

On Knowing Humanity Journal

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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Jewish Mystical Insights for Christian Anthropologists: Kabbalistic Musings on Ontology, Critical Realism, and Comparative Theology

Kevin D. Pittle

The Jewish mystical tradition of Kabbalah, as reflected in ethnohistoric documents underwriting the beliefs and practices of contemporary neo-kabbalists, practitioners of shamanic Judaism, Jewitchery, and other para-Judaic spiritualities (including Hermetic Qabalah and Christian Cabala) illustrate a cosmological theory of “kabbalistic perspectivism” analogous to the Amazonian perspectivism reported by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1998). Consideration of kabbalistic perspectivism provides Messianic Jewish, gentile Christian, and other religiously committed anthropologists opportunity for practicing comparative theology. It also may serve as a model for developing “methodological possibilianism,” an ontologically-oriented complement to the epistemological model of critical realism popularized by Christian anthropologists Paul Hiebert and Charles Kraft.

“That’s another thing we’ve learned from *your* Nation,” said Mein Herr, “map-making. But we’ve carried it much further than you . . . We actually made a map of the country, on the scale of *a mile to the mile!*”

“Have you used it much?” I enquired.

“It has never been spread out, yet,” said Mein Herr: “the farmers objected: they said it would cover the whole country, and shut out the sunlight! So we now use the country itself, as its own map, and I assure you it does nearly as well.

Lewis Carroll, Sylvie and Bruno Concluded

Catholic Christian theologian Francis X. Clooney (2010, 10) recommends that believers living in a world of religious diversity engage in “Comparative Theology,” a discipline that

. . . marks acts of faith seeking understanding which are rooted in a particular faith tradition but which, from that foundation, venture into learning from one

or more other faith traditions. This learning is sought for the sake of fresh theological insights that are indebted to the newly encountered tradition/s as well as the home tradition.

As an anthropologist of faith conducting research in Messianic Jewish and Jewish mysticism-inspired communities (among neo-kabbalists, practitioners of shamanic Judaism, Jewitches, and Christian cabalists), my interlocutors are often curious about the spirituality of my *other* subjects. In attempting to make these perspectives mutually intelligible and help them recognize the cultural validity of spiritualities they find baffling, I have frequently found recourse to critical realism, an epistemological approach proposed by physicist and theologian Ian Barbour (1966)¹, developed by missionary and anthropologist Paul Hiebert (1976, 1999) and popularized by his fellow Christian anthropologist, Charles Kraft (1979, 2008).

While I have found critical realism a helpful tool, here, I offer a more philosophically and anthropologically up-to-date model inspired by comparative

¹ Barbour’s “theological critical realism” is to be distinguished from the critical realism of philosopher of science Roy Bhaskar.

theological reflection on Kabbalah. I have termed this contribution “methodological possibilianism,” which is an expression *and critique* of (as well as an alternative to) anthropology’s ontological turn (see Heywood 2017 and Meneses 2018) rather than merely an epistemological or representational approach. I am hopeful other religiously committed anthropologists will engage the kabbalistic perspectivism this article describes in their own exercise of comparative theology, and that methodological possibilianism will provide a hermeneutical device and ontological schema that might inform their anthropological labors in ways more in step with the ontological turn.

“The Jewish apocalyptic complex” refers to traditional accounts alleging to *apo-* (remove or take off) *kalypsis* (the concealing veil) from reality. Jewish apocalyptic and its derivatives constitute a revelatory disclosure of a world-behind-the-world, more substantial than the mundane material world—a spiritual space I suspect most readers will construe as merely “imaginary.” I do not limit “apocalyptic” to the eschatological, but treat all revelatory reports of both ancient and latter-day Jewish mystical *ekstasis* as members of the complex (Collins 1996, 7; Ostow 1995, 77; Rowland 2002, 9-11). All of these reports constitute a kind of “transhistorical mythology” evolving over the course of millennia (Ginsburg 2004, xxxvi.). While there is variation and even contradiction in the corpus, I am not the first to note that there are also clear “resonances and interrelations,” characterized by a common “suite of arguments [and] images” which emerge through a process where the earliest mythical paradigms are re-experienced, explored and elaborated upon by later voices in a multigenerational dialectic of retelling and reenactment; a kind of transgenerational palimpsest (Ginsburg 2004, lxxv-lxxvii.). Lest my readers take issue with my treating the ethnohistoric documents of several eras as all of one piece, note that I am following the convention of the tradition itself, which subsumes them all under the term “*Kabbalah*,” or “Receiving.”

