On Knowing Humanity Journal

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Creating a Christian faith-based approach to anthropology, incorporating insights from theology into ethnography and analysis, and allowing religiously committed anthropologists to speak freely of the ways in which their commitments inform their theory and practice. Raising new questions and lines of research on subjects such as: the significance of humanity's unique calling in nature for personhood and the construction of culture; the underlying reasons for humanity's destructive behavior toward self, others, and the environment; and the role that divine redemption and hope play in human lived experience and practice. Reincorporating teleology, in the sense of purpose, into scientific understanding, inviting dialogue between Christian anthropologists and anthropologists of all persuasions around a deeper understanding of the human condition, and encouraging the doing of anthropological research and writing through the eyes of faith.

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Table of Contents

Articles

Merely Rearranging Deck Chairs on the Titanic?: Our Global, Multi-faceted Challenge in Light of a Deep Grammar ESG Approach — 1
Lindy Backues

The Disparities in the Treatment of African American Women in the Southern Black Baptist Church — 15
Demora Haywood

Understanding Christianity Through Presentation and Practice: An Ethnographic Research Study — 28
Sarah Patterson

News and Opinions

OKH Rising: The Rise of the "On Knowing Humanity" Project in the Context of Today's Anthropology — 39
Edwin Roy Zehner

Book Reviews

Reforming a Theology of Gender: Constructive Reflections on Judith Butler and Queer Theory
By Daniel R. Patterson — 51
Vincent E. Gil

Connected Learning: How Adults with Limited Formal Education Learn
By L. Lynn Thigpen — 58
Daniel Baker

Merely Rearranging Deck Chairs on the Titanic?: Our Global, Multi-faceted Challenge in Light of a Deep Grammar ESG Approach

Lindy Backues

Our present situation finds us navigating a ship while avoiding at least three treacherous and menacing icebergs. The first is the global environmental crisis we face. By itself, this iceberg threatens to sink our ship, yet we seem blissfully to voyage along, either completely unaware of the dangers it poses or in complete denial that anything so menacing could possibly be lurking just over the rail of our ship. The second iceberg is the global pandemic all of us recently experienced. It is no exaggeration to say that this crisis prompted every government on earth to put its economy into a "coma". No one had a way out, nor did we have any idea how long the problem would last, and experts now tell us this will not be our last pandemic. The third iceberg is the spate of violence and state-sanctioned murders that have been directed toward persons of color, especially toward young black men. Prejudicial, inequitable arrangements found in state configurations across the globe seem to be baked into our world economic order and—alongside the other two icebergs—these threaten to sink our ship unless we come up with social and economic solutions rather quickly.

Our present financial and economic order—our ship—seems ill-equipped to navigate these waters. In this article, I take a rather detailed look at the educational as well as the financial makeup of our ship. It seems that our vessel needs a radical rebuild, a deep-grammar remodification that requires a rethink of our views on education and of the outsized role high finance plays on our world stage today. We are in desperate need of a deeply probing realignment, changes helpfully suggested by way of looking at these crises through an "ESG Impact Investing" lens. ESG approaches offer us deeply insightful environmental, socio-spiritual, and governance/power critiques, provided all three of these factors are deeply appraised and sincerely and holistically considered.

Our Present Treacherous Voyage

Like icebergs in the path of a ship, we have recently rammed into an assortment of global obstacles that many of us simply had not anticipated a mere ten years ago.

First, we continue to have before us the environmental crisis—of course, we have known about this "iceberg" for quite some time, but the threat it presents shows no signs of abating any time soon.[1] In fact, as a species we seem to be getting more and more adept at ignoring it as it looms larger and larger before us, though, most recently it seems that we are beginning to feel the acute effects of warming ocean waters, melting polar ice caps, decimated planetary species driven into extinction, leached top soil, dying barrier reefs, an ozone layer dangerously thinning with each passing day, and an economic and social system driven by our addiction to non-renewable energy sources (primarily petroleum products) that spew toxic pollutants over the face of our planet, that destroy the precious eco-balance of local habitats, and serve to

[1] Since Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962, the Western world seems to have put serious resources into ignoring her warnings, as well as additional alerts from *The Club of Rome* in "Limits to Growth" in 1972, from *The Brundtland Commission* in "Our Common Future" in 1987, by the *Kyoto Protocol* in 1992, the UN-sponsored *Millennium Development Goals* of 2000 (which gave way to *The Sustainable Development Goals* of 2016), and the *Paris Climate Agreement* of 2016 (President Donald Trump withdrew the US from this last agreement in June 2017).

poison especially poorer, more vulnerable populations—while the wealthiest on our planet insulate themselves by gating themselves off in residences or islands gilded with and drenched in opulence. All the while, our economic world order and our way of doing finance and business seems more and more oblivious to the challenges put before us. Some even fear that we may already have waited too long to address it—global ocean temperatures and the man-made extinction of species will not be reversed overnight; in fact, they may not be able to be reversed at all, given where we presently find ourselves. Nonetheless, as economic theorist and political activist David Korten once said, we *must* act as if we do still have time to address this problem (even if we fear we do not), since neglecting to do so will surely amount to a self-fulfilling prophecy of doom.[2]

The second "iceberg" is the global pandemic we all recently experienced. Never has the human species encountered such a virus, such a truly global threat. Even though we have largely got through this most recent test and no longer find ourselves needing to quarantine or wear masks, there remains on the horizon the ominous reality of virus variants, a challenge that continues as a formidable obstacle for our planet. It is no exaggeration to say that this global threat prompted every government on earth to put its economy into a "coma". Small business owners, common trades people, those in the service industry, the homeless, the poor, the needy, the most vulnerable, these people had no way out of this dilemma, nor did they have any idea as to how long the problem would last.

As the crises loomed over our planet, a phrase made the rounds that, at least the challenge here equally affected everyone. "Covid-19 does not discriminate" it was often said; "It attacks everyone." A corollary assertion was, "We are all in this together." But I found myself pausing and asking, "Really? Are we?" While at first seeming true, jingoistic sayings like these obscure the fact that the corona virus and threats like it wreak havoc most sinisterly upon individuals beset by preexisting conditions, by susceptibilities brought on by poverty, by lack of proper health care and health insurance, and by the necessity that poor people face of needing to work on the front lines (often without sufficient protective equipment) simply in order to pay their bills with wages that for decades have been outstripped by inflation. In short, these people had—and still have—little option to "shelter in place." Clearly, we are *not* all equally in this together.

We will soon see that this sort of systemic unfairness exacerbates the "third iceberg" below. Nevertheless, virtually no one on the planet enjoyed the luxury of ignoring Covid-19, since it stubbornly foisted itself into our social world, into our economic world, into our spiritual world, and into our political world. And, connecting the circle, this second "iceberg" is a lot more inextricably linked to the first "iceberg"—the environmental crisis—than we often realize, since we are told that increasing biospheric degradation is sure to prompt increased likelihood of global pandemics in the future.[3]

Third is the recent state-sanctioned murder of George Floyd at the end of May 2020 in the US city of Minneapolis, a video that piqued awareness of other events, of the case earlier in the year where Breonna Taylor had been shot in the middle of the night by unannounced police with a no-knock warrant in Louisville, Kentucky, or of a video released in the middle of May 2020 of the murder of the unarmed jogger Ahmaud Arbery in February 2020, a young man stalked, hunted down, and shot in cold blood by two (or was it three?) civilian white men who were not even arrested until two months later (after the video came to light). Only a month after the Floyd incident—in June 2020—the US public witnessed the fatal shooting of Rayshard Brooks by police at an Atlanta fast food drive-thru. Since then, other horrific cases have been tragically added to this number.

The US, thus, became embroiled in a social epidemic matching their biological one, a blight that consisted of persons of color murdered by the hands of law enforcement officials. We should all acknowledge that such state-sanctioned violence aimed at people of color did not just begin recently; no, it has been going on for centuries. Nor, are these recent cases the only victims who could be cited: the African American community is all too aware of the deaths of Treyvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir

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[2] See the preamble to Korton's lecture, "Radical Abundance."

[3] World Health Organization's lead climate scientist, Diarmid Campbell-Lendrum, claims that—for a variety of reasons—climate change and growing environmental damage will sadly increase the likelihood of additional pandemic outbreaks. See "Climate Change in the Era of Coronavirus" to hear him interviewed in relation to this point.

Rice, Freddie Gray, Sandra Bland, Philando Castile, all at the hands of the police, alongside a tragic assortment of other persons of color as victims of police overreach and institutional constabulary profiling and violence.[4]

Thus, US cities (and elsewhere) exploded in 2020—as they needed to—and the tide of opinion began to shift (at least for those younger). Calls for increased police justice have drawn attention to other needs faced by America's brown and black communities: a spotlight has now been aimed at the need for meaningful health care reform, for greater access to liquidity and banking services on the part of minority populations, for the need to drastically alter the US tax structure, on the lack of racial diversity at the local, state, and federal levels of government (as well as in the corporate sector), and for the need to drastically rethink our educational systems—both in terms of access as well as in terms of what a properly reconfigured holistic educational paradigm should look like (more on that just below). This sort of prejudicial, inequitable arrangement, of course, can be found in state configurations across the globe—it is certainly not unique to the US context; rather, it is baked into the world economic order, and it will increasingly threaten world peace the longer we permit it to persist.

Our Present Ship—Fit for the Voyage?

So, it seems we now face a true *kairos moment*,[5] as these critical issues globally congeal and overlap. For those of us in the university, we must seek ways to involve our personnel and our students in response to these challenges, doing so by way of educational approaches that nurture lifelong learning and action, curricula that are coupled with an awareness of the importance of humility as we increasingly (and necessarily) work with underprivileged and oppressed communities. In sum, we must embrace what some (usually Catholic) scholars have labelled a "preferential option for the poor," we must evince deep consideration for our embodied existence as we seek to construct educationally just praxis approaches, involvements that are carefully undergirded by physical proximity, nested closely in concrete contexts of learning and struggle.

The Educational Side of Our Ship

We must first realize that our stated aim as educators—i.e., to create contexts of learning, education, and growth—cannot be reduced to better schooling, nor does it simply imply deepening our present modes of teaching. Instead, we must revert to bedrock, back to big questions, exploring and reexamining fundamental issues. In sum, we must decide anew what education truly looks like as we find ourselves in this reconfigured new context. In doing so, I suggest that we bring to the surface a few concerns that might get us thinking in new ways, ones that could help point us in new directions, so that we hopefully might navigate a new, more macro-sustainable blue ocean that can help us navigate around our "icebergs".

First, we must rethink the nature of education. We who are educators often feel we already know the answer here but I fear we often fail to consider some very fundamental issues. We must realize at least two things that education is not:

1. Education is *not* equal to schooling. One can be educated and not be schooled, and it is also true that one can be schooled yet still not be educated.[6]

2. Education is *not* equal to teaching. While teaching is important, it only has value when it induces

[4] See the web site "Mapping Police Violence" for a strikingly long list of cases linked to police violence perpetrated in the last few years against (mostly young men in) the black community in the US.

[5] The concept "kairos moment"—derived from the Greek *kairos* (καιρος) implying a critical point in time requiring decisive action (as opposed to time as an on-going flow: *chronos* [χρόνος] in Greek)—was notably popularized by activists and liberation theologians in South Africa in the 80s, as they opposed the apartheid system at a key juncture in South Africa's national climate (just before the apartheid system came crashing down). See *Kairos Document*.

[6] I submit that authentic education more closely approximates what the Germans call "*Bildung*". I take this idea to be especially important for the sort of initiative described in this concept paper, since it seems to cry out for a broad-based, liberal arts, theological understanding of what education could be. For an interesting and provocative look at what I am saying here, see Ivan Illich's *Deschooling Society*.

> growth and learning[7]—and while growth and learning *can* be achieved by way of teaching, it also can be achieved by way of mentorship, by way of internship, and by way of a variety of other means that induce education and growth. Oddly enough, some forms of teaching can even hamper authentic education and growth—they can serve as state-sanctioned ideological tools that serve to pacify and anesthetize.

Thus, if these two points are correct and central to rethinking our task, we must return to who we are—to what sort of ship we are in and to what sort of ship we might wish to construct—given the reconfigured context (ocean) we find ourselves in. We must purpose to educate with a clear understanding of what education—the ocean—truly is and truly should be. We have some internal work to do.

A recent experience I had at the *Maui ESG Project/Ahupua`a Summit* in Hawai`i[8] in late January/early February 2020 helps to underscore why dramatically refashioning the nature of education for the poor and vulnerable—given the concrete milieu where they reside—is an essential, yet often overlooked and even superficially undertaken endeavor, one too important to ignore.

As we gathered with indigenous leaders from Hawai`i at the summit focused on green investing, often panel members from the financial sector (all of whom seemed very sympathetic to indigenous perspectives and rights) unintentionally began using professional jargon very common to the world of finance. By the second day of the summit—in mid-flow of non-stop presentations and discussions that were related to environmental, social, and good governance implications for impact investing—many of the elder Hawai`ians began to grumble and complain. Rumblings increased to the point it became obvious that several of them were significantly disturbed about something. Many of us involved in the organization of the summit were confused as to what might be going on. Eventually, a few of these local leaders approached audience microphones and they gently yet firmly began to verbalize their misgivings. It seems that they were feeling excluded by the vocabulary, by the language, by the terms thrown around in the discussions. They expressed that they were unsure that what was being described touched upon what they felt to be most important and, furthermore, that they were feeling foolish and embarrassed about the fact they were having a hard time tracking the flow of the conversation and analysis. In short, they felt excluded by professional jargon and categories foreign to their own context. Even at an event so focused upon sensitivity to local people's needs and knowledge, feathers ended up ruffled by the way those from outside the context inadvertently were reshaping the discussion, importing categories, and thereby not respecting the local knowledge Hawai`ian leaders in attendance felt to be so crucial to understanding the problems they were facing. Sympathetic green investors attending the Maui ESG Project/Ahupua`a Summit had unwittingly started speaking in a language of finance that served to marginalize extremely smart and savvy Hawai`ian discussants, something that roped them off from the conversation of investment in respect to their own homeland. Later in the day an indigenous Hawai`ian leader muttered to me,

> We really appreciate these people coming here to help us—we need the help! We need to know how to navigate the world of finance and investments and money. But do not come here and talk to us about our land, our water, and our oceans in a language you know we do not understand. We intentionally named this conference the Ahupua`a Summit—that is a Hawai`ian word our ancestors have used for centuries,[9] and it seems to give depth

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[7] Learning that looks like *Bildung*.

[8] Ms. Shay Chan Hodges and Mr. Ian Chan Hodges recently served as the lead organizers for the very significant *Maui ESG Project/Ahupua`a Investment Summit*, held on the island of Maui from January 31st through February 1st, 2020 (the world shut down due to the planetary Covid-19 outbreak just as this event concluded). Also providing leadership for this summit was Ms. Imogen Rose-Smith—a financial journalist, an impact investment consultant, and an industry expert on sustainable investing. New York City is her center of operations.

[9] The term *ahupua`a* is difficult to translate. It generally refers to self-sustaining Hawai`ian units of communal trust historically maintained between Hawai`ian people and their leaders, a trust that underwrites the use of all resources, all processes of communal development, and all access to Hawai`ian resource claims. This cultural bond derives from indigenous Hawai`ian

to what you people are talking to us about. However, don't think we don't know about it already. We do. It is summed up in the word ahupua`a—and do you know how many times *haoles* at this conference have not been able to pronounce ahupua`a? And have you seen how gracious our elders have been to them about that—we understand. But don't try to speak another language in front of us with the result we do not understand what is being said about our own homeland. We speak a language you do not—it is a good thing we are not having this conference in Hawai`ian, right?"

She was right.[10]

Educational systems that stand a chance of properly and justly addressing the problems laid out above will need concretely and tangibly to take into consideration what education should look like considering these problems. It also must take into consideration what constitutes valuable knowledge and proper ways of knowing—inclusive of the local languages, terminology, and those conceptual categories they use, when that is at all possible—given the needs and realities communities of privation face as they are threatened by environmental and other types of crises.

Furthermore, academic institutions are now entering what could be a viciously competitive phase [11]—one that business scholars Kim and Mauborgne[12] describe as a "red ocean" climate[13]—an environment that places them squarely before a looming reckoning and, for some institutions, imminent closure. This possibility has recently been provocatively described by Scott Galloway, Marketing Professor at Leonard N. Stern School of Business at New York University.[14] Galloway contends that, while the challenge will loom large for the entire sector of US university education, the reckoning most clearly threatens what he calls "third tier universities," a category of institutions that best describes the space occupied by most liberal-arts colleges.

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spiritual views of common responsibility, interdependence, and holistic conceptions of the common good. For greater insight into the meaning of the word, see Ahupua'a System.

[10] It must be said that this exchange and the problem it points to in no way typifies the way this wonderful summit was planned nor how it proceeded. Rarely have I attended a formal gathering where organizers worked so hard—and largely succeeded—at respecting local voices and honoring local values and perspectives. I believe the fact indigenous leaders felt so free to speak up and push back at the juncture I highlight here simply illustrates the amount of space that was continually open for local attendees and local leaders to voice their concerns. In fact, it was local leadership who were predominantly in charge of planning and arranging this two-day summit; that fact caused this event to stand out for me. It also shows that events like this *can* be arranged in a way that safeguards the honor of *all* in attendance, especially local leaders and residents who—typically at gatherings like this—are overlooked and ignored. The *Maui ESG Project/Ahupua`a Summit* held in February 2000 remains a beautiful example for me of what partnership, listening, and cooperation between outsiders and insiders can look like. The organizers did a wonderful job of making sure local voices were front and center, from beginning to end.

Nevertheless, in a context such as this, mistakes still will be made, they will continue to pop up and be the norm unless academic and professional outsiders work extremely hard at listening to, learning from, and partnering with local actors and indigenous persons. Unless real changes are made, marginalization of valuable insight and local knowledge will go unchecked. At this summit, that sort of mistake was an exception. Sadly, all too often it is a commonplace.

[11] Of course, we have been edging toward such a climate for decades now, but the pandemic has just thrust us more deeply into it in a dizzyingly short period of time.

[12] Kim and Mauborne are on faculty at the INSEAD Graduate Business School in France.

[13] See "Red Ocean vs. Blue Ocean Strategy". "Red oceans are all the industries in existence today—the known market space, where industry boundaries are defined and companies try to outperform their rivals to grab a greater share of the existing market. Cutthroat competition turns the ocean bloody red. Hence, the term 'red' oceans."

[14] See the very sobering interview of Prof. Galloway by Anderson Cooper and Sanjay Gupta on CNN on the 21st of May, 2020: "Prof. Scott Galloway Talks to Anderson Cooper: How the Pandemic Could Disrupt Higher Education". Here is an interview with New York magazine where he covers more or less the same ground: "The Coming Disruption: Scott Galloway Predicts a Handful of Elite Cyborg Universities will Soon Monopolize Higher Education".

A simple way that administrators of colleges and universities might take a fresh look at socially and environmentally informed education is by asking three simple questions, ones brought to the fore by well-known business consultant Jim Collins:

(1) What do our universities do best (that is, what is our institution's core competencies)?
(2) What is our university most deeply passionate about?, and
(3) What sorts of activities and research foci drive our university's economic engine; what activities will augment our resource base and permit us to undertake our passions and our core competencies?[15]

Collins has insisted that the overlap of these three spheres must point us to our missional focus; the Venn Diagram intersection found here is where our energies should be directed, and where our resources should be aligned in respect to the "icebergs" we face on the horizon. Put in a different way, doing so will direct our educational institutions toward "blue ocean" market segments: that is, toward " . . . unknown market space[s that are] unexplored and untainted by competition" (see footnote 13). Such a reconfiguration will greatly assist us in addressing our three-fold iceberg challenge, since it will force our instruction and tuition to be relevant, to be exciting, to be meaningful, and to be funded.

In such a climate as we find ourselves at present, those institutions that are best poised to adequately and sustainably address problems of biospheric degradation, racial, ethnic, gender, sexual-orientation, and class divisions and exclusions as these relate to true education and *Bildung* will end up meeting a need in the global market place (as will soon be seen below, this need is giving rise to shifting contours of the investment world and what is emerging as a growing demand for deep level work and research in impact investing). By focusing on "blue ocean" spheres directly related to the biosphere, to pressing social issues looming before us, and to the safeguarding of power and agency of poor communities, universities will be offered new and exciting ways forward in terms of innovation by inviting academic work that can inspire administrators, faculty, and students to bring a strong level of passion to these pertinent and urgent research questions. Such a move can tie departments and disciplines together, creating excitement and buzz that is infectious and easier to market and to support.

Finally, at these perilous times when our student debt funding model has long been broken—coupled with the extremely precarious context we find ourselves in, given the uncertainty of how to respond to Covid-19—the idea described below holds great promise for generating funds, whether in the form of research grants, financial endowment, or in terms of increased tuition fees and scholarship assistance for students who might be sent to the college expressly to study and gain insight into the inter-disciplinary focus. With a bit of initial investment and financial priming of the pump at the beginning, it is not an exaggeration to say the present concept could unleash multiple millions (if not billions) of US dollars in investment and assistance toward the college. Thus, this is an idea that could—almost by itself—drive the economic engine of a small justice-oriented (perhaps liberal-arts?) institution that could successfully deliver on this vision.

We must start afresh by discovering what constitutes proper ways of knowing and learning, given the realities that communities of privation face as we all confront our "icebergs". Local ways of knowing can and should be identified, studied, respected, and given space so that we might seek grassroots solutions to our problems in ways that induce stakeholder support. For our purposes in this OKHJ community, the role of a deep, "thick" anthropological approach is long overdue as we attempt to induce learning in our halls of academia. I submit that the academy must be soaked in humble approaches deeply informed by the anthropological task.

So, academic institutions who wish to found their work on sound footing need to look for spheres opposite to these "red oceans," there needs to be a search for what Kim and Mauborgne label "blue oceans": " . . . unknown market space[s], unexplored and untainted by competition. . . . [ones that are] vast, deep and powerful—in terms of opportunity and profitable growth" (see footnote 11). Customarily these openings bootstrap into areas where the institution already exhibits industry leadership (since having experience and expertise tends to lessen the effect of competition, seeing as how it is difficult to compete with a player who already has experience, networks, and a reputation in given operations).

In short, this "sea change" uncovers new opportunities for persons alert to its possibilities. I

[15] See The Hedgehog Concept.

believe the US (and global) educational context, especially given clear racial and socio-economic disparity hardwired into our society(ies), is shifting in ways that play directly into strengths enjoyed by liberal arts academic institutions who embrace a more holistic and multi-disciplinary approach to education, provided these strengths are recognized and capitalized upon. Two contextual surprises offer to such institutions "blue ocean" space that other institutions might not enjoy. Let us examine these two surprises briefly, one by one.

