesis (in the historical-critical method) “as an ongoing participation in God’s active providence, both metaphysically and Christologically-pneumatologically” (Levering 2008: 1). Which means that while we engage with humanly created methods of interpreting scripture both within the biblical context and for our context, we are also engaging a spiritual act of participating in Christ. This raises the question of the *telos* of such a spiritual act. While discipleship and greater spiritual intimacy with the Lord is a tremendous result of spiritually participating in the interpretation of scripture, if that were the only reason
then we would never have to relay what we have learned from the exegetical process - it would only be for our spiritual edification. Yet, exegesis is an eminently other-focused activity, even while both the physical and spiritual activity of exegesis are edifying to the individual, exegesis is meant for the community. This brings us back to the question of what is the ultimate end of biblical exegesis? But before we venture to answer that question, we must also look at the second portion of this article, cultural exegesis.

**Exegeting Culture**

The second component of this discussion is the exegesis of culture. Often cordoned off in missiology or intercultural studies programs within the teaching of anthropology or sociology, exegesis of culture is a necessity in relating the Gospel to those who have never heard the Good News of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Typically, missionaries use elements of anthropology and sociology\(^1\) in order to study culture and find culturally appropriate ways to deliver the Gospel to non-Christians. Undergirding this was the idea that the West was already Christian and therefore their culture was already molded around the Gospel, thus the location for missions was in non-Western cultures. The validity of this assumption can be debated, but it was this assumption that pushed the study of culture into the realm of missions. So let us take a quick look at the role of exegeting culture within its traditional discipline of missiology.

*The Role of Anthropology/Sociology*

As the academic study of missiology grew in the Twentieth Century, anthropology was closely linked to it, with several prominent missiologists of the mid-century acquiring anthropology degrees.\(^2\) Anthropology, or more specifically cultural anthropology, strives “to look beyond the world of everyday experiences to discover the patterns and meanings that lie behind the world” (Robbins 2009: 2). As a discipline of the social sciences, anthropology has provided the theories and methods by which missionaries have studied culture in order to properly contextualize the Gospel so that different societies could understand the message of the Good News. This study, often utilizing qualitative methods, has provided insights to missionaries in order for them to minister to local communities.

For example, the use of linguistic anthropology in the translation of scriptures, whereby linguistics is used to understand culture, then in turn the missionaries utilize both linguistics and anthropology to craft the
translation of scripture. While this is not the only example of anthropology being used in the field, it is the easiest to identify. Now we are in a place in the history of missions where the overwhelming majority of a macro-level culture has been investigated and the Gospel preached, thus we need to move toward more micro-level investigations, and investigations into responses to contextualization. Robert Montgomery concludes, “… what is needed most now in missiology is not the study of mission efforts, as important as these have been and are, but a serious study of the reasons for the wide variations in response to the Christian gospel from the peoples of the world” (Montgomery 2012: 289). Such studies must engage both the qualitative methods of anthropology and the quantitative methods of sociology in order to gain a better understanding the variations of microcultures and the differences of responses to the gospel in various cultures. But no matter which methods are chosen, the use of the social sciences is essential for the present and future of missiology and the spreading of the Gospel around the globe.

While we have discussed the role of anthropology and sociology within missiology, there remains an underlying question that we have not addressed, why does a Christian need to exegete culture anyway? It is this question, and the question of the goal of exegeting scripture posed above, that we will turn to next.

**Combining Biblical & Cultural Exegesis**

In each of the above sections we have uncovered some very important questions. What is the end of biblical exegesis? Why would a Christian need to focus on cultural exegesis? The answer to both of these questions lies is in the combining of these two exegeses in order to serve God’s calling to bear witness to the Gospel and disciple others to do the same. The concept of *missio Dei* points to the reality that as teachers, preachers, and leaders in God’s Church it is our responsibility to bear witness to God’s salvific actions throughout the world. “The mission can be nothing else than the continuation of the saving activity of God though the publication of the deeds of salvation” (Vicedom 1965: 9). Thus, by combing biblical exegesis with cultural exegesis we can fulfill this commission to bear witness to salvation in Jesus Christ through biblically sound and culturally relevant publications (in word and deed) of the salvific activities of God.
We have already seen the absolute necessity of biblical exegesis for all Christian communities. For the most effective use of anthropology/sociology within missiology we look towards contextualization. Contextualization has had a unique history, filled with starts and stops of usage and effectiveness in missions (Hiebert 1987), yet it still remains the most effective tool of the missionary to reach people with the Gospel. For Gospel contextualization to be effective and true to scripture, we must heed the advice of Paul Hiebert and engage in a process of critical contextualization. Hiebert’s critical contextualization utilizes three key steps: first is the exegesis of culture (gathering evidence about local customs and beliefs). It is important to note that exegeting of culture comes first only so we know what questions we wish to investigate within scripture. No one exegetes scripture blind, but they are influenced by their cultural perspectives and questions. Knowing the questions that culture is asking about the world or the assumption that a culture is operating within allows us the chance to ask “what does scripture say about that” and begin proper exegesis to discover the answer. But we have to make sure that our exegesis of culture does not pre-determine the answers we seek in scripture – this would be sliding into eisegesis and leads to syncretism.

The second step is an exegetical look at scripture and utilization of the hermeneutical bridge – this includes engagement with the global and historical hermeneutical community. This hermeneutical community includes the local church, the local Christian community, and then widens out in ever increasing circles to incorporate the entire global community. This means that we must be in fellowship with the global Church and ask this global community for evaluation and feedback of our hermeneutical outcomes. As well, we must investigate historical hermeneutics in order to determine whether our interpretations align with historical orthodoxy. Combined, these elements of local, global, and historical communities make up the hermeneutical bridge. Within this hermeneutical bridge, Hiebert points out that the leader must be cross-culturally nimble and able to translate between the biblical and congregational culture to the new culture so that those who hear the Gospel can grasp a clear understanding of it (Hiebert 1987: 109-110).

Lastly in Hiebert’s model is the critical response of believers, both old and new, to reflect upon “their own past customs in the light of their new biblical understandings, and to make decisions regarding their response to their new-found truths” (Ibid.: 110). Thus, it is essential that this process
happen within and by the full local congregation, and that the leaders of each local congregation properly teach its members how to do this type of critical contextualization both individually and as a community. Thus, even in the old Christian heartlands of Western Culture, we must engage with critical contextualization as culture has changed and so have we. What is most remarkable about Hiebert’s model of critical contextualization is that it can be used around the globe, in any culture, at any level, so that any teacher of the Gospel, missionary or not, can lead their community through this process; and its reliance on biblical exegesis to make sense of the cultural exegesis that pushes Hiebert’s model to scriptural fidelity.

Contextualization is not a wholly new topic either. New Testament scholar Dean Flemming in 2005 investigated the New Testament to identify and develop the patterns of contextualization that already exist within scripture. The most prominent (but definitely not the only) example of New Testament contextualization is Paul’s time in Athens in Acts 17:16-24. In this passage Paul spends time learning the city, seeing the religious culture that abounds, and approaches the culture of Athens in their traditional way - teaching on the Areopagus. Flemming would also point to Jesus as the true and original model of contextualization that we should follow, as Christ contextualized himself in the Incarnation and then within the rituals of the Jewish culture of his day (Flemming 2005: 20-23). It is this model that we see repeated, in different versions, throughout the New Testament, to which Flemming would call the local church to enter into. This is because culture changes, as well as the local church. Thus, there must always be a cycle of contextualizing by exegeting the Bible, exegeting culture, then evaluating culture by the light of scripture. The only issue is whether or not we, the leaders of the local church, will facilitate or hinder contextualization. “The question is not whether they (the local church) will contextualize, but how well they will contextualize” (Moreau 2018: 230). Therefore, it is the responsibility of teachers and leaders in the local church to make sure that this contextualization happens in a thorough, critical, Hiebertian way; teaching their community to continually critically contextualize.

By using Hiebert’s model we have an approach that necessitates the merging of biblical and cultural exegesis for the purposes of witnessing to the Gospel both within our own culture and to new cultures (both macro- and micro-) that we come into contact with during our pilgrimage of knowledge and wisdom to fulfill God’s calling. We have also seen that contextualization is both old and continuous. The only question that
remains is whether or not we can actually maintain faithfulness to both biblical exegesis and cultural exegesis while we combine them. To answer that question we will turn to the example of Bishop Lesslie Newbigin.

**An Exegetical Life: Lesslie Newbigin**

Bishop James Edward Lesslie Newbigin was born in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England on December 9, 1909, and while he grew up in a Christian home it was through the ministry of the Student Christian Movement at the University of Cambridge that he became a Christian (Weston 2006: 1 and James n.d.). After serving with the SCM at the University of Glasgow (where he met his wife Helen) and returning to Cambridge for theological training at Westminster College, the Newbigins applied for mission service to India with the Church of Scotland (Weston 2006: 2-6).

Lesslie, as he preferred to be called, and his wife Helen enter missionary service in southern India in the fall of 1936 and began language training, which was cut short due to a bus accident that broke Newbigin’s leg and after unsuccessful treatment in India, required the couple to return to England (Wainwright 2000: 4-5). Newbigin served in an administrative role for the foreign missions committee of the Church of Scotland during his recovery, and three years after they first left, he and Helen (with their baby girl Margaret) finally returned to Kanchipuram, India to begin the missions ministry they were called to there (Ibid.: 5). Early on Newbigin became involved with the movement to unify the churches of South India and during his furlough of 1946-47 this project was completed, with Newbigin being elected as one of the new Church of South India’s (CSI) founding bishops over the diocese of Madurai and Ramnad (Ibid.: 6-7).

Newbigin would spend the rest of his days in India serving both as a church leader and as an international defender of the South India scheme for unification, which made him a popular figure in the ecumenical movement of the mid-Twentieth Century. “The ‘South India miracle’ quickly made Newbigin a prominent figure in the growing international ecumenical scene” (James n.d.). He spend years traveling abroad to ecumenical meetings, both to the International Missionary Council (IMC) and the newly formed World Council of Churches (WCC), as well as many other international gatherings considering ecumenism and church unification. By the end of the 1950’s, with an agreed upon merging of the IMC and WCC, the IMC asked Newbigin to lead their merger with the WCC and then become the first head of the WCC’s Division of World
Mission and Evangelism (CWME) after the planned 1961 merger at the New Delhi consultation (Weston 2006: 9-10). Though reluctant to leave India, the CSI granted his release for five years to oversee this integration project (Ibid.: 9). Giving himself to the task of tackling the integration of these two organizations, Newbigin traveled the world and wrote extensively on issues related to this integration and set up the early movements of the CWME as its first director (Newbigin 1993: 158-201).

Newbigin returned to India in 1965, this time being elected as Bishop of Madras, a major city within the CSI, which effectively elevated him in responsibility and status to the top levels of the ecclesial hierarchy of the CSI, as well as his selection to top level leadership (Ibid.: 202-225). Here Newbigin tackled the needs of a large city and a large diocese, engaging in “fairly extensive social work in the slums of the city” as a means of obedience to Christ to meet human need and towards bringing about the conversion of those being served (Wainwright 2000: 145).

In 1974, at the retirement age of 65 and desiring to open a bishop-level position for the elevation of an Indian leader, Newbigin retired from the CSI and returned to Birmingham, England (Weston 2006: 11-12). His retirement did not last long as he took a post teaching missiology and ecumenism at the Selly Oak College in Birmingham for the next five years (James n.d.). After Newbigin had decided to retire for a second time, he argued for and eventually took up the leadership of United Reformed Church in inner-city Birmingham, working as its pastor for seven more years before retiring for a third time (Weston 2006: 12). Throughout the 1980’s and 1990’s Newbixin became a popular speaker and writer, until his passing on January 30, 1998 (Wainwright 2000: 14-16). It was during these retirement years that many of his most significant texts were written.

Going back to his first retirement, the Newbiginos took an overland trip to get from Madras to France before sailing for England; a long desired trek through regions that had once been the heartlands of Christianity (Weston 2006: 11-12). In Cappadocia they were forced to worship on their own because they could not find any other Christians on Sunday morning (Ibid.: 12). It was this episode that would direct much of Newbigin’s theological and missiological attention in his retirement years. “This had a profound effect upon Lesslie and helped to energize his later reflections on European culture, for it brought home just how completely a once-strong Christian heritage could all but disappear” (Ibid.: 12). It is these reflections that would come out in some of his most famous works - *The Other Side*

Newbigin’s writings have an enduring legacy, especially those writings that came after his initial retirement from India. But it was a lifetime of reading, writing, and doing that gave his ideas their longevity. “During his lifetime, Newbigin was highly regarded both as an ecumenical and missionary statesman, and as a cross-cultural missiologist of the first order” (Weston 2012: 10). While this accrued reputation gave him latitude in his writings, since he often “lacked the numerous footnotes characteristics of formal academic pieces” it also provided him with the gravitas to voice his critiques and new ideas in his retirement writings (Ibid.: 11). “Newbigin’s return to the UK was also the prelude to a period of intense activity, reflection and writing for which he was to become perhaps best known” (Ibid.: 15). It was a lifetime of experiences that gave him the perspective to reflect on Western Christianity and call for a renewal of the Western Church; and this call was so spectacular that it still challenges us today. “The fact that The Gospel in a Pluralist Society continues to resonate and reverberate with a wide range of people, twenty-five years on, surely owes a good deal to the provenance offered by that Glasgow classroom” (Shenk 2015: 47).

But this enduring legacy is not just of an excellent theologian and missionary who rang the bells of renewal for the Western Church; it is also a legacy of combining biblical and cultural exegesis. There are dozens of examples that I could look at concerning Newbigin’s biblical and cultural exegesis, but in the following sections I turn to one specific example of each of these exegetical practices and then follow with a discussion of Newbigin’s exegetical combination.

**Practicing Biblical Exegesis**

During his time as General Secretary of the International Missionary Council, Newbigin produced a small bible study addressing the issues of Christian unity called *Is Christ Divided?* This small study of four chapters takes on a verse(s) in each chapter and applies biblical exegetical methods to understand that verse and applying it to the issue of church unity. The first chapter uses John 12:32 in a discussion about Christ being lifted up and drawing all humanity to himself (Newbigin 1961: 5). In this chapter he uses an exegetical linguistics approach to break down the words of this verse and determines that in the sight of the risen Lord our divisions are a sinful splintering of the Church (Ibid.: 9-10). The second chapter looks
at 1 Cor. 12:13 for an understanding of the unity of all in Christ. “Here you have the dimensions of the Church’s being set forth in their barest simplicity. The material - all sorts and conditions of men, Jews or Greeks, slave or free, mankind in all its variety; the form - one body marked off from the world by the act of baptism; the agent - one mighty Spirit, the Spirit of God” (Ibid.: 11). Thus, in the Church all are united together through the Spirit in the Lordship of Christ. Chapter three investigates the reason for this unity, finding in John 17:22-23 Christ’s determination that his followers be one as he is one with the Father, for the glory of the Father (Ibid.: 18-19). Chapter four then takes a look at Mark 13:6-10 as a commissioning of the unified Church to glorify God to all the nations, even amidst the changes of the times (Ibid.: 26-41). In this small book Newbigin searches the scriptures for answers to the issues of unity that he and the IMC were facing as they entered this integration process with the WCC. In this, he models a way of exegeting scripture in order to address contemporary problems, but this is not the only exegesis that Newbigin engages in throughout his life.

Modeling Cultural Exegesis

Another small book of Newbigin’s, produced in the mid-1950’s, was an English translation of the doctrine and catechesis manual he produced for rural Tamil churches, Sin and Salvation. This book provides the foundational questions and answers that were needed to catechize converts in the rural Tamil-speaking villages in south India (Newbigin 1956: 7-10). This book was originally produced for the indigenous leaders and teachers who were traveling to these villages and teaching these issues to new converts, thus its original publication in Tamil. Newbigin had studied deeply the Hindu culture of India and used language of contradiction and harmony to begin to depict the ideas of sin and salvation (Ibid.: 11-15). He also focused on the Hindu values of family and social interaction (Toropov and Buckles 1997: 121) in order to discuss the community of Christian faith (Newbigin 1956: 92-114). All of this coming from his deep study and even admiration for the culture in which he was ministering, in order that he may properly contextualize the Gospel for local peoples to hear, understand, and accept the reality of salvation in Jesus Christ. But this cultural exegesis was only possible because simultaneously he was engaged in biblical exegesis.
Combining the Two

Newbigin dedicated his life to ministry and missions, which drew him to simultaneous exegesis of scripture and culture. It is in the combination in Newbigin that we see the telos of biblical exegesis and the reasoning of cultural exegesis - to bear witness to the Gospel among all the Nations of the world. His scriptural exegesis garnered him international acclaim and respect as “he was elected chair of the high-powered” Committee of Twenty-Five, which prepared the theological discussions for the 1954 WCC meeting at Evanston⁴ (James: n.d.). He exegeted culture as well, both within Tamil-speaking India and on his return to England. It is his understanding of Hindu, and specifically Tamil, culture that gives Newbigin the credibility to later write in his theology of mission that: “A real meeting with a partner of another faith must mean being so open to him or her that the other’s way of looking at the world becomes a real possibility for us” (Newbigin 1995: 184). The only thing holding us back from adopting the views of the religious other is our relationship with Jesus Christ, fostered by a deep reading and interpreting of scripture. So Newbigin modeled throughout his life both the necessity and the possibility of combining scriptural and cultural exegesis, all for the purpose of bearing witness to the Gospel.

Newbigin’s biblical exegesis allowed him to properly share the Gospel in biblically sound and orthodox ways. His cultural exegesis allowed Newbigin to properly share the Gospel in culturally relevant and understandable ways. Thus, in the life of Lesslie Newbigin we see that it is necessary to combine biblical and cultural exegesis in order to fully practice both.

Like Newbigin, we too must learn how to merge these exegetical processes for the purposes of teaching and ministering the Word in the cultures and places where God has called us. Even if we are not called to places on the other side of the world, learning how to exegete the micro-cultural differences on the other side of town is essential for presenting a properly exegeted scripture.

Conclusion

Biblical exegesis and cultural exegesis, like biblical studies and missiology, have been separated in the academic world in order to adequately teach both. Yet, learning just one of these exegetical processes is like gaining knowledge without gaining the wisdom to know how to apply that knowledge. In particular for those who are called to teach, preach, and
lead within God’s Church, it is necessary to gain the knowledge of both exegetical processes. Once we have gained that knowledge we can start to merge them together in the ministries of the Word that God has called us into, thus gaining the wisdom of application. For if we are truly pilgrims of the Kingdom of God, living between the current and future realities of God’s reign, then we must always be studying culture in order to properly apply the Bible to our context. And it is in this combination of exegetical processes that we enter into the joy of fulfilling God’s will to exercise knowledge with wisdom to share the Gospel and further discipleship.

End Notes

1 The methods and theories of anthropology and sociology are too large for a discussion here, but for most missiological programs a form of ethnographic cultural anthropology is the preferred approach to exegeting culture.

2 The history of missiology and anthropology is a complicated one, but you can see in the prominence of missiologists like Alan Tippett, Chuck Kraft, Paul Hiebert, Dan Shaw, Bob Priest, Darrell Whiteman, and others who studied anthropology in order to enter the mission field or teach missiology. Though this connection has been debated by the likes of Whiteman, Priest, and others, it is undeniable that there has been a link between missiology and anthropology for decades.


4 A committee that included Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and Reinhold Niebuhr amongst its illustrious members.

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Abstract:
A lack of engagement with the theology of evil and suffering leads to immature responses when tragedy strikes our congregations and alienates the sufferers among us. I believe the best path forward is an interdisciplinary approach that is both intellectually honest and spiritually whole. In this article, I explore the first speech of Job through the lens of classical rhetorical studies and modern psychological trauma theories in order to demonstrate how Job's deep lament offers the Church an example of how to give sufferers the space to work through their grief as they walk their path towards healing and hope.

Keywords: trauma studies, rhetorical studies, Job 3, theology of evil, suffering

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Introduction

The presence of evil has been behind the arguments against the existence of a good God since (at least) the Enlightenment. In his Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion David Hume argues that evil proved that God is indifferent to his creation and therefore, is not good (Peterson 2016b: 3). Almost 200 years later, evil was the basis of J. L. Mackie’s logical argument against theistic belief. He contended that God cannot be both omnipotent and good while evil is present in this world. A good God would not allow evil and an omnipotent God would be powerful enough to eliminate it (Mackie 1955). Since then philosophers and theologians have offered points and counter points for and against theistic belief based on this problem of evil.

Unfortunately, this ongoing debate tends to be an academic endeavor that the average person tries to avoid. This is at least partly due to a Western culture that desperately wants to avoid suffering. N. T. Wright calls this the new problem of evil. We largely pretend that the world is good until evil hits us squarely in the face. Then, because we have no well-formed theology of evil, we are surprised and respond in immature ways (Wright 2014: 24–25). Like the philosophical debate, the theology of evil tends to be an academic pursuit that rarely trickles down to the pews. For example, the Christian faith does not advocate for universal salvation and yet at funerals we almost always hear people say the deceased “is in a better place.” Likewise, most Christians do not believe God is distant and aloof, ready to smite humans for poor decisions. Why then do we tell our suffering brothers and sisters that God has allowed their suffering to strengthen them or that their misery is part of God’s good plan? Rabbi Harold Kushner, in his book When Bad Things Happen to Good People, rightly argues that these shallow explanations may defend God, but they do not comfort the sufferer (Kushner 1981: 23). This line of thinking heaps shame on victims – if they had stronger faith, this would not have happened; if they were good enough, the pain would end. The sufferers among us are isolated and shamed; they have no one to turn to in order to ask difficult questions. Maybe that is why sufferers for centuries have turned to another man who lost everything and had no one to turn to—Job.

I do not believe that Job simply offers us an example of how to suffer well. Like theological bumper stickers, those arguments often heap blame on suffers and allow the Church to dismiss grief. Instead, I believe the book of Job teaches the Church how to interact with trauma and suffering
in a way that is both intellectually honest and spiritually whole. Through the lens of classic rhetorical criticism and modern psychological trauma studies, I will look at the first speech of Job in order to demonstrate how Job’s deep lament offers the Church an example of how to give sufferers the space to work through their grief as they walk their path towards healing and hope.

**Methodology**

*Classic Rhetorical Criticism*

Rhetoric was defined by Aristotle as “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion” (Yu 2011: 5). Similarly, George Kennedy, described rhetoric more recently as “that quality in discourse by which a speaker or writer seeks to accomplish his purpose” (Dozeman 1992: 715). Against his contemporary’s focus on the literary style of a text, Kennedy developed a method for New Testament studies attuned to the editor’s intent and the perception of the audience (Dozeman 1992: 715). Ryan Cook adapted Kennedy’s methodology for use in the Old Testament, specifically the Psalms. For Cook (2015: 458), a rhetorical analysis focuses on two primary questions. First, what is the intended effect of the poem? Second, how is that achieved? Similar to Cook’s work in Psalms, I believe the poems of the book of Job can also be rhetorically analyzed in order to posit its effect.

Not all poems are so clear-cut, though. Barbara Hernstein Smith (1968: 131-132) rightly posits that an argument can “develop informally and irregularly through analogies, examples, and inferences, and ... be interrupted by digressions or elaboration.” Therefore, it is also in the irregularities of Job’s first speech that we are able to discern his purposes and greater rhetorical aims – for his own grief process and as an example for the audience.

*Modern Psychological Trauma Research*

According to modern research, there are typical patterns people follow in reaction to a traumatic event. First, the victim experiences an overwhelming disruption of their mental processes. They are often left in shock or speechless. Second, they experience an inability to express emotion. Third, defense mechanisms leave a victim stuck in a distorted view
of the past with no avenue to move forward. Finally, victims experience a decreased ability to trust other people or to trust God (O’Connor 2011: 4).

It takes more than just time to move beyond the traumatic events and one never fully heals. Instead, victims integrate their trauma into their lives by reinterpreting the events to fit into a larger narrative that they can understand (O’Connor 2011: 47). This requires processing the events and accepting the consequences of the trauma. Additionally, victims must reengage their emotions by allowing themselves to grieve. Grief “involves living in the present with knowledge of the self and of the world as they are” (O’Connor 2011: 68). Lack of emotion de-humanizes the world, but grief opens the heart to feel and experience life again.

For a deeply religious person, studies have shown that asking difficult spiritual questions after a trauma experience is more beneficial than glossing over the events with shallow, pious responses. In general, victims who search for deeper answers experience negative results initially, but the long-term results are significantly greater. For example, one study showed higher levels of depression, suicidal thoughts, and PTSD symptoms than victims who do not question their spirituality (Wortmann, Park, and Edmondson 2011: 443), but greater success in the long term (Wortmann, Park, and Edmondson 2011: 447). Another study analyzed a process called “meaning-making” (Currier et al. 2015: 29) placing them at risk for burnout and trauma-related problems (e.g., posttraumatic stress disorder [PTSD]), where victims find a framework to explain their traumatic experience. The study also found that those who struggle to find a religious framework take longer to report positive moods, but once they do, the moods reported are far more positive than those who never assigned a spiritual framework to their trauma (McCann and Webb 2012: 150). Therefore, these studies wrestling with God and experiencing a full range of emotions is better than bypassing those emotions for quicker, but superficial recovery.

**Analysis of Job 3**

A careful analysis of the three stanzas of Job 3 through the lens of classical rhetorical studies and modern psychological trauma theories illuminates the depth of Job’s trauma and demonstrates the early stages of his integration process.
1 After this Job opened his mouth and he cursed his day.
2 Job answered and he said:

3 May the day perish [that] I was born into;
and the night [that] he said, “a man was conceived.”

4 That day may it be darkness;
    May God not seek it from above;
    May light not shine upon it.

5 May darkness and deep darkness redeem it;
    May a cloud settle upon it;
    May the glooms of the day terrify it.

6 That night, may darkness seize it;
    May it not rejoice among the days;
    Among the number of months, may it not come.