Précis

Following Merleau-Ponty’s charge to develop a “lateral universal” acquired through incessant testing of self through other and other through self, with the ultimate goal of “constructing a general system of reference where . . . [all the relevant parties’ views] find a place” (1964, 120), I envision a “common ground” constituted through reciprocal dialogue in my

fieldwork among neo-kabbalists and my study of the ethno-historic texts, which has led me to reflect upon the implications of appreciatively regarding “their view,” for the larger ethnographic enterprise. In this article, I ask “What kind of ontological schema and hermeneutical methodology do we need in order to find common ground with the Jewish apocalyptic complex?” Is it possible to generate a schema which not only explains the world of the kabbalists to anthropologists (and vice versa), but also accounts for the broadest possible cultural divergences and contradictions in apprehension of reality beyond this particular case?”

In answering these questions, I begin with a sketch of kabbalistic perspectivism as illustrated by a description of the *Olam Ha-Nistar* (“The Hidden [Spiritual] Realm”). I follow this with a critical assessment of the enterprise of humanistic science, balanced by the entertainment of some variations on philosophical approaches which might assist in the endeavor. I review some of the resources available from our own intellectual milieu for considering the ethnographic possibilities of these philosophical perspectives, and propose methodological perspectivism as a schema providing an appreciative, yet critical, way of considering the foundations in reality of experiences alien to most of us.

The Jewish Imaginal World

Philosopher-theologian Henry Corbin developed a useful phenomenological approach to experience which challenges a false “dichotomization of the real and imagined” (Wolfson 2007, 121). He posits that “reality consists of . . . rational form, but this form, in turn, reflects and is in the form of the one to whom the image is manifest” (Wolfson 2007, 121). He observes that mystics generally agree that humans experience three distinct worlds: the physical world of our senses, the world of “intelligible forms” understood by the active intellect, and an in-between/intermediate suprasensory world (the imaginal world or *mundus imaginalis*), perceived through imagination. The *mundus imaginalis* “permits the formation of a rigorous analogical knowledge,” which (because “the same substantial realities assume forms corresponding respectively to each universe”) permits “all the universes to symbolize with one another” (ibid.). Although it is accessed through the imagination, the imaginal world should not be confused with the unreal *imaginary*. In sum, Corbin (ibid.) proposes that it is

. . . [a world] ontologically real as the world of the senses and the world of the intellect, a world that requires a faculty of perception belonging to it, a faculty . . . as fully real as the faculties of sensory perception or intellectual intuition. This faculty is the imaginative power, the one we must avoid confusing with the imagination that modern man identifies with ‘fantasy.’

The imaginal world is apprehended by “psycho-spiritual senses” of “imaginative perception” particularly suited to a subtly embodied world. Corbin also warns that “forms and shapes in the *mundus imaginalis* do not subsist in the same manner as empirical realities in the physical world; otherwise anyone could perceive them”—instead, the “‘immaterial’ materiality” of the imaginal world has its own kind of “‘corporeality’ and ‘spatiality’” (Wolfson 2007, 121).

The texts of the Jewish apocalyptic complex are replete with “maps” of the *Olam Ha-Nistar*. Probably the most intuitively clear map of the relations among places in this imaginal world is the abstract *Etz Chayyim* (or “Tree of Life”) image (Figure 1), showing interrelationships among *Sefirot* (“spheres,” or more literally, “tellings”). The *Sefirot* are together “the skeleton of the universe” “the tree of God,” and the various attributes of the Creator by means of which It communicates with creation (hence “tellings”). They are the ten most common names for varying aspects of the “Root of all Roots” (the *Ein Sof*, “Infinite One”), which is also the sap running through the tree and giving it life, and, though they are one with the Creator, they are also Its garments and the “beams of light which It sends out.” They are recursively replicated over and over again, as they “descend” through the four worlds of Emanation, Formation, Creation and Making (i.e., Doing or Acting), where they are finally manifested in “stepped-down” fashion to humankind.