1. The Secularization Thesis is Dead.

For years and years social scientists—prompted by luminaries like Max Weber, Karl Marx, and Emile Durkheim—have predicted a growing level of global secularization that will (necessarily) require religious perspectives to become (1) at least privatized or, to their mind better yet, (2) eliminated and excluded, since spirituality and religiosity must increasingly be viewed as useless or even obstructive to the betterment of our society. Hence, it was thought that spiritual and religious considerations would increasingly recede in importance from the academy at large. It was conceded, of course, that overt faith-based schools—primarily third tier liberal arts institutions—would continue to value religious perspectives, but doing so would render those institutions irrelevant in terms of participating in serious discourse in the public sphere.

But this is no longer the case, since the secularization thesis has been strongly challenged for over 40 years now. Americans, for instance, are not necessarily becoming more secular—and the Global South is surely not discarding religiosity nor discarding their spiritual identities. Formidable thinkers such as sociologist Peter Berger, philosophers Charles Taylor, Alvin Plantinga, and Michael Polanyi, theologian John Millbank, and even academic natural scientists John Polkinghorne, Ian Barbour and John Headley Brooke (the latter is actually an historian of science) have strongly challenged the secularization thesis. This shift opens renewed space for institutions that can academically and holistically consider the role of religion in a cross-disciplinary manner. In this way we can enter more boldly into the public square by offering values and religious perspectives—ones balanced by academic rigor and insight—that more closely align with world views still strongly embraced by the majority of the world's inhabitants—especially by the poor and those in the Global South.[16]

2. The Wall Street Finance Model is Dead.

Many thinkers have critiqued the global finance world's overemphasis on modeling, abstract and conceptual economic theories, and casino-like activities centered in trading and goosed up share prices and detached valuation (as opposed to actual manufacturing, service, and production that reflects Main Street consumer demand).[17] In fact, a strong case could be made (and has been made) that over-confidence in rarified financial models and detachment from concrete contexts of real business activity helped to pave the way for the great financial recession of 2008. The same could be said for the present, even more severe, crisis we face with the corona virus. Economists label all factors that do not figure directly into cost-benefit considerations pertinent to parties engaged in exchange externalities.[18] It is admitted that externalities are always present—there are always "spillover effects" to actors not party to transactions—but, it is reckoned, the price mechanism will eventually adjust so as to take into

[16] It is interesting to note the nature of the prophetic and powerful sermon delivered by Reverend Al Sharpton at George Floyd's funeral. One senses that without the religious and transcendent tenor of Reverend Sharpton's sermon (especially at a funeral of someone who died so senselessly), it simply would not have landed as a message. One could hardly have "secularized" it and still maintained its power. See "Rev. Al Sharpton Delivers Powerful Eulogy at George Floyd Funeral" and "The Movement for Black Lives Has Always Been Spiritual". In my 20 years of experience in Southeast Asia at the village level (including my involvement just weeks after the tragic 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean)—and in my not infrequent involvement in other communities that were tradition-based in nature—communal religious and spiritual perspectives serve as key resources when persons make sense of their lives. In Weber's terms, these communities are nowhere near being "disenchanted".

[17] As representative here, see Harvard economist Stephen Marglin, especially his book *The Dismal Science: How Thinking Like an Economist Undermines Community*.

[18] For an explanation of what economists mean by "externalities" see here.

consideration factors intentionally ignored or overlooked. In other words, market mechanisms will assert themselves and clear all irregularities once actors begin to feel the effects of these. Externalities will then be internalized, and adequate corrections will be made. Prices will assert themselves and natural adjustments will follow.

The trouble with our present crisis, though (and even more so with the coming biospheric challenges faced globally), is

(1) Some externalities are not so easily internalized into the price mechanism (how does one put a price tag on lost species, on melting polar ice caps, or on stolen water rights?) Environmental economist Herman Daly calls these factors "pervasive externalities;"[19] he claims that they are so impacting[20] that they will eventually assert themselves in ways we cannot bear—by the time we recognize their deleterious results, it will be too late. I submit that the effects of climate change and the crippling effects of pandemics represent two types of "pervasive externalities." We must come up with models that can handle these disturbances as a matter of course well before we experience their injury—we cannot afford to ignore them.

(2) Given our present economic model, internalizing certain "externalities" is simply too costly for our society to bear (this is precisely what is happening at present—in order to properly address the present pandemic risk, we have been forced to "internalize" the threats of sickness and death in the hundreds of thousands—and perhaps millions—by placing our global economy into a "coma"). This threatens to drive global unemployment, underemployment, and disguised unemployment to levels we simply have never seen before. It is not outlandish to say that the market will find it exceedingly difficult to clear—especially in respect to the needs of the poorer segments of global societies.

So, given challenges like these, a new financial and economic paradigm is desperately needed—one that

(1) no longer treats land as just another "factor of production," ignoring sacred, biospheric visions that are at the heart of all deep understanding of agricultural activity,[21] and

(2) no longer treats labor in that manner, reducing persons to unavoidable units of cost in a way that limits their agency and alienates them from the fruit of their labor.[22]

[19] Daly—along with Cobb—do an excellent job of explaining the notion (and threat) of "pervasive externalities" in *For the Common Good*. As I understand Daly's description of pervasive externalities, I find these to be quite similar to what historian and philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn labelled "paradigm anomalies;" see Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

[20] Which means they are not externalities at all—they simply are unrecognized and unacknowledged internal factors.

[21] The essayist, novelist, and public intellectual Wendell Berry has long been pointing to this. As an example, see his classic work *The Unsettling of America: Culture & Agriculture*. Berry has always written from an unashamedly religious—specifically a progressively Christian—position. For a helpful summative overview of this perspective, see "Traditional Sacred Agriculture" by historian and environmental strategist Evaggelos Vallianatos. For a thorough examination of the prospects for reinvigorating American sustainable agricultural, see John E. Ikerd's *Crisis and Opportunity: Sustainability in American Agriculture*. For something approaching a case study of farmer efforts along these lines—centering on renegade farmers planting and harvesting of lentils in Montana—see Liz Carlisle's *Lentil Underground: Renegade Farmers and the Future of Food in America*.

[22] This, of course, echoes a theme in Karl Marx's critique of capitalism, but it is also true that there are Christian thinkers (and Muslim thinkers, and Jewish thinkers, and Buddhist thinkers, and Hindu thinkers, etc.) who have come to this same conclusion. For Christian thought in this regard, see Donald Hay's Economics Today: A Christian Critique, William Cavanaugh's *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire*, Nicholas Wolterstorff's *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, or Bob Goudzwaard's classic *Capitalism and Progress: A Diagnosis of Western Society* as representative here. Back in the early 70s, British Economist EF Schumacher made the following observation in his classic work *Small is Beautiful: Economics as If People Mattered*:

"There is universal agreement that a fundamental source of wealth is human labour. Now, the modern economist has been brought up to consider 'labour' or work as little more than a necessary evil. From the point of view of the employer, it is in any case simply an item of cost, to be reduced to a minimum if it cannot be eliminated altogether, say by automation. From the point

Many are the voices that are crying out for such a new paradigm as this now.[23]

With the death of George Floyd and the ensuing protests caused by that tragedy, education, business, and academic instruction as normal will no longer suffice.

For institutions that can adapt to and reconfigure in such a way as to take the above surprises into consideration, an opportunity arises for confidently entering a new, niche market aligned with these factors. This opening constitutes a "blue ocean" opportunity—one that precisely demands the characteristics long found at the heart of an institution that has at its center a justice-oriented, holistically spiritual mission.[24]

I believe we are well overdue for a wide-scale, drastic reconfiguration of the external financial and business sphere that envelops us. Let us turn to that for a brief look at what I mean.

The Financial Side of Our Ship

With worldwide concern growing in respect to the threat of climate change, and with heightened awareness of sociological-political disparity in Western societies (typified by the centuries-long systemic degradation of the African American community), significant interest has developed on the part of the worldwide investment community to ensure that investment activities are responsible, both in terms of the biosphere as well as in respect to vulnerable communities marginalized and impoverished by the nature of customary investment practices.

With this concern has arisen an emphasis on what has come to be known as *ESG Impact Investing*. In this type of financial activity, significant attention is given to environmental (E), to social (S), and to corporate governance (G) considerations in respect to investment decisions that need to be taken.[25] Perhaps surprisingly, at present the practice is becoming increasingly popular, both on the part of institutional as well as on the part of retail investors.[26]

In October 2017, American management consulting firm *McKinsey & Company* described ESG investing in this way:

> Once a niche practice, sustainable investing has become a large and fast-growing major market segment. According to the Global Sustainable Investment Alliance, at the start of 2016, sustainable investments constituted 26 percent of assets that are professionally managed in Asia, Australia and New Zealand, Canada, Europe, and the United States—$22.89 trillion in total. Four years earlier, they were 21.5 percent of assets.[27]

Echoing similar sentiments, multinational professional services network company *Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited* has recently determined that

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of view of the workman, it is a 'disutility'; to work is to make a sacrifice of one's leisure and comfort, and wages are a kind of compensation for the sacrifice. Hence the ideal from the point of view of the employer is to have output without employees, and the ideal from the point of view of the employee is to have income without employment" (Schumacher 2010, 54).

[23] As an example of this, see David Korten's work, especially his *When Corporations Rule the World* and *The Post Corporate World: Life After Capitalism*. For a lucid address Korten delivered in 2008 at Trinity Institute (which is, ironically, located on Wall Street)—a talk that richly takes into consideration spiritual and religious factors—see "Radical Abundance."

[24] A recent enlightening analysis of financial markets and the often pernicious role they play in the business climate in the US—Rana Foroohar's *Makers and Takers: The Rise of Finance and the Fall of American Business*—devotes a central chapter (chapter 3) to the desperate need for a reconfiguration of the American business school—so that there can be a focus on business and not an exclusive focus on finance, and so that primary attention can be given to Main Street, not to Wall Street.

[25] For answers to a series of questions about ESG, see "Frequently Asked Questions: What is ESG Investing? What is the Ahupua`a Beneficial Audit?"

[26] Given the pressures of the Covid-19 pandemic overlapping with acute unrest in the US over racial disparity, *Forbes Magazine* recently has wondered aloud if the notion of ESG investing will not move to the forefront of many investment portfolios. See "Is ESG Ready to Take Center Stage in Portfolios?." Forbes, June 15, 2020.

[27] "From 'Why' to 'Why Not': Sustainable Investing as the New Normal." *McKinsey Quarterly*, October 2017.

> social consciousness has spread throughout many facets of life, and many companies are making a concerted effort to align with these principles. This effort has likely contributed to the steady rise in the media coverage afforded to 'sustainable' brands over the past two years. Evidence suggests a similar growth in a desire for what are characterized as 'sustainable' or 'socially responsible' investments. Globally, the percentage of both retail and institutional investors that apply environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles to at least a quarter of their portfolios jumped from 48 percent in 2017 to 75 percent in 2019.[28]

Deloitte went on to project that ESG-mandated assets in the United States could grow almost three times as fast as non-ESG-mandated assets, ultimately comprising half of all professionally managed investments by 2025 (for a total of $34.5 trillion of assets under management). With ESG assets that are projected to be under management climbing to almost $35 trillion in such a short time, there is obviously significant justification for this type of investment activity becoming a focus of a savvy university's business program—whether in terms of better understanding its intricacies, or in terms of actively engaging in the practice itself.[29]

But there is currently a problem: it is widely acknowledged that there is a lack of third-party sources of up-to-date, robust data that can assist in measuring the social value of investments locally, and there is no meaningful way to audit their impact from the perspective of local communities.

> Most would agree there are plenty of data—on carbon emissions, say, or water use—that can show how well a company is performing on environmental goals (the E in ESG). Similarly, changes in executive leadership or company policies can be a clear signal of progress on issues related to corporate governance (the G).
>
> But when it comes to gauging the "S"—the social impact that a company delivers—companies and investors are still struggling to come up with meaningful, and widely accepted, measurements. To put the challenge simply, it is a daunting task to translate into numbers the well-being of an underserved community.[30]

This challenge/promise is significant enough in normal times—but, as is the case in terms of many things, these challenges grow in importance in the shadow of Covid-19 and the social justice pressures we face, especially since there are likely to be an increased number of pandemics on the horizon if climate change is left unaddressed and if societal injustice is not significantly delt with. This fact alone provides a strong case for us to better learn how to gauge the "S" in ESG. No doubt, some of the tools to hand in the anthropological sphere could show themselves to be very helpful in better understanding means for gauging progress or regressions in the "S" sphere of ESG.

According to Mark Zandi, chief economist at *Moody's Analytics*, the impact of Covid-19 came in three waves. The first wave occurred at the onset of the pandemic, as businesses closed and the economy dramatically slowed to a halt. The next wave—felt right on the tail of the first wave—were job losses which, as we saw, reached unprecedented levels. But, Zandi believes that it is the third wave that threatens to have the longest impact, repercussions felt by millions of people—particularly persons nearing retirement—as dramatic market declines served to reduce the value of the net worth of retirement nest eggs. Those affected by these repercussions, says Zandi, will likely respond by drastically cutting back on spending and this could potentially have the longest-term impact on the economy and, especially, upon underserved communities, as millions reduce spending as well as giving and as social programs are scaled back at governmental levels.

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[28] "Advancing Environmental, Social, and Governance Investing: A Holistic Approach for Investment Management Firms." *Deloitte Insights*, February 2020.

[29] For additional insight into this rapidly expanding investment space, see "Yes, Sustainability Can Be a Strategy," *Harvard Business Review*, February 11, 2019; "Why It's Time to Finally Worry about ESG," *Harvard Business Review*, May 21, 2019; 'Five Ways that ESG Creates Value," *McKinsey Quarterly*, November 2019; and "McKinsey: ESG No Longer Niche as Assets Soar Globally," *Institutional Investor*, October 27, 2017.

[30] "The Difficulty of Measuring a Company's Social Impact." *The Wall Street Journal*, June 24, 2019.

When it comes to systemic shocks, the vulnerable and the poor are virtually always those most severely impacted, especially when it comes to healthcare, education, food security, housing, crime, mental health, and general well-being. So, as can be seen, a focus on ESG investing fits very well with a focus on justice and on empowerment of the marginalized, a point I argued for above. Special emphasis needs to be placed most squarely upon a better understanding of the "S" in ESG.

So, we need to do a new thing. Yet, it would be a mistake to suggest that sustainable investment as such is an entirely new idea. Rather, its roots stretch back as far as people had money in their possession to invest; it has long been championed by parties with a stake in environmental concerns and in financial and resource stewardship, for persons friendly to the welfare of the common worker.

Furthermore, the recent surge in corporate interest in ESG and sustainable investment has largely been focused on addressing climate change pressures—and in these spheres, religious institutions and liberal arts institutions that are willing to explore the role that religion plays in ethical theorizing have emerged as significant thought and action leaders, especially in relation to campaigns directed toward carbon divestment. Such a movement seeks to see institutional investors and other asset owners divest from companies that realize the bulk of their gains from fossil fuel extraction.[31]

Socially responsible investing has strong roots in religious communities—and in what is a remarkably interesting factor for those of us from the Philadelphia region, actors from the Delaware Valley have historically played a significant role in that global movement. In our present day, as large institutional investors become increasingly interested in ESG investing, it now becomes even more critical that communities impacted by investment decisions become central to decisions made about how capital is allocated. In the words of West Indian political philosopher Frantz Fanon, it is not only the earth that needs a voice—the "wretched of the earth" need one as well!

The present-day carbon divestment movement has overtly modeled itself after the worldwide anti-apartheid campaigns of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. During those historic campaigns, a worldwide coalition of religious institutions, union workers, and students, coalesced to protest the segregationist regime in power in South Africa. A particularly effective strategy at that time was a divestment campaign targeted at academic institutions and pension plans that held investments with companies—like General Electric—and who non-reflectively did business in apartheid South Africa.

The resulting economic isolation of South Africa is thought to have been a key factor that brought the policy of apartheid to an end in the country. In 1977, the Reverend Leon Sullivan of Philadelphia's Zion Baptist Church—an African American pastor and board member of General Electric—developed what has come to be known as the Sullivan Principles: this was a crucial document in the promotion of corporate responsibility at the time. What this tells us is that religious institutions who embrace values transcendent and prophetic in nature often play a crucial role in bringing about necessary social change.[32]

[31] Given some of what we have already examined above, I believe that the "S" in ESG must be expanded in scope to include the spiritual. I say this not as a clandestine tactic for pushing religiosity into the conversation, or as a misguided mistake that muddies up ESG waters with a particular religious agenda (whether that be Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, folk-indigenous, or any other possibility); instead, I say it due to the fact global South persons—by and large—simply do not separate the spiritual from the social, the economic from the sacred, the agricultural from giving attention to stewardship obligations in the face of what they firmly believe to be providential care and provision factors, or governance issues from divine providence issues. For most persons on the planet, land tenure, land ownership, and resource control are deeply and inseparably intertwined with the spiritual and what could be called the numinous. The bulk of the world's population are simply not epiphenomenally religious—rather, they are centrally so. As we fail to take this principally into consideration, we risk inflicting upon already marginalized communities yet another variety in a line of conceptual colonialization tactics they long have been forced to endure. Our models will require them to translate often untranslatable cosmologies into ways of seeing more in keeping with our version of the world; as a result, they will be left conforming once more to a world we insist they describe only in our terms.

[32] Examples here are legion—from the Civil Rights Movement to the abolitionist movement, to the women's suffrage movement, to trade labor movements. Transcendent religious fervor and commitment has long been a key element that has served to motivate religious (and non-religious) communities toward greater justice. Contra Marx, religion is not always simply an "opiate of the people"; just as often it is "the moral conscience of the people." Once again, the secularization thesis has proved not to be an accurate description of what is happening—nor of what should happen!

Interest in sustainable investment and corporate responsibly has continued post-1985, even after overt apartheid in South Africa came to an end. Even so, these types of discussions have not been as mainstream to investment or capital markets deliberations as they should have been. Overall, ESG factors primarily have been championed by unions or religious institutions, accompanied by a small group of retail investors.

With the sub-prime mortgage and global credit collapse of 2008, the world witnessed a dramatic increase in focus on ethical and sustainable business practices, something that has been accompanied by amplified interest in ESG and sustainable investment principles as well. Many are the reasons for this shift: (1) disgust at Wall Street's ethical lapses, (2) changes in approaches to modern philanthropy, (3) innovative thinking in respect to the nature of corporate stewardship and long-term investing, (4) the climate change movement, and (5) revitalized interest in local and community investing, among other factors.

One of the peculiar ironies of this new global focus on sustainable and ethical investing is that it positions justice-focused liberal-arts oriented institutions—ones that still embrace the humanities and the social sciences, but which are often overlooked by the financial sector as not sufficiently specialized in things financial due to their excessive emphasis on values and on values-based approaches—at a distinct competitive advantage. Liberal arts and liberal arts-friendly institutions that boast a long history of human-centered wisdom resources are situated precisely in the conceptual space most needed, i.e., they come with academic approaches more bio-spherically friendly and local community affable (since this is what is emphasized by the humanities and the social sciences). At the same time, most modern universities with large and robust business schools (and with investment offices that promote these) are usually philosophically committed to the tenets of modern financial portfolio theory and financial appraisal, a posture that makes them keen to attract deep-pocketed donors who often hale from industries strongly incompatible with true ESG investment; oddly enough, these august business schools—finance-rich though they may be—are not very well positioned to make true ESG a core part of their curriculum, nor will its logic play much of a role in their educational programs.

Even when larger academic institutions have adopted programs more ESG-friendly in nature (and these are few), those programs have typically been underfunded by a small cadre of marginalized, wealthy donors, rendering them decidedly outside the curricular core of their institution. These programs almost always lack the deep knowledge and historical understanding of the sector since they prefer to see sustainable investment as something akin to a tactic that serves their assumed core competency: making money. Thus, institutions with an emphasis on social sciences and humanities—those that are poised to take a Geertzian "interpretative," hermeneutical turn—would seem well placed to contribute with value in this very important field. This seems even more so to be the case as academic anthropology departments programmatically make space for the religious, for the theological, for the spiritual as they ply their trade and undertake their field work.

All Three of the ESG Letters—A Case Against "ESG"-Washing

As I hope I have made clear, ESG Impact Investing is ripe for exploration, especially by folk like us who are predisposed to honor the cultural, the spiritual, and the ethically important as we come to know things. We can be encouraged that others, too, seem to be getting the point, since it is now not difficult to find people willing to consider ESG ideas and their implications kicked up.

But, in my recent experience, I have discovered a remaining rather significant problem. Over the course of the last three to four years—as I have attended meetings, seminars, conferences, curricular programs, purportedly focused on ESG—I have found the entire conversation often ends up reduced to one letter in our triad, i.e., to biospheric, to concerns about environmental challenges and threats brought on by the specter of climate change: to the "E". While such a shift surely is understandable given our looming biospheric crisis, long neglected, since "E" is so tightly interwoven with "S" and "S" with "G" and "G" with "E", such an attenuated, narrow, and thin move will not do. ESG focus must be upon all three letters, with special attention given to the way they interact and interrelate.

In short, ESG is not the same thing as green finance. Equal attention must be given to "S" and "G" and how we are to accurately, to justly, and to inclusively measure progress or regression in respect to all three factors. In doing so, we will need to learn the deep dance between "E" components, "S" components, and "G" components, especially in relation to tradition-based communities (since this so

deeply impinges, informs, and relies upon "S" and "G" variables).

For instance, as I have pointed out in footnote 29 above, S is much more than simply social. It must also include the spiritual, since the values and deep-level ethical convictions of BIPOC and majority-world communities throughout the globe are deeply grown out of the conceptual soil of sacralized notions of these people's sacred surroundings and their views of stewardship (contra ownership, in direct contradiction to capitalist notions of land tenure). For most of the world's inhabitants, the social is *always* the spiritual, and "E" is almost always viewed through the optics of an "S" lens. If we insist on desacralizing "S" and "E"—treating these two elements as if they are merely resource factors, as we are wont to do in Enlightenment fashion—this becomes a concealed, smuggled-in form of capitalist neo-colonialism. Churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, and other communities that ipso facto come to the conversation with transcendent value systems have a good bit to contribute to us in this area, provided they are permitted to help us learn to theologize more holistically.