7 Behold, that night may it be barren;
    May a cry of joy not enter it;

8 May the cursers of the day curse it;
    Those ready to rouse Leviathan.

9 May the stars of its twilight grow dark;
    May it hope for light, but there is none;
    May it not see the eyelashes of dawn.

10 Because it did not shut the doors of my womb;
    And therefore, hide trouble from my eyes.

11 Why is it not from the womb [that] I would die?
    From the belly had I come forth I could have perished.

12 Why did knees meet me?
    Why breasts that I could suckle?

13 Because if I had laid down, I would be at peace;
    I would have slept, then I would be at rest.

14 with kings and advisors of the land;
    Those who rebuild desolate places for themselves.
15. Or [I would be] with leaders who have gold;
Those who fill their houses with silver.

16. Or like a hidden miscarriage, I would not exist.
Like children who do not see light, [I would not exist].

17. There the wicked have ceased agitation;
There the weary of strength will have rest.

18. Altogether prisoners sleep;
They do not hear the voice of an oppressor.

19. Small and great are there;
The servant is free from his master.

20. Why did he give light to the laborer,
And life to the bitter of soul?

21. They are waiting for death, but it is not.
Therefore, they search for it more than hidden treasures.

22. They are joyful concerning rejoicing;
For they shall rejoice when they find the grave.

23. [Why did he give light] to the man whose path is hidden?
Therefore, God hedges around him.

24. For before my bread my groans come;
My roarings flow like water.

25. For fear I trembled, and it came to me;
That which I feared came to me.

26. I am not at ease. I am not at peace.
I am not at rest because agitation has come.

After the introductory lines in vv. 1-2, Job begins his curse of the day of his birth and night of his conception in the first stanza. This topic is introduced in v. 3, particularized in vv. 4-9, and explained in v. 10. Beginning with v. 3, we are introduced to an important word pair – יָמִין (day) and הָלָכָה (night). While some commentators quibble over the implication of the use of these two words,4 I believe this is an example of James Kugel’s notion that “A is so, and what’s more, B is so.”5 The day and night are
neither individual entities of disdain, nor do they mean the same thing. Instead we hear Job trying to effectively express the deepest agony of his soul. Kugel paraphrases it well, “my whole life is a waste! Blot out the day of my birth, in fact, go back to the very night I was conceived and destroy it (Kugel 1998: 9).”

This desire for wholesale destruction of Job’s origins, begs a further question, though. Why does Job desire the day of his birth to perish, not the day of his misfortune? Rhetorically, Job is trying to express that he is not merely saddened at the loss of his livelihood and family but is in such deep agony that he wishes he would have never been born at all. This skewed view of reality introduces us to the depth of Job’s trauma right from the start.

Verses 4-5 particularize Job’s desire to curse the day of his birth. The use of personification of the day heightens Job’s lament. For example, v. 4 describes his abstract day as something concrete to be sought and shined upon. In v. 5, Job personifies darkness as a potential redeemer of his wayward day. Furthermore, the darkness is being personified as one who terrifies, and the day is being personified as someone who can be terrorized. The rhetorical effect is that his grief does not just surround him, it lays claim to him and attacks him.

Next, Job turns in vv. 6-9 to the particularization of the curse of the night of his conception. Where Job’s day was dark in v. 4, here Job proclaims that his night is worse than dark—it is barren. The extension of darkness to barrenness is a metonymy that highlights the sadness surrounding infertility. Job sees his life as the deepest kind of darkness and wishes not to go back to his old life, but that he had never existed in the first place.

Job continues with vain requests and unfulfilled hopes. He desires the professional cursers of v. 8 to undo his conception. Of course, this is impossible as the events have already happened. In v. 9 he expresses the desire of his night to remain dark without light ever entering it. Clearly, the impossibility of Job being un-conceived is as impossible as preventing daylight from eclipsing each night. Only God could be capable of fulfilling Job’s astronomical requests and yet, strangely, that is the one person Job does not reach out to.

Verse 10 finally answers the reader’s burning question, “why?” Although we can understand that Job is sad, why does he insist on non-existence rather than just having his pain alleviated? In Job’s mind, the only way to find true respite from his condition is to have never been born. In fact, he accuses the day of his birth and the night of his conception of
having failed to protect him. This blame of inanimate objects for failing at an impossible task highlights Job’s warped view of reality. The trauma he has experienced is so profound that he cannot possibly imagine integrating it into his life narrative.

Furthermore, Job’s elevated language in this stanza gives insight into his process of wrestling with God. Joseph Dodson (2008: 41) explores the rhetorical power of figurative language and suggests metaphor is often used to deflect attention away from a difficult topic. Job gives human characteristics and expectations to the day and night, but is there an underlying metaphor at work as well? Is there a something or a someone that has failed to protect Job? Someone who Job wants to blame, but maybe is not ready to address head on? As the speeches continue, we discover that Job does blame God for not protecting him, but here, in the early stages of wrestling with reality, Job is not direct, maybe not yet comfortable to make such a bold accusation.

The second stanza continues to highlight Job’s struggle to integrate his trauma into his life. Rather than admit he is hurt or angry, Job fixates his mind on death and the ease he would have experienced had he never been born or had died right after birth. The intimate wording of vv. 11-12 should bring connotations of love and comfort that newborns receive from their parents. Instead, Job has juxtaposed these concepts with death and lament. Rather than being grateful for loving parents, Job cries out, “Why did good things have to happen to me?” This rhetorical reversal dramatically illustrates both the depth of Job’s lament and his warped view of reality.

After expressing grief that he was born, Job goes on in vv. 13-19 to idealize the rest he could have found if he had died. In fact, he believes his life is currently so awful that only death upon entry into the world could provide him with real relief. Job goes beyond describing this rest and begins to list the kinds of people he would be with—kings, leaders, the wicked, prisoners, and the like. While many commentators use the word pair כותל and טבלי in v. 19 as the lens to read the whole of the section through, I am unconvinced. First, the classification of כותל or טבלי is not always straightforward. For example, Alter (1985: 81) posits that the טבלי are listed first, but then why is a hidden miscarriage listed between rich leaders and the wicked? Furthermore, why is the servant listed after the word pair? Rather than a categorization, this word pair should be understood as a merism used to idealize death. In short, the kind of rest that death provides is such that all people—no matter their lot in life—will experience it.
Job clearly has an overly romantic view of death in this stanza. In his mind, to have never been born at all is his best possible life and he would rather throw away his many years of happiness than to continue to experience his deep agony. It is worth emphasizing again—Job does not desire death now, but to have never existed. Oddly, although the variety of people listed would find rest in death after their long lives, Job appears to not believe it is possible for himself. Only death immediately following birth could relieve his pain. This warped view of reality and fantasy life Job is playing out in this stanza again illuminate the depths of his agony and reveal his inner process of wrestling—really avoiding—reality. He would rather have never had life than to find a way to integrate this experience into his life narrative.

Job begins to make a shift, though, in the last stanza of the poem. Rather than hiding behind personifications or idealizing death, Job begins to ask real questions about God. This shift is significant for his integration process. First, Job is stepping back into reality. One way we see this shift is in the repetition of the word light (を持타) throughout the poem. In v. 9 the personified day hopes for light but finds none. In v. 16 the miscarried children are described as those who do not see the light. In each of these verses light represents life that is not actualized. In v. 20, though, light does not simply represent life but is overtly connected to it by metonymy. Further, in this statement, Job is finally admitting reality. This is a far cry from integrating his trauma into his life narrative, but he has shifted from the world of imagination and fantasy to asking tough questions about the reality he now experiences.

Second, this shift reveals that Job is wrestling with God and conventional wisdom. Proverbs 2 promises that if someone seeks after understanding as if it were a hidden treasure, they will find it. In Job 3:21, though, Job claims that when no relief is found from a bitter life, people will seek after death as if it were a hidden treasure. It could be posited that Job is claiming that wisdom matters little for a life filled with misery. These seemingly impious claims are not exclusive to Job, though, as Ecclesiastes has similar themes. This impious talk is shocking on the lips of Job, though, as his previous words were perfectly aligned with conventional wisdom. For example, after Job received the news that everything he had was gone, his response in 1:21 was, “The Lord gives, and the Lord takes. Let the name of the Lord be blessed.” Likewise, after being struck with horrible boils, he said in 2:10, “Must we only take good from God and not take the bad?”
Even in his deep laments in the first two stanzas of the poem, Job avoids directly blaming God or questioning his plan. Here, though, Job is finally willing to voice his deepest concerns. Piety is no longer more important that finding the truth. Job is taking a step into the ring to really begin his wrestling match with God.

Verse 24 brings another important shift in Job’s integration process. In the first two stanzas the use of first person was only in reference to the past or in a fantasy, but in vv. 24-26 Job openly admits his present reality. He confesses that his complaints spew forth with no real direction, that he is surrounded by fear, and that he can find no peace in the agitation. With no clear recipient, his complaints avoid blaming God, but also leave behind the fantasy world of the second stanza. His last line is significant because it echoes v. 13. There, Job believed that only in non-existence could he find peace (שֶׁשָּׁם), sleep (שָׁשֵׁשׁ), and rest (שָׁמָע). Here, Job admits that he is not at ease (שֶׁשָּׁם), not at peace (שָׁשֵׁשׁ), and not at rest (שָׁמָע). By admitting where he really is—rather than dreaming about where he wants to be—Job is stepping back into reality, which is essential to integrating his trauma into his life narrative.

This shift is encouraging for the reader. Through honest inner dialogue, Job finds words to begin accepting the reality of his trauma. Hope and integration seem just around the corner for Job – and his example can be a roadmap for the sufferers among us. In fact, in the overarching rhetoric of the book, the honesty of the introduction allows the reader to empathize with Job in a way the friends cannot. We know that Job is innocent and did not deserve his plight. We are invited to sit next to Job with our deepest grief and allow his harrowing lament speak words we are unable to articulate ourselves. The first speech of Job becomes a safe space to process grief and begin the process of integration. Sadly, we know that Job’s friends do not create a safe space for Job to continue processing his trauma. But for a moment the eyelashes of dawn appear on the horizon to bring a ray of light to the darkest soul.

Conclusion

Through the lens of rhetoric and trauma studies, I have tried to illuminate key themes and topics in each stanza of Job 3 that can help the modern reader better understand the intended effect of the poem. In the first stanza (vv. 3-9), Job cloaks his mistrust in the personification of the day of his birth and night of his conception. Rhetorically, Job is both attempting to put words to his deep anguish and avoiding facing his reality.
The audience begins to understand how the traumatic events of chapters 1-2 are really affecting Job. Rather than working through his grief, though, Job places unrealistic expectations on inanimate objects and insists that non-existence is his only relief.

Job continues these themes in the second stanza where his desire for non-existence becomes an elaborate fantasy about how wonderful his life would have been had he never been born. Rhetorically, Job is not criticizing those who are well-off in the world, but rather emphasizing that everyone—small or great—finds rest in death. Ironically, Job does not suggest death now would be his relief, but only death at birth. This romanticizing of death and non-existence only heightens the fact that Job is not yet willing to wrestle with his reality.

This changes though, in the final stanza (vv. 20-26). While Job is not yet willing to fully admit his circumstances or integrate them into his life narrative, he makes strides in that direction. First, his probing questions in vv. 20-23 imply an admittance of reality. Like the author of Ecclesiastes, Job admits that the world is not fair and asks why. Against conventional wisdom, Job is willing to wrestle with God. Second, the switch to the first person in vv. 24-26 further reveal Job’s shift in mindset. In the beginning of the poem Job distrusted everyone and hid his pain behind the personified day and night, but here, in the last stanza, he begins to look at his reality more directly even if he cannot yet directly blame God for his situation. The tone of the last stanza indicates that his distrust and pessimism towards God are just below the surface and his admission of reality is a step toward direct confrontation with God.

These subtle allegations are not missed by the friends who interrupt Job’s lament to bring a full attack in the following chapters on Job’s lack of piety. Unfortunately, the friends miss Job’s deep emotional plea and are seemingly ill-equipped to help Job process his trauma. They offer intellectual solutions that sound good but fall flat on Job’s grief-stricken ears. It is only after his face-to-face meeting with God that his understanding of suffering is realigned and he finds rest for his soul.11

Sadly, the Church often follows the path of the friends—a path that leads to frustration, blame, and broken relationships. How would the book of Job been different if the friends had been what modern researchers call “trauma-informed?” (Bath 2008) which has, in turn, led to a focus on the treatment of trauma-related conditions. Much of the recent literature describes different approaches to therapy. However, there are a few
consistent propositions arising from the research and clinical literature which suggest that much of the healing from trauma can take place in non-clinical settings. There is some evidence to suggest that trauma-informed living environments in which healing and growth can take place are a necessary precursor to any formal therapy that might be offered to a traumatised child. It stands to reason that the treatment of children exposed to complex trauma will itself be complex and long-lasting. However, there appears to be a remarkable consensus about the key prerequisites for healing—those critical factors or therapeutic pillars that need to be in place if healing is to take place. Although there is debate about the number of critical factors, there are three that are common to most approaches. This article outlines the three pillars of trauma-informed care: (1) What if they had realized that integrating the traumatic event into one’s life narrative was essential for moving forward? What if they knew distancing yourself from reality and wrestling with God were helpful steps in that process? Fortunately, the Church has access to this knowledge. Through careful integration of modern trauma research into biblical narratives such as the book of Job, the Church can find a better path—one that offers intellectually honest answers to the problem of evil and spiritually whole responses to the sufferers among us.

End Notes

1 Most scholars researching the intersection of trauma studies and the Bible work in the world of literary criticism—focusing on the story as created by the author for a specific purpose. While an insightful endeavor, I find this approach misses the nuances of how the individual characters (real or presented) experience and process trauma. Therefore, I will follow the path of psychological trauma research as laid out by Christopher Frechette and Elizabeth Boase in the introduction of *The Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*. They state that “within the field of psychology, the study of trauma focuses on the range of responses evoked by an experience perceived to pose an extreme threat and that overwhelms an individual’s ordinary means of coping” (Boase and Frechette 2017: 4). Clearly, these experiences and responses are recorded for us as literary material, but my focus will not be the way trauma is encoded in the text for a specific audience, but in Job, the individual as recorded in the literature.

2 O’Connor (2011: 3) is not a trauma specialist, but I have found her research to be extensive and in line with other sources I have found. Therefore, I will rely on her general explanations of trauma that are cast in the context of biblical studies.
PTSD symptoms include three categories: reexperiencing (nightmares, flashbacks), emotional numbness, and hyperarousal. See Catherall (2004: 264).

Clines, for example, insists that day be a 24-hour period, but night is just a night (Clines 1989: 17:81), while Hartley explores the magical quality of these two events that both represent his origin (Hartley 1988: 92) Berlin notes the contrast between the definite הַיָּמִים and indefiniteпот, but I do not think much can be made of this considering there is only one possible day Job was born into (Berlin 1985: 51).

See Kugel (1998: 8), see also Alter (1985: 78).

See Longman (2012); Hartley (1988); Clines (1989); and Balentine (2006).

The knees could either refer to lap or be related to blessing (ברא) a newborn child based on Gen 48:12 and 50:23 (Longman 2012: 103). The adoption language is associated with knees and suggests the reference points to acceptance and concern for the newborn child by mother or father (Stade 1886: 143–65).

See Eccl 4:3 and 7:1.

See v. 3, 10.

See v. 11, 12, 13, 16.

These conclusions are largely based on the work of Matitiahu Tsevat (1966) and Michael Peterson (2016a).

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_Prophetic Peace in the Epistle to the Romans: Intertextuality, Isaianic Discourse, and Romans 14:17_

Abstract:

Interpreters of Romans have not recognized the Isaianic character of Paul’s description of the kingdom in Rom 14:17. Therefore, in this paper I demonstrate that there is an intertextual relationship between multiple Isaianic texts and Rom 14:17. First, I identify key texts in Isaiah that depict kings or kingdoms and share terms found in Romans: righteousness, peace, joy, good, and spirit. Second, I conclude by rereading Romans 14:17 in dialogue with Isaianic kingdom texts. This reading reveals that Romans presents the kingdom of God—and the church community—as the fulfillment of Isaiah’s eschatological hope for peace.

Keywords: Romans, Isaiah, intertextuality, peace, kingdom of God

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Introduction

It is safe to say that Paul’s epistle to the Romans is one of the most contested documents in the New Testament, especially since the Protestant reformation. In recent decades, interpreters have investigated the use and influence of scripture in Paul’s epistles. Consequently, interest has arisen in the multitude of scriptural citations, allusions, and echoes in Romans. Although citations and allusions pervade the entire letter, interpreters have been drawn to Rom 9–11, likely due to the sheer density of citations. Isaiah has taken a central position in the discussion because it is cited by name five times, quoted numerous times, and Isaianic allusions and echoes permeate Romans. Moreover, multiple scholars have noted that the New Testament’s theology concerning the gospel and the kingdom of God is intimately connected to Isaiah’s eschatological hope, and this connection between the gospel and Isaiah is often identified in Romans. Lastly, in recent years interpreters of Romans have noticed the prominence of peace language in contrast to the other Pauline Epistles, and this has spurred numerous investigations.

However, interpreters have overlooked the intimate connection between peace and Isaiah in Romans, and interpretations of Rom 14:17 have not recognized the Isaianic character of Paul’s description of the kingdom. Therefore, in this paper I demonstrate that there is an intertextual relationship between multiple texts of Isaiah and the description of the kingdom of God in Rom 14:17. Paul’s statement, “The kingdom of God is … righteousness, peace, and joy in the holy spirit,” is not a uniquely Pauline description, but it is characteristic of multiple Isaianic kingdom discourses. In order to demonstrate this relationship, first, I identify key texts in Isaiah that depict kings or kingdoms, and I indicate that these texts also mention key terms found in Romans: righteousness, peace, joy, good, and the Spirit. Second, I conclude by rereading Romans 14:17 in dialogue with Isaianic kingdom texts. This reading reveals that Romans presents the kingdom of God—and the church community—as the fulfillment of Isaiah’s eschatological hope for peace.

Isaiah’s Kingdom of Peace and Righteousness

Isaiah is a massive work, and there is no way to cover every text that depicts a king or a kingdom. However, in the following section I demonstrate that peace and righteousness are primary themes in LXX
Isaiah’s kingdom discourses. Secondarily, good, joy, hope, and Spirit also appear regularly in kingdom discourses.

Isaiah begins with indictment. The people of God are laden with corruption and iniquity. The prophet writes, “Woe, sinful nation, people weighed down with iniquity, offspring who do evil, children who deal destruction” (Isa 1:4). Later, after the song of the vineyard, Isaiah explains God’s disdain for the vineyard; “he hoped for justice, and behold there was bloodshed; he hoped for righteousness, and behold there was a cry!” (Isa 5:7). Clearly, the prophet Isaiah had a problem with the people of God—they were unjust, violent, and corrupt.

Isaiah offers a solution to this quandary in Isa 7, 9, and 11 by envisioning a king who will lead God’s people to redemption. Beginning in 7, the prophet explains that a king will be born who does good, not evil; “a virgin will conceive in the womb, and she will birth a son, and you will name him Emmanuel. … before he knows to prefer evil he will choose good (ἁγαθόν). For before the child knows good (ἁγαθόν) or evil, he refuses evil, to choose good (ἁγαθόν)” (LXX Isa 7:14–16). Although this prophetic utterance may have been about Hezekiah in its initial telling, the depiction of a royal child becomes more phantasmagorical and eschatological in Isa 9 and 11.

For a child was born to us, and a son was given to us, whose government was upon his shoulder: and his name is called the Messenger of great counsel: for I myself will bring peace (ἵππην) upon the rulers (ἁγιοντας), and health to him. His rule (ἄρχη) is great, and of his peace (ἵππης) there is no limit upon the throne of David, and his kingdom (βασιλείας), establish it and support it in righteousness (δικαιοσύνην) and in judgment, from now and forever. (LXX Isa 9:5–6; emphasis added)

This royal child does not just choose good over evil, but he brings peace to rulers, rules his kingdom in peace, and establishes righteousness forever. Then in Isa 11:1–5 the promised ruler is depicted as Spirit empowered and the paragon of righteousness. Ultimately, the plight of Israel’s corruption is prophetically placated by divine intervention. God anoints a new Davidic king with the Spirit, and that ruler will lead God’s people to peace, righteousness, and goodness. Ben Witherington concludes, “in Isaiah 7, and even more in Isaiah 9, and finally very clearly in Isaiah 11 our prophet speaks not only of the near horizon but of the more distant one where
an ideal or eschatological ruler with divine attributes and even the very character of God will come and set things right once and for all” (2017: 180).

In a similar manner, Isa 32 hopes for a kingdom where there is a righteous king. “For behold, a righteous king will reign (βασιλεύς δίκαιος βασιλέως), and rulers will rule with judgment” (LXX Isa 32:1). Yet, for the time being, society is still doomed; “the positive promise for the future leaves no doubt that in the present Judah has a problem” (Goldingay 2012: 180). This is most exemplified in 32:7, “For the counsel of the wicked will deliberate as a lawless counsel, in order to destroy the poor with unjust (ἀδίκοις) words and ruin the cause of the poor in judgement.” The leaders in Israel show little concern for the poor and the needy, and they govern with injustice rather than justice. Yet, Isaiah is not without hope and the discourse changes. God’s people are destined for destruction but there is still hope.

Daughters listen to my words with hope (ἐλπίδα) ... the families have left the rich city; they will abandon the desirable houses; ... until the Spirit (πνεῦμα) from upon high shall come upon you all ... and righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) will dwell in Carmel, and the works of righteousness will be peace (ἐσται τὰ ἔργα τῆς δικαιοσύνης ἐρήμη), and righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) will ensure relief, by believing (πιστευοντες) for eternity; and his people will dwell in a city of peace (ἐρήμης), they will dwell by believing (πιστευοντες).” (LXX Isa 32:9, 14–18; emphasis added)

The prophetic hope of Isaiah is a kingdom where the Spirit of God is poured out upon the people, and righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) and peace (ἐρήμη) reign (Goldingay 2012: 182). Interestingly, although Isa 7, 9, and 11 highlight different kingly characteristics, ch. 32 disperses those kingly characteristics throughout the kingdom. Therefore, Isaiah’s hope is not just for a righteous and peaceful ruler, it is also for a righteous and peaceful kingdom populated by righteous and peaceful people.

This hope does not disappear, and it arises again in Isa 59–60. The prophet asks in 59:1, “Is the hand of the Lord not strong enough to save? Or has he made his ear heavy, so that he should not hear?” The prophet responds with more indictment, and “focuses on the depth and extent of their depravity” (Harman 2011: 442). “Your sins separated you and God, ... your hands have been defiled with blood and your fingers with sins,
and your lips speak lawlessness, and your tongue practices unrighteousness (ἀδικίαν). No one speaks justice (δίκαια) ... they believe (πεποίησαν) in emptiness and they speak vanity” (59:2–4). Then in 59:8–9 the prophetic indictment increases, “they did not know the way of peace (οὐκ ἑδόσαν εἰρήνην) ... they did not know peace (οὐκ ἑδόσαν εἰρήνην). Because of this, judgment was withdrawn from them, and righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) did not reach them; while they waited for light, darkness came to them, waiting for day break, in darkness they walked.” The prophet depicts a bleak reality, one where God’s people are waiting for justice, but their own injustices have isolated them from their redeemer. Yet, similar to 32, the text turns positive.

The deliverer will come for the sake of Zion, and he will turn away the impiety of Jacob. And this is my covenant with them, says the Lord; my spirit (πνεῦμα), which is upon you, and the words, which I gave into your mouth, shall not fail your mouth and from the mouths of your descendants, for the Lord has spoken, from now and forever. Shine, shine, O Jerusalem, for your light is present, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. Behold, darkness will cover the earth ... but the Lord shall appear upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And kings (βασιλεῖς) will live in your light, and nations in your brightness. (Isa 59:20–60:3; emphasis added)

Isaiah envisions a time when God redeems Israel and God’s Spirit rests upon them, so much so that foreign kings live in their new found light. The presence of God and the anointing of the Spirit results in a new kingdom full of righteousness and peace from top to bottom.

I will bestow your rulers (ἄρχοντάς) in peace (ἐν εἰρήνῃ) and your overseers (ἐπισκόπους) in righteousness (ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ); and they will never again obey unrighteousness (ἀδικία) in your land, nor destruction nor misery in your boarders, but your walls will be called salvation, ... and all your people are righteous (ὁ λαός σου πάς δίκαιος). (Isa 60:17–18, 21; emphasis added)

Isaiah 59 and 60 depict a kingdom that is helplessly unjust and violent until God intervenes. Kings, rulers, and all the people of Israel are turned peaceful and righteous at the arrival of God and the pouring out of the Spirit.
More passages in Isaiah pair peace and righteousness, but I highlight those above because they demonstrate that Isaiah has a pattern and a vocabulary for discussing kingdoms. Isaiah begins with indictment, then God sends a leader who is empowered by the Spirit, or the Spirit is sent to empower the people. This divine intervention leads to redemption and restoration, not just for unrighteous rulers, but also for unrighteous people. The result of this transformation is radical peace, righteousness, justice, goodness, joy, and renewed hope.

Romans 14:17 in Intertextual Dialogue with Isaiah

The Isaianic texts delineated above indicate that Isaiah has a consistent “socially charged” discourse (Bakhtin 1981: 291)—or a consistent “ideologeme” (Kristeva: 1980: 31)—when discussing a renewed and restored kingdom. Investigating intertextuality is not just about a sharing of signs (lexical similarity), it is also about a sharing of discourses. Therefore, if Romans shares with Isaiah similar topics, patterns, and vocabulary, then the two can be read together intertextually.