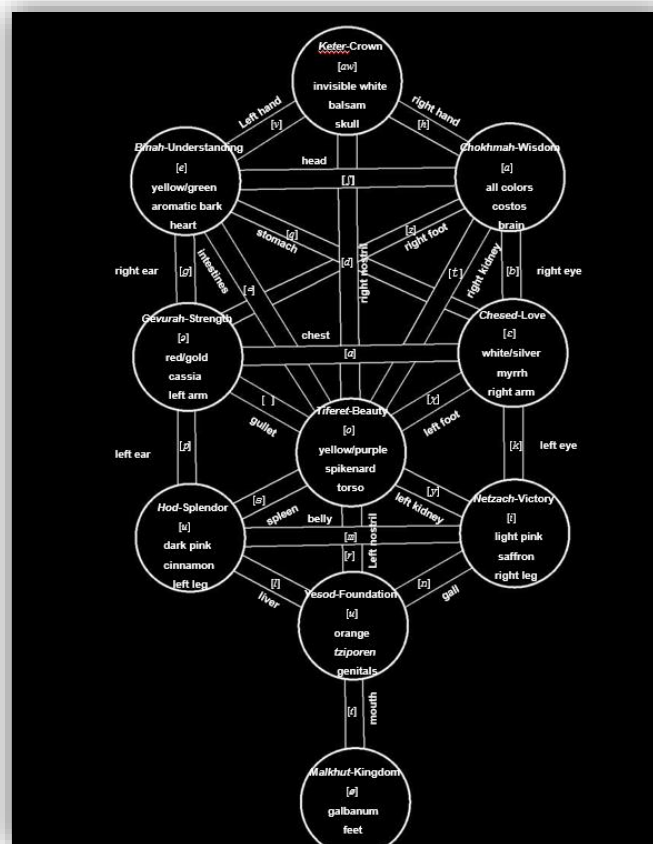


Figure 1.
The Etz Chayyim (“Tree of Life”)
as Map of Multiple Modalities of Experience.

The ten nodes and twenty-two lines of the kabbalistic *Etz Chayyim* are ascribed values from any number of domains. Alternate tree versions are spiritual maps modeled on various more or less material worlds: the interrelated appendages of the human body; categories of plant or animal life; celestial bodies; classes of angels; vowels and consonants of Hebrew; days, times and seasons, etc. All of these created domains are, in turn, both iconic and indexical of the attributes of the otherwise inconceivable *Ein Sof*.

The converse of all of this is that the physical world is really an expression of the hidden Divine; this world is formed in the image of its Creator. The *Etz Chayyim* and all worlds modeled after it, including the human form and the smallest particles of matter, are icons that resemble or correspond to various aspects of the supernal form of the Divine. They are also indices of their Creator, who is the primal Cause of Causes.

To the kabbalist, the world is a “*corpus symbolicum*,” the human arm, for example, is a symbol that only exists by virtue of the existence of the inner-innermost reality it points to: “the arm of God.” Isaac ibn Latif (13th century) elucidates this concept, averring that “All names and attributes are metaphoric with us but not with [the Creator].” Indeed, the material could be conceived of as a metaphor for the spiritual! As Rabbi Nahum Tzernobiler (d. 1798) (Newman 1963:83) said:

Divinity created matter so that man, composed of matter and soul, may have a conception of it. It follows, therefore, that all matter may be likened to a parable by means of which Divinity can be understood.

Thus, the *Sefirot* are as much creation’s blueprint as a map of the imaginal world. The physical Universe—in Hebrew, *Olam* (related to the root *alam*, “concealment”)—is like a garment both concealing and revealing the true essence of Reality. In Lewis Carroll’s book, *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* (quoted in the epigram), Mein Herr’s countrymen would not allow an oversized map of their land with its one-to-one correspondence to their country to be laid down, although Mein Herr muses that now the country itself serves almost as well as its own map. In the Jewish apocalyptic complex, it is as if the Infinite actually did what they did not: It laid the map over the territory, making the map a new, more immanent, “territory.” The territory is almost as good as the map.

Just as laying a 1:1 map on the ground would obscure the “true” terrain and restrict perception of its actual features, kabbalists posit that the *Olam ha-Zeh* (this material world) obscures the *Olam Ha-Nistar* (the hidden world). However, it is more complicated than just a matter of us not normally being able to see what is on the recto of the map. The restraints (or constraints, if you will) are much more profound than such a crude physical metaphor would suggest.

First, since the Four Worlds are conceived of as “simultaneous phases,” rather than successive—everything that has being is present in all four simultaneously, so any being or event in our World of Action is simultaneously being formed, created and emanated in the three worlds “above” (Winkler 2003, 28). Everything in this world has its counterpart in the transcendental worlds (Luzzatto 2007, 77-79).