Such a move escorts us straight toward "G" considerations, toward the very important issues of governance and power, i.e., toward the question of whose voice gets heard, toward who has a right to assert opinion, toward whose view of justice needs to prevail. On the rare occasion that "G" has been brought up in recent ESG conversations where I was present, it usually has pointed to inside persons already seated at boardroom tables who attempt to sufficiently consider the needs of those outside in indigenous communities, to corporate insiders who try to imagine what those residing in local contexts might want. Let us not ignore them, they seem to say, let us take their views into consideration. Such a stance is often embraced as a good and considerate posture; in fact, it is often praised as admirably magnanimous.

But why do we—those of us from the outside—think we have a right to speak for others? Why do we imagine we know what they feel, how they might think, what is surely most important to them? Why must our voices replace theirs? Instead, why do we not simply step aside and ask local people what they think? Why do we not invite them to the boardrooms, to sit at the tables of power? Why are they not more in control of their own environs, of their own locales, of their own Ahupua`a? Doing our part to see to it that these people are actually heard—in their own voices—is what would truly constitute authentic "G" in the ESG formula.

We must learn what these sorts of steps might mean. We must take more seriously the fact that local people should be seated at tables of power while decisions are made concerning their own regions and neighborhoods. We must cease trying to speak *for* people and instead begin speaking *to* people, we must begin listening to people, to those who wish to speak about their *own* values in their *own* idiom, precisely as was recommended by that wise female elder that I heard from in Hawai'i at the Ahupua`a Summit.

I would like to end with an analogy, a metaphor quite commonly used but one that I think will helpfully clarify my position and offer insight into the challenges we face and the opportunities we have in respect to all of this.

"Do not let the tail wag the dog," we are often told. This is a clever image that is easy to visualize, one designed to keep major things major and minor things minor. In this case, I suggest that the dog best represents the three letters underscored throughout this essay: "E", "S", and "G". As I have tried to make clear, these three spheres serve as the primary points to be kept before us, they are the substantive issues that deserve the bulk of our attention. But, for some time now, our ESG dog has been wagged by its tail, by alternate, less important factors decidedly not "E", "S", nor "G" in nature.

We might ask, though, what constitutes the tail in this case? What has been wagging the ESG dog all this time? The tail wagging the ESG dog can best be understood by adding two additional letters to our formula: the letters "F" and "A". "F" stands for the financial world, the world of high finance, the locus of power epitomized by Wall Street and currency markets and by the commercialization and monetarization of all things transactionally. The letter "A" stands for academia—especially as it represents modern business schools and their accompanying departments; for some of us reading this, it could stand for us.

I am suggesting that the financial world and the academic world need to be converted so that they end up entirely in service to the ESG world—we need to allocate resources toward ESG purposes so that we might concretely and wisely and humanely meet the challenges of our three "icebergs" dangers. Continuing to allow the tail to wag the dog will not make us more prosperous. Rather, it threatens to ruin us, perhaps even to the point of extinction. Therefore, a significant

change is in order, and those of us outside the typical paradigm just might be able to embrace a perspective that truly understands the dilemma we are in, so that we can collectively and globally work toward a true solution. I fear that without such a radical change in perspective, we are in for a dire trip across a perilous ocean—one that threatens to sink us into oblivion.

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The Disparities in the Treatment of African American Women in the Southern Black Baptist Church

Demora Haywood

Although the backbone of the African American community, the Black Church still engages in discriminatory practices against women. The Black Church was born to help African Americans survive in a world that discriminated against them, and yet it discriminates against its own Black women. This study focuses on the disparities in the treatment of African American women and men in the Southern Black Baptist Church. Based on ethnographic interviews of women who actively hold leadership roles in prominent Southern Black Baptist Churches, I highlight the magnitude of the problem Black women face, and show that the continued discrimination is resulting in many women leaving the Black Church. The Black Church will continue to be the backbone of the African American community, but until the Black Church faces its own issues of gender discrimination, it will not advance.

Introduction

The Black Church has been a stronghold for the Black community. As the Black community's foundation, the Black Church has shaped every chapter of African American history. The Black Church has been a constant pillar for the African American community, providing refuge from the racist world we live in; a place for African Americans to come together, as a community, and praise God for bringing us out of the turmoil we face each day. The Black Church has been a saving grace in every aspect of the African American community. From the Underground Railroad to the Civil Rights Movement to now, the Black Church has been and always will be the foundation of the Black community. The Black Church was born at a pivotal time for the African American community to address the constant problems in White America caused by the discriminatory acts of racism. It was born to help African Americans survive in a world that hated them because of the history of slavery as marked by their skin color (Gates 2021, 19).

Although the Black Church has been constant in the African American community, the Black Church has internal issues of its own. Gender discrimination has been a sustained problem in the Black Church. Unlike other denominations, where it is common for women to hold leadership positions, obtaining such roles in the Southern Black Baptist Church is not so common. In many Black churches, congregations are predominantly composed of women, and the pastors in these churches are typically all males. However, over time, Black women have begun to feel that they too are called to preach God's word and minister to the saved and unsaved. In the Black Church, women have been denied the right to hold leadership, based on gender. Based on the interpretation of certain biblical texts, many believe women are not to teach God's word. In the Black Church, pastors, specifically older pastors, preach that a woman's place is in almost every aspect of the church except the pulpit. However, younger generations have begun to change this narrative. So, the question arises, How do Black women feel about their role in the Black Church, and what strategies have they adopted to participate in ministry?"

A Brief History of African American Women and their roles within the Southern Black Baptist Church

My research (Haywood 2022) focuses on the disparities in the treatment of African American women and men in the Southern Black Baptist Church. To understand the lack of African American women holding leadership positions within the Southern Black Baptist Church, one must understand the history of the Black Church in general. Established during slavery, the Black Church became the primary place for enslaved African Americans to worship freely with one another. The Black Church stood as the foundation for oppressed people, brutalized by slavery, murdered, and told when and where to go, during the Jim Crow era. Dealing with racism, the Black Church has provided a haven for African Americans in America. Henry Louis Gates Jr. explains that it is "a place of racial and individual self-affirmation, of teaching and learning of psychological and spiritual sustenance, of prophetic faith; a symbolic space where Black people, enslaved and free, could nurture the hope for a better today and a much better tomorrow" (Gates 2021, 19). Being the foundation of the African American community, the Black Church aided in the success of the African American community. Reverend Al Sharpton states, "I think the Black Church was an incubator because it was the thing we were totally in charge of. We didn't have any external forces that had to give us permission. Whatever we wanted to do, it was up to us. It was ours" (Gates 2021, 66). McKinney explains that the Black Church was a symbol of freedom for African Americans. McKinney states, "the most important to them was the freedom to worship in their own way, freedom to establish their own churches, and the freedom to select and support their own ministries" (McKinney 1971, 458). Still, although a refuge for many African Americans, the Black Church has had a lot of discrimination within its own walls.

Ethnography

Growing up in South Carolina, I witnessed the lack of women in leadership positions. I grew up in a small town and, my mother made it her mission to raise my sister and me in church. Being raised in a Southern Black Baptist Church, and frequently visiting other Southern Black Baptist Churches within my surrounding area, I witnessed the lack of women possessing leadership positions throughout the years of my childhood. That experience gave me an interest in studying the disparities in the treatment of African American women in the Southern Black Baptist Church. In this study of African American women holding leadership positions, it was imperative to interview individuals who were, of course, African American and women who held leadership positions, such as pastors, deacons, trustees, and ministers. The interviewees consisted of eight women and seven men. Each interview gave me insight into the lack of women in leadership roles in the Southern Black Baptist Church and to the mistreatment many females endure when holding leadership positions there. But it also demonstrated the strength of current women leaders, the support they are receiving from some men, and the changes that are coming.

Each interview was conducted in private, and most were recorded for accuracy of the quotations. I assigned each participant a pseudonym to hide their identity. Questions were designed to encourage conversation between the interviewer and the participants. Given our common backgrounds, many of the participants interviewed became more than just participants, some were people I had known since I was a young girl.

Reverend and Minister Smith

Reverend Michelle Smith and Minister David Smith are prominent members of one of the oldest Southern Black Baptist churches in the Upstate of South Carolina. Being licensed in 2001, Reverend and Minister Smith express the hardships they've faced over the years as a husband-and-wife duo preaching God's Word. When asked what his earliest recollection was of a woman holding a leadership position in the church, Minister Smith recalled that he was able to experience his sister and his wife, Reverend Smith, in leadership roles.

I asked Minister Smith to explain how his sister and his wife were received in their roles. Minister Smith stated,

> With Reverend Smith, she has always been a trailblazer in whatever she was doing, and I was always supportive and always proud. I took a backstep to make sure she shines and she's supported. My calling from God was just to be obedient, and whatever his will for my life was, just to be obedient. I wasn't looking to be a preacher nor

> a pastor but, somehow that happened, and sometimes in your mind you think you know what you are doing until He spells it out for you. In my mind and in my heart, I was there to support her and to make sure she was good and respected. We never went into a pulpit without each other, and I've always thought she was the better and most prepared of the two of us.

Minister Smith expressed that although his wife, Reverend Smith, oftentimes was not welcomed into her position or into a pulpit, he supported her. Minister Smith does not believe his calling was to preach or become a pastor. He believes that God called him to simply be obedient by supporting Reverend Smith. Minister Smith supports his wife in any way he can because he believes she is being led by God's calling.

Reverend Kevin Daniels and First Lady Daniels

Reverend and First Lady Kevin Daniels are a youthful, outstanding couple who are making it their mission to change the perception of the Southern Black Baptist Church. Beginning this new journey, Reverend and First Lady Daniels are both changing the way women are viewed in leadership roles. Reverend and First Lady Daniels make it a point to teach others that anyone, properly trained, has the ability to preach the word of God, regardless of gender.

When asked if he believed women should stay silent in the church, Reverend Daniels stated,

> I do not believe how vocal women are today matters. I don't believe there's enough emphasis on being a saved Christian. Female leaders in the church should have the same opportunities as male leaders. I believe if a woman has been spiritually led, the church should make a responsible decision to allow her to serve in the capacity of her heart. I don't believe we should be so stuck on gender preferences and gender roles, but whether they are being used by God and for the Kingdom of God.

Society, generally, views the man as "head of the household," overseeing the actions of his family, his marriage and his wife. But Reverend Daniels believes that the only person who can dictate a woman's calling is God. Within the Bible, according to Reverend Daniels, God used Noah, who was a drunk, to build Noah's Ark, carrying out God's mission to replenish the earth. In the same respect, God used Rahab, who was a prostitute, to protect the Israelites as they spied on the Canaanites, providing them a place to stay so they would not be caught. Finally, God used a donkey to talk to his servant Balaam. God simply uses whomever he wishes to carry out his Word.

Reverend Dennis

Reverend Annie Dennis is a momentous figure, leader, and woman of God within the Upstate area of South Carolina. Reverend Dennis is the first Black female pastor of one of the prominent Southern Black Baptist Churches in the area. Being in the ministry for over 30 years and, pastoring for 10 years, Reverend Dennis shared the hardships she has faced while pastoring her own church, being a leader, and while continuing the good fight and spreading God's Word.

I asked Reverend Dennis. How do you feel about women holding leadership roles within the church? Reverend Dennis said,

> To be honest with you, what would we do if we didn't have the women? I'm going to be very honest about that because in most of the churches that I've seen, in most of the Black churches I've seen, you have a lot of black women doing a lot of jobs. A lot of the churches don't have a lot of men in there. So, what I've done, the men I have along with the women, I have in leadership roles. I have women trustees, I don't have a deacon, but we have women trustees, we have Sunday school teachers, etc. So, I believe if you have a gift, no matter what your gender is, God wants you to use it, and that's me. I love the fact that I have women who want to be in leadership, so I allow them to be so because I lead. I'm thankful and grateful for women in leadership.

Reverend Dennis explained that it does not matter what gender you are. If God called you to pastor a church, serve as a deacon or trustee, to be a Sunday school teacher, or an usher on the Usher Board, he has blessed you with a gift. So many times, as individuals, we try to run away from the gifts that God has given us. God never fails to tell us, show us, and clarify how these gifts are to be used. For example, during our interview, Reverend Dennis expressed how originally she did not want to teach or become a pastor. She struggled with the idea that God had bestowed the gift of preaching on her. God's will for his Word to be

heard shall always be done. God's guidance ensures the proper use of our gifts, no matter who we are.

In reference to 1 Corinthians 14:34, I asked Reverend Dennis if she believed women should stay silent in the church, not having a voice. Reverend Dennis responded by saying,

> No, I don't believe that. A lot of times, that is what I've had to deal with because Paul was talking about a whole other different thing. When they would all come together, and the men and women would come together, they did want the women to be silent, at the time, because we did talk a lot. But he did not mean that women could not speak their minds, because if you look at the Word of God, you had women leaders in the Bible, in the Old Testament. Deborah was a leader, you know, you had different leaders. So, I don't believe that. I think we take it out of contexts, and we have to go back and understand and read what's happening when Paul said that. You know that's the first thing people have said to me that "You know women are supposed to stay silent." But, if women are silent, there's not going to be much being done. I'm very honest about that. When we speak, we get things done. So, no I don't believe that women should stay silent in the church.

Reverend Dennis expressed that oftentimes 1 Corinthians is taken out of context by men who try to justify their beliefs that women should not hold leadership roles within the church. Reverend Dennis believes that women get things done, and if we were made to be silent in the church then much less would be accomplished. Reverend Dennis explained that God wants us, as his people, his believers, to be able to spread His word and to tell unbelievers about Him. None of us can do that if we are made to be silent in the church.

I then proceeded to ask Reverend Dennis, if she believed that women cannot teach God's Holy Word to others, specifically to men? Reverend Dennis responded by saying,

> Women definitely can teach God's Word. If they didn't then I wouldn't be preaching, but I'm doing Bible study. I'm excited because I watched the church family, men, also women, and young people, and how they gravitate to what I say. It has nothing to do with Annie, it has to do with God's Word. So, women can definitely, and are able to preach and teach God's Word. He uses who he uses, and whatever gender he uses to get the word out, I don't believe that women can't preach or teach because, oh yes, we can . . .

According to Reverend Dennis, women can teach anyone men can teach. It is my opinion that when God calls us to use our gift, he does not view our gender as a factor, so neither should we. As Christians, we should continue to spread God's Word helping others gravitate toward Him. As Christians, we must carry out God's ministry, continuing his work begun by the sacrifice of his only Son, who died for the sins of all.

I asked Reverend Dennis if in her upbringing there were discussions held about women holding positions in the church, and she said,

> Oh yes. I was brought up in an old Southern Black Baptist Church, and when I was little and small, women stayed in their place, I saw that. Now, we could usher, we could even sing in the choir, and we even had a couple of women who taught Sunday school but, that was just about it. When I was growing up, I saw a lot of women that were not able to hold positions, like trustees, and positions that other men were able to hold, because of our gender. So a lot of that, yes, I grew up with that, until I was called to preach, and I started preaching, and they looked at me differently. I started doing something that I didn't realize I was doing, and that was telling people about the Lord. After a while, people started realizing I was more than just singing and directing the choir. I had something else, I needed to tell people about Jesus.

Being from similar churches, Reverend Dennis and I witnessed comparable situations within our own churches. According to Reverend Dennis, women were not allowed to hold leadership roles, but they could usher, sing in the choir, and teach Sunday school. Men, then and even now, opposed women holding leadership roles within the church. Their beliefs were grounded in the idea that men and women different places, and those boundaries should be respected.

Theological Analysis

Although the backbone of the African American community, the Black Church still has many discriminatory practices against women. This is especially true in the South. According to Henry Louis

Gates Jr., "gender inequality had been an open wound for the Black Church since its inception. Change has been slow, but there is movement" (Gates 2021, 196). The Black Church is falling behind in accepting women in leadership positions. As explained in *This Is Our Story, This Is Our Song,* Henry Louis Gates Jr. writes that Black women were the driving force that kept the Southern Black Baptist Church going. Although the Black Church isn't that accepting of women within leadership positions, African American women have made great strides toward spreading the Word of God.

In "The Roles of Church and Community Mothers," Cheryl Townsend Gilkes explains that although the Black Church lacks Black women in leadership roles, older Black women are revered as 'mothers.' Gilkes states, "Church mothers are not only role models and venerable elders—according to some ministers, 'women who are important for moral guidance within our congregations'—but also older, venerated, Spirit-filled women" (Gilkes 1986, 50). Within the Black Church, it is common for older Black women to be deemed the 'mothers' of the church. However, if these 'mothers' ever decide they want to preach God's Word, they would surely face resistance. Black women are often told how they should serve God in the Black Church. But the profession of a woman's calling to the ministry may be taken lightly, or the notion belittled. According to Gilkes, a calling to the ministry is seen as reserved for men only, and it is no place for women.

Historically, Black women have always held leadership roles in some West African tribes. Jacqueline Carr-Hamilton explains in "Notes on the Black Womanist Dilemma," women in the Gelede Society of Yorubaland held multiple leadership roles, such as housekeeping, tailoring, and catering. Carr-Hamilton states, "This society is headed by a priestess, the Iyalode, who sits on the king's council." Prior to slavery, women typically played key roles in many societies in Africa. Carr-Hamilton explains that in spite of the patriarchal influence of Western European colonization, African people's perception of motherhood and women's power would go with them to the New World. Black people in American churches have gotten away from this concept, and now believe that women have a certain place in which they must remain. Carr-Hamilton states, "one of the primary areas of influence for black women in African American culture is in black religion and society, the realities of racism and sexism notwithstanding" (Carr-Hamilton 2001, 68). Given the racism and sexism Black women face in society, the Black Church should be a safe haven, shielding them from such discrimination, not upholding it. Although the Black Church in itself was and still is that safe place, the Black woman must find her voice within her sanctuary. For example, interviewee Trustee Atkins became the first woman within her church to hold the trustee chair position. Being a member of one of the oldest Southern Black Baptist Churches in Upstate South Carolina, Trustee Akins sits as Trustee Chair. Trustee Atkins explained when she was appointed to her role, many individuals, especially men, were not thrilled. Her appointment came after the previous male trustee was asked to step down. Trustee Atkins explains that her pastor approached her with the request that she become Trustee Chair. The trustee board was comprised of primarily men, most of whom were not thrilled that a woman was placed as the head of the trustee board. These same men would oftentimes not listen to her during meetings, or help with the day-to-day duties they once did. Although they were not thrilled about Trustee Atkin's position, she explained that she remains firm in her position and that any woman can hold a leadership role within the church.

The Black Church, specifically the Southern Black Church, male preachers, and male congregants use the Bible to support their belief that women do not belong in the pulpit or in certain leadership positions. Male clergy and male congregants interpret certain passages in the Bible to justify the idea of the gender subordination of women to men. For instance, 1 Timothy 2:12 states, "I do not allow a woman to teach or to have authority over a man. Instead, she should be quiet." Many male clergy reference this verse, along with 1 Corinthians 14:34, to substantiate the idea that women should be silent at certain times in the church. For instance, interviewee Reverend Vanessa Johnson, recalled a conversation between her parents, both ordained pastors. Her father threatened her mother that because her mother was female, he could take away her license just as quickly as he gave it to her. The depressing truth is that we live in a day and age where men are still not okay with women being more than just their wives, sisters, and cousins. But according to scholars, these verses have been misinterpreted. Teresa Green states, "Black male ministers' arguments against women pastors are questionable because they compare twenty-first century African American women, many with graduate degrees and extensive theological training, to uneducated first-century

women" (Green 2003, 121). When Paul made the statement that women should be silent in the Corinthian church, he was speaking to the Corinthian culture that did not believe in women getting an education. In the Black Church, male ministers use these scriptures to question female pastors seeking higher biblical knowledge with the intent of sharing that information with congregations as a preacher. Trustee Atkins recalled during her upbringing the discussions that were had about the positions women should hold in the church. Trustee Atkins explained,

> During my upbringing, there was not a lot of talk about it, it was just kind of understood that men lead and women followed. I grew up in a Baptist church, and we just understood that women belong in the audience and men belong in the pulpit.

Trustee Atkins explained that, growing up, they were taught that a woman's place was not in the pulpit. Trustee Atkins shared that on many Sundays male pastors preached that women are not permitted in the pulpit. She recalled a preacher stating that if a woman wanted to preach she should do so from the floor, not the pulpit. This was, in fact, a form of control, challenging the rights of Black women who desire to pursue a role as pastor.

Black women are a thread woven deep into the pattern of the Black Church. According to Green, after the Civil War, Black women played a key role in raising money for the reconstruction of church buildings. During Reconstruction, Black women established ministries that assisted urban areas. Green states, "in these ministries they preached, ran daycare and food distribution centers, and educated those who sought them out" (Green 2003, 123). Although Black men would not ordain them, Black women did not let that deter them from serving the church and their community. For Black women, the Black Church has always been a sanctuary, a refuge from the evils that are committed against African Americans. It is an asylum, of sorts, a place of comfort, that should be free of trials and adversity. Yet, in some situations, it is the source of affliction. LaVerne Gyrant explains in "Passing the Torch," Black women became leaders during the Civil Rights Movement which motivated them to hold leadership positions. Although they did hold leadership positions, many Black men discouraged them from progressing because they didn't want Black women to "undermine the security and threaten the masculinity of Black men" (Gyant 1996, 641). Some Black women would remain behind the scenes, but many Black women possessed self-determination, strength, and faith that helped prepare them for their leadership roles. According to Gyant, throughout life, Black women have always held leadership roles in some aspects of their lives. Gyant states, "realizing that the Black man has been systematically denied his dignity, Black women have been in the forefront in the fight for dignity and survival of the Black man, woman, and child" (Gyant 1996, 643). Throughout the Civil Rights Movement, Black women opened their homes to those in need, served as adoptive mothers and religious leaders, all while taking care of the household when their husbands were unable to work. Black women kept their homes and communities afloat.