The literary structure of Romans begins by stating its author and its dialogue partners. Romans 1:1–2 states, “Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, called an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which was promised beforehand through the prophets.” Romans begins by placing Paul’s discourse in dialogue with, potentially, many prophetic discourses outside of the text. However, the literary structure of Romans offers interpreters clues to which prophetic texts are important for understanding Romans. Isaiah is cited by name five times, and the NA 28 notes an astounding 19 quotations of Isaiah throughout Romans. Thus, Isaiah plays an important role in Romans, and Isaiah is the most pronounced dialogue partner.

Paul’s first large block quotation in Rom 3:10–18 pulls from Isaiah. Paul places Ecclesiastes, Psalms, and Isaiah together to explain that “all are under sin” (Rom 3:9). The catena begins with Eccl 7:20, “a righteous/just (δικαιός) person does not exist, not even one,” and then it sandwiches Isa 59:7–8 between two Psalm citations; the words chosen from Isaiah in Rom 3:15–17 are, “their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their ways, and they did not know the way of peace (εἰρήνης).”

The scriptural catena in Rom 3 is paradigmatic for how peace is presented throughout Romans. With the exception of Paul’s greeting, every time peace is mentioned righteousness/justice is also mentioned. Romans 2:10 states, “Glory, honor, and peace (εἰρήνη) to all who does
good.” This statement is in a pericope concerning “God’s righteous judgment (δικαιοκρισίας)” (2:5), and it is followed by 2:13, “For the ones who hear the law are not righteous (δικαιοί) in God’s sight, but the ones who do the law will be made righteous (δικαιώθησονται).” Romans 5:1 states, “Therefore, since we are made righteous by faith (Δικαιοθέντες), we have peace (εἰρήνη) with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Romans 8:6, “The mind of the Spirit is life and peace (εἰρήνη).” Then 8:10 explains, “the Spirit is life because of righteousness (διὰ δικαιοσύνην).” Rom 12:18–19 exhorts, “live peacefully (εἰρηνεύοντες) with all people. Never procure-retributive-justice (ἐκδικοῦντες) for yourselves, … for it is written, ‘I myself will repay retributive-justice’ (ἐκδίκησις) says the Lord.” Finally, Romans 14:17 and 19, “The kingdom of God is … righteousness (δικαιοσύνη), peace (εἰρήνη), and joy in the holy Spirit. … Therefore then, let us pursue the things of peace (εἰρήνης).”

The appearance of kingdom, righteousness, peace, good, joy, and the Spirit in Isaiah and Romans validates this paper’s argument—the two works share a “socially charged” discourse, or “ideologeme.” Romans repeatedly pairs peace with righteousness because Isaiah does the same. Moreover, in the contexts where peace is mentioned, goodness, joy, and the Spirit also regularly occur. Therefore, it is necessary to reconsider Rom 14:17 and its surrounding context in dialogue with Isaiah’s key kingdom texts.

There is no one kingdom text in Isaiah that perfectly holds all the terms from Rom 14:17, but there are many texts that share the topic and some of the terminology. Interpreters have often noted the similarities between Rom 14:17 and 5:1–5. Interestingly, the NA 28 and Michael J. Gorman note an allusion to Isa 32:17, “the works of righteousness (δικαιοσύνης) will be peace (εἰρήνη),” in Rom 5:1, “since we are made righteous (δικαιωθέντες) by faith we have peace (εἰρήνη) with God” (2013: 234). Multiple reasons indicate that Rom 14:17, like 5:1, is an allusion to Isa 32. First, both texts describe a kingdom (Isa 32:1 and Rom 14:17); second, both pair righteousness and peace (Isa 32:17–18; Rom 14:17); and third, both mention the Spirit (Isa 32:14; Rom 14:17). Furthermore, if one extends beyond 14:17 and into the surrounding context, there is more evidence that Rom 14 alludes to Isa 32. In Isa 32:17 the righteous are described as “believing (πεποιθοῦσι) for eternity/an age,” and 32:18 repeats, “they will dwell by believing (πεποιθῶς).” Interestingly, in Rom 14:14, Paul uses the same verb (πείθομαι) in the perfect like Isa 32:17 and 18. “I know and I have
been persuaded (πέπισμα) by the Lord” (Rom 14:14). Reading Rom 14 and Isa 32 in dialogue reveals that the peaceful, eschatological kingdom that Isaiah hoped for is presented as a reality in Romans. The people of God, in Christ, represent a peaceful kingdom where God’s Spirit reigns and the ripples of righteousness and peace permeate the population. Perhaps, Paul understands that he is now participating in this eschatological “believing” (πεπιστεύω) community and he has been “persuaded” (πέπισμα). The people of the kingdom in Isaiah live in righteousness and peace and believe in the Lord, and Paul does the same.  

15 Isaiah 59–60 is one of the most extensive discourses on the peaceful and righteous kingdom. There is a direct quotation from Isa 59:7–8 in Rom 3:15–17. Therefore, it is also possible that Rom 14:17 and the surrounding context alludes to Isa 59–60 because it has already been cited in Romans. Both texts describe kingdoms (Isa 59:20–60:3; Rom 14:17), and both texts emphasize righteousness, peace, and the Spirit (Isa 59:21; 60:17–18, 21; Rom 14:17). Furthermore, in Isa 59 after mentioning those who “do not know the way of peace,” the prophet explains, “in darkness they walked (περιπατήσαν)” (59:9). “Walk” (περιπατέω) is a rare term in in LXX Isaiah, only appearing in chapters 59 and 8, but “walk” also appears in Rom 14:15. “For if your brother is grieved because of food, then you are not walking (περιπατεῖ) according to love.” Additionally, “walk” also appears in 13:12–13, “Therefore, let us put off the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light. As in the day, let us walk (περιπατήσωμεν) honorably.” Although “walk” is not a rare word in Pauline literature, the reversal of walking in darkness from Isa 59:9 to walking in the day in Rom 13:13 is striking. Furthermore, in 14:1 Paul writes, “Welcome those who are weak in faith not for the purpose of disputes of opinions (διαλογίσμων).” This term for “opinion” (διαλογισμός) is only used five times in Pauline literature, and it only occurs in LXX Isaiah in 59:7—but it is used twice. 16 “Their swift feet run to wickedness to shed blood; and their opinions are the opinions of fools (οἱ διαλογισμοὶ ἁτῶν διαλογισμοὶ ἡφόνων), destruction and misery are in their ways.” Notice, when Paul cites Isaiah in Rom 3:15–17, the phrase “their opinions are the opinions of fools” is omitted, but Paul uses this emphatically repeated term later in Rom 14:1. Reading Rom 13–14 in dialogue with Isa 59–60 reveals that Paul wanted the Christian community to be the kingdom depicted in Isaiah—where the Spirit of God rested upon God’s people, and they knew the ways of righteousness and peace. However, the quarrels over eating certain foods and observing certain days threatened
the peace. If the community quarreled over “opinions” (διαλογισμός), they were at risk of turning away from God’s light and wandering back into darkness. “It is a real political and social peace that Christ enables and, moreover, demands of those who truly belong to His kingdom. This cannot be a one-sided peace, favouring one group over another” (Campbell 2008: 25). Therefore, when Rom 14 is read in dialogue with Isa 59–60, it becomes a text that is appealing to kingdom ethics—an ethic of peace not violent division.

**Conclusion: the Eschatological Kingdom of Peace**

Although scholars in recent decades have interpreted Rom 14:17 in terms of Paul’s eschatology and his ethics, the connection between peace, righteousness, and Isaiah’s kingdom discourses has been overlooked. In this paper I revealed that there is a larger socially charged discourse that explains Paul’s articulation of the kingdom. “The kingdom of God … is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit” because the eschatological hope of Isaiah was a reality in Paul’s present. In Paul’s believing communities, people are made righteous through the work of Christ and the power of the Spirit. The result of this transformation is a community founded on peace—those who are righteous, or justified, are peacemakers.

Craig Evans has noticed the connection between Jesus’s ministry and Isaiah’s kingdom, but he has overlooked this in Romans. Moreover, Evans does not recognize the importance of peace to the kingdom in Isaiah. He writes, “The principal elements of Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom are present in Second Isaiah … the demand for repentance, and the summons to faith are all rooted in the language and vision of Second Isaiah” (1997: 672–73). Evans is correct that repentance and faith are essential to the kingdom, but this study has also demonstrated that peace is essential to Isaiah’s kingdom and to the Gospel. Moreover, Evans is quick to conclude that Isa 52:7 is the foundation of Paul’s understanding of the gospel, but he overlooks that peace is essential to the gospel in 52:7: “one who proclaims the good news of peace (εὐαγγελισμόνος ἀκοῇ εἰρήνης), … I shall make your salvation heard, saying, oh Zion, your God will reign (Βασιλεύσει σου ὁ θεός)” (1997: 689–90). In a similar manner, Ross Wagner writes, “Paul finds in Isaiah a fellow preacher of the gospel, the message that reveals God’s righteousness for all who believe, for the Jew and also for the Greek” (2002: 356). Although Evans and Wagner are correct that Isaiah is integral to Paul’s articulation of the gospel, they overlook the centrality of
Isaiah’s kingdom of peace. Wagner even emphasizes righteousness, but he misses the connection of peace and righteousness in Isaiah and Romans.

Isaiah’s kingdom discourses explain the union of the kingdom, gospel, righteousness, and peace in Rom 14:17 and many other texts in the NT (Luke 1:79; Acts 10:35–36; 2 Pet 3:13–14; Jas 3:18; Heb 12:13). More work is needed in Luke, Acts, the General Epistles, and Hebrews in order to demonstrate whether it is appropriate to read these texts in dialogue with Isaiah. Yet, at the moment, it seems that Romans is not unique. Peace and righteousness are essential to the gospel and the kingdom of God.

In conclusion, Romans 14 imagines a community where God has replaced division and violence with righteousness and peace through the Holy Spirit. The church then, and today, must not only be made righteous, but it must also be made peaceful. The kingdom of God requires that Christians be peacemakers. “Pursuing the kingdom of peace is a call to work for peace. … Christians are called to become actively involved in the transformation of the world. They not only wait but also work for that kingdom” (Simmons 1982: 603). This call to work for peace is not passive, it is active. Peace in God’s kingdom is creative, productive, and transformative. When Christians pray, “may your kingdom come and will be done,” they are praying for peace, and they are praying for the power to make peace.

End Notes


This is not to say that no scholars have recognized the importance of peace in Pauline Literature. Swartley, *Covenant of Peace*, offers a comprehensive treatment of the theology of peace in the NT (2006), and Michael J. Gorman writes, “There are, of course, exceptions, according to Swartley: The New Testament ethics of Wolfgang Schrage, Allen Verhey, and Richard Hays, and J. Christiaan Beker’s theology of Paul for example” (2013: 221).

All New Testament quotations are my own translation.

Both Isa 1:4 and 5:7 are my translation of the Hebrew text.

From this point forward, every reference to Isaiah is exclusively referring to LXX Isaiah, and the translation is my own.

There are more passages to consider in Isaiah that pair righteousness and peace: Isa 7:14–16; 9:5–6; 11:1–5; 26:1–5, 9–14; 33:5–8; 41:1–3; 48:14–19; 54:10–14; 57:1–2.

Mikhail Bakhtin explains “socially charged discourse” as “each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intention. Contextual overtones (generic, tendentious, individualistic) are inevitable in words” (1981: 293). Julia Kristeva, explains ideologeme as “The concept of text as ideologeme determines the very procedure of a semiotics that, by studying the text as intertextuality, considers it as such within (the text of) society and history” (1980: 37).

The translated terms righteousness, righteous, justice and just are discussed interchangeably in this paper because they represent the Greek word family ἰς - e.g. ἰς, ἰς, ἰς, etc.

There may be more intertextual echoes; Isa 32:11 uses πιθω and λυπέω, and Rom 14:15 also uses λυπέω, but space does not permit an explanation of this relationship.

Διαλογισμός: Rom 1:21; 14:1; 1 Cor 3:20; Phil 2:14; 1 Tim 2:8.

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*Women on the Outside Looking In: Rahab and Ruth as Foreign Converts to the People of God*

**Abstract:**
How does an outsider become an insider? This is a question that emerges from considering both the modern immigrant situation and the unique situation of non-Israelite women becoming part of the people of God in the Old Testament. The usual pattern in the Old Testament is to be born into the people of Israel, but for men there is the possibility to become part of the covenantal people through the physical act of circumcision. In this patriarchal society, women usually had no choice but to follow the decisions of their husbands. But what if there was no husband? The Bible tends to take a particularly harsh view on Israelite men marrying non-Israelite women, so even marriage does not seem to be an acceptable pathway for unmarried or widowed women. But two significant women in the Old Testament do successfully navigate the transition from outsider to insider, Rahab and Ruth. This article explores what this means for understanding conversion within the Old Testament context as well as its potential theological implication for the immigrant community in today’s world. Understanding the importance of a person’s allegiance to YHWH as well as following up this allegiance through actions of loving-kindness (*hesed*) are the key similarities which bind these two women together and help create a theological bridge for immigrants in our modern context.

**Keywords:** Ruth, Rahab, women, conversion, immigration, people of God

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Introduction

How does an outsider become an insider? This is a question that frequently confronts me as an immigrant in a foreign country. When your skin color and accent set you apart, you are almost always seen as an outsider, even after living for 20 years in your current context. This question also emerges at times in the Old Testament. The usual pattern is for one to be born into the people of Israel, but for men there is the possibility to become part of the covenantal people through the physical act of circumcision. In this patriarchal society, women usually had no choice but to follow the decisions of their husbands. But what if there was no husband? The Bible tends to take a particularly harsh view on Israelite men marrying non-Israelite women, so even marriage does not seem to be an acceptable pathway for unmarried or widowed women. But there are two significant women in the Old Testament who successfully navigate the transition from outsider to insider, and become not just members of the people of God, but essential parts of the history of God’s salvation plan as ancestors of both King David as well as Jesus in the New Testament. The question this raises for me is how does this happen and what is the implication for the immigrant community?

In addition, the issue of conversion is one that has been an important point for evangelical theology for a long time. How does one become a Christian? Most of this is theologically rooted in New Testament scriptures, but is often overlooked in a theological study of the Old Testament. The only real equivalent for looking at the issue of New Testament conversion is to examine this issue of how people outside the people of Israel became part of the people of God. The same stories of Rahab and Ruth, which answer the first question, help us understand the nature of conversion as well as how women without husbands might have been able to transition from outsiders to insiders in the Old Testament context.

Male Circumcision as a Pathway to the People of God

In Genesis 17, God establishes the covenant between God and Abraham and his descendants. Verse seven emphasizes that this will be an “everlasting” covenant for generations. This covenant will include the land of Canaan as well as the act of male circumcision. In verse ten, it is clear that every male must be circumcised to be part of the covenant, and verse twelve makes provision that those bought from foreigners are also to be circumcised. Finally verse fourteen warns that any male who is not
circumcised will be cut off from the covenant. Verses 23-27 indicated that Abraham, Ishmael, and all the men in his household, born or bought, were circumcised that very day.

In Exodus 12, the crucial ritual meal of the Passover is established. In this chapter, Moses instructs the people on the future celebration of this meal, and he notes in verse 48, “A foreigner residing among you who wants to celebrate the LORD’s Passover must have all the males of his household circumcised; then he may take part like one born in the land.” (NIV). This allows for men outside of the Israelite community to become part of the people of God through the physical act of circumcision—aligning themselves and submitting to the covenant of Abraham.

In Joshua, chapter five, Joshua commands the Israelites to be circumcised before the conquest of Canaan. For some reason, the practice seems to have been abandoned in the wilderness, but now the covenant is to be renewed. Joshua often appears in the book as a type of “new Moses” for the people, so the renewal of the covenant at Gilgal (Joshua 5:2-12) should not be surprising. When the covenant is renewed at Mount Ebal in chapter eight, it is clear that foreigners are included among the people of God. Verse 33 notes that, “Both the foreigners living among them and the native-born were there” for the reading of the Book of the Law.

But while foreign men have a way to join the Israelite people through circumcision, such a possibility is denied to women, even through marriage. The prohibitions against Israelite men marrying foreign women is made clear in the story of Dinah in Genesis 34 and Deuteronomy 7:3-4, “Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your children away from following me to serve other gods, and the LORD’s anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you.” The same prohibitions are repeated by Joshua in Joshua 23:12-13. Other passages repeat this concern including 1 Kings 11:2 and Ezra 9:14. Nevertheless, two women in scripture do enter the people of God as foreigners during the early period of Israel’s history, and they are not insignificant. Nor are these two women unconnected. Matthew 1:5 connects Rahab as the mother of Boaz, who would marry Ruth, the grandmother of King David, and ultimately become ancestors of Jesus.¹
The story of Rahab in Joshua chapters two and six is an interesting exception to much of the conquest literature. Rahab is first shown as a prostitute in the city of Jericho, where she encounters the two spies sent by Joshua to study the city for conquest. She successfully hides the two spies and redirects those sent by the King of Jericho in search of the spies. Before letting the spies go, she gives an interesting speech in verses 9-13 of chapter two,

I know that the LORD has given you this land and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. When we heard of it our hearts melted in fear and everyone’s courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.

Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness (hesed יְהֵסד) to you. Give me a sure sign that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them- and that you will save us from death. (NIV)

The spies leave after swearing an oath and telling her to bring everyone into her house and hang a scarlet cord outside the window as a sign, and they would be spared. In Joshua 6:17, 22-23, 25, Rahab and her family are spared, with verse 25 noting, “But Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, because she hid the men Joshua had sent as spies to Jericho- and she lives among the Israelites to this day.” Ruth 4:18-22, which outlines the genealogy of David notes that Salmon, the father of Boaz (who is her husband according to Matthew 1:5: See footnote 1) is an Israelite going back to Perez, one of the sons of Judah. This marriage solidifies Rahab as an insider and one of the people of God.

Moberly (2013: 71) discusses how Rahab is compared with Achan in Joshua. Rahab as the ultimate outsider- a Canaanite woman and a prostitute who becomes an insider, while Achan, an insider with a pedigree becomes the ultimate outsider, as he and his entire family are stoned for disobedience. In the same way, Moberly points out how Rahab shows the quality of hesed יְהֵסד (steadfast love or kindness) and because of her words
and actions, “she is exempted from herem בֵּית, despite the lack of exemption clauses in Deuteronomy, and enabled (with her family) to become part of Israel.”

Ruth: The Moabite Who Became One of the People of God

In the book of Ruth, we see another exceptional case of a woman who becomes part of the people of God. Naomi and her husband, Elimelek had gone into the land of Moab with their sons, Mahlon and Kilion, and both of them married women of Moab, Orpah and Ruth. When her sons and husband die, Naomi decides to return to her own people. In Ruth 1:8, Naomi releases both Orpah and Ruth from their obligations to her and praises them for their kindness (hesed יְסֵד), but encourages them to go home to their families and remarry. The two young women at first refuse, but Naomi lays out the reality that she will have no more children to provide as husbands. Orpah finally leaves, but Ruth still stays. Naomi again tries to get Ruth to leave her, but Ruth responds in Ruth 1:16-17,

Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me. (NIV)

Ruth continues to show her faithfulness in supporting Naomi while gleaning the fields of Boaz, a close relative of Naomi. Ultimately, Boaz becomes the ideal kinsman-redeemer and redeems the rights to the land of Naomi’s family and thus the right to marry Ruth, who becomes the grandmother of the future King David. When Boaz redeems his rights to Ruth, the elders say in Ruth 4:11-12, “We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the family of Israel. May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. Through the offspring the LORD gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.” Once again, a foreign woman enters the people of God, which is solidified by her marriage to one of the people of God.

While most commentaries focus on the themes of kindness (hesed יְסֵד), loyalty, protecting the weak in society, and the book’s support for
Davidic kingship, some point out other possible uses of the book. Fleenor and Ziese (2008: 320) note the possible implications of the book as protest,

As literature of protest, it is argued that the text contains a message directed to those seeking to narrowly define the “people of God.” As such, the text deliberately undermines (or subverts) a so-called “purity position” seeking to expel “good” aliens (like Ruth) from the Jewish community. A variation of this view considers the message of the book to be an encouragement directed toward the gentile wives of Jewish husbands. In this, Ruth is the poster child: a model proselyte for all foreigners to imitate.

Only some writers tend to develop the outsider nature of Ruth in this story, even though the text itself refers to Ruth as the “Moabite” specifically in a number of places (Ruth 1:22, 2:2, 2:21, 4:5, and 4:10), highlighting her status as a stranger or outsider in the community. In this sense, identity also becomes a theme, as Matthews (2004: 207) writes, “Ruth, who has become a liminal or socially undefined figure by her decisions and actions, must establish a new identity within a strange community. In essence, she must ‘find her place.’ Both physically and socially, in Bethlehem.”

The Conversion of Rahab and Ruth

There are a number of similarities in the stories of Rahab and Ruth, although on the surface they are very different kinds of women. Rahab is a prostitute, while Ruth is an unfortunately childless widow. First and foremost, they are women who do not have husbands who will decide their spiritual direction. However, both make oaths tying themselves to the God of Israel. These oaths are closely tied to concepts of kindness and loyalty. Both also exhibit faithful obedience in carrying out these oaths. Finally, because of their faithful obedience, each is permitted to enter the people of God, and this is ultimately sealed through marriage, despite previous prohibitions against this practice.

William Barrick (2000) argues that conversion is modeled in the Old Testament by stories such as Rahab, Ruth, Naaman, and the sailors and Ninevites in Jonah as a way of understanding the concept of the circumcision of the heart (Deuteronomy 10:16 and 30:6) as opposed to physical circumcision as a way to enter the people of God. As such Barrick also sees the covenant and covenant renewal as a “recommitment to the changed life that had been entered at conversion” (Barrick 2000: 23). Barrick sees Rahab
as acknowledging a formal relationship to YHWH in her confession of YHWH’s ultimate authority in Joshua 2:11. He also points out her changed life by showing hesed יְשֵׁד (for the first time in the book of Joshua) (Barrick 2000: 28-29). For Ruth as well, Barrick sees her “oath of allegiance” to Naomi as a confession, which is then lived out by a changed life dominated by hesed יְשֵׁד (Barrick 2000: 29). As Barrick writes,

 Conversion may be summed up in the Hebrew term sub (he turns). Repentance and faith are its primary elements. Faith ‘achieves in practice the acknowledgement by the individual of the sole sovereignty of Yahweh.’ Such acknowledgement is inseparable from conversion which includes penitent humility. Confession of the sovereignty of Yahweh is clearly evident in the cases of Rahab, Ruth, Naaman, the sailors, and the Ninevites. (Barrick 2000: 35)

Ultimately in a final chart, Barrick looks at a number of themes and the ones which he sees as in common for Rahab and Ruth are: a confession of faith (Joshua 2:11, and Ruth 1:16-17), and a change or commitment (Joshua 2:12, Ruth 1:8 and Ruth 3:10).

While Ruth is not mentioned in the New Testament except in Matthew 1:5, Rahab is reflected on in two other passages. In Hebrews 11, the famous chapter on the faithful, verse 31 reads, “By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.” In James 2, where James discusses the importance of faith and works, the writer compares Rahab with Abraham in verse 25 and 26 he writes, “In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.” Biddle and Jackson (2017: 232) make a similar distinction in their assessment of the two spies in the story of Rahab, when they write, “Who saves whom in this story, then? In this striking text, Israel learns that a Deuteronomistic-sermon-preaching Canaanite prostitute can deliver them, even as they make plans for her future deliverance. All expectation is upended. There is no longer a distinction between who is savior and who is saved.” The faithful righteous Rahab is held up as a model according to Biddle and Jackson, while the “spies” seem to bring back limited intelligence (and if they are “messengers” as mentioned elsewhere they do not seem to deliver any message).
As faithfulness and good works are the characteristics pointed out in Hebrews and James in the New Testament for Rahab, it is possible to see how she reflects on a Christian understanding of living a Christian life following conversion. It seems to come close to Jesus’ understanding of the greatest commandment in Matthew 22:37-39, “Jesus replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” Rahab and Ruth make a commitment to God through an oath and follow up on this oath through a sacrificial love of others. There is also a close connection between issues of justice, kindness, and humility, As Smit and Fowl (2018: 220) point out,

In Mic. 6:8 the Israelites are told that all God requires of them is “to do justice, and to love kindness [hesed טשד], and to walk humbly with your God.” This text from Micah raises the prospect that justice, hesed טשד, and humility before God are connected. This would lead one to think that success in cultivating one of these virtues leads to and may presume some measure of success in cultivating the other two. If justice requires one to give to others what they are due in God, and if humility is based on rightly knowing one’s own state relative to God and others, then hesed טשד would be that grace which recognizes but is not constrained or limited merely by what is due to others and by where one stands relative to others and God. This would seem to fit Ruth quite well. She goes well beyond justice in her dealings with Naomi and acts with both grace and boldness toward Boaz without ever seeking to aggrandize herself.

In this sense, both Ruth and Rahab go beyond the confines of what is just, and both of them act with kindness while simultaneously exhibiting humility before God.

It is interesting that even in Jewish tradition, there is no question that the story of Ruth is an account of conversion. Brady (2013: 135) writes, “While modern scholars debate whether or not Ruth 1:16-17 actually describes Ruth’s conversion to the Israelite religion, within Rabbinic tradition there was no question that Ruth is the proselyte par excellence. The first chapter of Ruth provides for the Rabbinic exegete the prototypical framework for conversion, including Naomi’s rejection of the would-be proselyte.” It is apparently tradition that a would-be Jewish convert should be turned back three times, and if they still persist, it should be permitted
(and this is modeled in Naomi’s rejection of Ruth three times). The Jewish writers of the Targum Ruth have added to Ruth 1:16-17 to turn it into a dialogue for conversion. Brady (2013: 137) lays it out like this (with the scripture in regular script and the additions in italics),

Ruth said, “Do not urge me to leave you, to go back from after you, for I desire to be a proselyte.”
Naomi said, “We are commanded to keep Sabbaths and holy days such that we may not walk more than two thousand cubits.”
Ruth said, “Wherever you go, I will go.”
Naomi said, “We are commanded not to lodge with Gentiles.”
Ruth said, “Where you lodge, I will lodge.”
Naomi said, “We are commanded to keep six hundred and thirteen commandments.”
Ruth said, “What your people keep I will keep as if they were my people from before this.”
Naomi said, “We are commanded not to worship foreign gods.”
Ruth said, “Your god is my god.”
Naomi said, “We have four death penalties for guilty:stoning with stones, burning with fire, execution by the sword and hanging on a tree.”
Ruth said, “How you die, I shall die.”
Naomi said, “We have a cemetery.”
Ruth said, “And there I will be buried. And do not say any more. May the Lord do thus to me and more against me if even death shall separate me from you.”