Second, “even in completely inanimate matter, such as stones or earth or water, there is a soul and spiritual life-force—that is, the enclothing of the . . . Ten Utterances which give life and existence to inanimate matter” (Zalman 1984, 287). According to the *Sefer Ha-Zohar*, “The form of the . . . [material] body in this world is projected outwards, and takes the impress of the spirit from within . . . [As] the seal presses from within and the mark of it appears outwards, so the spirit acts upon the body” (Zohar, Shemoth, 13b). Thus, everything we experience in our mundane world is an incarnation of consciousness.

Third, each world has its own distinct laws of nature and its own sorts of bodies, and these, in turn, have diverse capabilities suited to the nature of their own worlds. When a consciousness is separate from its this-worldly body, it has a more subtle “other-worldly” body (Zohar, Shemoth, 2:285b). Each world has its own conceptual space and mode of embodiment appropriate to that space.

Taken together, these three observations imply that what we experience in our world of Making is a highly constrained perception of what is really *Real*. The soul is, as it were, “held back,” its “[native] power [and perceptions] obstructed,” so that “it cannot do everything in its power” and “it can only act upon the body to the extent that . . . [the Infinite] allows” (Luzzatto 2007, 57-59). Before and after its embodiment in this world, the human soul “can see from one end of . . . [this] universe to the other,” its perception is “unrestrained by the governance of the material world” (Winkler 1983, 271), though still constrained by the laws of perception of its own, more subtle, world. Perhaps unsurprisingly, human souls are

not the only ones constrained by this arrangement (Zohar, Bereshith, 1:65b):

[The souls of non-humans (including rocks, trees, birds, etc.)] . . . assume shapes which are clothed in another garment . . . They would . . . [prefer to] partake of the garment of humankind, corresponding to their inner nature, but their forms are covered by the name applied to their bodies; so we find [for example,] “flesh of ox,” “ox” being the inner element of that body, while the “flesh” is the garment; and so with all.

It should also be kept in mind that *all* worlds, with their own laws of nature (not just our physical world), are likewise constrained. So, as R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi wrote (1984, 269):

[The] higher worlds receive, in a somewhat more ‘revealed’ form, than do the lower; and all creatures therein receive each according to its capacity and nature, which is the nature and the form of the particular flow . . . [with] which the . . . *Efiyn Sof* imbues and illumines it.

If the light of the Infinite were not concealed, it could not be revealed, and all that exists in all worlds would be nullified by its unmediated inundation (Zalman 1984, 303): “[It] is like wishing to gaze at the dazzling sun,” wrote Moshe Cordevero in the sixteenth century, “Its dazzle conceals it, for you cannot look at its overwhelming brilliance. Yet when you conceal it—looking at it through screens—you can see and not be harmed” (Shabbatai Donnolo, paraphrased by Shim’on Lavi, trans. by Matt 1996, 91). We might call this a kabbalistic (ontological) perspectivism on analogy with Viveiros de Castro’s Amerindian perspectivism (1998).

During sleep, the bond between the restrictive material body and the ethereal spiritual body is loosened (Luzzatto 2007, 189; Winkler 2003, 270, 271). Released from earthly confinement, the soul transcends its physical limitations and “once again ‘perceives from one end of the universe to the other’” in a world unbounded by time, space or matter (Winkler 2003, 270, 271). Having been liberated to experience the *Olam Ha-Nistar* without their usual restraints, the “freed portions of the soul can . . . move about in the spiritual realm wherever they are allowed . . . [and] interact and associate with . . . the angels who oversee natural phenomena, some angels associated

with prophecy, and . . . (Demons)” (Luzzatto 2007, 189), as well as with souls of other dreamers, the unborn and deceased. What the higher “divine” portion of the soul perceives and encounters “over there” may be transmitted to some degree through dream to the coarser imaginative faculty, which is stimulated by these stepped down perceptions of perceptions to form *dimmuyot* or images “in its normal manner” (ibid.).