Historically, during slavery, it was common for Black women to hold leadership roles in the Black Church. Black men and women were, in some respects, equal because of their mutual enslavement. As African Americans became more and more detached from slave culture, a separation between men and women began to form in the Black Church. According to Green, the equality of the Black woman's role began to decline. Black men began seeing themselves as superior to Black women. Along with this came limitations for Black women to serve in the church. The limitations Black women faced took many forms. Green states, "In addition to their not being granted ordination, the authenticity of the call to the ministry for women was frequently questioned. Even today women preachers have the extra burden of proving their call to an extent not required of men" (Green 2003, 125). So even now, Black women must prove themselves when stepping into a leadership role. During our interview, Reverend Dennis recalled how she was received in her leadership role, not only as a female pastor, but in the ministry overall. She said,

> Well, it's quite interesting, when I became pastor, a lot of pastors believe certain things, like women aren't supposed to pastor a church, and a lot of them really and truly did not receive me well. A lot of them I truly respected, but they did not like the fact that I was pastoring a church at that time. A lot of questions went to my husband because I pastor, and he does not. We do it together, but God called me to do the pastoring. So most of the time what they would do was ask him, 'how do you feel about your wife pastoring the church and, you're not?' I'm so blessed to have a wonderful husband of 45 years, and he says "God didn't call me, He called her, and I back her

> up 100%. She has been called, anointed, and pointed. God called her and I'm okay with that." I think once a lot of people heard that and saw that my husband was okay with it, and he didn't have a problem with me pastoring a church, I think a lot of people saw that we hung together, that we were together as one, and I think a lot of people say that and saw that it was okay. While pastoring, I still have a few problems when I go different places, but it's okay. A lot of people just look at me, and the older saints, they believe in what they believe in, and I don't have a problem with that because we all believe in what we believe in, but I do know I was called by God.

Although she was called by God, Reverend Dennis faced a great deal of hardship being in the ministry and pastoring a church. Many pastors whom she revered did not agree with her decision to go into the ministry nor did they agree with her pastoring a church. Why? Because she was a woman, and many men did not believe women belonged in the pulpit, nor did they believe a woman should pastor a church. Many men went so far as to ask her husband how he felt about her pastoring a church. During that time, many men believed that if a woman decides to pastor a church, she must ask her husband's permission first. However, Reverend Dennis's husband was ecstatic for his wife because he knew that God had placed a calling on her, and that pastoring a church was her place. Reverend Dennis's husband expressed that God called her to lead, not him.

During the Civil Rights movement, Gyant says, the focus was on men as leaders. Because of the society we live in and our culture, it had always been expected that men would lead and women follow. Women did not resent men being leaders. In fact, Gyant explained, women were joyful to have Black men, during this time, in leadership roles (Gyant 1996, 641). But when women began to accept their calling into the ministry, or they were appointed to male-dominated roles, some men had issues with women taking on leadership roles. According to TeResa Green, "since the ministry was the only avenue to even an illusion of masculinity, the inclusion of women seemed threatening to Black men. The impediments to preaching for Black women were thus further complicated by the perplexing dilemma of Black male identity in a racist society" (Green 2003, 124). Unfortunately, we do not live in a society that is geared to help minorities. The society we live in today takes away the Black man's dignity and masculinity. The Black church is, at times, the only place where men can still have power. So, although Black men are constantly being disgraced and beaten down by this society, Black women are consistently carrying the torch, and are taking the lead, to salvage the greatness of the Black men.

Thus, although women make up between 66% and 88% of the Southern Black Baptist Church (Barnes 2006, 373), men primarily still hold leadership roles. In the article, "Whosoever Will Let *Her* Come: Social Activism and Gender Inclusivity in the Black Church," author Sandra Barnes states, "African American clergywomen who aspire to the pastorate must often contend with the "triple oppressive reality" of racism, sexism, and classism" (ibid). Just like male pastors, women are also called to continue God's work and spread the Good News. But women are less likely to be welcomed by their male counterparts in such leadership positions. When asked about her upbringing and if there were ever discussions about the positions women should hold in the church, interviewee Reverend Vanessa Johnson said,

> Yes, well not necessarily discussions per se, but there was an air that women should not be in the pulpit. There were discussions as well because even my father, who was a preacher, at one time did not believe in women preaching. Later on, in his ministry, he did have some women who came forward and said they were called, and he did license them, but even when he licensed my mom, it took a while for him to do that because she became a preacher. He said, "I have a right to give you this license, and I have a right to take the license back from you." Although I did not agree with that, that is the thought process of the older men in our churches. There were churches here in my community that never asked me to preach in their pulpit because I know for a fact, and their members know and have expressed to me, that their pastors do not believe in women preachers. Slowly, that belief has changed, and more male pastors have begun asking me to preach in their pulpits.

Reverend Johnson describes the difficult situation that many female pastors and women who hold leadership positions face within the Southern Black Baptist Church; elder men of the church do not believe a woman can hold a leadership position or lead a church. Despite the leadership skills demonstrated as superintendents over Sunday school, presidents of

the usher boards, trustee chairs, deacons, and pastors, women are still not being broadly accepted by men of the church. According to Barnes, when women pastor churches their churches and congregations tend to be smaller than churches led by men. Barnes explains that in the Black Church, only about 1% of traditional Black denominations are led by women. Barnes states, "in the Black Church, the pulpit has been viewed as 'men's space' and the pew as 'women's place" (Barnes 2006, 374). The belief of many, men and/or women, is that God cannot use a woman in the same way he can use a man. But as we have seen above, the Bible displayed a different mentality.

Linda Belleville explains in *Women in Ministry* that women hold the same spiritual gifts as men. Belleville expresses that women are to be "encouraged to develop and exercise these gifts to their fullest potential" (Belleville et al. 2005, 24). Belleville states that for traditionalists, "the relationship of male and female continues to be perceived in hierarchical ways. God created men to lead; God created women to follow" (26). But, Belleville states, "Women functioned as prophets during every epoch of Israel's history" (42).

Within the Southern Black Church, many traditionalists have issues with women who hold leadership positions because they believe that women do not possess the same gifts or authoritative nature as men. Belleville states, "To publicly teach is to exercise authority; to publicly preach is to exercise authority; to corporately lead is to exercise authority (whether one names the leader "elder," "deacon," "bishop," "pastor," "chairperson," or "president")" (Belleville et al. 2005, 81). It is this exercise of authority that many men object to, despite the many examples of strong women in the Bible, such as Eve, Sarah, and others, who were not perfect, but leaders nonetheless.

Although some Southern Black Baptist Churches do not believe women can hold leadership positions, there are denominations that believe differently. For instance, interviewee First Lady Kevin Daniels recalled her earliest recollection of a woman holding a leadership position growing up in the African Methodist Episodical denomination. First Lady Daniels said,

> I would say [I saw a woman in ministry in] early childhood. I am originally AME, which is my denomination even though my husband is a Baptist preacher. I converted over, but I still consider myself AME. Being in the Baptist church, I have noticed that it is a hard embrace whenever women are placed in leadership positions. However, with the AME church, it has been something I've seen since I remember going to church as a little girl. We call them 'stewards', but they are kind of like deacons in the Baptist faith. We also have women trustees, women ministers in the pulpit, etc. Women held a role just as the men did in the AME church as they still do today.

First Lady Daniels expresses the enormous inequality women face in the Southern Baptist denomination compared to the African Methodist Episcopal denomination in which she was raised. First Lady Daniels explains that she was raised seeing women in leadership roles: there were female stewards (deacons), trustees, ministers, even pastors—all roles that are primarily held by men in the Southern Black Baptist Church. In "The Role of Women in the Sanctified Church," Cheryl Gilkes highlights women's contributions to the Sanctified Church. According to Gilkes, women made remarkable contributions to the advancement of the Sanctified Church because women made up much of the church. Gilkes states, "It is the enterprise of black women that provides the urban settings in which traditional black religion is able to thrive and to provide a haven for cultural developments . . . . the failure to appreciate the roles of women within the churches and the roles of the churches in the lives of women has led to a lack of appreciation of the ways in which black women shaped this religious tradition" (Gilkes 1986, 34-35).

Despite the hindrances in the Black Church i.e., the Black men and structures who oppose them, the Black Church is a place Black women can still find a sense of security. According to Marbley, "the Black Church is and has been for decades an emotional support system and the most important social institution in the African American community and the one in which African American women (as opposed to African American men) constitute the base" (Marbley 2005, 610). Without Black women, the Black Church would not continue to be as instrumental in the Black family as it is today. Black women make up the majority in any Black denomination, financially contributing by way of fundraisers and means of increasing revenue for the upbuilding of God's Kingdom. If it had not been for Black women and God, the Black Church probably would not be standing today.

Implications for Christian Practices

Feminist theology is a movement created to empower women and overturn patriarchal beliefs. It can be a key to changing the belief in the church that women are unable to hold leadership positions, along with how they are perceived in religious institutions. Additionally, it focuses on reexamining scriptures that seem to view women as being inferior to men, and on changing how women see themselves.

Feminist theologians make it a practice to fight against the injustice of women in religious institutions. Although they believe religion has oppressed women, they still believe religion can provide resources for encouraging women, such as the Bible, which is the root of inspiration that empowers women who deal with gender discrimination. Another resource is other women and men who believe women can hold leadership roles. These individuals empower women through their support when dealing with gender discrimination. In "Feminist Theology as a Revitalization Movement," Amanda Porterfield suggests that many feminist theologians, specifically Jewish and Christian feminist theologians, attempt to change the sexist interpretations of the biblical God. Jewish and Christian feminists defend religious institutions receptive to feminist issues. They consider God a symbol of freedom from oppression rather than a symbol of paternal authority. Instead of focusing on the masculinity of Christ, Christian feminists focus on the positive relationships Christ had with women, as well as on the love and compassion he displayed toward them. To Christian feminists, God represents freedom.

Amanda Porterfield explains that feminist theology can be viewed as a revitalization movement. According to Porterfield, Anthony F. C. Wallace defines revitalization movements as "deliberate, conscious, organized efforts by members of a society to create a more satisfying culture" (Porterfield 1987, 236). A revitalization movement is the act of giving new life to new a cause. In this case, feminist theology qualifies as a revitalization movement because feminist theologians are changing the perception of women within religious institutions in order to "create a more satisfying culture." Feminist theology grew out of the different concerns feminists had surrounding Western culture, along with a desire to see Western civilization abandon its patriarchal beliefs, practices, and institutions.

In "The Future of Feminist Theology in the Academy," Rosemary Ruether explains that patriarchal theology is when "the male is taken to be the normative and dominant representative of the human species" (Ruether 1985, 704). From an anthropological view, cultures around the world deem men superior to women. But from a biblical standpoint, the image of God is both male and female (Genesis 1:27), and patriarchy is a result of the fall (Van Leeuwen 2009).

Feminist theology continues to advance. According to Ruther, three stages aided in the evolution of feminist theology. Its first stage, according to Ruether, is the criticism of the masculine belief attached to theology. In theology, women may face misogyny in the form of not being seen. Ruether states, "The invisibility of women can never be seen by those for whom the generic "man" is simply assumed to include "women" (Ruether 1985, 706). In mainstream theology, women are overlooked because men believe women do not have a place in the conflicts of religion, despite receiving training and credentials comparable to their own. By slowly unmasking the full impact of androcentrism on theology, feminist theologians can begin to change the views that prevent women from holding leadership positions in religious institutions. Ruether explains that androcentrism not only views men as generic humans but also views women as being naturally mindful of their position or place, and a mediating force between male subjects. Basically, men believe women do not have the ability to hold leadership positions on their own, and should be assist religious institutions by acting as a support system.

Some men believe women should not be in leadership because they are responsible for the evil caused by Eve in the Garden of Eden. Eve ate fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The mythological lore of Pandora's Box also presents a negative view of women and alleges their role in the dawn of evil. As the myth is told, Pandora was curious about what was in a box left in her care. In this box were death, sickness, and other evils that were released into the world as a result of her opening the box. These beliefs, Ruether states, "reinforce the patriarchal definition of woman as subordinate and auxiliary, by claiming that woman caused evil to come into the world by speaking and acting autonomously" (Ruether 1985, 706). According to Ruether, women are then subject to punishment for the past sins they committed. Some believe that women attract negativity. Ruether states, "If a man rapes her, it is

presumed that she 'asked' for it. If her husband beats her, it is because she has provoked it by her complaints. That she must have 'deserved it' defines the basic stance of patriarchy toward assaults on women" (707). Feminist theologians highlight the issues with victim-blaming ideologies in mainstream theology and mythology.

The second stage of feminist theology that Ruether identifies is one of discovering alternative traditions. Alternative traditions or Non-Religious Movements are culturally based beliefs, such as Santeria, Cults, etc. Alternative traditions sometimes support the personhood of women. According to Ruether, the quest for alternative traditions takes the form of feminist studies that affirm a woman's personhood, her equality in the portrayal of God, and her participation in teaching and leadership. Ruether states, "this does not mean denial or cover-up of patriarchal bias, but rather a demonstration that, even amidst this bias, there are glimpses of alternative realities" (Ruether 1985, 707). According to Ruether, women are agents of the divine Spirit, constantly aiding in the mission to bring more souls to Christ and helping to build God's church. Ruether highlights how alternative traditions occur in various periods of Christian history. In the Early Church, Middle Ages, and Reformation, women participated in various roles, such as church mothers. Those stories regarding women in leadership roles have been concealed throughout history. Ruether states, "those women who have been lifted up for us as models by the tradition have been selected by men and have functioned, by and large, to reinforce male ideologies about female roles" (708). Men have attempted to censor the roles women played throughout the Bible and church history, but such history has survived, nonetheless.

According to Ruether, women should be regarded as the powerful beings they are, and not be silenced. Patriarchal tradition conceals and censors the authority and dignity of women who held leadership roles throughout the Bible. Moses' sister Miriam for example, was named co-equal leader with Moses and Aaron. However, when Miriam criticized Moses, she was in turn criticizing God because Moses was commissioned by God to deliver His people from bondage. God, in turn, punished Miriam by making her a leper. Ruether states, "She becomes like one whose father has spit in her face; that is, has totally repudiated her as a daughter. God is said to be the father who has spit in her face" (Ruether 1985, 708). Another patriarchal tradition attempts to censor Mary Magdalene. According to Christian tradition, Mary Magdalene was a prostitute. However, God used her, and she became a leading apostle to Jesus. She was also the first witness to Jesus' resurrection. Ruether explains that Mary was commissioned by Jesus to share the good news that he had arisen with the male disciples. Under patriarchal tradition, women were not identified with their leadership roles but were heavily identified with the roles that showed they were inferior to men. For instance, many highlight that God used Miriam to help deliver the Hebrews out of bondage. Patriarchal tradition, however, highlighted the fact that Miriam was punished because she criticized a man, Moses. Mary Magdalene is highlighted as being a prostitute, although Jesus used and taught her, under his leadership, to become an apostle. Ruether explains that like Miriam and Mary Magdalene, other women's stories have been shared partially to maintain the subordination of women to men. Ruether states, "They have been defined as heretics, witches, or lunatics, their writings have been destroyed and their memory survives only in the negative judgments made against them" (ibid.). Feminist theologians read between these narratives, deciphering good works and leadership roles women have held, to dismantle patriarchal theology.

The third and final stage of feminist theology takes the form of tentative efforts to reestablish theology after the feminist critique and the consideration of alternative traditions. Ruether explains that feminist theologians must now operate not only as critics of the past but as "constructive theologians for a contemporary community of faith, for a contemporary understanding of church which seeks to live its faith as repentance of sexism, exodus from patriarchy and entrance into a new humanity" (Ruether 1985, 710). According to Ruether, feminist theologians should enter into a new humanity, not just critiquing the past, but taking the past and changing it for the future, leaving behind patriarchal Western beliefs.

A more radical view advocates focusing on God as female. Richard Grigg explains in "Enacting the Divine: Feminist Theology and the Being of God" that women should view God as a Goddess, one who empowers women, rather than as a male being. Grigg explains that focusing on God as a Goddess creates a sense of closeness for women to God. According to Richard Grigg, "Goddess is the self-affirming being of women" (Grigg 1994, 520). Grigg explains that divinity should be a way for women to tap into themselves, and relate to the power of being, and to nature. Grigg states,

"Goddess is not to be equated with nature, but understood as a special kind of relationship that can obtain between women and nature. The Goddess is born when women come to understand their rootedness in nature and finitude and claim the power that such rootedness confers" (ibid). Worshipping God from a woman's perspective is important to her role as a leader, enabling her to achieve God's purpose as it is specifically aligned with her life.

Feminist theology highlights the mazeway (or cultural mental map) that feminist Christians have suffered from because of patriarchal tradition. In this mazeway, women are belittled, not allowed to hold leadership roles, and endure constant discrimination and sexism in religious institutions. Porterfield explains that a new mazeway needs to be created. She suggests that in this new mazeway sexism would be viewed as a sin, instead of being praised as God's order. Porterfield states, "the overcoming of sexism is the redeeming work of God, the human experience of conversion, transformation, a new being, and new community" (Porterfield 1987, 242). Overcoming sexist beliefs is crucial to the continuation of religious institutions. Through feminist theology, this kind of cultural transformation can take place. However, Porterfield explains that feminist theology hasn't reached this level of cultural transformation because of the continued control of religious institutions by patriarchal authorities. Until more men accept the new view, women will not be considered equal.

Rosemary Ruether explains that biblical institutions belong to women, as well as men. As women, we have a right to lead in religious institutions. Women have a right to preach, a right to lead a church and a right to leadership roles in the church. Being licensed in 2001, interviewee Reverend Smith recalls the discrimination she has faced in the ministry. Although Reverend Smith has been preaching God's Word for over 22 years, when asked how she felt about women taking on leadership roles within the Black Church, Reverend Smith said,

> I believe women can hold leadership roles within the Black Church. My husband said he would not go into a pulpit without me. But, in his home church in Haines City, FL, they don't have women in the pulpit, and a lot of times when he goes, they'll ask him to preach for that particular Sunday. But I've never been invited and so I don't ever hold him back. I tell him to go on and preach. I'm still a preacher in the pulpit, I'm still a child of God in the pulpit or in the bleachers. But yes, I believe women can hold leadership roles within the church. His church is still old, they are Old Missionary Baptist Black. I've even had some of their deaconesses come to me and say they're sorry, but we're not there yet. But I tell them I'm fine. I'm still here.

Being a woman in a leadership role herself, Reverend Smith believes women can hold leadership roles. Reverend Smith explained that women will continue to face hardships within the Black Church because of their gender. Reverend Smith shared that when she and her husband, Minister Smith, travel to his home church, Reverend Smith is not invited to join the other clergy in the pulpit, much less preach. Minister Smith's home church still firmly believes women have no place in the pulpit. Although many women are disheartened by this act, Reverend Smith explains that at the end of the day, she is still a woman called by God. It is in situations like this that feminist theology can help churches to reconsider whether to allow women to be in the pulpit.

Conclusion

Despite gender discrimination, women are working to overturn patriarchal control in Southern Baptist churches, aiding in the modification of the southern Bible Belt. Throughout African American history, women have been involved in many key moments, from Harriet Tubman, also known as "Black Moses" who led thousands of slaves to freedom, to Sojourner Truth, who fought to legally free enslaved African Americans—from Angela Davis, an activist who fought for African Americans' rights and freedom in the 1960s, to Shirley Chisholm, the first Black woman to run for president. Throughout society, Black women have held leadership roles in some form. Despite patriarchal control, Black women continue to work for the advancement of the African American community and the Black Church.

People repeatedly forget the contributions Black women have made in the Black Church. Black women have invested substantial amounts of time aiding in its growth and development. Despite the constant discrimination and sexism, Black women have held leadership roles in the Black Church. Now Black women are pursuing theological education to help reshape the Black Church. Black women are driven to make changes that will positively steer the future of the

Southern Black Baptist Church, ultimately impacting the African American community.

The Black Church has been and will continue to be the backbone of the African American community. But, until the Black Church faces its own issues of gender discrimination against Black women, the advancement of the Black Church will be hindered. According to Helene Moore-Haywood:

> The Black woman is and always will be a force to reckon with. This foundational being serves as a reflector of all the negativity the world hurls at her: rage, grief, hate. Yet, somehow, she is able to take those same ingredients and mold them into hope, passion, and love. The needs of the generations she will birth fuel the necessity of her survival. What choice does she have?[1]

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Understanding Christianity Through Presentation and Practice: An Ethnographic Research Study

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Having grown up in the Midwest, I have seen the localized practice of Christianity as a way of life for many members of small communities. Christian protocols cultivate a mindset of fellowship outside the sanctuary. Praying for members of the community that do and do not regularly attend services instilled in me a curiosity about community dynamics through religious practices. This research-based study describes the congregation of a small country church known as The Harmony Church[1] through regular attendance at Sunday services, weekly music practices, Bible study, and prayer meetings as well as monthly business meetings. Using ethnographic methods of participant observation and interviews, I discuss how the congregation understands and values their General Baptist Christian practice locally, as well as perceive its presentation globally.

Introduction

To understand the complexities of Christian faith and practice in today's societies, I searched for an opportunity to explore the matter academically through my small corner of the Midwest and beyond. I began my ethnographic research locally, but reflected globally, on how Christianity operates in the realm of religious identity and how it does or does not affect our decisions made within the community. Throughout this article I discuss my immersive study of a small, country church in which regular attendance is no more than forty members. It is here that I attended weekly services, music practice, Bible study sessions, prayer meetings, and monthly business meetings. Each opportunity to connect with regular attendees allowed for a better understanding of the relationship that is established between believers and God through Jesus Christ. This discussion is pivotal in expanding religious studies to a deeper interpretation of the necessity of community and locality in the growing, globalized nation of America.

Methods

I chose to study The Harmony Church located in my small town, and used participant observation and interview processes to not only be interpersonal but make me more approachable in the field. I wanted to be acknowledged as a regular member to the extent that there would be no fear of outward judgement. As I gravitated from sitting in the back of the church, to a simple introduction at the altar, members grew in their confidence to discuss their religious identity and their personal convictions with me. It is important to have an easy, natural approach regarding content to ensure that congregants are open and accepting of the anthropologist's documentations (Patterson 2023, 20). In preparation for doing participant observation, I reviewed Harry Wolcott's, *Ethnography: A Way of Seeing,* in which he mentions:

> Participant observation lends confusion because the label is used in two different ways, in some cases referring to all the activities in which fieldworkers engage, at other times being paired off with its complement, interviewing, to highlight two major

[1] A pseudonym.

> activities into which fieldwork can be subdivided, participant observation and interviewing. As a result, participant observation is sometimes employed as an umbrella term to describe everything that ethnographers do—indeed, that all on-site researchers do in the field—and is also employed by others to refer to any fieldwork activity that is not some form of interviewing. (Wolcott, 2008)

Although participant observation is an umbrella term that constitutes several ethnographic field activities, I heavily regarded this method as a main avenue toward obtaining the insider perspective (Patterson 2023, 20).

Many of my conversations were of the casual and informal form of participant observation, but I did follow up with questions that might broaden the conversation and provide additional insight (Patterson 2023, 23). I focused on themes of transition in values, religion in daily life, and salvation to cultivate three key questions:

1. Do you believe / are you concerned we as a community and nation are experiencing cultural shifts that will retract our obedience and further detour our acceptance into Heaven? How does that make you feel?
2. What are some of your daily / weekly routines done out of religious intent?
3. How do you believe you have received God's salvation?