So, even in the Jewish tradition, Ruth is seen as a text dealing with conversion.

Uriah Kim (2011) brings the additional insight of a biblical scholar who is Korean living as an immigrant in the U.S. He examines both Rahab and Ruth alongside the “man from Luz” (Judges 1:22-26) as examples of the hesed relationship based on loyalty to YHWH. However, his reading as a Korean immigrant is a bit different. He argues that Rahab and Ruth might be insiders in one sense, but this sense of belonging is not complete. While Rahab is allowed to live among Israel, she is also sent to live “outside the camp of Israel” in Joshua 6:23, so that she is not recognized as a real Israelite (Kim 2011: 257-258). I can see his point in this interpretation, but I disagree, since her ultimate marriage to an ultimate insider demonstrates a complete inclusion, but such inclusion may take time. His reading on Ruth however is quite interesting. His focus is not on Ruth, who through hesed becomes an insider, but rather on Orpah, who also demonstrates
the same type of hesed תִּשְׂדָּר as Ruth, but “her loyalty to her people disqualifies her from being a part of Israel” (Kim 2011: 260). Ruth becomes a model minority (in the same way as Pocahontas in U.S. myth) because she rejects her own people. Kim ends his article with a powerful conclusion, relevant to the immigrant community today,

When we practice hesed תִּשְׂדָּר with others, can we expect God to honor our hesed תִּשְׂדָּר when the other party does not fulfill their responsibility? We need to remember that Jesus Christ, who is a bicultural being par excellence, fully God and fully human, used hesed תִּשְׂדָּר to cross the divine-human divide in order to build the relationship between God and humans. Jesus Christ is the assurance that when we practice hesed תִּשְׂדָּר with others, God will surely honor our hesed תִּשְׂדָּר. Perhaps home is where hesed תִּשְׂדָּר is practiced for the sake of human solidarity and for God’s kingdom. (Kim 2011: 262)

Rahab and Ruth as Models of Conversion

Rahab was supposed to be subject to the herem הֶרֶם announced against Canaan- the idea that the Israelites should “utterly destroy” the Canaanites they found in the conquest. Yet, in the very first battle for the conquest, her family alone is spared because Rahab showed hesed תִּשְׂדָּר, or kindness to the spies and makes an oath acknowledging the authority of YHWH. In the same way, Ruth shows hesed תִּשְׂדָּר to Naomi, even after she is freed from her responsibilities, and likewise makes an oath to accept YHWH as her God. Both women end up having their faithfulness to their oaths rewarded by marriage to Israelites for full inclusion into the people of God. In addition, they both become ancestors of King David and Jesus as part of God’s model plan of salvation.

Clearly the concept of hesed תִּשְׂדָּר is vitally important to both accounts and to the process of conversion as seen in the Old Testament. Edward F. Campbell (1990) points out that hesed תִּשְׂדָּר is used to describe both human relationships and divine action. Basing some of his work off of the book, The Meanings of Hesed in the Hebrew Bible: A New Inquiry (1978) by Katherine Doob Sakenfield, Campbell (1990, 67-68) summarizes hesed תִּשְׂדָּר in five different ways:

- First, hesed תִּשְׂדָּר is not just a “special favor” but is essential for deliverance from serious danger.
- *Hesed* יְסֵד is done by a situationally stronger person toward a weaker person.
- The more powerful person has other options and so *hesed* יְסֵד is not forced.
- A prior relationship is usually involved for *hesed* יְסֵד to be done, so there is a moral or ethical responsibility to act as opposed to doing nothing.
- The one showing *hesed* יְסֵד is usually the only one who can preform the action.

So *hesed* יְסֵד is more than just a simple act of kindness. It is steadfast kindness, or loving kindness, but it is acting in the same way that God acts with human beings from a position of power to one who is in extreme need. Campbell (1990: 69) writes, “To put it another way, the impact of the book of Ruth is to portray at least Orpah and Ruth, and especially Ruth, acting towards others in the manner in which YHWH acts- living out the imitation of God.” Ultimately this act of *hesed* יְסֵד can be most completely seen in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Baruch Levine (2013: 6) adds to this understanding by noting that *hesed* יְסֵד “is an act of kindness and love undertaken without expectation of reward or reciprocity.” By acting with *hesed* יְסֵד toward others, God in turn shows *hesed* יְסֵד in return.4 For Rahab and Ruth, the first act of conversion is to act as God would have acted. It is part of their nature to show kindness when it was not necessary to do so for someone who was in a vulnerable position. In the middle of these acts of *hesed* יְסֵד, both Rahab and Ruth make an oath recognizing the power and authority of the God of Israel over their own lives. Finally, Rahab and Ruth are faithful to their oaths, and in response YHWH shows *hesed* יְסֵד on them by incorporating them into the people of God, ultimately validating this through marriage. As L. Daniel Hawk (2015: 20) puts it, “Finally, like Rahab, Ruth confesses the God of Israel (Joshua 2:11; Ruth 1:16), displays faithfulness (*hesed* יְסֵד) to Israelites (Joshua 2:12-14; Ruth 1:8; 3:10) and receives a place for herself and her descendants among the people of God.”

**Conclusion**

So, how does one become a part of the people of God in the Old Testament? It seems to differ in some ways from the New Testament understanding, which tends to place repentance for sins before a confession
of faith and finally a changed life. In the case of Rahab and Ruth, there is no repentance of sin. This is especially obvious in the life of Rahab, a prostitute, in which we might expect to see some kind of judgment passed on her profession. In both cases, we see women who have a deep commitment to YHWH and a willingness to recognize YHWH’s authority. But this is more than a doctrinal statement of faith. In both cases, this willingness to submit to YHWH is accompanied by concrete actions of hesed. Both Rahab and Ruth act in the way that God would act.

Rahab is not a person with any power in Jericho. Yet, for one brief moment, she is given the power of life and death over the Israelite spies. We do not know what her thoughts may have been at this time, but she could have sought favor with the king of Jericho by turning over the spies, or she could have exacted revenge on the men who she so often had to serve and please in her business. Yet, in that moment, she chose to act with hesed, without any real thought of getting something back for herself, she chose to protect and hide these helpless men. This is compatible with the way God acts towards human beings. However, she does not just do this act of hesed, but she continues to keep the secret- to remain faithful to her promise, even after the spies have left. Because of this, God gives her a second chance at life, along with her family, and gives them a chance to live among the people of God. Ultimately, she will be validated in her actions and marry a descendant of the tribe of Judah, and she will be honored as King David’s great-grandmother.

Ruth was also a person without power. She was a widow, and even worse, one without children or land. She shows hesed to Naomi, by refusing to leave her widowed mother-in-law in a difficult situation. Naomi had freed her from her familial responsibilities, and so for perhaps the first time in her life, Ruth was in a position of power. She could choose to go back to her people, to seek a new husband, and build a new family. We can only imagine how dangerous life must have been for Naomi as a widow, alone, with no one to protect her in a foreign land. Ruth’s act of hesed probably saved Naomi’s life in multiple ways. Not only did she accompany her on what was probably a dangerous journey back to her hometown, but also she gleaned from the fields to feed them both, and cared for the elderly Naomi. Ruth makes an oath to accept YHWH as her God before she really begins her action of hesed. But Ruth is also faithful to her action and carries out ongoing hesed for Naomi. As with
Rahab, she will ultimately be validated for her actions and marry a descendent of the tribe of Judah and become the grandmother of King David. As one thinks about the connection between Rahab and Ruth, one is left wondering if Boaz was open to seeing the positive aspects of Ruth because of the influence of his own mother, Rahab, who had gone through the same process of becoming an insider.

These acts of hesed יִשְׂדָּכְ by Rahab and Ruth are perhaps connected to King David for a reason. He is also a person who is shown as invoking the idea of hesed יִשְׂדָּכְ as well. This can be seen in 2 Samuel 2:6 when he asks God to show hesed יִשְׂדָּכְ to the men of Jabesh Gilead who had buried Saul. It can also be seen earlier in the relationship between David and Jonathan in 1 Samuel 20: 14-15 when they make an oath of hesed יִשְׂדָּכְ between David and Jonathan and his descendants. The faithfulness of this oath is lived out in how David treats Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel 9, after Jonathan and Saul are killed in battle. This entire theme of God showing hesed יִשְׂדָּכְ to those who show hesed יִשְׂדָּכְ may also be reflected in 2 Samuel 7, when God blesses David and says in verses 15-16, “But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me: your throne will be established forever.” Rahab and Ruth as spiritual ancestors of David are a link to the importance of hesed יִשְׂדָּכְ, and may be a source for David’s hesed יִשְׂדָּכְ to others which results in God’s favor on his kingship. Jesus Christ in turn fulfills this hesed יִשְׂדָּכְ in the ultimate act of hesed יִשְׂדָּכְ on the cross. Certainly this is part of the spiritual connection we are to draw from the genealogical inclusion of Rahab and Ruth in the family of Jesus presented in the opening of the Gospel of Matthew.

Conversion for Rahab and Ruth speak louder than the physical conversion of male circumcision. Their conversion came from the heart and not just physical identification with the people of God. Their changed lives as women who were a part of the Israelite community was possible because they submitted to YHWH as God and acted on that commitment by living out hesed יִשְׂדָּכְ in their actions with others. Their faithfulness was rewarded as God showed hesed יִשְׂדָּכְ in return by including them into the people of God as insiders. In many ways, the lives of Rahab and Ruth reflect the teaching of Deuteronomy 7:9, “Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.”
recognizing the authority of God and faithfully keeping his commandments by living in hesed יְשֵׁד, we experience conversion and a changed life, and can rely on God to show us hesed יְשֵׁד in return.

So, what are the lessons to be learned for the immigrant community, living as outsiders in a different culture? We cannot define our lives based on what the insiders expect, because we may never become accepted as insiders. God sees and knows our allegiance based on our testimony and faith. By living out hesed יְשֵׁד in our lives and community, we are living as God would have us live, not as the insider society or culture would have us live. God alone decides who are included within the people of God, even if congregations and churches do not extend this inclusion in turn to the outsiders among them. Nevertheless, immigrants should strive to advocate and fight for equal treatment and inclusion within the community. Justice and hesed יְשֵׁד are connected, along with humility. There seems to be no expectation that Rahab would reject her Canaanite identity or Ruth her Moabite identity as part of the conversion process, except in terms of their allegiance to the God of Israel over their traditional gods. Ruth binds herself to Naomi and her community based on family relationships, but Rahab has no such obligation. In neither case are legal requirements, citizenship, or official recognition required. Being included in the people of God is based on no other requirements than allegiance to God and acting with hesed יְשֵׁד. This is true for both insiders and outsiders in any community. The focus is no longer on hoping others will allow you into their circle, but rather on trusting that God will include you among God’s people if you live a life aligned to God and act accordingly in loving-kindness to others, in spite of how they might treat you in return.

End Notes

1 There are some issues here, but I will not go into detail due to the scope of this paper. Richard Bauckham (1995) does a good job looking into the questions of the relationship between Rahab and Ruth. The only account that connects Rahab to the father of Boaz is in Matthew, it is not found in the Old Testament. Bauckham indicates that this was probably accepted Jewish tradition at the time Matthew was written, even though the time between Rahab and Ruth should be much greater than one generation. Some rabbinic traditions hold that Rahab married Joshua. Other traditions connect Nahshon (the father of Salmon) as one of the spies Rahab rescued. For purposes of this paper, it is enough that Rahab and Ruth are connected in the passage in Matthew, which shows a theological or spiritual connection, even if a real genealogical connection is impossible or unlikely. Scholars
often connect the stories of Rahab and Ruth, since their similarities are quite striking. See also Hawk (2015: 19-20).

2 It is such an exception that is seems some scholars try to read more into the story than I think the text validates, such as Nicholas Lunn (2014) who uses the story as an example of “intertextuality” as a parallel for the Exodus. There are definite parallels between Joshua and Moses, but I think reinterpreting the story of Rahab in light of the Exodus is a bit of a stretch.

Rahab can be and has been interpreted in many different ways, some good and some bad. For other interpretations of Rahab see Lockwood (2010).

4 One could argue that Rahab was expecting her and her family to be saved as a result of her kindness, but keep in mind that she really had no guarantee that the spies would keep their word, or that she and her family would not be killed by others during the attack to come.

5 This is especially interesting in the case of Rahab, who was both a prostitute and likely a person who worshipped the Canaanite gods. Yet, her oath and acts of hesed seem sufficient for her conversion. This may be because her sinful life was led before she made her oath to YHWH. In the Old Testament the focus on repentance seems to be often aimed at the people of Israel, those who are already insiders.

6 Although Hawk (2015: 50) does note that the use of the Hebrew work sub (turning or returning) is frequently an illusion to repentance or turning back to YHWH, so Ruth as “the one who returned” in 1:22b can carry the idea of repentance.

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Mujeres desde Afuera Mirando hacia Adentro: Rahab y Rut como Conversas Extranjeras al Pueblo de Dios

Resumen:
¿Cómo se convierte una persona de afuera en una persona de adentro? Esta es una pregunta que surge al considerar tanto la situación moderna del inmigrante moderno como la situación única de las mujeres no israelitas que se convierten en parte del pueblo de Dios en el Antiguo Testamento. El patrón habitual en el Antiguo Testamento es nacer en el pueblo de Israel, pero para los hombres existe la posibilidad de convertirse en parte del pueblo del pacto a través del acto físico de la circuncisión. En esta sociedad patriarcal, las mujeres generalmente no tenían más remedio que seguir las decisiones de sus maridos. ¿Pero, y si no hubiera marido? La Biblia tiende a tener una opinión particularmente dura sobre los hombres israelitas que se casan con mujeres no israelitas, por lo que incluso el matrimonio no parece ser un camino aceptable para las mujeres solteras o viudas. Pero dos mujeres importantes en el Antiguo Testamento navegan con éxito la transición de una persona de afuera a una de adentro, Rahab y Rut. Este artículo explora lo que esto significa para entender la conversión dentro del contexto del Antiguo Testamento, así como su potencial implicación teológica para la comunidad inmigrante en el mundo actual. Comprender la importancia de la lealtad de una persona a YHWH, así como seguir esta lealtad a través de acciones de bondad amorosa (hesed) son las similitudes clave que unen a estas dos mujeres y ayudan a crear un puente teológico para los inmigrantes en nuestro contexto moderno.

Palabras clave: Rut, Rahab, mujeres, conversión, inmigración, pueblo de Dios.

Introducción

¿Cómo se convierte una persona de afuera en una persona de adentro? Esta es una pregunta que con frecuencia me enfrento como inmigrante en un país extranjero. Cuando su color de piel y su acento lo distinguen, casi siempre se le ve como una persona de afuera, incluso después de vivir durante 20 años en su contexto actual. Esta pregunta también surge a veces en el Antiguo Testamento. El patrón habitual es que uno nazca en el pueblo de Israel, pero para los hombres existe la posibilidad de convertirse en parte del pueblo del pacto a través del acto físico de la circuncisión. En esta sociedad patriarcal, las mujeres generalmente no tenían más remedio que seguir las decisiones de sus maridos. ¿Pero, y si no hubiera marido? La Biblia tiende a tener una opinión particularmente dura sobre los hombres israelitas que se casan con mujeres no israelitas, por lo que incluso el matrimonio no parece ser un camino aceptable para las mujeres solteras o viudas. Pero hay dos mujeres importantes en el Antiguo Testamento que navegan con éxito la transición de una persona de afuera a otra de adentro, y se convierten no solo en miembros del pueblo de Dios, sino en partes esenciales de la historia del plan de salvación de Dios como antepasados tanto del Rey David como de Jesús en el Nuevo Testamento. ¿La pregunta que esto me plantea es cómo sucede esto y cuál es la implicación para la comunidad de inmigrantes?

Además, el tema de la conversión ha sido un punto importante para la teología evangélica durante mucho tiempo. ¿Cómo se hace uno cristiano? La mayor parte de esto tiene sus raíces teológicas en las escrituras del Nuevo Testamento, pero a menudo se pasa por alto en un estudio teológico del Antiguo Testamento. El único equivalente real de mirar el tema de la conversión del Nuevo Testamento es para examinar este tema de cómo las personas fuera del pueblo de Israel se convirtieron en parte del pueblo de Dios. Las mismas historias de Rahab y Rut, que responden a la primera pregunta, nos ayudan a comprender la naturaleza de la conversión, así como cómo las mujeres sin maridos podrían haber pasado de ser personas de afuera a personas de adentro en el contexto del Antiguo Testamento.

La Circuncisión Masculina como Camino Para el Pueblo de Dios

En Génesis 17, Dios establece el pacto entre Dios y Abraham y sus descendientes. El versículo siete enfatiza que este será un pacto “eterno”
por generaciones. Este pacto incluirá la tierra de Canaán, así como el acto de la circuncisión masculina. En el versículo diez, está claro que todo varón debe ser circuncidado para ser parte del pacto, y el versículo doce establece que los que han sido comprados de extranjeros también deben ser circuncidados. Finalmente, el versículo catorce advierte que cualquier varón que no esté circuncidado será excluido del pacto. Los versículos 23-27 indican que Abraham, Ismael y todos los hombres de su casa, nacidos o comprados, fueron circuncidados ese mismo día.

En Éxodo 12, se establece la comida ritual crucial de la Pascua. En este capítulo, Moisés instruye al pueblo sobre la futura celebración de esta comida, y señala en el versículo 48: “Un extranjero que resida entre ustedes y quiera celebrar la Pascua del Señor debe hacer que todos los varones de su casa sean circuncidados; entonces podrá participar como un nacido en la tierra.” Esto permite que los hombres afuera de la comunidad israelita se conviertan en parte del pueblo de Dios a través del acto físico de la circuncisión, alineándose y sometiéndose al pacto de Abraham.

En Josué, capítulo cinco, Josué ordena a los israelitas que se circunciden antes de la conquista de Canaán. Por alguna razón, la práctica parece haber sido abandonada en el desierto, pero ahora el pacto va a ser renovado. Josué aparece a menudo en el libro como un tipo de “nuevo Moisés” para el pueblo, por lo que la renovación del pacto en Gilgal (Josué 5: 2-12) no debería sorprendernos. Cuando se renueva el pacto en el monte Ebal en el capítulo ocho, queda claro que los extranjeros están incluidos entre el pueblo de Dios. El versículo 33 señala que, “tanto los extranjeros que vivían entre ellos como los nativos estaban allí” para la lectura del Libro de la Ley.

Pero mientras que los hombres extranjeros tienen una forma de unirse al pueblo israelita a través de la circuncisión, esa posibilidad se les niega a las mujeres, incluso a través del matrimonio. La prohibición en contra de que los hombres israelitas se casen con mujeres extranjeras se aclara en la historia de Dina en Génesis 34 y Deuteronomio 7: 3-4, “Y no emparentarás con ellas; no darás tu hija a su hijo, ni tomarás a su hija para tu hijo. Porque desviará a tu hijo de en pos de mí, y servirán a dioses ajenos; y el furor de Jehová se encenderá sobre vosotros, y te destruirá pronto.” Josué repite las mismas prohibiciones en Josué 23: 12-13. Otros pasajes repiten esta preocupación, incluyendo 1 Reyes 11: 2 y Esdras 9:14. Sin embargo, dos mujeres en las Escrituras ingresan al pueblo de Dios como extranjeras durante el período temprano de la historia de Israel, y ellas
no son insignificantes. Tampoco estas dos mujeres están desconectadas. Mateo 1: 5 conecta a Rahab como la madre de Booz, quien se casaría con Rut, la abuela del rey David, y finalmente se convertirían en antepasados de Jesús.¹

**Rahab: de Prostituta Extranjera a uno más del Pueblo de Dios**

La historia de Rahab en los capítulos dos y seis de Josué es una excepción interesante a gran parte de la literatura sobre la conquista.² Primero se muestra a Rahab como una prostituta en la ciudad de Jericó, donde se encuentra con los dos espías enviados por Josué para estudiar la ciudad con el fin de conquistarla. Ella oculta con éxito a los dos espías y redirige a los enviados por el rey de Jericó en busca de los espías. Antes de dejar ir a los espías, da un discurso interesante en los versículos 9-13,

>Sé que Jehová os ha dado esta tierra; porque el temor de vosotros ha caído sobre nosotros, y todos los moradores del país ya han desmayado por causa de vosotros. Porque hemos oído que Jehová hizo secar las aguas del Mar Rojo delante de vosotros cuando saliste de Egipto, y lo que habéis hecho a los dos reyes de los amorreos que estaban al otro lado del Jordán, a Sehón y a Og, a los cuales habéis destruido. Oyendo esto, ha desmayado nuestro corazón; ni ha quedado más aliento en hombre alguno por causa de vosotros, porque Jehová vuestro Dios es Dios arriba en los cielos y abajo en la tierra. Os ruego pues, ahora, que me juréis por Jehová, que como he hecho misericordia (hesed עֶשֶׁד), con vosotros, así la haréis vosotros con la casa de mi padre, de lo cual me daréis una señal segura; y que salvaréis la vida a mi padre y a mi madre, a mis hermanos y hermanas, y a todo lo que es suyo; y que libraréis nuestras vidas de la muerte.

Los espías se van después de hacer un juramento y decirle que lleve a todos a su casa y que cuelgue un cordón escarlata afuera de la ventana como señal, y se salvarán. En Josué 6:17, 22-23, 25, Rahab y su familia se salvan, y el versículo 25 señala: “Mas Josué salvó la vida a Rahab la ramera, y a la casa de su padre, y a todo lo que ella tenía; y habió ella entre los israelitas hasta hoy, por cuanto escondió a los mensajeros que Josué había enviado a reconocer a Jericó.” Rut 4: 18-22, que describe la genealogía de David señala que Salmón, el padre de Booz (quien es su esposo según Mateo 1: 5. Ver nota 1) es un israelita que regresa a Pérez,
uno de los hijos de Judá. Este matrimonio solidifica a Rahab como una persona de adentro y como parte del pueblo de Dios.

Moberly (2013: 71) analiza cómo se compara a Rahab con Acán en Josué. Rahab como la más grande persona de afuera: una mujer cananea y una prostituta que se convierte en una persona de adentro, mientras que Acán, una persona de adentro con un pedigrí se convierte en el más grande persona de afuera, ya que él y toda su familia son lapidados por desobediencia. De la misma manera, Moberly señala cómo Rahab muestra la cualidad de hēsēḏ (amor firme o bondad) y debido a sus palabras y acciones, “ella está exenta de hārēm, a pesar de la falta de cláusulas de exención en Deuteronomio, y habilitada (con su familia) para convertirse en parte de Israel.”

**Rut: la Moabita que se Convirtió en Uno más del Pueblo de Dios**

En el libro de Rut, vemos otro caso excepcional de una mujer que se convierte en parte del pueblo de Dios. Noemí y su esposo, Elimelec, habían ido a la tierra de Moab con sus hijos, Mahlón y Quelión, y ambos se casaron con mujeres de Moab, Orfa y Rut. Cuando mueren sus hijos y su esposo, Noemí decide regresar con su propia gente. En Rut 1: 8, Noemí libera a Orfa y Rut de sus obligaciones para con ella y las elogia por su bondad (hēsēḏ), pero las anima a volver a casa con sus familias y volver a casarse. Las dos jóvenes al principio se niegan, pero Noemí expone la realidad de que no tendrá más hijos para dárselos como esposos. Orfa finalmente se va, pero Rut aún se queda. Noemí nuevamente intenta que Rut la deje, pero Rut responde en Rut 1: 16-17,

> No me ruegues que te deje, y me aparte de ti; porque a dondequiera que tú fuieres, iré yo, y dondequiera que vivieres, viviré. Tu pueblo será mi pueblo, y tu Dios mi Dios. Donde tú murieres, moriré yo, y allí seré sepultada; así me haga Jehová, y aun me añada, que sólo la muerte hará separación entre nosotras dos.

Rut continúa mostrando su fidelidad al apoyar a Noemí mientras espiga los campos de Booz, un pariente cercano de Noemí. En última instancia, Booz se convierte en el pariente redentor ideal y redime los derechos a la tierra de la familia de Noemí y, por lo tanto, el derecho a casarse con Rut, que se convierte en la abuela del futuro rey David.
Cuando Booz redime sus derechos sobre Rut, los ancianos dicen en Rut 4:11-12: “Testigos somos. Jehová haga a la mujer que entra en tu casa como a Raquel y a Lea, las cuales edificaron la casa de Israel; y tú seas ilustre en Efrata, y seas de renombre en Belén. Y sea tu casa como la casa de Fares, el que Tamar dio a luz a Judá, por la descendencia que de esa joven te dé Jehová.” Una vez más, una mujer extranjera ingresa al pueblo de Dios, que se solidificó con su matrimonio con uno de los del pueblo de Dios.

Si bien la mayoría de los comentarios se centran en los temas de bondad (hesed יְשֵׁד), lealtad, protección de los débiles en la sociedad y el apoyo del libro a la realeza davídica, algunos señalan otros posibles usos del libro. Fleenor y Ziese (2008: 320) señalan las posibles implicaciones del libro como protesta,

Como literatura de protesta, se argumenta que el texto contiene un mensaje dirigido a quienes buscan definir estrechamente al “pueblo de Dios”. Como tal, el texto deliberadamente socava (o subvierte) una supuesta “posición de pureza” que busca expulsar a los “buenos” extraterrestres (como Rut) de la comunidad judía. Una variación de este punto de vista considera que el mensaje del libro es un estímulo dirigido a las esposas gentiles de esposos judíos. En esto, Ruth es la modelo a seguir: un prosélito modelo para que todos los extranjeros lo imiten.