In order to obtain an insider, or emic, perspective on these questions, I did both formal and informal interviews with the directors of the church to gain insight into the implied values Christians hold in their culturally-based reasoning about action in daily life. I interviewed the Pastor's wife, Jen, early in my ethnographic research, and then later interviewed both Pastor Nick and Jen. I asked them a series of questions ranging from the physical aspects of service structure and musical choice to the metaphysical purpose and fulfillment in Christian practice of baptisms and communion. The discussions provided an understanding of Christian identity and communal activity, as well as of the perceived necessity of a revival of spiritual guidance.

The Harmony Church

The Harmony Church has been an establishment of Christian religious expression for 130 years (as of October 2022) and counting. In the Midwest, some form of Christian or Catholic religion is bound to be a part of the weekly (if not daily) life routine of most people. The Harmony Church is located in a small town between miles of corn fields, with just one gas station, a library, and a post office. Other businesses in which people make their living are 15 miles north, leaving the town with the feeling of quaint, old-fashioned times. Those looking for solitude would find this peaceful in our country's current state of friction. With such strong local identity, there are potential hazards to being closed off from the fast pace of the larger world. Hazards of boredom among the community's youth leads to substance abuse, and mental illness, for which resources are limited and divine intervention seems to be the last believable resort, are found among the youth of this community. The older members of the community believe attending regular services at The Harmony Church is part of the small town's charm as well as providing a religious identity that keeps people grounded and connected, and builds the community's moral structure. Understanding this generational gap in views about the value of religious influence was a point of interest for me in my ethnographic research. Studying religion in small communities that range in population size from 1,300-2,900 residents can help us to understand better the local and global contextualization of Christianity (Patterson 2023, 26).

At the outset, I discovered that at the time of my initial introduction to the church, there were no youth that regularly attended weekly events at The Harmony Church. In delving into the literature on religious generational gaps in America, I found that H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* was helpful. According to Niebuhr, Christianity is a religion with a multitude of communities. No two churches are the same, each one taking on a unique perspective on following Christian customs and living in a community in which the image of God is representative. An interesting note made by Niebuhr regarding our inherent human characteristic to divide and categorize, is that we seem to have ". . . an unconquerable tendency to think in terms of in-group and out-group, of self and other (Niebuhr 1951, 134.)" During my ethnographic research, I found that those in the congregation discussing those outside the congregation believed the

latter were misguided by their own interpretations of scripture. Congregants also discussed their concern that those who did not uphold the value of religious identity to aid them in their moral reasoning were going to have issues throughout this life as well as with their souls acceptance in the afterlife.

Upon entering The Harmony Church, I received a hospitable acceptance from the members due to our shared religious identity. I identified key aspects of the church's service structure and regular cross-denominational Christian activities including communion, baptism, Advent, and celebratory dinners. I then observed music and prayer, weekly Bible studies, and the business developments of the church. And, as mentioned above, I further discussed these activities in two formal interviews with Pastor Nick and his wife, Jen.

Just a few weeks after my basic observations made from the back of the church sanctuary, Pastor Nick came up to me and asked, "How do you feel about possibly helping out with the service?" I did not hesitate in saying "yes". I viewed this as an opportunity to do participant observation. Thankfully, the congregation was open and willing to share their experiences with me upon my introduction at the altar (Patterson 2023, 29-30). As I initially only did the weekly announcements and some personal reflection, it was a rather short time I spent as the center of attention in the eyes of the congregation. Generally, the announcements consisted of weekly music practice, Bible study sessions, and prayer meeting reminders, as well as noting special dinners after Sunday services in instances of holidays and communal celebrations. There were also instances in which the church focused on donations or special offerings for those needing assistance. These announcements reflected the church's involvement in the community, as well as in the congregation; there is a sense of reciprocity in this regard. In each week's message, Pastor Nick did not follow in the tradition of picking apart a few verses, narrowing down the meaning and correlating the message back to modern usage. Rather, he would discuss scriptures, philosophers, fellow theologians, and real-world stories that would align with similar themes and connective concepts that the congregation could reflect on, not only in their own lives, but in the community as well.

I further discussed with Jen her reasoning and perspective on the church services, given that she was the one to develop them (Patterson 2023, 31-32). She commented,

> I think it varies per person and per style. I tend to go a little more with the idea and then build it from there, since I'm not the sole sermon provider at this juncture, probably won't ever be, but I like my style of researching it. Taking it all the way to scripture, then taking it all the way back to the King James Version as I can, and then I like to search for two or three women's perspectives on the sermon. I feel many of our messages in sermons are men centered, and I always strive to find a woman's perspective on scripture.

Jen strives for inclusivity as well as suggesting that there is not one way to learn scripture that is solely correct and current in relation to its meaning in today's Christianity.

As previously mentioned, each church dynamic is different. The importance placed on scripture is circumstantially dynamic as well. While scripture can be used to justify Christian moral and ethical standards of congregants, within The Harmony Church there are an abundance of members that openly recite scripture primarily to better their personal understanding and its usage in guidance for faith. The themes emerging from my observations of weekly services include: glorifying God, obedience to God, turning fears into prayer, and the unconditional love of God (Patterson 2023, 32). I find these themes to be pivotal to all believers, encouraging them to find and keep the faith (Patterson 2023, 32).

In communion weeks, Pastor Nick would often address topics such as devotion to Christ, glorifying the Savior, salvation through service, and obedience. Through this, I believe the emphasis on faith for this church's congregation lies in devotional practices and communal representation of devotion to one another as well (Patterson 2023, 32-33). At the distribution of communion, Pastor Nick would remind the congregation that the bread embodies the body of Christ in his sacrifice, and the juice, that of the blood of Christ (Luke 22:19-20). "In the scripture, it tells us to take communion as often as necessary . . . in reality, I could take communion four times a day just to have a closer walk with God and be in that spirit I need to be at." With this reflection, Pastor Nick tries to link communion to daily religious practice. During my time at The Harmony Church, the opportunity arose to formally observe a Christian Baptist baptism, and to engage in further discussion about one's salvation in service and how believers perceive and know about developing a further relationship with God through

Jesus Christ. The Baptist denomination believes the person must be wholly immersed in water, unlike other Christian denominations that follow protocols of affusion, or water being poured over the individual, and aspersion, or sprinkling water over the individual (Byer, 2014). The formality of baptism is important to the church image and congregation. As it brings a new level of trust and religious guidance to the individual receiving the baptism, it is a joyful celebration accompanied by silence as the new member's connection with God has just become greater (Patterson 2023, 44).

In the weeks of special events and holidays, the topics addressed in services shift. As the discussion usually encompasses the special events and are less guided by scripture, these services seem more personable to an extent. These weeks of special commemorations lead to personal testimonies and religious reflection by congregants, and are also commemorated in special activities and decorations around the church. Advent was the first cross-denominational practice I attended at The Harmony Church. It is traditionally celebrated by Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Episcopalians, Lutherans, and other Protestants (Gillan, 2006), and commemorates the four weeks prior to Jesus' birth and the preparations Christians make for that event. Banners with Advent themes of hope, peace, joy, and love were hung each week leading up to Christmas, and there were specific scripture readings and the lighting of the candle for that week's theme. I discussed with Pastor Nick and Jen their connection to the season of Advent and their understanding of the reasons for its celebration, not only in The Harmony Church, but also globally within Christianity. Though Pastor Nick's preference to celebrate Advent was to maintain a local tradition, there are celebrations of Advent by Christians around the globe as well (Patterson 2023, 38-39).

Celebratory dinners were not necessarily devout or serious events, but rather emphasized the communal aspect of the congregation. As I asked congregants their personal understanding of and value on the special events dinners, many responded that the dinners were an opportunity to socialize and reflect on communal connections. In pursuit of a more theological reverence in community dinners, I asked Pastor Nick and Jen about their understanding of the significance of such gatherings. As he chuckled and reflected on his first year's services at the church, Pastor Nick commented, "It was an expectation; everyone knew what they were bringing." So church dinners were largely viewed as an opportunity to get the community together and socialize.

Worship through Music

Music is essential for this church and the practice of Christianity beyond this church. To understand its significance in the weekly service, I asked Jen how the music is chosen each week, and about its importance to this church. Jen paused and reflected on their first services eight years ago when they became church directors, saying,

> It was strictly traditional. Over time, we evolved into a blend of contemporary [and traditional]. . . If he's [Pastor Nick] going to talk about vision, then I have enough skills to say oh [we will sing] "Be Thou My Vision." Or if it's Easter, I know we sing "He Lives." The talent of our music selection is that we have a minister of a lifelong music career, and most of his military career [he] organized music. He really has two gifts, in addition to the pastor aspect. One is an integrated program, . . . [and the other is that] he is very much more theme based. (Patterson 2023, 47)

Since the congregation is primarily older, their familiarity with the traditional hymns leads to more involvement in singing the hymns, though they do equally enjoy the contemporary music as well. With The Harmony Church's music team consisting of a vocalist, drummer, pianist, and guitarist, the sanctuary is lively with performances at every opportunity (Patterson 2023, 45-46).

The defining aspect of Christian music is its lyrical content rather than its musical style. In the article, "Watering Down Christianity? An Examination of Use of Theological Words in Christian Music," Megan Livengood and Connie L. Book note, "Christian music lyrics [are] rooted in notions of framing theory. Frames are created when selected pieces of information about a certain idea, person, or object are more memorable to audiences. The selected information then becomes the 'dominant meaning' for the idea, person, or object" (Entman 1993 as cited by Livengood and Book, 2004).

Through establishing rapport with congregants, I was invited to music practice. As I developed another layer of participant observation, I began to assist in maintaining a basic rhythm at times by playing the box drum or egg-shaped wooden objects called rice

shakers. Personal testimonies arose during music practice, and there was a sense of the value of service. Some did not attend other weekly events the church hosts, but they attended music practice as a way to feel more comfortable in their expression of praise and worship to God. As I could already play basic percussion instruments, I was then introduced to the ukulele, an instrument that was small, versatile, easily learned, and overall enjoyable to hear (Patterson 2023, 49). I was very hesitant at first, so much so that I could barely strum the four strings. As willing as I was to participate, I was not as willing to mess up the music. When I expressed my nervousness, I was told to "Exhale all doubt." This was a simple, yet profoundly true statement, and I reflect on this moment often. I find this suggestion to be appropriate in situations of doubted belief in the metaphysical as well. While believers are made in the image of God, they are also imperfect. Hence doubts can be a part of the Christian lived experience as well, and "Exhale all doubt" can be a helpful means of retaining hope in the gift of salvation (Patterson 2023, 49).

Weekly Prayer Meetings and Bible Study

In the new year, a member of the congregation recommended developing a weekly prayer meeting. She was familiar with such meetings from previous church settings, and her reason for introducing it to this church was to "Bring a collective understanding of the effects of spiritual rain." The idea was that active prayer would encourage the curiosity of those outside the regular church congregation or those unfamiliar with God in general, and might draw them to attend services and ask about forgiveness as well as salvation (Patterson 2023, 53). Pastor Nick began the prayer meeting with prayer and Bible verses that reflected the potential mood or direction of discussion for the meeting. Jen set the ground rules: what was said stays in the circle, no one is interrupted, and no one should feel forced or obligated. As we stated praises for the week, followed with concerns—either personal or communal—the discussion was open, with emotions abundant in each prayer meeting. The first meeting was very emotional in all areas. There was an overarching feeling of interpersonal uncertainty, as well as uncertainty about the reactions to the concerns being expressed. But with instructions to have a listening ear, and to avoid conversation and personal perspectives on others' concerns, the level of comfort and respect established was greater in prayer meetings than in Bible studies or Sunday services. Once we each completed our testimonies and concerns, we each prayed, with no standard format, just purely by will. It was here that I felt the most challenged. As I had never prayed publicly, only within the comfort of my own thoughts, I was easily intimidated. This was Jen's circumstance as well. She mentioned it wasn't until the pandemic struck that she had had to pray out loud in the services that were live streamed each week. With this, she reminded herself to *exhale all doubt*. This became a reoccurring personal reminder over the duration of my ethnography.

The weekly Bible studies began at high noon with prayer and lunch. With themes of the weekly Sunday service encompassing obedience, glory, guidance, and salvation, there were some consecutive overlapping themes in the Bible study sessions (Patterson 2023, 53-54). Themes of obedience and glory in God were heavily covered, indicating that the ultimate thing humans can do to fulfill God's wishes is to be obedient and faithful in having a walk with Jesus Christ and to seek the gift of salvation, as previously mentioned. Other themes of adoption, humbled in God's presence, the fight of temptations of the flesh, and grace were all covered in Bible study sessions (Patterson 2023, 53-54).

The study sessions consisted of lecture-discussion driven conversations. Along with reading and reflecting on the material of the chosen Bible chapter, there was also reference to Max Lucado's, *Life Lessons from Romans*, in which the aim of the text was to bring the words of Paul to the readers life circumstances and guide readers, with the knowledge that, "The wrong solutions are pleasure and pride (Romans 1-2), and the correct solution is Christ Jesus (3:21-26). According to Paul, we are saved by grace (undeserved, unearned favor), through faith (complete trust) in Jesus and his work" (Lucado 2018, ix). Lucado also suggests that the understood purpose of the Bible is to provide us with the opportunity of seeking salvation.

In order to assess the importance of the Bible to The Harmony Church, I asked Pastor Nick and Jen what relevance they find in the scripture and how do they understand its use in their lives as well as that of the congregation. Pastor Nick mentioned that the importance the Bible holds for believers instills a biblical worldview in the congregation. "The one that has the biblical world view has stimulated a lot of thoughts [reflecting] the culture we are in now, it has opened the door to a new revival of the Christian worldview and what that means. It is heartfelt because

I am experiencing things that I know God is working me through them." As he broadens this discussion, he identifies three points at which the biblical world view should instill in believers a walk of faith. It is through truth, submission, and relationships that believers can continue to follow the path of religious guidance, maintaining faithfulness in the midst of worldly distractions (Patterson 2023, 51-52).

Bible study provided insight into individual variations in interpreting scripture. While there are some readers that are very literal, and categorized the dos and don'ts of Christian expectations depicted in the scripture, there were others of this church that considered circumstance and the cultural dos and don'ts of Jesus' time, suggesting that the implement-tation of scripture may involve a whole new meaning which has shifted over time. In the study group I found there was a healthy combination of both types, allowing for discussion and consideration to take place. The believers participating in the Bible study group had respect for opposing opinions and takeaways from scripture. As we see in the news media today, there are some raging religious folk doing radical things in the name of God. As a result, there are misconceived notions in the general public that believers are not wanting to participate in an authentic faith (Patterson 2023, 51-52). It is so often we forget the Apostle Paul's comment in Romans 12:18, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."

The Harmony Church practices prayer regularly through service and weekly meetings. The newly developed Thursday night prayer meeting is where the communication, not only with God, but with fellow community members, is prevalent, abundant, and comfortable. The discussions range from lighthearted requests to emotional, difficult fears and uncertainties. It is in those moments that members of the meeting ask fellow members to pray for them (Patterson 2023, 60-61). This is a direct avenue for members to build each other up in their beliefs and faith, as well as to care for one another beyond religious obligations, and it reflects positively within the community, not just in the congregation and sanctuary.

Business Meetings and Outreach

Observing the church's business meeting was very informative for understanding the future and concerns of the church. Business meetings were held the first Wednesday of each month, and all congregants were invited to attend. Matters such as account totals, church repairs, donations, and new installations were all discussed. In a traditional business meeting fashion, one member would make a motion to action, and another would second the motion or discuss resolutions. Generally, the meetings were small, and everyone was respectful of motioned statements. Financially, the church is stable, and able to help out other organizations. I believe this is a positive thing as rural churches are morphing congregations together due to low attendance and financial strain (Patterson 2023, 54-55). The Harmony Church also received a grant which allowed for a new camera installation to live stream services to do outreach via YouTube.

While outreach is being done to maintain and grow the congregation, there are concerns about the continued success of The Harmony Church. The necessity to bring in new congregants is apparent. Specifically, the church would like to bring in younger families with children, as there are currently no children or children's ministry in the church (Patterson 2023, 54-55). This is largely because the current congregation is older, with their children already grown. With this comes the question, "Why are there no children and families attending The Harmony Church?" The answer to this could go in multiple directions. Locally, Pastor Nick and Jen have only been this church's directors for eight years, making their influence and presentation seem new, though they are viewed as prominent and involved members of the community. Furthermore, the church is a rural country church for which there is no proper transportation or access for children who want to be involved, but whose parents may not have the resources, health, or determination to come to church. Much of the community is financially supported by a local car building factory. While this brings financial stability, it also brings excessive labor with only the weekend to rest. Religious activities are second in this regard. Globally too the importance of work in the economy and maintaining one's household can take priority. As the cost of living is gradually climbing, the understanding that one must rest up on the weekends and be healthy to work becomes predominant.

While the globalization of economic life is a factor in this church's continued success, the cultural representation of Christian ideals is equally concerning. Throughout the duration of my ethnographic work, there was discussion of the end of the church era amongst many congregants. They discussed this not only with regard to their community involvement, but also the state of our country.

Members believe that through prayer, recommend-dation, public connection, and communal events, the opportunity to discuss what is going on at the church will bring people to the sanctuary and provide them with the gift of salvation, along with what that involves in an eschatological sense. The obligation people used to feel (potentially) to go to church to prove to the community that you are guided by faith is no more. This is a concern for the members because it represents the possibility that loved ones will not be saved (Patterson 2023, 56). So, the lack of children and family members the church is currently experiencing is coming up in business meetings, urging them to recommend new waves of outreach. Through advertisements of church activities via social media, the church hopes to bring in children, old members, newcomers to the religion, along with genuinely curious individuals who might learn about Christian practice. The hope for 2023 is to have a children's ministry, greater community involvement, Sunday school installations, and more discussion of salvation and guidance for understanding a walk with Christ (Patterson 2023, 56).

Tithing

Upon completing the ethnographic field research for this study, I had to review observation notes, formal interview recordings, and contextualize informal conversation with congregants in a way that illuminated their understanding of Christian faith and practice within the context of global Christianity. An example of this connection can be found in tithing. The Harmony Church practiced tithing as a cultural practice that was in place to maintain social etiquette and to align religious values with that of community values as well. These cultural practices included not only tithing, but also good moral values such as obedience, traditional gender roles, and embodying support of the community through prayer (Patterson 2023, 57).

As early as 1928, there was a concern among anthropologists to study the relationship of religion to other global structures of social and economic organization. In Franz Boas' *Anthropology and Modern Life* he states, "It is just as necessary to study economic life as dependent upon inventions, social structure, art, and religion as it is to study the reverse relations. . . . Social bonds and conflicts, concepts, emotional life, artistic activities are in their psychological and social origin only incompletely redouble to economic factors" (Boas, 1928, p. ix). As many members of The Harmony Church are retired with fixed incomes, offerings are still abundant and keep the church functioning. While Pastor Nick does not threaten membership standings, he does emphasize that, at the very least, 10% of available income should go to tithing, and that members will be blessed in doing so. As the physical church is well maintained but older, extra donations from congregants are requested for updates and renovations. Pastor Nick and Jen recommend tithing in generosity and obedience to God, with Pastor Nick making his weekly contribution publicly as the offering plates make their way through the pews. His act of tithing is symbolic to the congregation that he is not just a leader or lecturer of the subject but a contributor as well. Tithing is seen as a fulfillment of not only earthly commands, but God's commands, as well. In this matter, communication and directional guidance are key factors of the church's success (Patterson 2023, 57-58).

This kind of directional guidance is central to American expressions of Christian faith. Oskar Gruenwald's "Phenomenology of Communications: Toward a Culture of Grace" explores this guidance in a way that is reflective of this community's reason for and conceptualization of religious practice. As scripture illustrates that God is a merciful being, Gruenwald suggests that this early introduction and continual look to God for guidance as a key for the believers, more specifically American Christian believers, in their faith walk (Patterson 2023, 60-61). Christians are always directed to pray, seek guidance from God regularly, let him know their concerns and requests, ask for forgiveness, and in turn, believers will be enlightened with direction and mercy. Gruenwald states, "In the end, America's destiny is a universal story, a hope-filled enduring odyssey, enabled by innumerable acts of kindness, despite all the violence and wretchedness, even lost wars, where erstwhile strangers become friends by discovering common ground—their essential humanity (Gruenwald, 2021, 17)."

Gender Roles

I noted throughout my field research a presence of traditional gender roles. As pivotal as Pastor Nick was and continues to be to the ministry, it was Jen who was tasked with as much work, behind the scenes. Jen has an organizational role in the church. From organizing

regular weekly events, to the new updates and installations of the church, and so on, much of Jen's role is task oriented and involves a willingness to aid in setting up events as needed (Patterson 2023, 61-62). In Melody Maxwell's "A Winding and Widening Path: American Women's Roles in Twentieth-Century Baptist Life," she discusses similar traditional roles for women in the church. While restricted by conservative gender constraints, Maxwell states, "women served in a variety of volunteer roles in Baptist churches. . . . Baptist women typically took the lead in church hospitality and meal arrangements, nursery and children's work, and ministry to other women (Maxwell, 2018)." The emphasis here is on women doing volunteer work (Patterson 2023, 61-62). While Jen knows she is loved and appreciated by the congregation, the congregation might not know all the effort that she is putting in to being the support system for Pastor Nick and his services, as well as to the organizing tasks of the church.

On top of this work, Jen has a regular full-time job. As she is not the only woman of the church who works full-time, Jen is a symbolic representation of the resilience and tenacity of women who help to maintain the equilibrium of the church. While Jen directs and organizes events of the service, other women of the congregation help prepare meals in the fellowship hall and regularly volunteer to clean the church. I find all these traditional social and cultural norms to still be active within the church, and unquestioned. This is not necessarily a good or bad thing, just simply a circumstance in which there is compliance and contentment. In a world that is rapidly changing and pulling on what is encompassed in cultural gender normative practice, much of this congregation is holding on to their traditional normative practices, though there are currently not enough youth today to continue these practices in this congregation for the future (Patterson 2023, 62-63).

Local and Global Christian Cultures

In cultural anthropology, tracing local—global connections is a must for understanding how people are compartmentalizing their practices and developing cross-cultural practices, along with what that means for cultures of the future. Arjun Appadurai suggests that "the intellectual infrastructure of anthropology, and of the culture concept itself, remains substantially shaped by the lens of pastness" (Appadurai 2013, 285). *What does culture mean to the circumstances now?* If Christians want to continue to grow in the future in unity as a global social organization we must explore past and present cultural practices and relations and how they coexist. While there are several dynamics to what this entails, understanding religious practices across the globe are pivotal.