Solo algunos escritores tienden a desarrollar la naturaleza extranjera de Rut en esta historia, aunque el texto mismo se refiere a Rut como la “moabita” específicamente en varios lugares (Rut 1:22, 2: 2, 2:21, 4: 5 y 4:10), destacando su condición de extranjera o forastera en la comunidad. En este sentido, la identidad también se convierte en un tema, como escribe Matthews (2004: 207), “Rut, que se ha convertido en una figura liminal o socialmente indefinida por sus decisiones y acciones, debe establecer una nueva identidad dentro de una comunidad extraña. En esencia, ella debe ‘encontrar su lugar’. Tanto física como socialmente, en Belén.”

La Conversión de Rahab y Rut

Hay varias similitudes en las historias de Rahab y Rut, aunque en la superficie son tipos de mujeres muy diferentes. Rahab es una prostituta, mientras que Ruth es una viuda lamentablemente sin hijos.
En primer lugar, son mujeres que no tienen maridos que decidirán su dirección espiritual. Sin embargo, ambos hacen juramentos ligándose al Dios de Israel. Estos juramentos están estrechamente ligados a conceptos de bondad y lealtad. Ambos también muestran una obediencia fiel al llevar a cabo estos juramentos. Finalmente, debido a su fiel obediencia, a cada uno se le permite ingresar al pueblo de Dios, y esto finalmente se sella mediante el matrimonio, a pesar de las prohibiciones anteriores contra esta práctica.

William Barrick (2000) argumenta que la conversión está modelada en el Antiguo Testamento por historias como Rahab, Rut, Naamán y los marineros y ninivitas en Jonás como una forma de entender el concepto de la circuncisión del corazón (Deuteronomio 10:16 y 30: 6) en oposición a la circuncisión física como una forma de entrar en el pueblo de Dios. Como tal, Barrick también ve el pacto y la renovación del pacto como un “nuevo compromiso con la vida cambiada que se había entrado en la conversión” (Barrick 2000: 23). Barrick ve a Rahab como reconociendo una relación formal con YHWH en su confesión de la máxima autoridad de YHWH en Josué 2:11. También señala su cambio de vida al mostrarle hesed ḫṯ (por primera vez en el libro de Joshua) (Barrick 2000: 28-29).

Para Ruth también, Barrick ve su “juramento de lealtad” a Noemí como una confesión, que luego es vivida por una vida cambiada dominada por hesed ḫṯ (Barrick 2000: 29). Como escribe Barrick,

La conversión puede resumirse en el término hebreo sub (se vuelve). El arrepentimiento y la fe son sus elementos principales. La fe “logra en la práctica el reconocimiento por parte del individuo de la soberanía única de Yahvé.” Tal reconocimiento es inseparable de la conversión que incluye la humildad penitente. La confesión de la soberanía de Yahvé es claramente evidente en los casos de Rahab, Rut, Naamán, los marineros y los ninivitas. (Barrick 2000: 35)

En última instancia, en un cuadro final, Barrick analiza una serie de temas y los que ve como en común para Rahab y Rut son: una confesión de fe (Josué 2:11 y Rut 1: 16-17) y un cambio o compromiso (Josué 2:12, Rut 1: 8 y Rut 3:10).

Si bien Rut no se menciona en el Nuevo Testamento excepto en Mateo 1: 5, Rahab se refleja en otros dos pasajes. En Hebreos 11, el famoso capítulo sobre los fieles, el versículo 31 dice: “Por la fe Rahab la ramera no perdió juntamente con los desobedientes, habiendo recibido a los espías
El escritor compara a Rahab con Abraham en los versículos 25 y 26 y escribe: “Asimismo también Rahab la ramera, ¿no fue justificada por obras, cuando recibió a los mensajeros y los envió por otro camino? Porque como el cuerpo sin espíritu está muerto, así también la fe sin obras está muerta.” Biddle y Jackson (2017: 232) hacen una distinción similar en su evaluación de los dos espías en la historia de Rahab, cuando escriben: “¿Entonces, quién salva a quién en esta historia? En este impactante texto, Israel aprende que una prostituta cananea predicadora de un sermón deuteronomista puede librarlos, incluso mientras hacen planes para su futura liberación. Todas las expectativas se trastocan. Ya no hay distinción entre quién es salvador y quién es salvo.” La fiel y justa Rahab es considerada un modelo según Biddle y Jackson, mientras que los “espías” parecen traer de vuelta una inteligencia limitada (y si son “mensajeros” como se mencionó en otra parte, no parecen entregar ningún mensaje).

Como la fidelidad y las buenas obras son las características señaladas en Hebreos y Santiago en el Nuevo Testamento para Rahab, es posible ver cómo ella reflexiona sobre una comprensión cristiana de vivir una vida cristiana después de la conversión. Parece acercarse a la comprensión de Jesús del mayor mandamiento en Mateo 22: 37-39, “Jesús le dijo: Amarás al Señor tu Dios con todo tu corazón, y con toda tu alma, y con toda tu mente: Este es el primero y grande mandamiento. Y el segundo es semejante: Amarás a tu prójimo como a ti mismo.” Toda la ley y los profetas dependen de estos dos mandamientos.” Rahab y Rut se comprometen con Dios a través de un juramento y dan seguimiento a este juramento mediante un amor sacrificado por los demás. También existe una estrecha conexión entre cuestiones de justicia, bondad y humildad, como señalan Smit y Fowl (2018: 220),

En Miqueas 6:8 se les dice a los israelitas que todo lo que Dios requiere de ellos es “que hagan justicia, amen misericordia [hesed יְהֵסֶד] y se humillen ante su Dios”. Este texto de Miqueas plantea la perspectiva de que la justicia, el hesed יְהֵסֶד y la humildad ante Dios están conectados. Esto llevaría a uno a pensar que el éxito en el cultivo de una de estas virtudes conduce y puede presumir cierto grado de éxito en el cultivo de las otras dos. Si la justicia requiere que uno dé a los demás lo que se les debe en Dios, y si la humildad se basa en conocer correctamente el propio estado en relación con Dios y los demás, entonces hesed יְהֵסֶד sería esa gracia que
reconoce, pero no está limitado o limitado simplemente por lo que es debido a otros y por donde uno se encuentra en relación con los demás y con Dios. Esto parece encajar bastante bien con Ruth. Va mucho más allá de la justicia en su trato con Noemí y actúa con gracia y audacia hacia Booz sin buscar nunca engrandecerse.

En este sentido, tanto Rut como Rahab van más allá de los confines de lo justo, y ambas actúan con bondad mientras simultáneamente exhiben humildad ante Dios.

Es interesante que incluso en la tradición judía, no hay duda de que la historia de Rut es un relato de conversión. Brady (2013: 135) escribe: “Mientras que los eruditos modernos debaten si Rut 1: 16-17 realmente describe o no la conversión de Rut a la religión israelita, dentro de la tradición rabínica no había duda de que Rut es el prosélito por excelencia. El primer capítulo de Rut proporciona al exégeta rabínico el marco prototípico para la conversión, incluido el rechazo de Noemí al prosélito en potencia.” Aparentemente, es tradición que un posible converso judío deba ser rechazado tres veces, y si aún persiste, debe permitirsele (y esto se basa en el rechazo de Noemí a Rut tres veces). Los escritores judíos del Targum Rut han agregado a Rut 1: 16-17 para convertirlo en un diálogo para la conversión. Brady (2013: 137) lo presenta así (con la escritura en cursiva),

Ruth dijo: “No me instes a que te deje, a que me aleje de ti, porque deseo ser un prosélito.”
Noemí dijo: “Se nos ha ordenado guardar los sábados y los días santos de manera que no podamos caminar más de dos mil codos.”
Ruth dijo: “Dondequiera que vayas, yo iré.”
Noemí dijo: “Se nos ordena no alojarnos con los gentiles.”
Ruth dijo: “Donde tú te alojes, yo me alojaré.”
Noemí dijo: “Se nos ha ordenado que guardemos seiscientos trece mandamientos.”
Ruth dijo: “Lo que tu gente guarde, lo guardaré como si fuera mi gente de antes de esto.”
Noemí dijo: “Se nos ordena no adorar a dioses extranjeros.”
Ruth dijo: “Tu dios es mi dios.”
Noemí dijo: “Tenemos cuatro penas de muerte para los culpables: apedrear con piedras, quemar con fuego, ejecutar a espada y colgar de un árbol.”
Ruth dijo: “Cómo mueras, yo moriré.”
Naomi dijo: “Tenemos un cementerio.”
Que el Señor me haga así y más contra mí, si hasta la muerte me separa de ti.”

Entonces, incluso en la tradición judía, Rut se ve como un texto que trata sobre la conversión.

Uriah Kim (2011) aporta la perspectiva adicional de un erudito bíblico coreano que vive como inmigrante en los Estados Unidos. Examina tanto a Rahab como a Rut junto con el “hombre de Luz” (Jueces 1: 22-26) como ejemplos de la relación hesed דּ째֩ hakk basado en la lealtad a YHWH. Sin embargo, su lectura como inmigrante coreano es un poco diferente. Sostiene que Rahab y Rut podrían ser personas de adentro en un sentido, pero este sentido de pertenencia no es completo. Si bien a Rahab se le permite vivir entre Israel, también se le envía a vivir “fuera del campamento de Israel” en Josué 6:23, de modo que no se le reconoce como una verdadera israelita (Kim 2011: 257-258). Puedo ver su punto en esta interpretación, pero no estoy de acuerdo, ya que su matrimonio definitivo con una persona de adentro demuestra una inclusión completa, pero tal inclusión puede llevar tiempo. Sin embargo, su lectura sobre Rut es bastante interesante. Su enfoque no está en Rut, quien a través de hesed דּ째֩ se convierte en una persona de adentro, sino en Orfa, quien también demuestra el mismo tipo de hesed דּ째֩ que Rut, pero “su lealtad a su pueblo la descalifica de ser parte de Israel” (Kim 2011: 260). Ruth se convierte en una minoría modelo (del mismo modo que Pocahontas en el mito estadounidense) porque rechaza a su propia gente. Kim termina su artículo con una poderosa conclusión, relevante para la comunidad inmigrante de hoy,

¿Cuando practicamos el hesed דּ째֩ con otros, podemos esperar que Dios honre nuestra hesed דּ째֩ cuando la otra parte no cumple con su responsabilidad? Debemos recordar que Jesucristo, que es un ser bicultural por excelencia, completamente Dios y completamente humano, usó la hesed דּ째֩ para cruzar la división divino-humana con el fin de construir la relación entre Dios y los humanos. Jesucristo es la seguridad de que cuando practicamos la hesed דּ الإم por el bien de la solidaridad humana y por el reino de Dios. (Kim 2011, 262)
Rahab y Rut como Modelos de Conversión

Se suponía que Rahab estaba sujeto al herem anunciado en Parts de Canaán, la idea de que los israelitas debían “destruir por completo” a los cananeos que encontraron en la conquista. Sin embargo, en la primera batalla por la conquista, su sola familia se salva porque Rahab mostró su bondad o hesed hacia los espías e hizo un juramento reconociendo la autoridad de YHWH. De la misma manera, Rut le muestra hesed a Noemí, incluso después de que ella es liberada de sus responsabilidades, y de la misma manera hace un juramento de aceptar a YHWH como su Dios. Ambas mujeres terminan siendo recompensadas por su fidelidad a sus juramentos mediante el matrimonio con israelitas para su plena inclusión en el pueblo de Dios. Además, ambos se convirtieron en antepasados del rey David y Jesús como parte del plan modelo de salvación de Dios.

Claramente, el concepto de hesed es de vital importancia tanto para los relatos como para el proceso de conversión como se ve en el Antiguo Testamento. Edward F. Campbell (1990) señala que hesed se usa para describir tanto las relaciones humanas como la acción divina. Basando parte de su trabajo en el libro, *The Meanings of Hesed in the Hebrew Bible: A New Inquiry* (1978) de Katherine Doob Sakenfield, Campbell (1990, 67-68) resume el hesed de cinco maneras diferentes:

- **Primero,** hesed no es solo un “favor especial”, sino que es esencial para la liberación de un peligro grave.
- **Hesed** lo hace una persona situacionalmente más fuerte hacia una persona más débil.
- La persona más poderosa tiene otras opciones y, por lo tanto, hesed no se le fuerza.
- Por lo general, se requiere una relación previa para que se haga hesed, por lo que existe una responsabilidad moral o ética de actuar en lugar de no hacer nada.
- El que muestra hesed suele ser el único que puede realizar la acción.

Así que hesed es más que un simple acto de bondad. Es bondad constante, o bondad amorosa, pero es actuar de la misma manera que Dios actúa con los seres humanos desde una posición de poder hacia alguien que está en extrema necesidad. Campbell (1990: 69) escribe: “Para decirlo
de otra manera, el impacto del libro de Rut es retratar al menos a Orfa y Rut, y especialmente a Rut, actuando hacia otros de la manera en que YHWH actúa, viviendo la imitación de Dios.” En última instancia, este acto de *hesed* פֶּסֶח se puede ver más completamente en el sacrificio de Jesucristo en la cruz.

Baruch Levine (2013: 6) se suma a este entendimiento al señalar que *hesed* פֶּסֶח “es un acto de bondad y amor realizado sin expectativa de recompensa o reciprocidad.” Al actuar con *hesed* פֶּסֶח hacia los demás, Dios a su vez muestra *hesed* פֶּסֶח a cambio.4 Para Rahab y Rut, el primer acto de conversión es actuar como Dios hubiera actuado. Es parte de su naturaleza mostrar amabilidad cuando no era necesario hacerlo por alguien que se encontraba en una posición vulnerable. En medio de estos actos de *hesed* פֶּסֶח, tanto Rahab como Rut hacen un juramento reconociendo el poder y la autoridad del Dios de Israel sobre sus propias vidas. Finalmente, Rahab y Rut son fieles a sus juramentos, y en respuesta YHWH les muestra *hesed* פֶּסֶח incorporándolos al pueblo de Dios, validando finalmente esto a través del matrimonio. Como dice L. Daniel Hawk (2015: 20), “Finalmente, como Rahab, Rut confiesa al Dios de Israel (Josué 2:11; Rut 1:16), muestra fidelidad (hesed פֶּסֶח) a los israelitas (Josué 2: 12-14; Rut 1: 8; 3:10) y recibe un lugar para ella y sus descendientes entre el pueblo de Dios.”

**Conclusión**

¿Entonces, cómo se convierte uno en parte del pueblo de Dios en el Antiguo Testamento? Parece diferir en algunos aspectos del entendimiento del Nuevo Testamento, que tiende a anteponer el arrepentimiento de los pecados a una confesión de fe y finalmente a una vida cambiada.5 En el caso de Rahab y Rut, no hay arrepentimiento del pecado.6 Esto es especialmente obvio en la vida de Rahab, una prostituta, en la que podríamos esperar ver algún tipo de juicio sobre su profesión. En ambos casos, vemos mujeres que tienen un compromiso profundo con YHWH y la voluntad de reconocer la autoridad de YHWH. Pero esto es más que una declaración doctrinal de fe. En ambos casos, esta voluntad de someterse a YHWH va acompañada de acciones concretas de *hesed* פֶּסֶח. Tanto Rahab como Rut actúan de la forma en que Dios actuaría.

Rahab no es una persona con poder en Jericó. Sin embargo, por un breve momento, se le otorga el poder de vida y muerte sobre los espías israelitas. No sabemos cuáles pudieron haber sido sus pensamientos en este momento, pero podría haber buscado el favor del rey de Jericó al
entregar a los espías, o podría haber vengado a los hombres a quienes tan a menudo tenía que servir y complacer en su negocio. Sin embargo, en ese momento, eligió actuar con hesed דְּם, sin ningún pensamiento real de recuperar algo para ella, eligió proteger y esconder a estos hombres indefensos. Esto es compatible con la forma en que Dios actúa con los seres humanos. Sin embargo, ella no solo hace este acto de hesed דְּם, sino que continúa guardando el secreto: permanecer fiel a su promesa, incluso después de que los espías se hayan ido. Debido a esto, Dios le da a ella una segunda oportunidad en la vida, junto con su familia, y les da la oportunidad de vivir entre el pueblo de Dios. En última instancia, será validada en sus acciones y se casará con un descendiente de la tribu de Judá, y será honrada como la bisabuela del rey David.

Rut también era una persona sin poder. Era viuda, y peor aún, sin hijos ni tierra. Ella le muestra hesed דְּם a Noemí, negándose a dejar a su suegra viuda en una situación difícil. Noemí la había liberado de sus responsabilidades familiares, por lo que quizás por primera vez en su vida, Rut estaba en una posición de poder. Podía optar por volver con su gente, buscar un nuevo marido y formar una nueva familia. Solo podemos imaginar lo peligrosa que debe haber sido la vida para Noemí como viuda, sola, sin nadie que la protegiera en un país extranjero. El acto de hesed דְּם de Rut probablemente salvó la vida de Noemí de muchas maneras. No solo la acompañó en lo que probablemente fue un viaje peligroso de regreso a su ciudad natal, sino que también recogió de los campos para alimentar a ambas y cuidó a la anciana Noemí. Rut hace un juramento de aceptar a YHWH como su Dios antes de que ella realmente comience su acción de hesed דְּם. Pero Rut también es fiel a su acción y lleva a cabo una hesed דְּם continua por Noemí. Al igual que con Rahab, finalmente será validada por sus acciones y se casará con un descendiente de la tribu de Judá y se convertirá en la abuela del rey David. Cuando uno piensa en la conexión entre Rahab y Rut, uno se pregunta si Booz estaba abierto a ver los aspectos positivos de Rut debido a la influencia de su propia madre, Rahab, que había pasado por el mismo proceso de convertirse en una persona de adentro.

Estos actos de hesed דְּם de Rahab y Rut quizás estén relacionados con el rey David por una razón. El es una persona que también se muestra invocando la idea de hesed דְּם. Esto se puede ver en 2 Samuel 2: 6 cuando le pide a Dios que muestre hesed דְּם a los hombres de Jabes de Galaad que habían enterrado a Saúl. También se puede ver anteriormente en la relación
entre David y Jonatán en 1 Samuel 20: 14-15 cuando hacen un juramento de hesed תשם entre David y Jonatán y sus descendientes. La fidelidad de este juramento se vive en la forma en que David trata a Mefiboset en 2 Samuel 9, después de que Jonatán y Saúl murieron en la batalla. Todo este tema de Dios mostrándole hesed תשם a aquellos que muestran hesed תשם también puede reflejarse en 2 Samuel 7, cuando Dios bendice a David y dice en los versículos 15-16: “pero mi misericordia no se apartará de él como la aparté de Saúl, al cual quité de delante de ti. Y será afirmada tu casa y tu reino para siempre delante de tu rostro, y tu trono será estable eternamente.” Rahab y Rut como antepasados espirituales de David son un vínculo con la importancia de hesed תשם, y pueden ser una fuente de hesed תשם de David para otros, lo que resulta en el favor de Dios en su reinado. Jesucristo, a su vez, cumple este hesed תשם en el más grande acto de hesed תשם en la cruz. Ciertamente, esto es parte de la conexión espiritual que debemos extraer de la inclusión genealógica de Rahab y Rut en la familia de Jesús presentada en la apertura del Evangelio de Mateo.

La conversión de Rahab y Rut habla más fuerte que la conversión física de la circuncisión masculina. Su conversión vino del corazón y no solo de la identificación física con el pueblo de Dios. Sus vidas cambiadas como mujeres que eran parte de la comunidad israelita fue posible porque se sometieron a YHWH como Dios y actuaron en ese compromiso al vivir hesed תשם en sus acciones con los demás. Su fidelidad fue recompensada cuando Dios mostró hesed תשם en respuesta al incluirlos en el pueblo de Dios como personas de adentro. De muchas maneras, las vidas de Rahab y Rut reflejan la enseñanza de Deuteronomio 7: 9, “Conoce, pues, que Jehová tu Dios es Dios, Dios fiel, que guarda el pacto y la misericordia a los que le aman y guardan sus mandamientos, hasta mil generaciones;” Al reconocer la autoridad de Dios y guardar fielmente sus mandamientos al vivir en hesed תשם, experimentamos la conversión y una vida cambiada, y podemos confiar en Dios para que nos muestre hesed תשם a cambio.

Entonces, cuáles son las lecciones que se pueden aprender para la comunidad inmigrante, que vive como personas de afuera en una cultura diferente? No podemos definir nuestras vidas basándonos en lo que esperan los de adentro, porque es posible que nunca seamos aceptados como los de adentro. Dios ve y conoce nuestra lealtad basado en nuestro testimonio y fe. Al vivir hesed תשם en nuestras vidas y en nuestra comunidad, vivimos como Dios quiere que vivamos, no como la sociedad o la cultura de adentro quiere que vivamos. Solo Dios decide quiénes están incluidos.
dentro del pueblo de Dios, incluso si las congregaciones e iglesias no extienden esta inclusión a su vez a los de afuera entre ellos. Sin embargo, los inmigrantes deben esforzarse por defender y luchar por la igualdad de trato y la inclusión dentro de la comunidad. La justicia y la hesed (דהק) están conectados, junto con la humildad. No parece haber ninguna expectativa de que Rahab rechazara su identidad cananea o Rut su identidad moabita como parte del proceso de conversión, excepto en términos de su lealtad al Dios de Israel sobre sus dioses tradicionales. Rut se une a Noemí y su comunidad basada en las relaciones familiares, pero Rahab no tiene esa obligación. En ningún caso se requieren requisitos legales, ciudadanía o reconocimiento oficial. Ser incluido en el pueblo de Dios no se basa en otros requisitos que la lealtad a Dios y actuar con hesed (דהק). Esto es cierto tanto para los de adentro como para los de afuera en cualquier comunidad. El enfoque ya no está en esperar que otros te permitan entrar en su círculo, sino en confiar en que Dios te incluirá entre el pueblo de Dios si vives una vida alineada con Dios y actúas en consecuencia con bondad amorosa hacia los demás, a pesar de cómo ellos podrían tratarte a cambio.

Notas finales:

1 Hay algunos problemas aquí, pero no entraré en detalles debido al alcance de este documento. Richard Bauckham (1995) hace un buen trabajo al investigar las preguntas de la relación entre Rahab y Rut. El único relato que conecta a Rahab con el padre de Booz está en Mateo, no se encuentra en el Antiguo Testamento. Bauckham indica que esta probablemente era una tradición judía aceptada en el momento en que se escribió Mateo, aunque el tiempo entre Rahab y Rut debería ser mucho más grande que una generación. Algunas tradiciones rabínicas sostienen que Rahab se casó con Josué. Otras tradiciones conectan a Naasón (el padre de Salmón) como uno de los espías que Rahab rescató. Para los propósitos de este artículo, es suficiente que Rahab y Rut estén conectadas en el pasaje de Mateo, que muestra una conexión teológica o espiritual, incluso si una conexión genealógica real es imposible o improbable. Los eruditos a menudo relacionan las historias de Rahab y Rut, ya que sus similitudes son bastante sorprendentes. Véase también Hawk (2015: 19-20).

2 Es una excepción tal que parece que algunos eruditos intentan leer más en la historia de lo que creo que el texto valida, como Nicholas Lunn (2014) que usa la historia como un ejemplo de “intertextualidad” como un paralelo del Éxodo. Hay paralelismos definidos entre Josué y Moisés, pero creo que reinterpretar la historia de Rahab a la luz del Éxodo es un poco exagerado.
3 Rahab puede ser y ha sido interpretada de muchas formas diferentes, algunas buenas y otras malas. Para otras interpretaciones de Rahab, ver Lockwood (2010).

4 Se podría argumentar que Rahab esperaba que ella y su familia fueran salvados como resultado de su bondad, pero tenga en cuenta que ella realmente no tenía ninguna garantía de que los espías cumplirían su palabra, o que ella y su familia no serían asesinados por otros durante el ataque por venir.

5 Esto es especialmente interesante en el caso de Rahab, quien era una prostituta y probablemente una persona que adoraba a los dioses cananeos. Sin embargo, su juramento y actos de hesed parece suficientes para su conversión. Esto puede deberse a que su vida pecaminosa fue llevada antes de hacer su juramento a YHWH. En el Antiguo Testamento, el enfoque en el arrepentimiento parece estar dirigido a menudo al pueblo de Israel, aquellos que ya están adentro.

6 Aunque Hawk (2015: 50) nota que el uso de la palabra hebrea sub (volverse o regresar) es con frecuencia una ilusión de arrepentimiento o volverse a YHWH, por lo que Rut como “la que regresó” en 1: 22b puede llevar la idea del arrepentimiento.

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From the Archives: Ichthus Music Festival- The World of Christian Music Comes to Wilmore

It was the “dawning of the Age of Aquarius” as the 1967 musical Hair told us.¹ The hippie and New Age Movements were in the ascendancy. The U.S. was in the middle of the Vietnam War. In 1969, it seemed like the counterculture exploded when on August 15-18 the Woodstock Music Festival was held near White Lake, New York. Political and cultural shifts were occurring at a breath-taking pace, and the evangelical church seemed to be desperately trying to figure out how to respond. However, Wilmore remained isolated from much of this cultural change. Yet while cut off from much of what was going on in the U.S. culturally in 1970, an idea emerged, led by students (called the Christian Service Brotherhood) and their faculty advisor, Dr. Bob Lyon of Asbury Theological Seminary, of a Christian music festival as a counterpoint to Woodstock. Using the Wilmore campground, the site of many traditional Holiness camp meetings, the first Ichthus festival was established. It would continue as one of the major Christian music festivals in the U.S. until 2012, for 42 years, and would be called by at least one writer, the “granddaddy” of all Christian music festivals.²

Music plays a crucial role in youth culture, and rock and roll has been the defining genre of music used by young people since the 1950s within the context of the United States. While rock and roll partially grew out of gospel music, it took its own secular form of development and so was often actively opposed by many conservative Christians. As the academic study of Christian music has pointed out,

The dilemma for Christian adolescents then is clear. On the one hand, rock and roll music plays a critical role in establishing identity and defining their social groups, but at the same time it appears to contradict many of
the values they hold as Christians... Standing in the gap between evangelical Christianity on one side and youth culture on the other, contemporary Christian music offers evangelical Christians who cannot identify with what they see on MTV their own set of alter egos. With its angelic waifs, strutting arena rockers, choreographed girl groups, guitar-strumming folkies, flannel encased grunge acts, posturing rappers, and wordy singer-songwriters, contemporary Christian music provides the evangelical audience with the same ethereal voices, the same driving guitars, and the same chunky rhythms that can be found anywhere on the radio dial- but with one important difference: rather than challenging predominant evangelical values, this music affirms them.³

The primary goal of the Ichthus music festival in its later years was to reach out and share the gospel message to young people through contemporary Christian music.

(Image courtesy of Asbury Theological Seminary Archives and Special Collections.)
Understanding how the modern contemporary Christian music genre has developed includes understanding how music and the church have interacted for centuries. Some have even argued a direct line from the popular camp meeting tradition to Ichthus to modern festivals such as the Cornerstone Festival that started in 1984, TOMfest (1995), HeavenFest (2008), Lifest (1999), and the Agape Festival (1977). Scholars seem to accept that Larry Norman’s 1969 album, *Upon This Rock* (Capitol Records) was the first Christian rock album, occurring contemporaneously with the growth of Jesus Rock in the late 1960s and 1970s from the Jesus Movement, as well as the popular musicals *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1970) and *Godspell* (1971). At the start of this movement, the Ichthus music festival was born with an evangelistic emphasis, according to Bob Lyon, “to use the medium of young people to reach young people.” As sociologists Steck and Howard note,

A key component of the evangelistic rationale of contemporary Christian music is the tradition of music festivals that mark the summer season. With Christian bands for the most part lacking access to the tours and club circuits that support mainstream musicians, the Christian music industry was forced to develop its own resources in order to create opportunities for live performances. And while churches and coffeehouses to some degree replaced the standard clubs and bars, it was the summer music festivals that became the focal point for CCM’s (contemporary Christian music) live performances; here is where audiences and performers connect.

The context of Wilmore in 1970 is also important to the development of Ichthus. The cultural turmoil of 1969 had really led to a faith crisis in the evangelical streams of the church, which often functioned as if it was still the 1940s or 1950s. Even while Wilmore seemed remotely isolated from these cultural changes, both Asbury College (now University) and Asbury Theological Seminary were feeling the stresses like the rest of the country and the need for some type of Christian response was increasing. On February 3, the Asbury Revival of 1970 broke out in Hughes Auditorium at Asbury College and began to spread around the nation. This was one important spiritual response focusing on inner spiritual renewal and awakening. Ichthus was an equally spiritual response to the cultural context, but focused instead on an outward cultural engagement and evangelism, even though it was completely separate from the Revival. As
Dr. Steve Seamands, Professor Emeritus of Christian Doctrine at Asbury Theological Seminary and a part of the first Ichthus in 1970 notes,

Even though Ichthus was not directly connected to the Asbury Revival, years later I began to realize that it probably would have never happened if there hadn’t been a revival. The revival created a spirit of openness and boldness. There was a passion for evangelism and outreach, a desire to witness for Christ, that had emerged in the Wilmore community as a result of the revival and that created the impetus for Ichthus.⁸

Those involved with Ichthus at the start note no connection, (and even a bit of skepticism about the Revival) and also point out the divisions between the College (where the Revival occurred) and the Seminary (where Ichthus began) were wide at this time, but it becomes almost impossible to separate these two spiritual moves, which are really two almost simultaneous spiritual responses to the cultural context of 1969. It is highly likely that the Revival triggered enough of a change in the environment of Wilmore itself that allowed for Ichthus to emerge, even when no direct connection existed. Inner renewal by the Holy Spirit was necessary for outward cultural engagement (also a part of the work of the Holy Spirit), and both required a spiritual freedom from the traditional confines of a church caught in outdated cultural patterns. This combination of spiritual renewal and social engagement has become much of the norm in holistic mission today, but in the 1960s and 1970s they remained very separate ideas.

The Ichthus music festival was a groundbreaking effort that helped launch contemporary Christian music and provide a working model for its future growth, while aiming to contextualize the gospel message for a new generation. As Gary Baker, the executive director of Ichthus wrote in 1997,

This ministry was started out of a response to meet the needs of the youth of this country who were looking for substance in a world in which they had lost faith. In this endeavor, Ichthus Ministries has always been a catalyst for spiritual and social change in youth, as well as a leader in festival ministries. Ichthus is the first and oldest Christian festival in the nation. We find our greatest strength in whose we are and who we are as a festival ministry. As festivals spring up all over the nation, more and more they start out of a mode to entertain rather than to minister the gospel. It is to this mission that Ichthus has always remained loyal, to present Jesus Christ to the
youth who attend the Ichthus festival, that their lives may be changed for the glory of God.9

This was a bold new ministry for its time and fitted to its cultural context. It challenged traditional ways of doing evangelism and opened doors to allow the Holy Spirit to work in the lives of young people impacted by the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s.

To really understand how the music of the 1960s impacted the context in Wilmore, it is important to go back a few years before Ichthus. Ed Kilbourne came as a student to Asbury College in 1962 from a well-known missionary family in Korea.10 He had learned how to play the guitar on the mission field, since it is a portable way to make music and there wasn’t much else for him to do for entertainment. As a result, he was one of the few people on the campus who could play the guitar, and this novelty led to groups gathering in the dorms around him and even to informal singing on Saturday nights in the semi-circle in front of the administration building on Lexington Avenue. They would sing popular folk songs such as, “If I had a Hammer,” “Michael Row Your Boat Ashore,” and “Where Have All the Flowers Gone,” along with popular works by Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie. As these sing-alongs became more popular with students (sometimes even gathering as many as 300 people), Ed was called in to see President Z.T. Johnson. The Asbury College president felt that Ed was “out of sympathy with the school” and even told him, “You can’t do God’s work with the devil’s music.” Johnson encouraged Ed to transfer out of Asbury College, but his mother intervened to prevent that from happening. Ed continued with his music, even using the Methodist Church in Wilmore to record music with Rev. David Seamands’ permission (he was a friend of Ed’s father, Dr. Ed Kilbourne, former president of Seoul Theological Seminary and an OMS missionary/leader). Ed’s first album, I Know Where I’m Going, was recorded at the Arthur Smith Studios in Charlotte, North Carolina in 1964, while still a student. By the time he graduated from Asbury College, he was able to hold a small concert in Hughes Auditorium. He went on to Asbury Theological Seminary, where he took all of Dr. Gilbert James’ classes on the role of the Church in society that he could take. While he graduated from the Seminary in 1969, a year before Ichthus, most of the early leaders remember Ed coming back to perform at the first Ichthus. Ed also recounts leading others at the college in practicing folk music in an informal group called “The Villagers,” who helped him work on developing
the use of a sound system by sneaking onto the Wilmore campgrounds when it was not in use and setting up mock performances on the stage. Ed Kilbourne notes that Asbury had created a famous “bubble” of holiness isolation by keeping out other influences, such as intercollegiate sports, but that it was becoming “harder and harder to hold off the world.” He also commented that, “it was the music that broke the bubble.” Ed Kilbourne set the stage for the introduction of Ichthus as a formal organization.

It would be easy to dismiss Ed Kilbourne as a typical youthful rebel going against the religious authorities in power in Wilmore, but that would be too simplistic. Influenced by the mission field and yet also influenced by the events of the culture around him, Ed was (and still is) a gifted musician with a progressive theological point of view. Even in the 1960s he was creatively “tweaking” popular folk songs to give them a spiritual bent. A good example is his reworking of Petula Clark’s 1965 hit, “My Love,” which he recorded as “His Love.”
“My Love”
Petula Clark
(Written by Tony Hatch)
1965

My love is warmer than the warmest sunshine,
Softer than a sigh.
My love is deeper than the deepest ocean,
Wider than the sky.
My love is brighter than the brightest star that shines
every night above,
And there is nothing in this world that can ever change
my love.

Something happened to my heart the day that I met you.
Something that I never felt before.
You are always in my mind, no matter what I do,
And everyday it seems that I want you more.

(Chorus)

Once I thought that love was meant for anyone else but me.
Once I thought you’d never come my way.
Now it only goes to show how wrong we all can be,
For now I have to tell you every day.

(Chorus)
“His Love”
Ed Kilbourne
(Lyrics modified by Ed Kilbourne)
1965

His love is warmer than the warmest sunshine,
Softer than a sigh.
His love is deeper than the deepest ocean,
Wider than the sky.
His love is brighter than the brightest star that shines
 every night above,
And there is nothing in this world that can ever change
 His love.

Something happened to my heart the day that You walked in.
Something that I never felt before.
And that something is that He has buried all my sins,
And everyday it seems I love Him more.

(Chorus)

Once I thought that this love was meant for anyone else but me.
Once I thought that no one knew the way.
Now it only goes to show how wrong we all can be,
‘Cause now I have to tell it every day.

(Chorus)
This type of inventive contextualization, along with his willingness to share his knowledge with others at Asbury College and Asbury Theological Seminary about folk music, sound systems, and even how to play the guitar, was not just foundational—it was crucial to making Ichthus a real possibility, even though Ed was not directly connected to the organizing of Ichthus. It changed the atmosphere in Wilmore just enough to break the “bubble” of isolation and make dramatic change possible. The fact that almost all of the early founders of Ichthus pointed to Ed Kilbourne as an important influence only highlights the significance of how one person can influence and change entire institutions.
The story of Ichthus as an actual festival begins in the cafeteria of Asbury Theological Seminary one day in mid-March of 1970. A group on campus called the Christian Service Brotherhood was holding an executive meeting with their faculty advisor, Dr. Bob Lyon over breakfast. The Christian Service Brotherhood consisted of a very small minority of the student population who had a genuine concern for social issues, such as racism, the Vietnam War, and poverty. One of them, John Park, had been involved with Dr. Gilbert James’ project of taking students to New York City in 1969 to work in ministry in urban areas and become more aware of urban social problems and needs. While Dr. James was not directly involved with Ichthus, his teaching both prior to and after the founding of Ichthus influenced a number of students who would be involved. The Christian Service Brotherhood was really very much on the fringe of the student body at this time. This meeting in the cafeteria included Dave Lewis, the chairman of the Brotherhood, John Park, Peter Emmett, Charlie Paxton, and Larry Minner. While Wilmore was very disconnected from the local community, John Park remembers very clearly when Dr. Lyon said, “You know, there ought to be a Christian alternative to Woodstock—a place for young people to raise the name of Jesus!” Right there at the table, the plan was worked out. John Park even suggested a name for the event. During the summer of 1969 when he had been with Dr. James in Central Harlem, he and a friend had gone into a small shop and bought a fish cross. For him, the cross stood for the original use of the fish symbol in early Christianity as “an announcement, or declaration” of our faith in Christ (the Greek letters being an acronym for “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior”). The group accepted the idea and the name Ichthus was attached to the new musical event. Dr. Lyon liked to ask probing questions among his students and stimulated ideas about faith and society in his role as a professor, and as the faculty advisor of the Christian Service Brotherhood he led and supported their work, although indirect support also came from Dr. Gilbert James and Dr. Kenneth Kinghorn, who were all relatively new faculty at the time, coming in 1965-1966.

With only six weeks left to hold the event, and with three of the group planning to graduate that spring, the plans for the event were made quickly and on the spur of the moment. There was no real budget, perhaps $300 (and $100 of that was a gift from Dr. James, and the rest appears to have come from Dr. Lyon and Dr. Kinghorn), but in short order John Park
took over the advertising side of things, designing the first poster, printing it off on The Herald printing press on campus on the cheapest brown paper stock. Since they didn’t know how to publicize the event so quickly, they sent out copies of this advertisement to all the colleges in driving distance of Wilmore, sometimes just addressing them to the student body president, or sending them to friends they knew on the campuses. They had been particularly careful in designing the information to limit the term “rock” and to focus on acoustic folk music of the time avoiding the negative connotations of the psychedelic music of the late 1960s. Dr. Lyon helped arrange the use of the Wilmore campground and provided the leadership while the Christian Service Brotherhood divided much of the work among themselves.

Musicians were almost all local talent, pretty much anyone who could play an instrument and perform. The Christian Service Brotherhood used their contacts to pull together the musical acts. While Ed Kilbourne had graduated, his brother Kent and his younger cousins Ron and Bill Moore had followed in his footsteps and some of them performed at the first Ichthus along with Ed. Bill Moore had not only learned from his cousin, but from 1967-1968 he had traveled to Europe and Asia with an Asbury College group called the New World Singers with Youth for Christ International. As with Ed Kilbourne, this College group sang a mix of secular and religious music in a folk style “sharing their faith through music.” They had even produced an album called Who Will Answer? with one side containing secular music and the other side sacred. Ron and Bill Moore had also put out their own album in 1969, entitled Lo and Behold (it is interesting to note that Ed Kilbourne’s influence was so strong that Ron Moore wrote a song “Eddie Was a Pioneer” in honor of their cousin). With their experience and connections, it was possible to pull the music for the first Ichthus together. As John Park relates with a chuckle, the Christian Service Brotherhood had three goals: to see if they could do this, to see how many people would come, and to try not to be run out of town! The first poster and advertisement for the festival reads in part,

Ours is a musically oriented society, Ichthus 70 moves into that realm with power. Ichthus 70 is a weekend of contemporary expression of the Christian faith through music. Ichthus 70 provides togetherness for hundreds of Christians from colleges across the nation… Ichthus 70 brings you folk and folk rock groups from many schools and areas. Ichthus 70 presents the best in entertainment
with a message. Ichthus 70 offers you two days of music for less than the price of one album. Ichthus 70 is a demonstration of the society of the committed.

The tickets cost $2.50 if you preregistered ($4.50 with housing) and $4.00 at the gate. (By 2010, full event tickets were $99.00 and single day tickets were $47.00 at the gate.) The performers in 1970 included: The Awakening, New World, Rick Bonfin, and Wind Song, while Dr. Bob Lyon was the main teacher.

There definitely was concern on campus and in the town of Wilmore, with even a secret meeting held by business owners worried about the possibility of drugs, communists, and the hippie counterculture coming to Wilmore, but the Christian Service Brotherhood did not find out about this until long after the fact (John Park only learned of this in the 1990s). Also, the Christian Service Brotherhood was not exactly unaware of such different positions on social issues. The shootings at Kent State on May 4, 1970 of four students at an anti-war rally in Ohio a week before the Ichthus festival, led the Christian Service Brotherhood to put up a small table on campus covered with a black cloth, with a sign reading simply “Kent State” and displaying a cross for each of those killed. The opposition was so fierce, they were forced to remove the display by the middle of the day. Nevertheless, the group went forward with their plans, painting a simple banner on painter’s canvas and hanging it in the tabernacle on the Wilmore campground. Students from Asbury Theological Seminary, especially the Christian Service Brotherhood, worked that festival and eventually many volunteers would follow, most coming from Asbury College and Asbury Theological Seminary as the festival became more accepted. From those picking up trash and providing stage security to those serving in prayer tents and working concession stands, there were many roles to be filled over the years.
The idea that music is a key part of identity formation among young people is part of what made Ichthus a successful vehicle for communicating the gospel from 1970 to 2012. (Image courtesy of Asbury Theological Seminary Archives and Special Collections.)

On May 9-10, 1970, the first Ichthus music festival was held at the Wilmore campground in Wilmore, Kentucky. The Wilmore campground was a site for traditional Holiness camp meetings, which continued to be held at the site until 2015 after 125 years of service (currently it is the home of Adventure Serve Ministries). At first there seemed to be little problem with using the campground, since no one knew what Ichthus really was about. Over the next few years increased concern did arise due to the “loud music and long hair” of the counterculture, according to Dr. Seamands, but several voices of older leaders including J. C. McPheeters and Rev. David Seamands, who were on the Wilmore campground board, supported the festival. E. A. Seamands (known as “Tata”), a veteran missionary from India, would attend Ichthus and tell his grandson, “This is not my kind of music, but if it’s reaching these kids, why not?” Dr. Bill Moore recalls seeing “Tata” Seamands dancing alongside the stage at one of the early festivals. Steve Moore, the program director from 1973-1976 even remembers “Tata” Seamands speaking from the stage about his time in India. Gradually Ichthus would win over those most concerned with the festival as it brought
economic benefits to local merchants, encouraged recruitment for Asbury College, and provided a stable rent income for the Wilmore campground.

John Park also relates how the very first Ichthus drew about 300 to 350 people. Because there was not much contemporary Christian music written at this time, and they did not want to have a simple hymn sing or focus on Southern Gospel music, many of the performers played and sang secular folk music on the first night of the festival. The group had planned a worship service for Sunday morning to help emphasize the Christian nature of the event. One event especially remained strong in John Park’s memory. A young lady playing an acoustic guitar and singing in the style of Joan Baez had performed on Saturday night and someone had criticized her for not playing enough “Jesus music,” so she asked to sing again on Sunday and performed a beautiful folk version of the hymn “I’d Rather Have Jesus.” Park notes that the memory still remains of this young lady singing as one of his most powerful moments of the festival,

I’d rather have Jesus than silver or gold.  
I’d rather be his than have riches untold.  
I’d rather have Jesus than houses or land.  
Yes, I’d rather be led by his nail pierced hands,  
Than to be the king of a vast domain and be held by sin’s dread sway.  
I’d rather have Jesus than anything this world affords today.12

Larry Minner, one of the original founders, recalls how some funds were used to buy bread and cold cuts and make sandwiches to feed the crowd. He even laughs as he notes that some of the musicians also helped make egg salad and cold cut sandwiches to pass out to the hungry attendees. Minner notes, “We weren’t trying to be different, just have fun with our friends!” Dr. Bill Moore remembers how Seminary wives were involved in preparing food and how his wife had to make ten pounds of potato salad for the event!

This first Ichthus was meant to be a one-time event—a counterprotest to Woodstock. The Christian Service Brotherhood was first and foremost focused on responding to Woodstock, and while Ed Kilbourne and the Asbury Revival of 1970 probably both paved the way for Ichthus in terms of the overall environment in Wilmore, neither was a part of their conscious decision in organizing the event. As the Christian Service Brotherhood gathered at Dr. Lyon’s house for a cookout to celebrate the success of their endeavor, Dr. Lyon had hung their canvas banner up at his house. The group
was excited about the turnout and how well everything had gone, when someone said, “Why don’t we do this again next year?” Until this time no one had really considered this possibility, but at that moment the idea of an annual music festival was born. Minner also added that he thought there was some additional money left over from the success of the first festival and so they thought to spend that the next year. John Park wasn’t even sure they broke even.

Dr. Jack Harnish, who was the program chair for 1971 and the general Ichthus chair for 1972 noted that the early years of Ichthus were a bit “haphazard,” but soon became organized. The festivals of 1970 and 1971 were rather small in number (with attendance in the 100s to maybe 1,000) and took place in the tabernacle on the Wilmore campground as attendees were housed in the campground dormitories. Musicians were primarily chosen locally or based on “what we could afford” since there was no outside funding except from ticket sales. While the Seminary student body was generally supportive, there was still a lot of concern in the community. Members of the Wilmore campground’s board were worried about potential damage to the trees or buildings, local people roped off their lawns to keep people from walking on the grass, and even Asbury College would not extend their curfew to allow students to attend. At the time, the major concerns at Asbury College were “the length of the men’s hair and the women’s skirts,” while at Asbury Theological Seminary there was only a small minority of the student population that protested the Vietnam War and challenged assumptions on campus. Primarily the entire Ichthus event was student led and organized with limited faculty support and encouragement, although Dr. Lyon remains as the primary person behind the idea and was on the board of directors throughout the 1970s.
Part of the poster and advertising for the third Ichthus music festival in Wilmore, Kentucky. Held April 28-29, 1972. (Image courtesy of Asbury Theological Seminary Archives and Special Collections.)

By the third year in 1972, registrations began to come in and the fledgling festival organizers gave up on the idea of housing the growing numbers, turning to tents and camping instead. Dr. Jim Garlow was the program director for 1972 and he led the idea for the festival to be moved out of the tabernacle into the field behind the Wilmore campground, where
a flatbed trailer served as a stage for around 1,200 to 1,400 attendees (Dr. Seamands estimates closer to 2,500). Dr. Harnish suggests that this growth could be traced to Asbury Seminary graduates who brought their youth groups to the festival after graduating. He did the same, bringing his youth groups from the hills of Pennsylvania for a number of years afterward, where Ichthus often became a spiritual highpoint for many of the youth. Dr. Garlow agrees with this assessment calling it a “built-in success factor,” as increasing numbers of Seminary graduates returned with youth for an informal home-coming each summer. Ed Kilbourne noted that even Asbury College had to embrace Ichthus, as the festival became “an incredible tool” for publicity, drawing in students for the College who had attended Ichthus as young teens. Such was the influence of the emerging music festival that it helped put Asbury College on the map.

Dr. Jim Garlow, who had some experience in performing with his mother and brother in Kansas before coming to Asbury Theological Seminary, remembers visiting the work of George Dooms and his youth ministry in Evanston, Indiana (which has held an inside concert event called Faith Festival since 1970) to help use his experience with Youth for Christ to find music groups for Ichthus. Dr. Garlow also managed to secure funds from an older businessman in the community to fund a film crew to film some of the 1972 Ichthus concert. This film, titled “One Way, Jesus Way” was about 25 minutes and was sent out to local colleges and churches to promote Ichthus. Dr. Garlow remembers meeting with Seminary President Frank B. Stanger along with Jim Harnish (Dr. Harnish’s twin brother) to negotiate some of the tensions and concerns over Ichthus’ growing popularity. It was the elderly “Tata” Seamands who came to the festival’s defense, stating that it was similar to things done in India on the mission field and was an important missional event. So, as a special honor, Dr. Garlow recalls that they made sure to film “Tata” Seamands standing near the stage clapping along with the music for the final film. Dr. Garlow returned to Ichthus as the Master of Ceremonies for 1973 and 1974. Dr. Garlow also relates the story of how his brother had died in an airplane crash in April of 1974, and then a month later he needed to stand on stage and speak to the crowds throughout Ichthus. He tells how he made it through the entire festival until the very end, when Andraé Crouch and the Disciples ended their performance with “It Won’t Be Long.” Through his tears, Dr. Garlow told the crowd about the death of his brother and how it had affected him, and Andraé Crouch right then and there, sat down
and wrote a song about Jesus coming back for us. The entire event was a powerful moment in his life and also impacted many of those in attendance who heard the testimony.

In 1973 Rev. Travis Hutchison was the General Chair of Ichthus, and with a background in business and experience from working his family’s ranch in the Dakotas, he brought more organization to the Ichthus experience. Since he was also eight years older than most of the others and had helped with publicity in an informal way in 1972, he understood some of the unique challenges of the festival. He created multiple teams to oversee different parts of the festival including people in charge of tickets, traffic, the tent city, and a former military member to put in charge of security. While he attended a couple of meetings with Seminary President Frank B. Stanger to convince him that they were not “hippies from Mars,” he had good success from having participated earlier in one of Stanger’s voluntary groups on healing prayer at the Seminary. He recalls the Wilmore campmeeting board as a bigger challenge. There were concerns about feeding the crowds (there ended up being about 4,800 people present based on ticket sales that year), which he handled by hiring a food service company to set up long tables with sandwiches and McDonalds for Sunday lunch. Another concern he remembered had to do with possible sexual promiscuity on the grounds. Travis laughs when he remembers that John Fitch (of Fitch’s IGA) stood up on their behalf and told the board about the former soldier who would be leading security and ended saying, “there won’t be any more babies conceived here than in the campmeeting days!” One of Travis’ major concerns was to leave enough funds to help support the following year, and because of his work Ichthus in 1973 was able to bring in more well-known groups.

Steve Moore had been a high school senior in 1971 and a part of Jim Garlow’s youth group. He was so impressed by the experience he had as a youth at Ichthus that he chose to attend Asbury College as a result. While a college student, Steve became the program director of Ichthus from 1973 to 1976. He notes that his approach to choosing the musicians was “to get the best people you can and turn them loose.” Steve worked with Andraé Crouch and the Disciples as well as the Archers, and Earthen Vessel. He remembers when bad weather was threatening to break up the performance early in either 1973 or 1974 that Andraé Crouch turned around on the piano stool while Steve was discussing what to do with Jim Garlow and remarked, “Well, they’re going to get wet anyway!” He
also reminisced about how Andraé Crouch was following a group singing songs from *Jesus Christ Superstar*, when he addressed the audience with, “Well folks, I gotta tell you, Jesus is more than a superstar to ole’ Andraé!” While sometimes criticized for spending too much money, Steve Moore was responsible for setting a pattern of inviting headliners who could help draw a crowd. Yet, it wasn’t just about popularity. Steve also remembers in 1976 how the Holy Spirit moved at the invitation given by Bill Glass, the speaker at the time, when the counselors were overwhelmed by the young people who responded. They were “no longer one-on-one but more like one-on-five or six!”