Locally, the congregation at The Harmony Church instills a notion of reliance and comfort in one another. Those outside the congregation might conclude that the church expresses only conformity and obligation to traditional practice (Patterson 2023, 64). But Appadurai describes in-group / out-group complexes and the force of culture, saying, "Some, usually anthropologists, have stressed the force of culture and the local understanding of a world that people are brought into as very young children and whose prejudices they quickly take to be part of ordinary life itself" (Appadurai 2013, 253). This force creates communities that can either confidentially coexist among those different in beliefs, practices, and moral judgements, or spread violence across communities that believe there are power battles to be won.

Appadurai references Emile Durkheim's conclusions about what and who God really was and is for society. He states, "For some great thinkers, like Emile Durkheim, God was just another name for the moral force of society, experienced as so powerful, abstract, and unquestionable by individuals that they projected it into the cosmos as the sacred" (Appadurai 2013, 253). Congregants of The Harmony Church reference God in various ways. Believers come to know God through leadership first, either through family or communal outreach. In cultivating the idea of seeking further knowledge, they then regularly attend church, where ministry implements God's scripture in a way that makes believers feel worthy of such a presence (Patterson 2023, 64-65). Members of the church call on God in prayer, during services, and experience physical symptoms of goosebumps and chills, further declaring his physical presence. There are unexplainable callings members express that guide their faith. I understand these to be their request for change or their embodiment of spiritual revitalization through worship. It is with new involvement of members and new development of activities that the congregation experiences renewal (Patterson 2023, 64-65).

The Church in Theological Terms

To understand The Harmony Church in theological terms, I reviewed John Wesley's Wesleyan Quadrilateral: scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. These four aspects reflect the capability of human rationality and moral action to embody religious practice, the preface for which is usually a calling or burden placed on one's heart and mind. As mentioned in Don Thorsen's "Faith Integration, Higher Education, and the Wesleyan Quadrilateral: A Personal Witness," "Of course, the Christian understanding of faith is a complex reality to define, even from a biblical perspective. On the one hand, faith is somehow thought to be divinely initiated and enabled. On the other hand, people experience and grow in faith in ways that, humanly speaking, may be analyzed historically, theologically, behaviorally, and in other ways" (Thorsen, 2014). There is a danger in theology of overreliance on human reasoning and showcasing one's mental capacity to conceptualize. This departs from depending upon the omnipotent power of the Almighty God. It relies on human transcendence and rationality rather than God's all knowing, all-encompassing divine power. Humans begin to believe the power is theirs, and if they deem themselves capable of such power, the fate of humanity no longer lies in God's hands, but in the mortal disposition of fellow humans (Patterson 2023, 68-69). The Harmony Church congregation is obedient to scripture guidance and reflection, creating a devout awareness of dependence upon God through Jesus Christ. The devoutness that the members embody is not to be mistaken with human righteousness, but results in hospitality for those within and outside the congregation.

Since The Harmony Church is of the General Baptist denomination of Christianity, there are protocols that are to be followed to maintain the denominational connection. They follow the basic standards of religious practice which involves scriptural reference and reflection, weekly services, traditional hymns, prayer, and the practices of communion and baptisms. Within each of these practices comes the layering and personal employment of protocols for specific discussions and actions to allow for a cultivated reverence for faith (Patterson 2023, 69). Expressions of the religious practice that are of importance to the church are that of the Bible, communion juice and bread, playing music, and being demonstrative in rejoicing. Also important are visiting ones in the hospital, having regular congregational dinners, and inviting speakers and musicians into the church. The purpose is to allow for growth of the community's knowledge of the church, as well as to entice the congregation to stay involved with the community and to engage in outreach of the Gospel (Patterson 2023, 65-66).

All this is reflected in the symbolism of the church, including in music and instruments, the Bible and scripture reflection, the act of prayer and vocalizing prayer, baptisms, dinners, and communion. The nuanced symbols of prayer bracelets and necklaces, personalized study Bibles, the admiration and recent implementation of the hanging of the Christian flag, and sanctuary imagery distinguish The Harmony Church as being concerned with revival and connection to God.

Exploring the reason for our earthly existence is regarded as important in Christianity, including eschatological avenues of interest that provide believers with the ability to face the unknown, along with circumstances out of their control. Knowing that there is peace and salvation after one is awarded graciousness and mercy through repentance is a pivotal aspect of Christian practice. The Harmony Church, through Pastor Nick's exercise of passion and devotion to scripture, calls on congregants to act now and save oneself from a tormented afterlife that will occur should believers not abide by what is commanded of them (Patterson 2023, 72-73). As Casey Barton discusses in "Preaching as Eschatology: Calling the Future into the Present," "First, the eschatological hope of many church members rests in the belief that Christ will come soon to rescue them from pain, discomfort, and cultural battles that they themselves and the church as a whole currently face. . . . Second, preaching about eschatology is largely absent or locates God in some time other than now, through casting eschatology as exclusively future, primarily past, or outside of time through allegorization" (Barton 2022, 18). This theology purports that time is of the essence and believers are closer to their salvation with each new day than when they first began (Romans 13). The Harmony Church emphasizes the importance of time in the time spent together in services, studying scripture, and in prayer. There is guidance in the right way to use one's time to ensure not only are they saved, but their loved ones and fellow believers as well (Patterson 2023, 73).

Though eschatological theological discussion is an important cornerstone in Christian doctrine, it is often

left up to interpretation in the eyes of believers. In fact, the discussion of eschatology is largely disregarded in today's studies (Patterson 2023, 73). As a result there is the potential for diverse ideologies regarding what life entails after death. Barton notes, "For eschatology in the realm of biblical interpretation, an increasing anti-supernatural conviction, and nontheistic approaches to the text in many ways, neutralized traditional interpretations of biblical texts of eschatological importance" (Barton 2022, 20). In this action of questioning and potentially disregarding eschatological knowledge, Christianity's ability to justify the unexplainable suffers. Eschatology applies reasoning to theological convictions. It helps to justify the seemingly mythological worldview of being guided by a higher power that is presumably in the cosmos. Pastor Nick rarely discusses the imagery of life after death for believers or non-believers. But he implies regularly that it is with obedience, call to action, baptism, and exclamation of the Lord in one's life that they will receive the opportunity of salvation on their day of judgment (Patterson 2023, 73-74).

Though it might seem difficult, the call to obedience is an opportunity to personally prosper by acting as Jesus' would have in similar circumstances, as well as stretching the power prayer has in changing the mindsets and considerations of those opposing Christian practice (Patterson 2023, 75-76). Knowing that one can rely on a fellowship in which the community considers prayer requests outside that of their own implies that not only are they encouragers of one another, but encouragers of the faith as well. Prayer in fellowship involves an emphasis on caring for one another as God has cared for His followers. On the whole, there is appreciation and unity in services and a call to continually rise above life's circumstances and take the next steps toward a closer relationship with God through Jesus Christ (Patterson 2023, 76).

Conclusion

The Harmony Church is a cog in the machine of modernization and the process of globalization, but also a link to Christian tradition and the historic global church. The church's humble beginning brought this small midwestern community together in celebration of their reason of existence, though some might say it was for a good meal or a home away from home. Reflecting on my experience, the events of The Harmony Church allowed me to become fully immersed in what it means to practice and participate in a religion. It is through repetitive prayer, scriptural guidance, group discussions, musical rejoicing, and communion that the traditions of Christianity flourish. With the aim of the religion being that of bringing all people to salvation, Pastor Nick reiterates that there are requirements for the believer, such as tithing regularly, repenting of one's old ways, and becoming baptized in front of the congregation to have a relationship with God so certain that on Judgment Day they will know their fate to be in eternity with God. This demonstrates that Pastor Nick is a leader of the congregation in a way similar to that of Jesus in his time spent on earth, with his determination to bring as many followers as possible to God.

The modernized world is full of distractions that are pulling people away from the church setting, leaving believers to be concerned that this is "the end of the church era." As the world is seen to be in chaos, the congregation calls this moment "the time before the second coming of Christ." These discussions may make Christians seem unrealistic in a world that understands seeing as believing. But their concerns are justified when it comes to the ideologies of Christian scripture and living in the real world as a Christian believer. There are moral convictions that are active in the basic decisions believers make each day, and these reflect within the community mindset and justify how members coexist with fellow believers of other denominations and with the community (Patterson 2023, 83-85).

In conclusion, I have utilized the ethnographic research methods of observation, participation, and interviews to enable me to retrieve the qualitative data discussed in this study to understand the concerns of this rural church's understanding and embodiment of Christian practice, and to further relate their practice to the global ideologies and practices of the religion. In doing so I have come to learn that religion is a part of culture through which people make sense of their time here on earth, and rely heavily on its enactment in the community to provide them with hope and faith in their spiritual future in the afterlife. It is a manifestation of the undoubtable fact that Christ has and continues to play a pivotal role in rural and global Christian practice (Patterson 2023, 83-85).

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NEWS & OPINIONS

OKH Rising: The Rise of the "On Knowing Humanity" Project in the Context of Today's Anthropology

Edwin Roy Zehner

Abstract

When the initiative eventually named the "On Knowing Humanity Project" was first announced, the present author was concerned about potentially negative impacts on the small but growing community of Christian anthropologists who were beginning to find their place in the discipline after decades of sidelining. Those concerns turned out to be misplaced, as the initiative has been conducted professionally and intelligently. The present article outlines three steps in the initiative's public introduction and institutionalization. A seminal article in the journal *Current Anthropology* helped to establish the initiative's scholarly credibility. A book published by noted scholarly publisher Routledge further established credibility, and the *On Knowing Humanity (OKH) Journal* has helped to begin institutionalizing the initiative in a way that has been drawing an increasing range of participants. The present article sets out the author's initial concerns and then reviews favorably each of these three developments.

Introduction

When I, Dr. Edwin Zehner, first heard in the early 2000s that professors at Eastern University were starting a new initiative exploring specifically Christian approaches to anthropology, I felt distraught. Anthropologists who identified as Christian had contributed greatly to the early development of anthropology as an academic discipline. However, for the previous 40 years or so they had been relatively scarce in the discipline's mainstream, and anthropologists had also become hostile to, or at least willfully ignorant of, the concerns of Christian anthropologists and global Christians, while rarely acknowledging the existence of the latter in their field sites [see criticisms by Barker (2008), Robbins (e.g., 1998; 2004); John and Jean Comaroff (e.g., 1991) were earlier examples of anthropologists studying Christians, albeit employing different analytical approaches than would be used later. For expression of concern about the relative absence of Christians from the most advanced discussions and institutions in anthropology, see the latter pages of Priest (2001)].

As the 21st century began, anthropologists began to acknowledge the presence of Christians as an object of study, highlighted the complexities of these groups, and were becoming more open to the disciplinary participation of self-identified Christians [examples include Aragon (2000), Coleman (2000), Coleman and Hackett (2015), Keane (2006), Kipp (1995), Engelke and Tomlinson (2006), and several others]. One of the main concerns that may have remained about Christian anthropologists in the new millennium was whether we Christians were driven by an ideological, or faith, paradigm that might determine the answers to our research questions before the questions were properly studied. In other words, did we Christians possess a preconceived set of biases that would shape and warp our work, and if so, how much would we be driven by our faith agendas and how much would we be driven by the discipline's norms?

At the turn of the 21st century, anthropology may have been said to be entering a post-post-modernist phase, where the novelty of the postmodern initiatives had worn off and practitioners were deciding how much of those innovations to retain. One of the post-modern influences that I believe has been mostly

retained is the idea that there is no single approach to absolute truths, at least to the kinds of truths that can be investigated through field research and other empirical methods. If some Christian anthropologists and theologians were developing a theologically-shaped approach to the discipline that purported a single approach, then the effort could be perceived negatively in ways that could impact all of us anthropologists who identify as Christian.

These were not idle concerns, as it was easy even for scholars outside the discipline to assume that any reference to "Christian anthropology" meant an attempt to dictate the particular way that the author assumes that Christians should think about anthropology. For example, when Brian M. Howell and Jenell Williams Paris (2010) published their groundbreaking cultural anthropology textbook (aimed at students in evangelical Christian colleges and universities), they gave it the title *Introducing Cultural Anthropology: A Christian Perspective*. When I showed the cover to a Christian colleague of mine (not even an anthropologist, in this case), he objected immediately to the title, assuming that the indefinite article "A" (implying multiple valid perspectives) *really* meant the definite article "The" (implying only one correct perspective). He was probably not alone in his assumption (but incorrect in the case of this particular book).

And such fears of a Christian push toward monolithic thinking may be justified in at least some cases. An organization I know that seeks to reach university students, professors, and academic disciplines for Christ recently hinted what they meant by "reaching academic disciplines" by initiating a series of study guides apparently meant to "equip" professors on exactly how to be a Christian witness in their disciplines. Although this was a very recent development, I think it was fair for me to question whether the earlier initiative from Eastern University was intended to take the same approach. And even if it did not, I worried what effect the initiative might have on the rest of us if the implied pluralist perspective (favored in the social sciences and humanities disciplines that are today the backdrop to anthropology) were perceived by disciplinary specialists to be monolithic.

Fortunately, my fears were misplaced in this case. The *On Knowing Humanity* project that I am referring to has been favorably accepted by secular anthropologists from its very outset, and by now it has been institutionalized in the form of a book of collected articles and also in the present *OKH Journal,* which has published enough issues to help us assess the founders' intent. The next few paragraphs outline what I perceive to be some of the main contributions and approaches of each of these materials, both individually and collectively.

Introducing the OKH Perspective—The *Current Anthropology* Article and Its Reception

The On Knowing Humanity project began in 2008 with the formation of a team of Christian anthropologists and theologians at Eastern University to develop a faith-integrated master's degree in anthropology. However, the time when the *secular* anthropological world became aware of the project can be dated to the appearance of a single essay in the leading journal *Current Anthropology* along with invited reader comments and the authors' response to the comments.

Titled, "Engaging the Religiously Committed Other: Anthropologists and Theologians in Dialogue" (Meneses et al. 2014), the article was coauthored by five scholars at Eastern University. The article proposed "an epistemology of witness for dialogue between anthropologists and theologians," and used the example of "the problem of violence" to illustrate the potentials of their approach (2014, Abstract).

The opening paragraph sets out the authors' epistemological foundations, in the form of two assertions that would probably be accepted by most secular anthropologists:

> Since its inception, anthropology has been engaged in two main tasks. The first is the scientific task of seeking to understand the full dimensions of the nature and expressions of humankind. The second, based on the first, is the instrumental task of using those understandings to press for processes, projects, and policies that will protect and nourish the best of that nature and its expressions. (2014, 82).

Another important early assertion is the following:

> It is our contention that the depth of anthropology's perspective on humanity, and therefore the relevance of its instrumental uses, has been constrained by the modernist epistemological assumptions and commitments that have generally governed Western discourse. In particular, the

> commitments to secularism and to liberalism, operating in the background of the discourse, have led to the exclusion of religiously based perspectives as intellectually coequal. (2014, 82).

Here, too, few of today's anthropologists would object. One of the main assertions of the "postmodernist" wave that swept through anthropology in the 1980s and 1990s was that the centralizing, secularizing, and homogenizing effects of modernist liberalism must be replaced with something better (see, for example, Harvey 1984). In addition, the "crisis of representation" that accompanied the postmodern wave was a rejection of the monolithic and rationalistic perspectives that secular modernism tended to favor (see also Clifford and Marcus 1986). The result was a discipline that by the turn of the 21st century was much more open to consider religiously-influenced (I avoid the term "religiously based") perspectives "as intellectually coequal" than it ever had before.

Therefore, by the time this article appeared the groundwork had already been laid for a positive reception, and the authors' opening was a perfect way of dovetailing with those newer perspectives, which by now had long been mainstream (at least "long" from within the perspectives of a discipline that seems to change its terminology every five to ten years). The article's authors note this fairly recent development, saying that

> The discipline [of anthropology] itself is recognizing the time is right to expand its discourse [to include the discourses and perspectives of religiously committed individuals] if it is to fulfill its twin purposes of scientific study and instrumental engagement with its public. (2014, 82)

The article then proceeds to examine secularism and its assumptions, and also its limitations, especially for practicing anthropologists. In particular, secularism's assumption that there is "a transcendent perspective, objectivity, from which reality can be correctly perceived" (2024, 83) has created problems for anthropological researchers and practitioners, especially in recent years (2024, 83), and not just for those who come from non-Western backgrounds. Further,

> Steven Smith (2010) suggests that, even in the West, secularism is failing because of the inevitably shallow nature of a discourse that does not permit the declaration of normative commitments, commitments that must be smuggled in to resolve problems that secular principles cannot work out. (2014, 83)

Before long, it becomes apparent that the term "religiously committed other" in the article's title refers not just to theologians and not just to Christians, but also to anthropologists raised in non-secularized cultures (Muslim, Hindu, etc.) and adapting to the secularized assumptions that still tend to dominate in anthropology. In order to develop shared meaning horizons among all these people it is necessary to find ways to accommodate their diverse starting points while still working toward the objectives stated at the outset. As the authors say, this can be hard for those who are used to thinking of secular liberal values as natural and rational, despite the practical difficulties:

> At issue is the fear that the elimination of the secular, or rather the reduction of secularism to one doctrine among many, will result in an intellectual free-for-all without grounding or potential resolution. Those already rooted in secularism may well wonder whether an academic discourse is possible under such a circumstance. . . . In part, it is simply a natural response to the realization that one's own perspective has been deeply privileged. (2014, 83)

However, it is not enough to simply abandon monolithic secularism. What kind of stance must replace it? As the authors note:

> [W]ith secularism being deconstructed, its unspoken ontological claims will have to be reexamined, and other possibilities reconsidered (cf. Alberti et al. 2011). (2014, 83)

The authors suggest that this is best done through a kind of interactive interpretive hermeneutic practiced within the context of community:

> We believe that all understanding is achieved by an interpretive process conducted against the background of a narrative, or "framing story" (Smith 2009). In the context of lived communities, these narratives produce plausibility structures rendering the world comprehensible and meaningful. (2014, 83)

The potential benefits of deliberately interactive hermeneutics can be many, including that:

> A thick description [ethnographic style] of our beliefs and operating assumptions for the sake of a transparent and ongoing dialogue with those whose assumptions are different can work toward the end of suggesting how various beliefs illuminate, critique, and expand [our progressive collective understanding of] the subject[s studied]. (2014, 84)

The authors ground these observations in the work of hermeneutic philosophers such as Gadamer, Heidegger, and Habermas. Gadamer grounded the notion of rationality in the speech community rather than the individual (2014, 84). Therefore, while not speaking for all Christians, this set of anthropologically and intellectually oriented Christians (a combination of anthropologists and theologians) argue that people like them, with one foot in communities of committed belief, and the other foot in the community of professional scholars, have a unique contribution to make to anthropology. To quote them again:

> We the authors believe that our dual identities as scholars and as believers give us a valuable vantage point from which to contribute to the current debate over epistemology in anthropology. We [the five authors] are Christians working within a socially engaged and intellectually open theological framework deeply shaped by the Christian story as articulated by the earliest strands of the Christian tradition. Our perspective can be described as orthodox, evangelical, ecumenical, and critical in nature. (2014, 84)

Also problematic is anthropology's commitment to liberalism, which while *appearing* to accommodate multiple voices, does so by privileging individual perspectives over collective community ones, thereby narrowing the terms of discourse while further privileging secular stances within anthropology (2014, 85).

That said, the authors' suggestion that Christians, and theologians, can be part of anthropological discourses, was not unique to this essay. As the authors note, they were preceded by the new field of "Anthropology of Christianity," and especially by Jewish anthropologist Joel Robbins, who was among the first to advocate sustained dialogue between anthropologists and theologians (2014, 85; cf. Robbins 2006). Robbins in particular has identified three ways that anthropologists might interact with theology:

> (1) By examining theology's historical role in the formation of the discipline [of anthropology], (2) by studying theology for ethnographic purposes, and (3) by allowing theological works to "lead anthropologists to revise their core projects." (Robbins 2006, 287, cited in Meneses et at, 2014, 85; also see Engelke and Robbins 2010)

A similar argument is now martialed against intellectual liberalism, alleging that, same as secularism, the overreliance on this perspective impoverishes the discipline's imagination. As the authors conclude:

> Liberalism's overreliance on "reason" ["scare quotes" are my addition] as the final arbiter, along with its rejection of community and tradition in favor of the autonomous individual with free-floating interests, causes it, like secularism, to be overly restrictive of the public discourse [. . . and] distances people from the usual sources of meaning, which are religious and cultural contexts. (2014, 84).

What is the appropriate response to these dilemmas? The authors quote Engelke and Robbins (2010), who suggest that in light of above considerations it is important for

> critical thinkers not just to think *about* religion but also in important respects to think *with* it; or at least with some of its conceptual and sometimes its narrative resources. (Engelke and Robbins 2010, 624-625; as quoted in Meneses et al 2014, 85)

These scholars

> invoke the work of three contemporary Continental philosophers (Agamben, Badiou, and Žižek) who are constructing models of change that reject incremental progress in favor of radical breaks, or "events." The conversion of the apostle Paul is the archetype for "the event as that which breaks into the present and allows for changes [that] the present on its own could never generate." (Robbins 2010, 649, quoted in Meneses et al. 2014, 85)

With these background principles established, the authors move on to a section outlining "A Christian Perspectival Epistemology" (2014, 85ff). I will devote less space to its specifics, because the authors have already argued the value of multiple such perspectives, presumably including evangelical Christian ones. By forefronting such perspectives the authors are not telling us other Christians how we should think, but are instead setting up the case study with which they close the article. The beginning of this section is worth quoting, however:

> In the construction of a broader anthropology, our starting point is that all human attempts to achieve a transcendent vantage point for engaging in the discussion are doomed to failure. This is because no human effort to discover truth is ever free of the limitations of context. We must be willing to engage in the project of understanding humanity by refraining from preemptively privileging any one perspective over the others. This acknowledgement of the limits of human discourse and understanding . . . emerges directly from our theology. (2014, 85)

The authors assert that only God knows absolute truth. And

> In biblical history, God reveals truth to chosen people who are entrusted with that truth for the purpose of announcing it to others. The witness does not know God's truth in totality or from God's perspective. Rather, the witness delivers the message from the vantage point of his or her own particular time, place, and social position as a *clue* to universal reality (Newbigin 1989:99-100). (Meneses et al 2014, 86)

The authors then link this *theological* position with parallels in the *postmodern* traditions, namely:

> In true postmodern fashion, a witness speaks truth from a grounded and specific identity, within the context of a larger narrative that gives meaning to it under the conditions of the hermeneutic circle. (Meneses 2014, 860

But understanding, or hermeneutics, is not enough. There must also be engagement with God's creation and especially with socio-cultural realities:

> witness is purposeless if it does not break out of the hermeneutic circle [a self-referential cycle whereby text is interpreted in terms of context and context is understood in terms of texts, in a never-ending back-and forth process—see Sherratt (2005)], and make contact with others to deliver the message. (Meneses et al. 2014, 86)

In such a role, properly understood,

> Christians are in no way precluded from the excitement, wonder, discovery, and illumination that come from the scientific investigation of the world, anthropology's first task, and are seriously charged with the proper care of creation and of their fellow creatures, anthropology's second task. (Meneses et al. 2014, 86)

The authors' argument also goes beyond this declaration of a right to participate in the discipline. They go on to assert that a "situated perspective" such as theirs (though not necessarily always this one) is essential in order for contemporary anthropology to be done well at all, saying that

> [I]t is only from a situated perspective, a view from somewhere, that the truth can be discerned at all, and it is only with the interpretive framework of a community of faith that it can be fully apprehended. (Meneses et al. 2014, 86)

The parameters of the emerging approach are best described with Newbigin's term "committed pluralism" (Meneses et al. 2014, 86). In such an arena, "discussants must be open to the truth in the other, while at the same time committed to their own truth as having potential relevance beyond themselves" (Meneses et al. 2014, 86).

They choose as an example, "the problem of human violence, both toward one another and toward the earth" as illustration of the advantage of "including religious thinking in the anthropological discourse" (Meneses et al. 2014, 86). Here I avoid a detailed discussion of their specific approach, not only because the authors acknowledge the potential validity of alternative approaches, but also because the presentation is so well done—drawing on both contemporary slightly left-ish mainstream evangelical theology (Croatian-American theologian Miroslav Volf figures heavily in the discussion) and also on the contemporary anthropology of violence towards others

and the earth—including the causes of that violence—that detailed discussion here would take up too much space.

Reader Responses in Current Anthropology

The invited reader comments in that issue of *Current Anthropology* were almost universally positive. While some of the criticisms seem harsh, on the whole they were more positive than most *Current Anthropology* articles receive. In addition, the number of reader responses was unusually large, indicating the high degree of interest that the authors had drawn to their discussion. I now summarize some of these comments.

For example, Simon Coleman of the University of Toronto began with a pair of relevant anecdotes from his own study of a large Charismatic Christian church in Sweden, and used those anecdotes to lead to the questions, "If we [non-Christian anthropologists] are to engage with Christianity in doing anthropology, then whose Christianity do we choose? Just the one that fits most closely with our vision of what anthropology should be—a vision [shaped by] secularism and . . . liberalism?" He also notes, usefully, I think, that "theology is not Christianity per se" (Meneses et al. 2014, 89-90). Many of his questions may have led the authors to feel like they were being "put on the back foot," if I may be permitted an overused phrase. However, he concludes by saying that his questions were inspired by the brilliance of the piece, "so thank you for that," among other things (Meneses et al. 2014, 90).

Omri Elisha, of Queens College of the City University of New York (CUNY) referred to the essay as "thought-provoking" and meriting his "utmost respect" (Meneses et al. 2014, 90). Elisha argues along the way, in contrast to the authors, that "theocentric paradigms are qualitatively distinct from ethnographic inquiries, and should remain so (Meneses et al. 2014, 91), and he asserts furthermore that "anthropology and theology are [not] simply two versions of the same conversation" (Meneses et al. 2014, 91). I personally think Omri Elisha mistook the authors to be posing a version of this conversation that they did not actually assert. He sees them as insisting on a revelation through the voice of God, rather than the command to understand and act within the complexity of human societies, which is the position the authors seem to take. In particular, I think Omri Elisha significantly misunderstands the authors when he writes:

> The power we have [as humans and as anthropologists] to pose innumerable and sometimes unanswerable questions about the world is different from God's power to answer them through special revelation. (Meneses et al. 2014, 91)

If I understand the original essay correctly, the authors would have considered themselves to be in agreement with this statement.

Ananta Kumar Giri, of the Madras India Institute of Development Studies, begins by favorably summarizing the authors' argument and noting ways that it links with some of his own academic concerns (Meneses et al. 2014, 91). He questions whether the Christian notion of "witness," highlighted by the authors, also includes openness to learning from others (in the authors' case, I believe it does). Specifically,

> They [the authors] . . . write, "witness is purposeless if it does not break out of the hermeneutical circle and make contact with others to deliver the message." But is this model of witnessing adequate for cross-cultural colearning and dialogues? Is the witness eager to learn from and with the other, including her faith traditions, and not only deliver a message? (Meneses et al. 2014, 91)

I believe the authors' answer is "yes," though I see how their phrasing here could suggest otherwise.

This reader goes on to imply that he is reacting more to the perceived history of Christian missions, from Paul forward, than to the actual words of the authors' text (see Meneses et al. 2014, 35). In addition, this critic repeats the canard (in my opinion untrue) that

> Early Christianity, with its loose network of spiritual communities where women played an important role, was more open to other religions and traditions than Pauline institutionalized Christianity (see Chopra 2008). (Meneses 2014, 91)

This assertion is almost certainly false. Paul's letters and the Book of Acts reveal Paul had a robust view of women's role in the local churches. Several letters were addressed at least partly to female church leaders (see the end of Romans, for example), and women were assumed to be playing prophetic, proclamation, and teaching roles in the churches, at least at times (see

Acts 2:17-18; Acts 16:11-15; Acts 18:26; Acts 21: 8-9; 1 Corinthians 11:5). Furthermore, the assumption that Paul transformed early Christianity, presumably as found in the Gospels, into something more masculine, is probably false, if not only because the first Pauline letters almost certainly preceded the formal writing of the Gospels. But the critic's account is widely believed, and here it slips into the critic's critique in a manner that suggests the critic was "seeing what he expected to see" rather than "seeing what was actually there" (my terms).

Naomi Haynes, of the University of Edinburgh, observes that recent work in the "anthropology of Christianity" has had a positive effect on the discipline (Meneses et al. 2014, 93):

> Ethnographic engagement with Christian populations has expanded anthropological understanding of topics like cultural change (e.g., Robbins 2007) and subjectivity (e.g., Bialecki 2011), to take just two examples. (Meneses et al. 2014, 93)

She goes on to note that

> What [the article] proposes is that Christian ideas can help to address some of the more vexing problems of contemporary social science, including the problem of violence. . . (Meneses et al. 2014, 93)

She adds:

> Robbins argues that anthropology has lost sight of the ability to speak about otherness in a meaningful way, and in so doing lost much of its disciplinary raison d'etre, not to mention its political potential. The political possibilities of anthropology are precisely what Meneses and her co-authors . . . seek to reinvigorate in their paper [together with an ethic of love]. (Meneses et al. 2014, 94)

And ends:

> What, then, does Christianity have to offer anthropology? Perhaps more than it realizes. (Meneses et al. 2014, 94)

Glenn Hinson, of the University of North Carolina, focuses his comments on relating with religiously committed others in the course of fieldwork. He begins with a strong word of praise for the authors:

> Bravery is a quality often attributed to anthropologists, who are still widely seen by the public as adventurous explorers of otherness. Whether or not this attribution is merited, it certainly applies to the authors of this essay, whose bravery rests not in their encounter with otherness, but in their claiming of self, and in their challenging of anthropology's claims to sensitivity and epistemological breadth. In laying bare the discipline's hesitation to unpack its own perspectival presumptions, and in simultaneously identifying the foundational convictions that guide their own practice, the authors invite new conversations about the role of faith in both the field and the academy. (Meneses et al. 2014, 94)

Based on his own field experiences, Hinson sees much value in the authors' approach:

> In my own fieldwork, consultants have often pressed discussions into places that they explicitly say they would never approach with one who did not share their foundational religious understandings. They see the sharing of beliefs—at least at some fundamental level—as a covenant that brings not only eased understanding but also a responsibility to representation without retreat. . . . This covenantal understanding . . . both fosters trust and often deepens ethnographic conversations. (Meneses et al. 2014, 94)

> This deepening, though, depends on the sharing of beliefs. . . . [even when they] foreground fundamental theological differences rather than similarities. (Meneses 2014, 95)

> Furthermore,

> How articulating one's faith might affect relationships in the field raises larger questions about ethnographic practice and about the role that the illusion of objectivity plays in ethnography. (Meneses 2014, 95-96)

. . . a point very similar to one made by the five authors themselves.

Brian Howell, of Wheaton (IL) College, an openly Christian anthropologist, is similarly approving, while raising specific questions. Particularly salient for him, in a major portion of his response, are the practical parallels between the authors' pairing of theology with ethnography, and other anthropologists' opposing of

morality against conventional objective ethnography. At the same time, he warns against dangers of proposing any one particular approach as "Christian," which is an approach that I now believe authors did not intend. At the same time, he points out that appeals for "anthropological militancy" driven by purported moral or ethical impulses are best formulated in terms of specific identifiable traditions—Christian or otherwise—"rather than the . . . generalized ethics of the day." (Meneses 2014, 96)

David Lowry, of the American University in Washington, D.C., says that the article "is highly needed" (Meneses 2014, 96), noting that "Christian viewpoints contain an expertise that anthropology cannot match" (Meneses 2014, 96), and saying that it calls for "a highly needed interdisciplinary and intellectually open discussion about what faces us as witnesses of human existence today" (Meneses 2014, 96).

James Peacock (Emeritus, University of North Carolina) notes that in expounding "a religiously committed anthropology," the authors demonstrate "important understandings that are missed by a secular viewpoint" (Meneses et al 2014, 97). He goes on to suggest several ways these points could be extended, while also noting several points where his own writings have paralleled those of the authors.

Robert Priest, then of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, told stories illustrating how the secular academy's preference for religious non-commitment in public presentations had affected his writing and teaching at various stages of his career. These stresses had created numerous tensions in his career, which he resolved partly by focusing on applied issues such as witchcraft accusations in Africa (Meneses et al. 2014, 97-98).

Joel Robbins, then of the University of California-San Diego, termed the article "highly original," agreeing with the authors that "conversations between anthropologists and theologians are rare" (Meneses et al. 2014, 98). He noted several ways that such discussions could be productive. At the same time, he notes that the authors seem more interested in intersections with ethnography than with anthropology's role in generating new theory about human beings (Meneses et al. 2014, 98-99). That said, one of the strengths of the article, says Robbins, "is that it clearly sets out a Christian theological anthropology (a Christian understanding of the nature of humanity)," adding:

> One of the great contributions of this article is that it suggests . . . that an excellent starting point for discussion between theologians and anthropologists would be a consideration of their different fundamental anthropologies. Such a discussion, which this article initiates, is one from which both sides might well stand to learn a good deal about both themselves and each other. (Meneses et al. 2014, 99)

Authors' Response

The authors devoted the bulk of their response not to a point-by-point rebuttal (there was little need for this, in any event), but rather to discussion of ten sets of questions meant to move the discussion further. I will refrain from listing them all, as they can be accessed in the original publication. However, the full list is worth reviewing.

A Step Toward Institutionalization—the Book

The authors did not stop with just one article. Instead they moved on to publish an edited volume with a respected scholarly publisher (Routledge—see Meneses and Bronkema, 2017) and also started the periodical, the *On Knowing Humanity (OKH) Journal,* where the program they had outlined could be carried out.

The book, which proceeds from a conference held at Eastern University in 2015, contains nine (9) essays by Christian scholars plus an afterword by secular anthropologist Joel Robbins. Essays include attention to epistemology, ontology, and other topics. The opening chapter is a reprint of the *Current Anthropology* article discussed above. Subsequent chapters discuss such things as Biblical teaching on "the stranger" as an anthropological resource (Dearborn 2017, 54-70); the project of knowing and being known in ethnography (Howell 2017, 33-53); witness as an epistemology for a committed anthropology (Meneses 2017, 80-100); humility as a motivator for anthropological theory and practice (Backues 2017, 101-130); insights from practical theology for a transformed applied anthropology (Bronkema 2017, 165-179); multiple expressions of the sacred in Andean ontology (Paredes 2017, 175-187); implications of the transcendent for love and purpose in migration (Ybarrola 2017, 188-208); and the Trinity as conceptual tools [plural in the original]

for an interdisciplinary theology of culture (Flett 2017, 209-221).

In their introduction to the book, Meneses and Bronkema (2017) note that they have brought together five anthropologists, three theologians, and a historian to "develop a new set of conceptual tools informed by insights from Christian theology to be used analytically in anthropology" (2017, 1):

> Together, we investigate the possibility of using theological understandings of what it means to be human living in a world that has more to it than meets the secular gaze to enlighten and enrich anthropological conversations about both theory and method [by drawing on our identities and intellectual resources as Christians]. (Meneses and Bronkema 2017, 1)

They consciously build on "anthropology's expansion in recent years to include voices from the others it is studying," citing several leading trends that have helped to open this kind of discursive space (Meneses and Bronkema 2017, 1). The effect has been to open the door to "scholars with religious commitments . . . to speak in their own terms of what they see to be the value of anthropology in illuminating the human condition" (Meneses and Bronkema 2017, 1).

The editors then reference the origins of the On Knowing Humanity Project at Eastern University, list the contributors to the volume, and detail the contributions made by each. They also justify briefly the decision to include only Christian scholars rather than representatives of other religious traditions (Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims, for example), although they imply indirectly that the collection might have been further enriched by such contributions. They then make the strong statement that "what ties the chapters together is a conviction that the field of anthropology as it stands lacks the explanatory power needed to elucidate its own subject matter" (Meneses and Bronkema 2017, 1). The introduction also grounds this effort in the work of anthropologist Joel Robbins (Robbins 2006; Engelke and Robbins 2010) and theologian John Milbank (2010), and parallel developments (Meneses and Bronkema 2017, 3).

Further Steps—The *OKH Journal*

Around the same time as the edited volume appeared, the authors, led by Dr. Eloise Meneses, went on to found a new journal, the *On Knowing Humanity Journal,* devoted to further institutionalizing their initiative. I consider this journal to be the real genius of the project. The *Current Anthropology* article established scholarly credibility, and the book further built on that credibility, while the journal really began showing the approach's potentials in practice. As of the writing of this article (June-July 2023), the journal was in its seventh year, having produced its first issue in 2017.

The journal could not have been easy to start.[1] The initiative was still relatively unknown, and the journal initially had to rely heavily on contributions from the authors and their current and former students—not that this meant a failure to produce quality work. By now, however, the journal has been able to attract a much broader range of authors—still mostly Christians, but no less valuable for that—and has published on a broad range of topics, thereby standing for the broad range of issues on which Christian perspectives can be brought to bear.[2]

A sampling of issues discussed may help give a sense of the journal's breadth. The most recent issue (Volume 7, Number 1, at the time of writing) included articles on Kabbalistic Jewish mysticism (Pittle 2023); Hausa women of Kano, Nigeria (Myland 2023); Pentecostal prosperity messaging in Southeast Nigeria (Nwadialor and Nwakocha 2023); and an analysis of the treatment of suffering in evangelical Christian songs and hymns, an analysis that drew on material from the United States, Britain, Australia, and Thailand (Zehner 2023).

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[1] This statement is based partly on personal experience. I have played a role in starting two scholarly journals. One of them, *The Journal of Burma Studies,* began with difficulty but has gone on to establish itself well, with institutional buy-in from scholars at multiple universities. The other, *Walailak Journal of Asian Studies,* had an even rougher beginning, and it never published a second issue. The difficulty of starting *OKH Journal* has been confirmed by electronic communication with Eloise Meneses, who poured a great deal of time into ensuring that the initial issues were of good scholarly quality.

[2] In a way, this journal, and indeed the entire project, is a response to Mark A. Noll's call, in *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind,* for work thoughtfully relating the best of Christian thought to the best issues in their respective disciplines (see Noll 1994).

Earlier issues touched on issues and phenomena such as the role of relics and icons in healing, conversions, and miracles (Darrell Pinckney); a Santeria community in the southern United States (Tony Kail); Emerging Christian witchcraft (Jeremy McNabb); an examination of salvationism (Jacob Winn); and a program for the assimilation of convicted felons (Autumn von Hindenburg), all in Vol. 6, No. 2. Other issues included an issue focused on sex, family, marriage, and the church (Vol. 6, No. 1), including an important exchange on sex and marriage between Robert Priest (Taylor University) and Jenell Paris (Messiah University).[3]

Still earlier issues included articles on the church and Black Lives Matter ; race reconciliation in white southern churches; missiology and anthropology; and healing and religion, in Vol. 5, No. 2; as well as thinking anthropologically with Jesus and Paul; and individualism and collectivism in community development in Vol. 5, No. 1; and Africans in America; international and customary adoptions in Vanuatu; and climate change during the Little Ice Age in Vol. 4, No. 2; and more.

Closing Remarks

On Knowing Humanity (OKH) has already proven to be a valuable addition to both anthropological and evangelical Christian discourses. Not since the 1950s initiation of the journal *Applied Anthropology* has there been a journal specifically serving the junction between anthropology and Christian concerns. Today, in the form of the *OKH Journal*, we see that the interests of that juncture have broadened significantly. Whereas the earlier journal addressed primarily missiological issues, the current journal also, even primarily, addresses issues of contemporary social significance, both domestically and abroad.

The mere existence of such a range of scholarship in the early pages of this journal should also demonstrate definitively that this is not a one-size-fits-all approach to "Christian anthropology," perhaps the primary concern of most critics, but instead is an approach that forefronts a growing range of Christian voices. The efforts of this project's founders are to be lauded, and I look forward to seeing what kinds of additional socially- and theologically-engaged scholarship they encourage into being.

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[3] Priest's initial article was multi-valent, being titled: "Faith Integration and the Outrageous Ethic of Sex Only in Male-Female Marriage: Towards an Anthropology of Sex and Marriage for the Christian Community" (Vol. 6, No. 1). As is often the case with Priest's work, the article has to be read in detail to appreciate the integrated complexity of his arguments.

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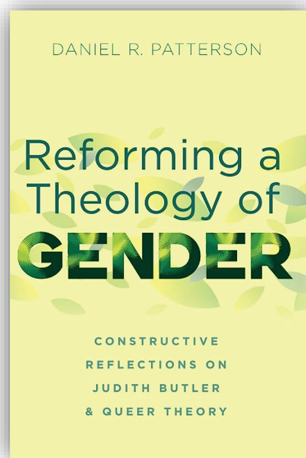
BOOK REVIEW

Reforming a Theology of Gender: Constructive Reflections on Judith Butler and Queer Theory

By Daniel R. Patterson

Reviewed by Vincent E. Gil



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2022

If you are a social scientist, anthropologist, social philosopher, theologian or ethicist working on a Christian anthropology, you have most likely encountered Judith Butler's corpus of work.[1] Or—at the very least—been disquieted by some of her vastly influential, yet controversial ideas. These range in myriad directions but coalesce in her being an early catalyst for queer theory, gender theory in general, and the ensuing turbulence of our newly gender-fluid age.

As Patterson early on admits, to encounter Butler is at once "to have wonder and fear provoked" (7). Wonder, because her work is not only intelligent, brilliantly multilayered and multifocal; but because it also questions the unquestionable, thus flirting with danger, which provokes fear that one may be climbing up a tree which one cannot descend without falling: "Some fear reading Butler because they worry that it might render a conservative position vulnerable to views that are hostile to Christianity and its foundational claims" (8). Butler becomes, then, an agent provocateur "who rouses Christians to snap out of their idolatrous obsession with the bygone days of Edenic beauty" (3). Hmm.

In this volume Patterson takes on nearly the entirety of Butler's work, not for critique but as a tool; a resource for theological reflection and exploration of one's ideas *about* gender. This is a tough undertaking by Patterson, but also for his readers. Any framing of Butler's theory of gender as a 'resource' for theological discourse will invariably lead to many lengthy incursions, contentious moments, conclusions that will stretch one or the other—theology or queer theory.

So, from the outset, what *is* the utility of this work by Patterson, aside from suffering the stretching? And why review this book in the *On Knowing Humanity Journal?*

Patterson suggests knowing Butler is an essential for those of us who work with cultures and want to understand more deeply what constructs personhood, the self, sex, gender, and the edifices of culture as rendered today. For Christians, "Butler's theory provokes the Christian to account for the two-pronged confession that humanity no longer lives in Eden, *and* this matters for what it means to fulfill the scriptural exhortation to glorify God in our body. Moreover,

[1] Please see the accompanying bibliography. Butler is a philosopher-cultural theorist whose work on the "performative" nature of gender and sex have been widely influential since the late 20th century. Having written the landmark *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler's ideas became foundational to queer theory, contributed much to the debate *between* cultural theorists; all, not without significant praise or criticism. She remains focal to understanding novel gender ideology, the role culture and social norms play, as well as revisionist theories of what constitutes a gendered self in the 21st century.

Butler prompts us to see that Eden is a problematic haven to which many of us return to negotiate gender trouble . . ." (2). *OKHJ*'s purpose is to give voice and opportunity for those of us whose lines of inquiry and research explore the nature of personhood, attempt "the reincorporation of teleology," "scientific understandings" and "insights from theology into our accounts of people and cultures" (*OKHJ,* Focus and Scope).

For Patterson, ". . . this book fills the lacuna [of understanding Butler's theories of self and gender] and how these operate teleologically and theologically" (1). Personally, I had *no idea* that Butler's thinking was *operating theologically* (and I still have my doubts after reading Patterson, but I will reserve personal commentary for later). The utility of this book remains as a treasure-trove exploration of both Butler's gender theories as well as one Christian's endeavor to further rouse theological reflection on God's human creation. We should all strive to do so well.

The Gist of Butler, and We Move On

To appreciate Patterson's work, one must have a rudimentary understanding of Butler's work and gender theory. Here is Patterson's reduction:

> Butler develops a theory in which gender is performative, which means that gender is not what one *is* by virtue of one's morphology or chromosomal make-up, but something [*sic*] one has *become* and *is becoming* by repeatedly acting out what they have come to understand is the meaning of their given gender. It is . . . a way of (re)reading history to show how language, and our participation as the vehicles that transport and implement that language, determine what gender is in history and now.[2]

For clarity, let me add that gender, as defined here, is a product of culture and learning and not at all influenced by the body proper—irrespective of how that body may have somatoviscerally and over the life-course communicated its properties to our brain and influenced our self-understanding of "living and being in a body." [3] This is an important element to note, as I explain in the footnote and cited work.