Andraé Crouch, one of the more memorable musicians performing at Ichthus in the early 1970s.
(Image courtesy of Asbury Theological Seminary Archives and Special Collections.)
In reflecting on his involvement with Ichthus, Dr. Harnish noted that his biggest takeaway was “learning as a pastor to think creatively. What if we tried this? - Not being afraid to take a risk.” Dr. Garlow noted that it was “impossible to calculate the spiritual impact” of Ichthus. Dr. Bill Moore defined it as a “pivotal spiritual experience” for the young people who attended. Steve Moore agrees that his time with Ichthus was spiritually meaningful and he remembers the musicians as “phenomenal people.” Travis Hutchison reflects back on the impact of Ichthus by relating the story of a Jack Daniels whiskey bottle found during the cleanup, which he still treasures as one of his prized possessions. Inside the bottle was a note indicating that the young people who brought the bottle had come to drink and party, but had found the Holy Spirit instead and no longer needed the whiskey they brought. By 1996 the event recorded 14,000 people in attendance and almost 1,000 people who committed their lives to Christ that year alone. There were around 20,000 people present in 2004 before the festival moved to a later date in the year.

Reflecting on how Ichthus was started, it is hard to pin down any one factor. Rather it was a perfect symphony of events led by the Holy Spirit. Ichthus would never have happened without the musical skill, leadership, and cultural challenge brought by Ed Kilbourne to Wilmore. It never would have happened without the earnest concern of Seminary students for reaching out to their generation in a culturally relevant way despite opposition. It never would have happened without the leadership, financial support, and encouragement of young faculty members like Dr. Robert Lyon, Dr. Gilbert James, and Dr. Kenneth Kinghorn at Asbury Theological Seminary. It never would have happened without the support of local businessmen like John Fitch. It never would have happened without key religious leaders such as “Tata” Seamands, David Seamands, and even Frank Stanger being willing to have a vision for something different. And it never would have happened without the Holy Spirit paving the way with both the Asbury Revival and a genuine concern for social needs.

Music, of course, remained the primary draw that brought young people to the Ichthus festival. A wide range of artists were typically chosen, from the more popular contemporary acts to more avant garde and cutting-edge musicians. While a general trend can be seen in moving from folk music styles and gospel music to contemporary Christian rock to Christian rap, punk, grunge, and even Goth and heavy metal, the entire range of Christian music was represented. Steve Moore laughs as he notes, “We just
called it Jesus music!” While Ed Kilbourne remains critical of contemporary Christian music for creating a new “bubble” that isolates Christians from the serious social and political concerns of the outside world, which were often addressed by the folk music genre, Ichthus festivals would headline the music of many well-known groups including:

Crimson Bridge (1972)
Ken Medema (1977)
Honeytree (1978)
Joe English Band (1982, 1983)
Benny Hester (1983)
Crumbächer (1986)
Servant (1986, 1988)
David and the Giants (1988)
Michael Peace (1990)
Michael W. Smith (1994)
Audio Adrenaline (1994, 1995)
Out of Eden (1996)
MXPX (1996, 2008)
Caedmon’s Call (1997)
CeCe Winans (1997)
Rebecca St. James (1997)
Casting Crowns (2006, 2008)
Superchick (2010, 2011)
Switchfoot (2012)

In 1981 Jessy Dixon headlined the Ichthus Music Festival.
(Image courtesy of Asbury Theological Seminary Archives and Special Collections.)

However, Ichthus organizers also sought to bring in Christian teachers to preach, teach, and evangelize during the course of the festival. Teachers would include: Don Wilkerson (1973), Tom Skinner (1974, 1979), Bill Glass (1976), Josh McDowell (1980, 1989), Steve Camp (1981, 1984), Tony Campolo (1983), Coach Floyd Eby (1986) along with many names
of Asbury College and Asbury Theological Seminary professors. Sometime about 1973 when Dr. Lyon went on sabbatical, Dr. John Oswalt was asked to be the faculty representative on the committee. Somewhere about this same time, organizers noticed there were empty spots in the program as the musical groups were changing and setting up. As Dr. Oswalt remembers, “so they asked me if I could do some 3-6 minute talks to fill those spots. Daunting to think of speaking to thousands of milling teenagers! But I said yes, and did four or five of these each year for three years. I always wondered if I was connecting with anyone in all the hubbub. However, there have been a few occasions when someone has reminded me of something I said during one of those times, so apparently there was some connection.” Dr. Oswalt also noted that there was a definite concern that entertainment might become the driving force of the festival and so sessions were created to address particular topics, often each having its own tent and being presented a number of times during the festival with seminary students as teachers. Steve Moore definitely recalls Dr. Oswalt and his “incredibly powerful teaching vignettes” as well as his strong support for Ichthus as important moments of his own time with Ichthus.
Dr. John Oswalt of Asbury Theological Seminary teaching from the stage at the Ichthus Music Festival in the 1970’s during one of his sessions between performances.
(Image courtesy of Asbury Theological Seminary Archives and Special Collections.)

One of the earlier performers who made a serious impact was Andraé Crouch. While he performed at least five times at Ichthus, primarily in the 1970s, his influence was widespread. Dr. Steve Seamands, who was an associate pastor at a United Methodist Church in New Jersey in 1974, brought his youth group to Ichthus. As he relates,

Saturday night, during the last few hours of the festival something happened that I’ll never (forget). Andraé Crouch and the Disciples were singing and leading the crowd of about 5,000 in worship. Our youth were sitting together as a group on the hillside.

All of a sudden, many of our youth were crying and hugging each other. I looked at the people sitting around our youth group and they seemed to be unaffected. They were just listening to the music.

I was somewhat skeptical at first. “Is this just teenage emotionalism brought on by several days of sleep deprivation?” I wondered. I suspect some of that was a part of it, but it didn’t take me long to realize that something profoundly real had happened to our group.
It was as if the Holy Spirit, the very presence of God had fallen upon our youth group.

As a result, I took a revival back to New Jersey with me. On the trip back, the youth would spontaneously break into singing on the bus. I especially remember them singing the words from one of Andraé Crouch’s songs: “Jesus is the answer to the world today. Above him there’s no other. Jesus is the way!”

The following Sunday evening when the youth shared what had happened to them at Ichthus, the presence and power of God was there. Youth who hadn’t been able to go to Ichthus were deeply touched. For the next six months incredible things happened in the life of the church. Lives were transformed. Many young adults came to know Christ. What had happened at Ichthus had a leavening effect on the whole church.

Dr. Seamands also notes that several of these youth felt called into ministry and a number continued on to Christian colleges including Asbury College and Asbury Theological Seminary.

Andraé Crouch and the Disciples, often referred to as the “father of modern gospel music,” performing at Ichthus in the early 1970s.
(Image courtesy of Asbury Theological Seminary Archives and Special Collections.)
However, the youth in Dr. Seamands’ youth group were not isolated in this experience. Tanya Goodman Sykes (of the Happy Goodman Family, a well-known Southern Gospel group) wrote at Andraé Crouch’s passing in 2015,

I can still remember how the rain felt on my skin that day. I was 15 years old, and my friends and I had driven to Wilmore, Kentucky, to attend the Ichthus Festival at Asbury College. We were beyond thrilled because Andraé Crouch and the Disciples were headlining that year. There was a steady drizzle the entire drive up, and just before Andraé took the stage, it gave way to heavy rain, but it didn’t dampen my enthusiasm. There was a palpable sense of excitement in the air that day as an entire hillside of dripping wet, mostly teenagers sang along- “Jesus is the answer for the world today….” Truly, I have never experienced anything quite like it before or since. And I certainly have never stood in the pouring rain to hear anyone else." 

Travis Hutchison recalls one Saturday evening when Andraé Crouch was preforming and Travis was standing on the stage looking out over the crowd and the “raptured” look on their faces as the Spirit was really working. Suddenly he noticed in different parts of the crowd several groups of 7-15 people who seemed to fall down suddenly to the ground, and into his mind came the thought, “this is the dancing hand of God” and he really understood that God could do anything with his life. Dr. Jack Harnish, also remembered the passing of Andraé Crouch in 2015 writing,

The highlight of the weekend was a performance by Andraé Crouch and the Disciples. If the whole notion of a folk-rock festival was a bit shocking for the town of Wilmore, the fact that the headliner was an African American was even more controversial. But once he took the stage, no one could question his spirit and his gift... I remember him closing the festival that weekend with, “It won’t be long, soon we’ll be leavin’ here; it won’t be long, we’ll be goin’ home.”

By 1998, the Wilmore campground was becoming too small of a venue for this growing musical event, so a 111-acre site, known at the Ichthus Farm (now called Servant Heart Farm) was purchased and became
the site of the festival from 1999 till 2012. The space allowed for more stages, bigger venues, and more room for campers. After the move to the new location, the festival had six stages including: The Main Stage, The Deep End, The Edge, two separate Indie Stages, and The Galleria Stage. This reflects both the growth of the festival, but also the diversity that had occurred in contemporary Christian music.

Camping at Ichthus and dealing with the unpredictable weather was part of the Ichthus experience.  
(Image courtesy of Asbury Theological Seminary Archives and Special Collections.)

Ichthus was also well known for the amount of rain it seemed to attract. Originally held in early May or late April, (which allowed the festival to make use of a large number of volunteers from Asbury College and Asbury Theological Seminary before the summer break in classes) by 2006 the organizers decided to move the festival to mid-June. Part of this move was due to the weather in 2005. Choosing the rather unfortunate theme of “Let it Rain,” did nothing to help matters. As one reviewer noted on the Friday afternoon,
Then, the theme of Ichthus 2005, “Let it Rain,” manifested itself. Only it did not just rain, it poured. A tornado warning forced campers to evacuate and take shelter in their vehicles. Cassie and I struggled against the wind and the rain to take down our tent. After the storm blew over, I was very dismayed to hear the rest of the concerts for the evening had been canceled... Saturday, the weather got even stranger. The gravel on the roads helped make them less muddy than last year, but there was still quite a bit of mud. It was also unusually cold... We had hoped to see Day of Fire during the afternoon, but we could not stand the cold. As we were leaving the Extol concert, the unthinkable occurred. It began to snow. I have seen wild weather at Ichthus over the years, but I never expected to see snow.18

In 2004, the rain was so bad it shut down the road system on the Ichthus Farm, and as a result paved and gravel roads were added. Another writer noted, “The problem with rain started in 1983, a year that became known as the ‘rain year’ or ‘Mudthus.’ However, it rained even harder at the 2002 festival. Last year (2005) set the record for the coldest temperatures.”19

In 1992 DC Talk and Steven Curtis Chapman both performed at the festival with the theme “Rock Solid” demonstrating some of the rapid diversification of contemporary Christian music that was developing.

(Image courtesy of Asbury Theological Seminary Archives and Special Collections.)
Christopher Jackson, a Lutheran pastor from Lexington, attended the 2007, 2008, and 2009 festivals with his youth group. He notes that Ichthus in 2009 attracted around 14,000 people and the festival reported 581 first-time commitments to Christ. He describes the atmosphere and the concert itself,

The concert area is a huge, fenced in compound on a hill above the campground. Inside the gate you pass two side stages that host bands outside the mainstream of Contemporary Christian Music, bands that either haven’t “made it” yet or offer musical styles that are less popular than those on the main stage. Most offer either heavy metal or punk rock. Some bands are more artsy—one stage even featured two violinists—and some defy categorization, like the Psalters, a group of bohemian acoustic musicians who mix such elements as Eastern European melodies, African drumbeats, and the Sanctus into their music.

The side stages also host breakout sessions, when concerts and other activities cease so that festival-goers can hear presenters. In recent years these have included Shaine Claiborne, Matthew Sleeth, M.D., Dr. Devin Brown of Asbury Seminary [actually Asbury University not Seminary], and XXX-church, a ministry aimed at preventing and freeing people from the use of pornography.

A little farther in are prayer tents, a Compassion International booth where you can sponsor a needy child, and the merchandise tent with an energy and feel all its own due to the eclectic mix of vendors. Every band sets up a table where they meet fans and hawk CDs, posters and T-shirts. Some vendors sell “Jesus Junk”- buttons, bobble-heads of biblical characters, and apparel. T-shirts reading “It’s a relationship, not a religion” are popular...

Past the merchandise tents you finally encounter the main stage, a massive steel and cement structure, with huge speakers and video screens. This is where popular, commercially successful groups play, artists like David Crowder, Skillet, Toby Mac, Grits, and Family Force 5.

While Jackson clearly admired many aspects of the festival, as a traditional Lutheran pastor he also was a bit skeptical about the clothing, tattoos, Mosh pits, and loud music!
Vendors often sold T-shirts and other faith-related items during the Ichthus festival, like this vendor in front of Sims Drugstore on Main Street Wilmore. (Image courtesy of Asbury Theological Seminary Archives and Special Collections.)

No matter what people thought of the festival itself, Ichthus had a major impact on young people’s lives. And some of those lives continue to have an impact. In an article in Charisma magazine Leslie Montgomery tells the story of how United States Vice President Mike Pence found Christ. A key part is detailed when she writes,

A few weeks later, (Mike) Stevens (a fraternity brother from college) invited Pence to attend the annual Ichthus Christian music festival in Wilmore, Kentucky. It was there that Pence’s life was transformed.

“I heard lots of great singing, and I heard lots of wonderful preaching,” Pence says, “On Saturday night [while] sitting in a light rain,... my heart really finally broke with a deep realization [that] what had happened on the cross, in some infinitesimal way, had happened for me. And I gave my life and made a personal decision to trust Jesus Christ as my Savior.”

The 1978 Ichthus festival at which Vice President Pence committed his life to Christ was held April 28-29, 1978, where much of the teaching was by
Bob Laurent, and the performers included: Honeytree, Andrus, Blackwood and Company, Good News Circle, Pat Terry Group, New Hope, and Selah. In an interview with Rev. Chip DeWitt, who served as the General Chair of the 1978 festival, he shared how as a newlywed senior at the Seminary he and his wife were asked to lead the 1978 festival. Many people advised him against this because of all the work involved and because he was just newly married, but they decided to take on the task. As Chip and his wife, Marge were preparing for the festival, it began raining and they felt concerned that the rain might be a problem, and so the couple walked around the grounds and prayed that God would not let the rain prevent the important work that needed to happen. Little did they know the future Vice President of the United States would be there. At the urging of people in his church, Rev. DeWitt shared the story in a letter with Vice President Pence, and they received not only a personal letter in response, but also a private meeting with the Vice President in Jacksonville, Florida. In the letter from Vice President Pence dated July 10, 2020, he wrote, “I thank God every day for that rainy night in Wilmore. Now I know who else to thank.”

With the last Ichthus festival in 2012, it might be useful to think about why the festival ended. Mark Vermillion was called in as a consultant in 2008-2009 and then served as the CEO of Ichthus from 2010-2012. He notes that there were a number of key factors that led to the end of the Ichthus festival. While attendance had dropped from its peak in 1999 and 2000, this was not really the deciding factor. The move of date from April/May to mid-June also had an impact. The later date conflicted with other music festivals and various summer events. As Vermillion notes there was very little going on in April in terms of youth activities like prom, graduation, or even major sports events, but while the move to June was great from a weather perspective, Ichthus suddenly found itself competing with summer camps and other activities. The change in date certainly impacted the number of volunteers Ichthus could count on from Asbury College (University) and Asbury Theological Seminary for working the festival, so that important connection was also minimized. The mortgage on the festival site was also a heavy burden, which Ichthus was not able to get out from under. Although as Vermillion points out, Ichthus was also committed to giving large amounts of money raised to help other ministries and still kept that focus even when they could have used the money for their own costs. In addition to the mortgage on the property, the costs of upkeep and liability continued to create a situation where the festival started each
year needing to make a sizeable amount before it could even begin work to break even.

Yet beyond the unique challenges that Ichthus faced, there were other factors that played a larger role. Realities that were true not just for Ichthus, but for all other Christian music festivals and may help account for a decline in the entire genre. The Cornerstone Festival ended in 2012, TOMfest in 2009, HeavenFest in 2016, and the Agape Festival in 2013, so Ichthus was not alone in ending its ministry in this time period. Vermillion points out that changes in youth culture led to a decline in interest in camping or “roughing it” (especially among youth pastors) and an increased interest in luxury camp or hotel experiences. While Ichthus responded to this with single day passes that grouped artists from specific genres on the same day, Vermillion responds, “it was too little, too late.” However, it is also interesting to note that the same type of trend was being noticed in secular music festivals as well. Large-scale traditional festivals were aimed at die-hard fans, but crowds, rising prices, the increasing age of those attending (along with an increased desire for comfort over camping and mud), and venue problems led to an increase in smaller, more niche-focused secular festivals during the same time period.23

Given the shift away from Christian music festivals in the early 2010s bigger possible factors are changes in the music industry and in music technology. If Steck and Howard were correct, part of the importance of contemporary Christian music festivals was the ability of various Christian musicians to connect with fans outside of occasional performances at churches and coffee houses, since other avenues were closed to them (such as bars and clubs). Music distribution changed drastically with the iTunes Music Store in 2003, Amazon Music in 2007, and Spotify in 2008 bringing the music world into a digital age (this legal use of digital music followed the earlier free exchange of music through Napster and other peer-to-peer networks). This led to an even greater diversification of music into specific niche markets while at the same time leading to a loss in profits for the music recording industry. It so happened that 2012 (the last year of Ichthus) was also the first year digital music sales outpaced physical sales.24 The greater ease of accessing music by mobile devices and smartphones also changed the way fans interacted with music. Musicians increasingly connected to their fan base through social media and the Internet, and as this happened the importance of the concert experience, and especially the music festival experience became less essential for contemporary Christian music. Mark
Vermillion adds weight to this argument. He notes that digital sales of $0.99 singles through iTunes drastically reduced the sales of albums. This meant that recording artists needed to make up for lost revenue through increased touring schedules. The market became oversaturated and artists sought to charge more for preforming at festivals outside of their touring schedule. All of this led to greater costs at the same time that attendance was slipping. Vermillion also points out that there were very few big headliners in contemporary Christian music and so this led to hiring the same six or seven groups each year and this in turn affected creativity.

Vermillion recalls that he and others were becoming increasingly disappointed in how “‘Christian’ became a marketing label.” He noticed how more “Christian” groups were being formed as a business approach, while genuine people of faith in other genres were excluded. He feels this same disillusionment about the contemporary Christian music industry was also growing among Millennials. Ichthus attempted to solve some of this concern with the Galleria stage, which tended to promote singer-songwriters (often acoustic or unplugged) who had publicly declared their faith, but were part of more secular genres of music. Millennials, like Ed Kilbourne and others involved in the folk music scene of the 1960s, felt that secular music could effectively convey spiritual truth without being specifically labeled as “Christian” and separated out from other musicians. In some ways, Christian music had come full circle at the Ichthus festival. As Mark Vermillion laments, “We couldn’t be ‘Christian’ enough for some, but for others we were too ‘Christian.’”
No matter what people may think of the music or the festival itself as a contextualized way to do evangelism, it cannot be denied that Ichthus definitely had an impact on many young people’s lives.

(Image courtesy of Asbury Theological Seminary Archives and Special Collections.)

The truth is that album sales, tours, or music festivals no longer drive Christian music. The industry has changed along with the technology that drove the changes. In a 2015 article by James Rickman, Josh Caterer, a Christian musician and worship director is quoted as saying,

Christian music is driven by a much more tightly controlled industry than secular music is. And it pertains to very specific revenue streams that don’t exist in secular music because of CCLI—Christian Copyright Licensing International, which is basically the Christian version of ASCAP or BMI. CCLI keeps track of all the songs that are performed in churches—every church is supposed to pay an annual fee to CCLI. Then CCLI will pay royalties to the songwriters and publishers of that music. So what you have is a situation where, in secular music, it’s becoming more difficult to make music because people aren’t buying CDs the way they used to, and the music industry is freaking out, but in Christian music, there’s this performance revenue stream that comes from churches performing worship songs every week and that is completely unaffected by album sales.
I happen to know from talking to people in the industry that generally they don’t care as much about trying to sell albums. Making an album is only a way to get people to perform these songs in their churches, because if a song takes on a life of its own in church world as being a popular worship song, that can become a huge revenue stream, even if they never sell any records. They could give the music away; they just want people to perform it in churches.\textsuperscript{25}

This insight into the world of contemporary Christian music helps to better understand why contemporary Christian music no longer needs to depend on Christian music festivals to drive album sales among fans. With both revenue from digital music sales and with a special source of revenue through worship song licensing, there is no longer an industry-driven need for musicians to attend music festivals.

Christian music festivals do continue to occur, as is evidenced by the Christian Festival Association, founded in 2006, which currently lists 26 Christian music festivals as their members; although the fact that they also currently list 25 of 28 Christian music festivals as postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 to 2021 may signal some future warning signs.\textsuperscript{26} Mark Vermillion made a thought-provoking point when he observed that even if Ichthus had made it to its 50\textsuperscript{th} year in 2020, it would have likely been the last festival anyway due to the current pandemic (or most likely it would have been postponed and then closed due to revenue losses). When asked about the impact of Ichthus, Vermillion concluded the interview by relating a story. After Ichthus ended he was in Memphis at a hotel wearing an old Ichthus T-shirt when a man approached him and asked about his ties to Ichthus. Then the man told him that he had been in the 2012 Ichthus and that festival had radically transformed him from a life of drugs into a life of faith. Vermillion concludes that even when he was feeling down about the end of Ichthus, “God wanted to put an exclamation point on it and say, ‘I was at work!’” Even in its closing days, God was still changing lives through Ichthus.

In the same way that Ichthus began with God’s perfect timing in a symphony of events and people, Ichthus ended with the same complex mix of factors. Rising costs tied to the purchase of the farm as a festival venue, along with costs for liability and upkeep, hindered the growth of Ichthus at the same time that changes in the youth culture and the changing of the April/May date for the festival reduced the attendance and number
of volunteers from Asbury University and Asbury Theological Seminary. But these factors alone are not sufficient to explain the end of the festival. Changes in music technology which spawned radical changes in the music industry all contributed to an environment which was no longer sustainable for a Christian music festival in Wilmore. What is clear is that God did not waste any time or talent. The last Ichthus festival was just as spiritually powerful as the first.

Despite the shift in the Christian music culture over time, it is important to recognize the contextualization of rock and roll, and the adaptation of the music festival setting, has been a major factor in the Christian culture in the United States from 1970 to the present. While the form itself may be in a decline from its peak, events like the Ichthus music festival demonstrated that evangelical Christianity could adapt to the complex youth culture of its time. Spiritually, Ichthus and the Christian music festivals that followed provided a context where young people could come together, drawn by a cultural love of relevant music, be affirmed in their Christian identity, and for many find the relationship with Christ that would grow, guide, and sustain them through adulthood. As with any ministry involved with cultural engagement, it may have been useful for only a moment of time, but for the people who encountered Christ in that moment, it became an eternity.

Special note: Do you have a special memory of Ichthus? Was your life and walk with Christ changed as a result of the festival? Did you volunteer your time while a student? We would love to hear from you! Please send us written accounts of your experiences or scans of photographs you may have of the festival. We are hoping to add to the collection of Ichthus materials for future researchers and want to preserve your stories of this incredible ministry. Send your stories or photos to: archives@asburyseminary.edu. We look forward to hearing from you!

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

1 All images used courtesy of the Archives of the B.L Fisher Library of Asbury Theological Seminary who own all copyrights to these digital images, unless otherwise noted. Please contact them directly if interested in obtaining permission to reuse these images.


5 Steck and Howard, Apostles of Rock, 29-30.

6 Steck and Howard, Apostles of Rock, 56.

7 Steck and Howard, Apostles of Rock, 59.

8 Email correspondence with Dr. Steve Seamands, August 5, 2020.

9 Gary Baker, Ichthus Through the Years. Ichthus Ministries, Inc.: Wilmore, KY 1997: 1. Published privately as a directory of past administrators and brief history of the Ichthus festival. Copy in the Archives and Special Collections of B.L. Fisher Library, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY.

10 Special thanks to Ed Kilbourne for an in-depth phone interview about music and the context of Wilmore during the 1960s, August 11, 2020.

11 Special thanks goes to Rev. John Park whose excellent memory and engaging stories provided much of the information in this section through a phone interview, August 5, 2020 (and a follow-up interview on September 3, 2020), as well as Rev. Larry Minner who provided additional and supporting information in a phone interview, August 6, 2020 and Dr. Bill Moore who also provided information about the music in a phone interview, August 14, 2020.

12 Published in 1922, with words by Rhea F. Miller and music by George Beverly Shea, the lyrics and music copyright are held by The Rodheaver Co. (a division of Word Music, Inc.). The lyrics themselves are in the public domain, being written before 1923, but the use of these lyrics is
also in line with Fair Use for scholarship reasons as advocated by the best practices of the American Musicological Society. The same applies to the use of the publication of the lyrics for “My Love” by Tony Hatch earlier in the article.


14 Special thanks to Dr. Jim Garlow for a lengthy phone interview, August 11, 2020. Additional phone interviews with Travis Hutchison (August 14, 2020) and Steve Moore (August 26, 2020) were also invaluable sources of information for Ichthus from 1972-1976.

15 Email correspondence with Dr. John Oswalt, July 31, 2020.


17 Jack Harnish, “‘Soon and Very Soon’... He’s Gone to Meet the King.” Monday Memo blog, January 11, 2015. Available at: https://jackharnish.wordpress.com/2015/01/11/soon-and-very-soon-hes-gone-to-meet-the-king/


19 Cassi Haggard, “The Ichthus Experience.” The Times-Tribune, Corbin, KY. June 14, 2006. Available at: https://www.thetimestribune.com/community/the-ichthus-experience/article_c6db4682-7a76-5203-bd25-3fa4fcb18422.html


22 Special thanks to Mark Vermillion for a Zoom interview on August 27, 2020, which confirmed and emphasized the variety of causes that led to the end of the Ichthus music festival.

Laurie Segall, “Digital Music Sales Top Physical Sales.” CNN Money, January 5, 2012. Available at: https://money.cnn.com/2012/01/05/technology/digital_music_sales/index.htm


Book Reviews

Between the Swastika and the Sickle: The Life, Disappearance, and Execution of Ernst Lohmeyer
James R. Edwards
Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans
2019, 368 pp., hardcover, $30.00
ISBN: 978-0-8028-7618-8

Reviewed by Susangeline Patrick

In Between the Swastika and the Sickle, James Edwards narrates the remarkable and unique biography of Ernst Lohmeyer, a German New Testament scholar and theologian, who lived through the Nazi years and mysteriously disappeared during the Soviet Communist occupation in 1946, East Germany.