Several other comments are necessary to understanding Butler's theoretical trajectory. One is to show how each person is dependent on social prescriptions to be fully recognized, therefore rendering each of us vulnerable to prevailing social gender norms. "The claim is that one cannot be gendered without being recognized, and one cannot be recognized without others *and* their norms" (36). Problems arise when social norms constrain individuals to their requisites, and the requisites are (most universally) a binary. Thus, some are not allowed to be recognized as gendered (or sexual) in the way they desire to be recognized. "Society decides what it will recognize . . ." (36).

If performing gender results in who we are, then to Butler "troubling" the definition of gender, challenging the status quo, would indeed re-write the performance and thus free the person to become whom they desire to be. [4] The physical materiality of the body is, in

[2] Patterson, 9. The term *gender* is being rendered to mean one's inner sense of self that is inexorably tied to *learning* and *performance*, and both to *lexical definitions* understood and socialized into the individual's psyche over time. Butler as well as other queer theorists do not link gender formation to any biological substrate, or for that matter, any physical form or body-brain communication. "Butler believes a person is not a particular sex and therefore gender[ed] by nature but is constantly receiving and becoming what it was created to be in the beginning. ['Created' alludes here to how a person was lexically and socially identified and then 'constructed' by sociality in their history.] The question of how this original and subsequent foundation happens is crucial" (17). (Bracketed comment mine for clarity). Thus the imperative, that understanding "gender history" is critical to Butler's eventual deconstruction of the binary (male and female)—a significant goal of her work—since binarism becomes the "oppressive duo" she seeks to alter (Butler, 2014, chapter 4) .

[3] See Gil 2022b. A significant omission in all discussions of Butler, and for that matter, theologies of the body, is the incorporation of scientific facts and knowledges. As I've argued in this cited piece and elsewhere, leaving anatomy, biology, neuropsychology out of our resources and explanations creates only further problems, given that explanations without science readily manifest themselves as incomplete teleological understandings of the person. This is also the case with Butler, and as we'll see eventually, with Patterson's contributions.

[4] See Gil 2022b, 54, for a fuller discussion on this Butler position.

Butler's terms, a "mute facticity"[5] (i.e., a fact of existence but of no consequence to gender). It is then the performance of gender which genderizes the body. The genesis of gender is not, therefore, corporeal, but performative (9): Change the norms, and the performance will change, rendering new gender options, these renewed, revised, freed from "the one or two." But to do that, we must understand 'the beginning.'

Patterson, Acting Upon the Disquieting Butler

Patterson writes,

> The fundamental problem that Butler diagnoses is not the causal relation between the beginning and the present [i.e., an originary heterosexual binary form and its maintenance through social norms and ascriptions], but the unquestioned *privilege* of the heterosexual couple, which Butler calls the 'heterosexual matrix,' [Butler 2007, 7] that assumes [this binarism] resides from the beginning. With this heterosexual foundation determining what is recognizably legitimate in the present . . . her desire is much more radical: to change society's understanding about the beginning so that the beginning is *always open to reform*. Butler desires to depart from the traditional concept of the beginning, which means departing from the beginning as an immoveable, static, or incontestable truth that the *binary* is the sole, legitimate, originary form. (16)

That 'beginning' invariably leads to the questions, "What *is* a man or a woman?," and, "Is gender a natural, and God-given identity?" To answer these through a theology of the body that is not reformed is to Patterson to "send us down the same well-worn tracks that operate like autopilots, ending up in the same place each time, Eden, which is ironic because we cannot enter Eden" (3). Moreover, "returning to Eden to find answers to abstract questions about gender usually works but only because lifeless questions (in the sense that they do not pertain to our lives) fail to broach the complexity of embodiment that we find *outside* of Eden, where we all live" (3).

A good portion of Patterson's focus thus centers around how this prevailing aim of Butler's, to disquiet gender and its beginnings to free it, circles back to reflect how theologically inept we Christians have been in our understanding of human life *after Eden*—and most importantly, how our traditional responses "curtail what questions can be asked, what possibilities can be discussed" (3, and footnote 7). All this, inclusive of "non-Edenic bodies in the present" (3).[6] Patterson thus maintains, "I exercise the God-given right of wonder to rupture the mastery of the body that too often characterizes traditional Christian views on gender" (4), if only because such "wondering about the body has the potential to animate new theological and ethical possibilities for receiving our own and others' bodies" (4).

Eden. To Patterson, we have disordered our theological anthropology by returning to Eden and the images of Adam and Eve (as DeFranza puts it) "as paradigms for human beings rather than as progenitors" (De Franza 2015, 153-185). To him, our constant reference to Adam and Eve becomes "a seductive site of pilgrimage" (116) which leads only to "misconstrued self-justification and a means by which to condemn the troubled bodies of others" (177). Adam and Eve do not bring life, but death. Their fall, tossed aside in many instances to then reflect on Adam and Eve's binarism, mutuality, reproduction, and "marriage," becomes a conservative vision of gender

[5] For Butler, sex is not a "bodily given on which the construct of gender is artificially imposed, but . . . a *cultural norm* which covers the materialization of bodies" (Butler 2011, 2-3).

[6] It would be well here to quote portions of Patterson's Footnote 7 from his Introduction: *"In the short term, the full force of her* [Butler's] *theory is evaded, which precipitates the longer-term situation (which has already arrived), where the church is ill-equipped to respond to the questioning of gender in a society that has been soaking in Butler's gender theory for three decades."* In agreeing with Patterson, I offer the reader my own work, *A Christian's Guide through the Gender Revolution: Gender, Cisgender, Transgender, and Intersex,* (Cascade, 2022), where in Chapters 4 and 7, I address in detail and animate the discussion of ethical and theological possibilities for receiving our own and others' bodies. Central to "non-Edenic bodies" is a discussion of how the church has historically refused to acknowledge *procreated bodies* that differ from the binary: those born intersex; which, while small in numbers, nevertheless remain outside the church's binarism. To counter that absence, theological and teleological understandings of intersex persons have been well discussed by Megan DeFranza (2015) and Susannah Cornwall (2010), to name a few besides myself.

and sexuality *for the present,* and for "narrating the sexual revolution as an ostensible fall of sex from innocence that characterized the age before the fall" (117). This leads to pressing the worth of heterosexual marital sex and nuclear families for undoing the effects of the fall (on sex) and returning to a state of societal purity (117). It becomes "a monoprinciple that demands compliance" (169).

The beginning is inexorably troubled when applying it to gender and sexuality in the present. We are not grounded in one moment in time, and Eden is not our home. Siding here with Patterson, and as I have noted with significance elsewhere,[7] the human race is *procreated*, not *created* in the same sense that Adam and Eve were. With procreation comes significant human variation, God be thanked for an adaptive (and I refrain here from saying evolutionary) genome.

Butler has forced us, then, to reckon with 'the beginning'—how we fixate and narrate Eden into our present. Yet, "Edenic images of *created* bodies do not save me or society. When I find myself 'worshipping' these created images by conforming myself to their perfect bodies to become like them, I have [then] fallen into a futile life of body-works righteousness" (118). (Butler, of course provides no salvation for our fallenness, only a move toward self-re-creation through reformation of the social imaginary.)

Reforming the subject? Patterson then rightly turns his explorations to how we ought to understand a theology of the body in light of our need for salvation, devoting the whole of chapters 5 and 6 to a response. Maneuvering through a half-dozen other luminaries that either touch on Butler's ideas or which magnetically enlarge what Patterson is trying to tell us,[8] he eventually takes the reader to the focal point: A life that honors God with our bodies is "indexed to the life of Christ that is worked into our bodies by the Spirit of God" (14).

And yes, it is a risky union because it immediately questions ownership; and beyond, opens up the conflicts which inevitably arise between one's own desires and that of Christ's desires for us. (Butler, of course, does not ask about ownership, rather *tells us* that ownership is a moot point when we are guided—indeed constrained—by social norms and molded by our requisite performances. To Butler, we are actually not our own, certainly not of our own making; that is, until we change sociality to then become who we wish to be; which is of course one of her main goals. Still, it is a reformulation of self with social risks, given that we live within a social matrix.)

Pauline verses enter Patterson's discussion at several levels here, and much like Paul, Patterson does not dismiss 'the beginning' (emphasis is on not reifying it as a salvo); does not entrench in the present; but does place emphasis on the ending (the eschaton) to answer questions of both bodies and transformation. It is Paul who narrates who will save us from these bodies of death (Rom 7:24–25), in the now with forbearance, and with transformation in the eschaton to come.

In the meantime, between the now and the eschaton, Patterson asks the very question which Schaeffer early on intoned, *How then should I live?* (Schaeffer 2022)—only with a different ending: *How then should I live in this body of death?*

His response is not reformational, rather, a well-worn theological exposition, one that calls for one's convictions and confessions, submissions, and death-of-self rather than the imposition of mastering bodies (179). In following such a course, our will ought be transformed into the will of God. Through faith, one becomes readied as a new creation and for ultimate liberation. It is that, God-in-us—the abiding of the Holy Spirit making us God's temple—which signifies this presenting our members as 'slaves' to righteousness and justification (Rom 6:14–19).[9]

[7] See Gil 2022a, Chapter 4, "Fearfully and Wonderfully Made."

[8] Patterson's work is based on his PhD dissertation, which understandably 'requires' one to prove they are embedded in the necessary literature and understand the geometry of the arguments. For this current book, however, such depth detailing seems unnecessary if not an overdo. Patterson would doggedly disagree, and he makes that point early on in his Introduction: he will cut no corners. However, moving through Espinoza's *Ethics,* Trueman's *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self,* arguments by Hegel, Foucault, Freud, and Bonhoeffer, is to certainly take the high road to a point which could have been reached without moving through such wooded thickets.

[9] "Being rescued from one's body of death *is not* into a life of sovereign agency where the mind exceeds the world it seeks to overcome." [The body] ". . . is the contested site where the vocation to image God is waged daily by the power of the Spirit, which

I find there's nothing new here, Patterson falling back on what theologians and Christian anthropology have already understood and doctrinally believe about body-life-in-Christ, transformations, and eschatonic liberation. Such do not address questions that concern queer theologians or transgender persons of faith.

As a matter of note, Patterson fails here to address much of Butler's critique of how society deals with transgressive bodies and bodies not normalized according to norms and traditions, aside from making references to her works on the issues surrounding transgressive violence (of which, again, he goes into detail). By 'going into the woods' of philosophical arguments, Patterson misses the opportunity to directly engage the church in its treatment of both intersex and transgender bodies. I feel these are significant omissions, both theological and for application, given where Patterson has taken us in detail and where he is going next, in detail.

Patterson does signal out Paul's admonition that "for in Christ you are *all* children of God, through faith" (Gal 3:26). In so doing he stresses Galatians 3:29, the Abrahamic promise of inheriting the kingdom, adding that "no gender marker" (meaning whether one is a man, or a woman—but we wonder whether he also means intersex, transgender, or nonbinary) inhibits one's participation in Christ and the accompanying blessings (187-88). Despite its indirectness, this is as close to making a statement about inclusion as Patterson gets.

Ah, the eunuchs. Any salvo at this juncture comes in his treatment of eunuchs, and "the eunuch's hope" (188-ff), which Patterson does take to new under-standings by implying Jesus is aligning himself with the "transgressive" body in terms of the types of eunuchs in the passage: not sexual, not married to a woman, by acknowledging "those whose good yet troubled bodies have been impeded on by others; or those whose good yet troubled bodies were present at birth; or [like Jesus himself] those who for the sake of the kingdom of God have made themselves eunuchs" (193). It is the eunuch who transgresses the originary couple and the originary body which Patterson compares Jesus to, not the man in Eden.

In this sense, Patterson feels Jesus also aligns with Butler when he "undermines" what is traditionally understood to be a man in Jewish society (189). In other words, to Patterson, Jesus does not discredit the transgressive body represented in any of the three eunuch categories; rather he acknowledges them and their reality, even underscores the difficulty inhered in working out the last eunuch type stated in the verse (i.e., those who make themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of God). In doing so, Jesus *normalizes* their entities in the context of a society and religious tradition that often marginalized them—because they did not marry, procreate, had altered genitals, and were thus excluded from many Jewish rites. However, what is left unsaid begs the question which Patterson *does not* ask: *What ought our current Christian view of the transgressive body be?*

Imago Dei. Patterson reiterates Jesus Christ as the means through which we become the image of God we cannot be by ourselves due to sin. The lens is focused on Christ alone as mediator of salvation, in the now, and in our transformation in the eschaton—Christ is means and ends to this body of death. The view reasserts that "Christ alone" ought be the sightline of the human vocation, and should therefore permeate every aspect of being human, inclusive of what it means to be sexed and what it means to be gendered as a man, woman, (and I add, or intersex?) (201).

Imago Dei is thus best engaged by the type of agency which propels "our living in our bodies as God desires; [it] is a work of God *and ourselves*, which only ramps up the complex nature of embodiment and a theology of gender" (208-9). In stating such, Patterson infers obtaining *imago Dei* is a give-and-take between our need for sovereign agency, "and therefore self-construction" (209), and utter subjection to God, given that the latter would "render gender as something given and not susceptible to reform" (209).

Patterson further clarifies: "Without God at work in us, the patterns of the world would flourish untouched, and without our own work [of submission to God], any form of one-sided formation would look like yet another moment of gender violence" (209). Moreover, "In a time when society is trying to claw back the right to do as we please with our bodies, Scripture continues to exhort me to hand over my body to be subject to another's desires, namely Christ's" (210). Ultimately, "By offering my body to Christ, I deny myself the illusion that I know myself fully and reject the myth of self-mastery. Instead, I move into a union of wonder to learn to be who I am in relation to Christ." Thus, ". . . I confess that 'it is no

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Paul points out when he says that 'the mind controlled by the Spirit is *life and peace*'" (206). Thus, "embracing one's freedom in Christ to discern how to image God with our subject-bodies reveals the contingent nature of human agency" (208).

longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. In other words, 'I live,' but this 'I' is not mine, as Butler has sensitized us to see" (210-11).

No room for transgender bodies. Without stating it directly, Patterson has in this refracted theology of the body made no room for a person who has struggled with gender dysphoria all their lives and *is Christian;* who has pleaded with God to encounter the dysphoria and exorcise it—yet to no avail, lives in constant alienation with their body of death. Some, to the degree that mental health is compromised and so is the significance of their lives. (Is this, then, the result of not trying hard enough to surrender to Christ? Patterson insinuates all *could be remedied,* but does not clarify . . .)

There are myriad testimonials of Christians who have found redeeming grace in the now by undergoing gender transition, transitions which have then opened up their flourishing in Christ.[10] What is the church to do with these testimonies? Could it be that being "not your own" in some of these instances means foregoing natal gender for the sake of spiritual peace and rebirth (i.e., the ultimate *kenosis* in the here and now)? Could this be understood as an utter surrender to Christ, given that the "eunuch is not despised" when opting such "for the sake of the kingdom"? Isaiah prophesied in chapter 56:4-5, "To the eunuch who chooses what pleases me and holds fast to my covenant . . . to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name, better than sons and daughters, an everlasting name" (NIV).

To Patterson, it is "not a question about ontological transformation, but spiritual transformation" (213). God, however, does not always and every time answer prayers for miracles; nor does God always and every time provide the injection of divine power that engenders a transformative impact which erases gender dysphoria, any more than it erases diseases for which we (and Paul) have prayed relief. The answer is often "sufficient is my grace" (2 Cor 12:9), grace that allows boasting about our weakness "so that Christ's power may rest on me."

Ultimately, any "reforming" of a theology of gender should address these questions. It should also revisit how Israel proper, "God's chosen people" actually accounted for the transgressive body *outside of Eden*—the *saris,* the *tûmtûm*, the *andrôgînôs*, and the *ay'lonit.*[11] Patterson makes no effort here to include such discussions, if only to realize and acknowledge what he himself states: ". . . gender is a human vocation of becoming what I am not yet" (215).

Concluding Remarks

This is a work worthy of our sweat. My wish for Patterson pairing down more of the material from his PhD dissertation remains, given that his many pauses to insert, compare, try to clarify with philosophical acumen the myriad arguments Butler brings to the proverbial table to reform our theology can be exhausting. Nevertheless, Patterson does more than do reconnaissance on Butler's theories; he extrapolates in a steady effort to help us think about the implications for a revised theology of the body and gender. In doing so, I still do not see Butler "acting theologically," unless Patterson means that Butler deals with the originary and the what-can-be in the same critical manner religionists expound hermeneutics and exegetics.

While he brings much to the table to think about, especially on how Eden is our well-worn path to reifying Adam and Eve vs *our procreated selves outside of Eden*, I find Patterson himself falling back on "well worn" theological conclusions and—despite so many words—still avoiding the pregnant questions of today that a reformed theology of gender ought to fully address.

Ultimately, "the question is not what is a male or female, but *whether what enslaves our subject-bodies leads to death or righteousness"* (207). A fair ending question, if we don't turn it into a judgment of the other, male, female, intersex, *or transgender*[12]—for who determines what *is* our righteousness but our God and Savior?

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[10] Let's start with Austen Hartke's *TransForming* (2018), Father Shannon Kearn's *In the Margins* (2022), Lisa Salazar's *Transparently: Behind the Scenes of a Good Life* (2011), and the life course stories of transgender Christians in Gil's *A Christian's Guide through the Gender Revolution* (2022). Many more histories in print could be added here.

[11] See Gil 2022a, 78ff and Chapter 4.

[12] See my earlier work (Gil, 2022) where I present significant biblical evidence on admonitions against judging the other (cf., Matt 7:1–5; all of Romans 14), particularly when it comes to those with gender/transgender issues.

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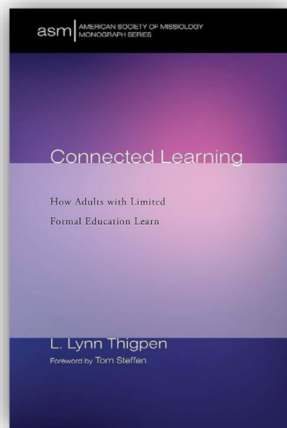
BOOK REVIEW

Connected Learning: How Adults with Limited Formal Education Learn

By L. Lynn Thigpen

Reviewed by Daniel Baker



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In Lynn Thigpen's book, *Connected Learning: How Adults with Limited Formal Education Learn,* readers are introduced to an important development in the field of orality studies. The book recounts the design, execution, and conclusion of Dr. Thigpen's dissertation research on Khmer adults in Cambodia who have had limited access to formal education. The book argues for a radical rethinking of pedagogy in Cambodia and a shift towards teaching which is determined not by instructor preferences but rather the needs of learners.

Thigpen arrived in Cambodia in 1999 as a cross-cultural teacher and had been prepared to teach using the highly textual pedagogies she herself had been emersed in for years as both student and educator. However, she found that the large majority of those she had been hoping to teach did not learn best through the tools and strategies she had brought with her. In the book, Thigpen does a wonderful job unpacking the atmosphere of education in Cambodia and how war, poverty, learning disabilities, and other life challenges had produced many adults without much formal education, whom she terms, Adults with Limited Formal Education (ALFE).

Thigpen realized that the majority of learners she encountered did not learn best by means of print technology and textuality. This discovery agrees with the claim made by the International Orality Network and Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization that an estimated four billion people over the age of fifteen, or 80% of the global population, are oral communicators (ION & Lausanne Committee, 2005). Despite this huge number of oral learners, virtually all research done regarding education in Cambodia focused on understanding the efficacy of text-based models. This disparity led Thigpen to the important realization that "we cannot afford to continue the inequity of overlooking the learning strategies of a majority of the world's population" (2020, 10).

Thigpen began her research with the purpose of examining the learning strategies used by those who did not depend on print technology in Cambodia. She specifically targeted ALFE, which she defined as those without any formal schooling or who only studied up until the sixth grade. Thigpen's research led her to conclude that Cambodian ALFE learn through more than simply oral avenues—they relied on relational and communal learning strategies which Thigpen refers to as "connected learning." Cambodian ALFE, according to Thigpen, learn through their connections to trusted people. These "connected learners" prefer observation, experimentation, and dialogue as primary modes of learning—a process quite similar to that of socialization.

I believe that Thigpen's research was conducted utilizing a robust methodology which produced trustworthy study data and results. Knight's Contextual

Constructs Model (CCM) was chosen as a framework to help guide Thigpen throughout her study (Thigpen 2020, 73). This model approaches research in four phases: conceptual, philosophical, implementation, and evaluation (Knight 2008, 41). These phases help to guide the overall construction of the research plan.

In terms of the study type, Thigpen utilized an ethnographic grounded theory study. This choice seems extremely appropriate based on the overall lack of current existing theory regarding Cambodian ALFE. Both the ethnographic method and grounded theory allowed for Thigpen to explore her research questions thoroughly and to build a working theory as the study progressed. I believe that if the study were to be reproduced it would yield results consistent with the overall findings contained within Thigpen's research.

I believe that *Connected Learning* is a significant contribution to a number of research fields including orality studies, anthropology, education, and communications. Thigpen has raised the alarm that virtually all research into learning strategies and their efficacy has focused on those models which rely on textuality. This simply does not line up with what the increasing body of research teaches us about the way the majority of the global population actually goes about learning. Thigpen does not claim that her findings can be universally applied to ALFE learners around the world, however, it is hard not to see the potential if the results of this study are found to be consistent among other audiences. Further research is urgently needed.

Additionally, Connected Learning has major significance for the world of missiology which has become very focused on the issues of orality and oral learners over the past five decades. Thigpen's study prompts a number of important discussions. Of first importance is the question, "Is orality a fitting term to describe the phenomenon which has been discovered among many groups of people who do not learn best through print technology?" Orality emphasizes the ear; it perpetuates a dichotomy between hearing and seeing, or orality and literacy; it promotes a continuum of lesser to greater. Do we really believe this about those we would call oral people? Is it not more complex than simply learning through hearing?

Thigpen makes the following important statement, "Having worked over a decade in Cambodia, I observed these learners needed more than auditory instruction. They also benefited from visuals, from observational learning, from interaction, from drama, from ritual, from hands-on activities, and from real-life experiences" (2020, 6). All these are incapsulated within the connected world of human relationship.

Connected Learning is sure to impact many in both academic and applied settings. Thigpen's book has only begun to set the stage for a new era of fruitful discussion surrounding how we should go about being the best that we can be in our communication and teaching.

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