Edwards has offered an in-depth analysis of how the circle of intellectuals responded to Nazism differently. He has also provided extensive contexts, historical background, and theological insights in the life and works of Lohmeyer. Edwards compares and juxtaposes his own scholarship in the New Testament and his own life experiences as an American who has lived in Germany both prior to and post 1990, with Lohmeyer’s life and experience. Assigned to investigate how Lohmeyer went missing, Edwards explored primary materials in difficult to access archives, conducted interviews and even made personal connections with Lohmeyer’s family members, friends, and witnesses.

Edwards resolved the puzzle of Lohmeyer’s disappearance. In the first two chapters, he introduces the reader to why he embarks on the quest of seeking the truth about Lohmeyer’s execution. Lohmeyer was accused of war crimes he never committed. The political regime of the time sought to erase Lohmeyer as if he never existed. Thus, Edwards pursued the restoration
of the memory of Lohmeyer as a way to resist a historical and political tyranny. Chapters three and four tell of Lohmeyer’s upbringing, education, his interests in mathematics and aesthetics that built the foundation of his later critical Biblical scholarship, and his courtship with Melie Seyberth, his later wife. Chapters five through eleven reveal Lohmeyer’s academic development, family life, and personal reflections in theologically opposing anti-Semitism in academia and supporting his Jewish colleagues in Breslau. Lohmeyer stood for truth and justice and endured opposition. Chapters twelve through fifteen chronicle Lohmeyer’s drafting into the German military, how he navigated through the atrocities of war, the complexity of his return to Greifswald, and his arrest and imprisonment by the NKVD. The last chapters, sixteen and seventeen, turn to the correspondence between Lohmeyer and his wife, Melie Seyberth, and share the essential testimony, “the issue of being a moral human being in a world of violence and chaos” (258). Ultimately, Lohmeyer’s memory comes alive to modern readers and presents him as a person of faith and character. His honest confession and self-understanding while in prison set him free and conformed his suffering and death with Christ’s. Edwards restores Lohmeyer’s honor.

Twenty-first century readers from academia and the church, and students in theology will find Edwards’ skillfully crafted biography a remarkable work of research. It compels us to carefully discern our own theological engagements, social consciousness, and personal integrity in the context of politics.

Preaching Isaiah’s Message Today
Bill Thompson
2020, 224 pp., paper, $17.99

Reviewed by Rob Fleenor

In Preaching Isaiah’s Message Today, Bill Thompson explores how to bring the book of Isaiah from the domain of academic debate to the province of an effective pulpit. Thompson’s work offers three goals: to bridge the gap between the Old Testament prophets and preaching, to bridge
the gap between mainline and evangelical traditions of North American Christianity, and to provide practical examples of sermons as a culmination of his study. The first section of the book provides an overview of prophets and prophecy itself in relation to preaching: their value in scripture, the nuances of the prophets themselves and the works that bear their names, and the particulars related to the interpretation and exegesis of Isaiah. Chapter two provides a useful conceptual framework for the prophets and the books that bear their names, while chapters three and four narrow the focus to issues related specifically to the book of Isaiah. Chapter three surveys the themes appearing in Isaiah, while chapter four wades through the literary-critical issues, particularly in regard to the question of Isaiah’s authorship. While Thompson ultimately finds a canonical approach rooted in a high view of scripture to be the most useful for the task of preaching from Isaiah, he presents a solid and fair overview of the issues involved.

The second section shifts toward homiletic concerns and engages the practical aspects of crafting sermons. Chapter six is a discussion of a straightforward template for effective exegetical study and sermon writing, followed by chapter seven’s focus on application. Chapter eight returns to an emphasis on a high view of scripture as the foundation of effective preaching. The prophets were who they were precisely because of their perspective about and connection to God’s message.

The third section is a sampling of sermon manuscripts from Isaiah, covering well-known passages such as Isaiah 1, 6, 53, etc. While the preaching style may resonate differently for different readers, the sermons clearly reflect the exegesis and writing framework offered in the second section.

Thompson’s writing style is straightforward and organized. The book is highly accessible, bypassing the technical language related to Isaianic studies in favor of a colloquial style that still nimbly discusses the academic issues. Many ministry-themed books are often bogged down by bulky illustrations, but that’s not the case here. Illustrations are succinct and illuminating rather than overwrought. The discussion throughout the book is well-documented and provides a strong jumping-off point for a deeper academic study on Isaiah.

The content itself would have benefited from more overt discussion regarding the book’s second goal of bridging the gap between evangelical and mainline preaching traditions. Much of the book’s accomplishment in this area is implicit, expressed primarily through the scholars and preachers
selected and Thompson’s even-handed navigation of the issues. The print copy reviewed suffered from some minor pixilation on the fonts and headings, an unfortunate production issue. These are small quibbles that detract little from the book’s effectiveness.

Thompson’s overview is a strong treatment of prophetic identity and offers good material to mine for audiences not used to processing preaching from the Prophets. The book’s treatment of Isaiah is broad enough that students, preachers, and motivated laity would benefit from the summary material.

Thompson’s book will prove a useful addition to most preachers’ libraries. Preaching students will especially benefit from the exegetical process presented in chapters six and seven, a condensed version of which appears as the second appendix. The first two sections include chapter review questions that should prove helpful, particularly to groups discussing the issues the book raises. Thompson’s work will benefit anyone wanting a strong introductory overview of Isaiah and the issues involved in translating his message for contemporary audiences.

 Acts of Interpretation: Scripture, Theology, and Culture
S.A. Cummins and Jens Zimmerman, eds.
Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
2018, 240 pp., paperback, $35.00
ISBN: 978-0-8028-7500-6

Reviewed by Zachariah S. Motts

I had high hopes that this would be a book where some of the leading evangelical interpreters come together to wrestle with the questions our culture is asking today and engage with the urgent voices from the broader world of interpretation. Acts of Interpretation did not meet my hopes. While most articles are well-written and appropriately scholarly, the authors and their “theological interpretation” do not do much to expand the boundaries of evangelical interpretation. Instead of offering us theology as the queen of the sciences, able to take on the hard questions and deal with new data, there is an atmosphere of almost  irenic defensiveness where appeals to canon and church seem to justify an inward turn.
One obvious exception to this was the article by Peter Enns, “The Bible, Evolution, and the Journey of Faith” (63-80). Enns faces squarely the implications and challenges that evolutionary theory brings to biblical interpretation. He deserves credit for his perceptivity and courage, but the fact that this point needs to be argued here in the way that it is also serves as a reminder that evangelicals have delayed and avoided open and honest conversations on this topic for a long time. Enns strongly emphasizes the role of extrabiblical information in interpretation, but the other authors do not reach as far for that information as Enns.

There is an emphasis in multiple essays on looking back into church history and pulling on older sources for the ressourcement of theology today. To that end, Hans Boersma offers an exploration of allegorical interpretation by drawing on Melito of Sardis and Origen of Alexandria. He opens with the question that is on the minds of moderns when they read allegorical interpretation: is this just an arbitrary way of reading meaning into a text? When Boersma returns to this question at the end of the essay, he has Melito and Origen perform a monologue where they scoff at our modern suspicions and say that the reading that makes sense in “[the church’s] liturgical setting and its confession of faith” is merely exposing the deeper, underlying meaning that is “already there” (174). This is an extremely frustrating ending to an otherwise decent essay and does not take seriously the modern difficulty with accepting these interpretations.

I am not opposed to attempts at ressourcement, to interpretations that take seriously the theological, canonical, or liturgical settings, or to giving more weight to the life of the community interpreting the text. My problem is that I do not see in this collection as a whole a way forward for evangelicals to engage the broader world. I do not see applications that take seriously the questions modern people cannot help but ask. Just before I read this book, I finished reading Paul Tillich’s Systematic Theology. I realize that he is not very popular in evangelical circles, but I was struck by something in his work. No matter what you think of the answers he arrived at, Tillich took very seriously and understood well the questions that modern people could not help but ask. As good as many of these essays are, the collection missed opportunities to open the conversation outward to engage our culture today.
George MacDonald in the Age of Miracles: Incarnation, Doubt, and Reenchantment
Timothy Larsen
Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic
2018, 150 pp., paper, $18.00
ISBN: 978-0-8303-5373-1

Reviewed by Ginger Stelle

Timothy Larsen’s George MacDonald in the Age of Miracles: Incarnation, Doubt, and Reenchantment is the compilation of three lectures given as part of the Ken and Jean Hansen Lectureship series at Wheaton College during the 2016-17 academic year. This lecture series features one member of Wheaton’s faculty presenting three lectures (with responses from other faculty members) on one of the seven Wade Center authors: C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Dorothy Sayers, George MacDonald, G.K. Chesterton, Owen Barfield, and Charles Williams. This is the second volume to emerge from this lecture series. In it, Larsen examines the works of George MacDonald in the context of key social and theological developments in the Victorian period.

Chapter one, “George MacDonald in the Age of the Incarnation,” begins with a discussion of a general midcentury shift in the Anglican church’s theological emphasis from the Atonement to Incarnation (12-13). This shift caused the Victorians to place greater emphasis on Christmas (21). Into this context, he places MacDonald, exploring both MacDonald’s explicit discussion of these theological matters and his treatment of the Christmas holiday throughout his fiction. The response from James Edward Beitel III briefly applies Larsen’s analysis to MacDonald’s fantasy novel Phantastes.

Chapter two, “George MacDonald and the Crisis of Doubt,” challenges the oft-repeated notion of the Victorian “Crisis of Faith,” a widespread loss of faith due to increasing secularization and doubt. In contrast, Larsen suggests that, as “the very notion of ‘doubt’ presupposes a context where faith is the norm” (50), it is more accurate to call the Victorian period “an Age of Faith.” For MacDonald, Larsen argues, honest doubt is often a pathway into a deeper, more mature faith in Christ. Larsen supports this with compelling examples from MacDonald’s writings, both fiction and literary criticism. The response from Richard Hughes Gibson moves from
Larsen’s analysis to explore MacDonald’s belief in poetry as the force best suited to draw humanity nearer to the mind of the Creator.

Finally, Chapter three, “George MacDonald and the Reenchantment of the World,” tackles MacDonald’s theology of sanctification. Drawing on both biographical and literary sources, Larsen argues that despite MacDonald’s claim that he thoroughly rejected the Calvinism of his upbringing, he nonetheless retained a life-long belief in God’s providence and the sanctifying power of suffering. The response from Jill Pelaez Baumbaertner digs deeper into MacDonald’s views by placing him in context with three poets: John Donne, Martin Luther, and William Blake.

Overall, this is an excellent resource for anyone interested in learning more about George MacDonald. Larsen chooses an unusual path in MacDonald scholarship. Whereas the majority of MacDonald scholarship still focuses on MacDonald’s fantasies and/or on his influence on C.S. Lewis and others, Larson presents a more balanced look at MacDonald, pulling many of his examples from MacDonald’s non-fantasy work, even including his (rarely-cited) works of literary criticism. He considers MacDonald firmly within his Victorian context, shining an important light on aspects of MacDonald’s work that would be easy for a twenty-first century audience to overlook. If the book has a downside, it would be that Larsen does not go into much depth about any individual text, choosing instead to highlight the breadth and consistency of MacDonald’s oeuvre. However, this approach also makes the overall work more accessible to a general audience. The end result is a book that opens new ground in MacDonald scholarship and which should appeal to both casual and scholarly readers of George MacDonald alike.

1-2 Thessalonians: Zondervan Critical Introductions to The New Testament
Nijay K. Gupta
Series Editor: Michael F. Bird
Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic
2019, 320 pp., Hardcover, $44.99
ISBN: 978-0310518716

Reviewed by William B. Bowes
1-2 Thessalonians is the first of the volumes released in Zondervan’s Critical Introduction series, which aims to provide an extended treatment of details often more sparsely addressed in larger New Testament commentaries. The series concerns itself with a thorough engagement of the issues typically relegated to the introductory section of a commentary, namely matters pertaining to the authorship, composition date, audience, socio-historical context, genre, purpose, literary integrity, literary style, structure, argument and history of interpretation of a biblical text. The content thus bears some similarity to the Sheffield New Testament Guides (produced about twenty years ago) and the more recent T&T Clark Study Guides. The length of this volume (at 320 pages) dwarfs the average length of the Sheffield and T&T Clark volumes, and as a result it has the promise of making a unique contribution in terms of its scope as a reference.

Nijay Gupta has been prolific in his writings on Paul, and this volume is nearly twice as long as his 2016 commentary on 1-2 Thessalonians from the New Covenant series. The book is divided into two sections, one for each of the Thessalonian epistles. Each epistle is assigned four chapters, with the first addressing the text of the epistle, the second addressing the background and situation, the third addressing the themes and various methods of interpretation, and the last addressing the history of interpretation. Each chapter is helpfully broken down into headlines and section divisions, which make them easier to follow and can keep a reader engaged who might otherwise be unaccustomed to a more technical volume. In terms of technicality, the book does presume that the reader has some familiarity with Greek, and if one does not, there are sections that require some skimming. These are relatively minor and most of the Greek is translated, but the book is aimed at an exegete with some language experience or otherwise an educated minister or layperson.

Beginning with the first chapter, Gupta lists the most relevant manuscripts of 1 Thessalonians and examines the most significant textual variants, noting where some are more important than others (21-24). Gupta likewise discusses the integrity of the text and the more significant debates of contemporary scholars, such as the difficult question of interpreting 2:13-16 (25). Date and authorship are then explored, with Gupta also surveying recent scholarship regarding matters of style, influence, and structure (27-37). Chapter five follows this same pattern with 2 Thessalonians, surveying text-critical issues and including a particularly helpful breakdown of the structure of the letter, which is not always discussed to a detailed extent.
in many commentaries (189-190). In each instance where a question of interpretation is raised, Gupta does take a position (with varying levels of certainty). However, he is fair to scholars of different views and is respectful in his treatment of their opinions. Because Gupta does propose a conclusion on each matter, the book can have the feel of a commentary (although it is not labeled as such). Gupta is inclusive of a wide spectrum of viewpoints, and when proposing a conclusive position, his tone is never dogmatic.

The second chapter addresses the background and situation of 1 Thessalonians, with Gupta discussing matters such as the scholarly views surrounding the account of Thessalonica in Acts (53-59), the reasons for which Paul wrote the letter (62), and possibilities regarding the meaning of ambiguous words like ἵππηκτος in 5:14 (64-83). In the sixth chapter, where these same issues are covered for 2 Thessalonians, there is also an extended discussion on the controversial aspect of authorship (197-219). The larger treatment of the issue is exceptionally helpful, since 2 Thessalonians is often placed in the “deutero-Pauline” category. What is especially helpful about this analysis is that Gupta (who does hold to Pauline authorship) takes the time to answer the “why” question, explaining the importance of doing the work of coming to a conclusion about issues like authorship (219).

In the third chapter, Gupta identifies various themes in the letter and how these are identified, with some being more pronounced than others (90-106). Gupta’s treatment of the most debated interpretive issues in 1 Thessalonians (in this case 2:7b, 2:13-16, 4:4, 4:11 and 5:3) may be the book’s most helpful contribution, in that the reader is provided with the broad spectrum of opinions and an evaluation of the reasoning of each. The discussion of themes in 2 Thessalonians is useful, in that the second epistle has some different emphases than the first (232-233), although the two are related (a connection which Gupta explores carefully). The fourth and eighth chapters begin with the apostolic fathers and look at how the letters have been interpreted from early church history, through the reformation, and into the modern era, which helps to nuance the reader’s understanding of the letters and put them into a broader perspective.

Gupta’s contribution excels in several areas. First, it holds a balance between academic technicality and readability. Second, Gupta’s respect for the scripture comes through, but his respect of other more critical scholars comes through as well, and he is fair in discussing and analyzing varying perspectives. Finally, above all, the book is thorough. In 320 extensive pages, the book completes its aim of a wide-ranging array of
helpful tools for any person seeking to develop a deeper understanding of the Thessalonian epistles and their interpretation.

The Rise of Network Christianity: How Independent Leaders are Changing the Religious Landscape
Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity Series
Brad Christerson and Richard Flory
New York, NY: Oxford University Press
2017, 185 pp., hardcover, $27.61
ISBN: 9780190635671

Reviewed by Matthew C. Maresco

Having begun their research looking into the repercussions of the 1906 Azusa Street Revival in the L.A. area (vii), Christerson and Flory quickly realized that the eruption of Pentecostalism across the globe had created new “roots,” as it were, for the movement across the United States and it was these new formations that they would need to study in order to understand the current climate of American Charis/Pentecostalism. In order to organize their presentation, the authors coin the phrase, “‘Independent Network Charismatic’ Christianity,” which they refer by the acronym, “INC” (2). The term, “Charismatic,” is utilized as the authors do understand that there is a theological line between Pentecostals and Charismatics in America (7-8); however, both can be referred to as “Charismatic” as they “emphasize miracles and physical manifestations of the Holy Spirit” (1).

Early on, the authors state that they chose to focus on four specific organizations, “Bethel, International House of Prayer (IHOP), Harvest International Ministries (HIM), and the Wagner Leadership Institute,” because of how frequently mentioned they were (6). Therefore, these four agencies are presented as exemplars of INC Christianity, with various implications drawn from each to build out what they deduced INC truly is. Having been raised in this world, as my parents helped start IHOPKC and were with Mike’s church since the late 80s, I was particularly intrigued to see how the authors would depict INC, as I see wide distinctions between the agencies listed.
My questions were abundantly answered as early as page 8, where the authors refer to C. Peter Wagner as a “highly influential INC leader,” and begin to discuss his term, “New Apostolic Reformation,” exactly equating his term, NAR, with their own INC. Even though they state that their research spanned from at least “2009 to 2016” (6) and involved “a total of forty-one in-depth interviews,” (6) which sounds bizarrely low for such a timeframe, it appears that founding their research upon Wagner’s work colored their perceptions of the ministries they subsequently engaged with. As it were, they believed they were walking into a singular ecosystem, whereas I would counter that they have cataloged a list of entirely separate planets in a similar solar system.

Regarding their research itself, I can only strongly speak about their sections on IHOPKC, as my knowledge of Bethel and HIM are only second-degree at best. However, turning to it, I found the work to be lacking considering the effort they claim to have given and the fact that it was published by Oxford Press. An early example can be found in their retelling of the arrival of these ministries, where it is evident that they had an “in-depth interview” with Todd Hunter and never verified his perspective with Mike Bickle or John Arnott (23-26). Where they begin to focus on IHOPKC (37), it is barely the second paragraph that they’ve already mistaken South Kansas City Fellowship, the church Mike began in 1983, with Metro Christian Fellowship, the church that left the Vineyard movement in October of 1996 (37). Added to which, they mention the attendance of Kansas City Chiefs football players at this church, followed immediately by a statement claiming that Bickle “says during that time he was actively anti-Charismatic,” (38) which proves difficult considering the Chiefs players began attending because of a miraculous healing under Mike’s ministry.

Regarding one of their assessments of IHOPKC, the authors state, “IHOP employs over 3,000 interns who pay from $1,200 to $4,900 to participate in one of five different internship programs,” where they spend, “twenty-four hours a week in training for their internship role.” Based on this they state, emphasis theirs, “Most of the work at IHOP is undertaken by people whom IHOP does not directly pay—people who in fact pay IHOP for the privilege of serving the organization.” (112) This is outright false. If they had looked into the internships, they would have learned that the internships are focused on theological training rather than work-related activities, that the more expensive internships provide food and housing for its entire duration, and that not a single person on staff pays to work
there. So far, I've selected these three examples to demonstrate how their representation ranges from simple mistakes to outright falsehoods, which brings into question their data on the other agencies.

Another highly problematic area is their utilization of the INC umbrella. For example, the authors take two pages to introduce various methods of intercession, a form of prayer, that they claim are “INC strategies.” This is problematic as IHOPKC’s teaching on intercession directly, and intentionally, condemns the practices outlined by the authors (94), yet labeling them as “INC strategies” while simultaneously calling IHOPKC part of “INC” implies coherence. Another such example is their statement that INC leaders view modern-day apostolic authority/covering (51-53, 115), a view which IHOPKC rejects. Further, they speak of INC as highly financially successful (105-124), mentioning how an event like “Lou Engle’s ‘Azusa Now,’ would be difficult for a denomination like the Southern Baptist Convention to pull off,” (155) which fails to recognize that Lou double-mortgaged his house in order to help pay for the conference. It is in a plethora of ways like these that the authors manage to piece together a coherent whole that simply does not exist.

All of this being said, it is impressive to see that the author’s assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of the INC, to use their term, are quite valid. Whereas I would argue that a more accurate book title would be, “The Rise of Ministry Christianity,” as every entity is its own ministry, rather than a church, their critique of U.S., non-denominational Charis/Pentecostalism finds firm ground on three out of four fronts: The common over-emphasis on the miraculous (125-131), the lack true community (131-34), and the abundant opportunity for corruption and scandal (140-44). Their fourth, which argues that INC lacks the capacity to create long-term societal reform, seems dubious at best. If one must view non-denominational ministries as a coherent whole, then they must also include the non-profit organizations, religious or otherwise, staffed and/or founded by non-denominational Christians who may not be actively partnering at a corporate level, but are influenced and interact on the peer-to-peer level.

Lastly, from the strengths that the authors list, they draw out four possible adjustments that the broader spectrum of Protestantism could incorporate, and it is my belief that these are excellent starting points for transformation. It could even be considered ironic that the dissemination of these ideas, “offer[ing] a compelling experience of the supernatural”
INC seeks: not to form a new movement, but reform the old (26). Due to these conclusions, this book can aid in the pursuit of the Protestant future, learning from the failures and successes found within. However, the data the conclusions are drawn from must be corrected and then reassessed if we are to find a true future.

**Can “White” People Be Saved?: Triangulating Race, Theology, and Mission**
Missiological Engagement Series
Love L. Sechrest, Johnny Ramírez-Johnson, and Amos Yong, eds.
Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic.
2018, 240 pp., paper, $30.00
ISBN: 978-0-8308-5104-1

*Reviewed by Zachariah S. Motts*

I am a Caucasian male and I work for an evangelical missionary organization. In many ways, I am in the target demographic of the discussions in this book. Essay after essay in this collection pulls no punches, and they land some strong blows. Many strong blows. The authors challenge the reader over and over to take a long hard look at the ways race, theology, and mission have interacted in the past, have shaped the conversation today, and what sort of view of the future would be a step in the right direction. This book does not dance around discussing the politics of today or where missionaries have failed in the past. It is a very challenging book, a book that I wholeheartedly welcome and wish there were more conversations like this going on in evangelical circles.

The theme of this collection, as seen in the title, centers on the idea of “whiteness.” The vocabulary might be provocative, but it pays to listen closely to how this term is defined. William James Jennings stresses that “no one is born white. There is no white biology, but whiteness is real” (34). The conversation here is larger than white supremacy or white nationalism, and it is not restricted to one racial group or another. Ramírez-Johnson and Sechrest write that the discussion centers around “privilege as the
critical resource mediated in racist societies... resulting in the privilege for those atop the racial hierarchy and unequal treatment, exclusion from legal protections, exploitation, and violence for those lower on the hierarchy” (11). Unfortunately, the authors assert, this kind of privilege, this whiteness, has been tied into Christian history and the modern mission movement.

The essays explore this from many different angles. They span continents and demographics looking at the ways privilege, colonialism, and racism have shaped the contours of missionary work, church structures, and how we think about God. If you have not worked through these issues before, if privilege has been an unconscious part of your world, there is a lot to be uncomfortable about in these pages. There is much to repent of that is brought to the surface. That is an important part of this, but the authors do not just leave things at criticism. Repentance is a first step on a new path forward with a different vision of how Christian mission can happen. Andrew Draper offers four further steps for White folks to resist whiteness:

second, learning from theological and cultural resources not our own; third, choosing to locate our lives in places and structures in which we are necessarily guests; fourth, tangible submission to non-White ecclesial leadership; and fifth, hearing and speaking the glory of God in unfamiliar cadences (181).

As someone who has worked in an evangelical mission organization for more than a decade, I have seen many failures to live up to these principles and know the temptation to take advantage of the security and power that whiteness offers. I have benefitted from the privileges of whiteness in the systems I have inherited. There are voices here calling us to face some uncomfortable realities. However, to avoid this discussion or continue to mute these voices would be to perpetuate the twisting of mission into a form that cannot transmit the whole gospel. This is an important book for a missiology or church history student to read, but it is also a book that evangelicals need to read and discuss right now. If we wish to continue to value mission, we will have to face the injustices and anti-Christian stance of whiteness. This book offers an excellent starting point.
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.


Camp, Lee C.  

Carroll, R., M. Daniel  

Chilcote, Paul Wesley  

Challies, Tim  

Chatraw, Joshua D.  

Cook, John A. and Robert D. Holmsted  

Crowe, Brandon D.  

Elliott, Mark W.  

Elmer, Muriel I., and Duane H. Elmer  

Emerson, Matthew Y.  


Howell, Adam J., Benjamin L. Merkle, Robert L. Plummer  

Huebenthal, Sandra  

Johnson, Luke Timothy  

Kärkkäinen, Veli-Matti  

Kling, David W.  

Kruse, Colin G.  

Lee, Ahmi  

Lennox, John C.  

Levison, Jack  

Longenecker, Bruce W.  

Longman, Tremper, III  


Romero, Robert Chao  

Schnelle, Udo  

Strahan, Joshua  

Strauss, Mark L.  

Thorsen, Don  

Vanhoozer, Kevin J. and Owen Strachan  

Webb, William J. and Gordon K. Oeste  

Works, Carla Swafford  

Wilson, Jim L. and Earl Waggoner  

Wright, N.T.  
Wright, N.T. 
2020  

Wright, N.T. 
2020  

Yong, Amos 
2019  
About First Fruits Press

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