A similar process is at play in the experience of prophetic vision. While the forms by which the *mundus imaginalis* are apperceived are “mental constructs or phantasma,” they are not *merely* so; the experience “is not purely subjective” (Luzzatto 2007, 189). Rather, “there is a correlation between the [objective] spiritual form and the [more tangible] mental image” (Wolfson 2006, 167). While moving about in the *Olam Ha-Nistar*, the visionary “sees forms appropriate to . . . his [or her] nature in accord with what he [or she] is accustomed to . . . The image is appropriate from the perspective of the seer but inappropriate from the perspective of that which is seen” (ibid.). The vision and the visualized are no less real or empirical than when a person imagines non-physically present things of *this* world (Wolfson 2006, 320). These *dimmuyot* are not “shaped in accordance with individual [subjective] human capacity” (Wolfson 2006, 36, 40). Rather, they are formed intersubjectively under the influence of a “community of vision,” “in accordance . . . with the received tradition each member of the faith community participates in” (Wolfson 2006, 39). This intersubjectivity is not limited to the community of consociates. Rather, it is dependent upon a “dialectical relationship . . . between past visions recorded in literary texts and the present visionary experience,” which makes the present experience a “revisioning” of earlier accounts (Wolfson 2006, 53).

Variations in experiences of apparitions of angels, demons, and ghosts clarify the limits of the intersubjective vision. As with the other experiences described so far, the apparition is an illusionary perception, but it is nonetheless an illusion of a real *reality*, a “reality illusion” (Winkler 1982, 321). The reality in question is perceived differently by different subjects due to no limitation of its own, but rather as a result of the limits of perceivers. On one extreme, there may be conflicts where one or more people see an apparition and others do not, or an apparition “appear[s] before two people at once, [and] before one person it appears in the form of a bird or another

creature, and before the second person it appears in another manner,” all depending upon the spiritual constitution or psycho-spiritual sensory capabilities of the one to whom it appears (Wolfson 2006, 320). R. Eleazer Ben Judah of Worms (d. 1238), wrote that “[transcendental beings are] replete with images (*da’atano*) and the particular perspective of a person is according to the decree that has been established” (Wolfson 2006, 213). According to the Ralbag (d. 1344), the reason Samuel’s ghost was invisible to Saul but seen by the “witch,” and that she did not hear the words of the ghost, but he did, is because “she had focused her concentration on visual appearance . . . and that is what her imagination revealed to her. But Saul alone heard the words . . . [because] he focused his concentration on the illusion of conversation” (Winkler 1982, 321).

The Possible and the Pragmatic

Berger and Luckman argue that our normal waking consciousness presents itself as “reality par excellence” and that “[compared] to the reality of everyday life, other realities appear as finite provinces of meaning, enclaves within the paramount reality marked by circumscribed meanings and modes of experience” (1967, 21). They claim that the experience of “intersubjectivity sharply differentiates everyday life from other realities of which I am conscious;” in their view, only “the world of everyday life is as real to others as it is to myself” (Berger and Luckman 1967, 25). Their perspective accords well with “embodiment” theorists who see the physical body as “the existential ground of culture,” “the source of symbolism” and “the locus of social practice” (Csordas 1993, 135). For them, the *Olam Ha-Nistar* is merely an imaginative projection from “bodily interactional experience” (Varela, et al. 1991, 178).

The assumption that the ‘spiritual’ worlds of our anthropological subjects are merely products of embodied metaphor is problematic. As Tedlock, Price-Williams, and others point out, “what is and what is not ‘reality,’” including the assumption that the physical body and everyday waking reality are the existential ground of experience “is itself a cultural and social projection” (Tedlock 1987, 4). Such exclusionary, anti-supernaturalistic presuppositions for explaining others’ phenomenological experiences seem self-evident to Berger and Luckman because, as Boas warned us, “We associate a phenomenon with a number of known facts, the interpretations of which

are assumed as known, and we are satisfied with the reduction of a new fact to these previously known facts” (1909, 6). As William James put it, “a rule of thinking which would absolutely prevent us from acknowledging certain kinds of truth if those kinds of truth were really there would be an irrational rule” (2000, 216). Instead, we ought to be challenged by Andras Sandor’s censure that “Seeing metaphors everywhere means assimilating other worlds to a particular world: it is ethnocentric and works against understanding strange worlds” (1986, 101, *italics added*).

If we hope to approach a lateral universal, we need a much more liberal construal of reality embracing a broad range of possibilities. In my work on Kabbalah, I consider the converse of Berger and Luckman’s presupposition: “What if, because of ‘natural’ restrictions and constraints placed upon our perceptions, compounded by limitations begotten of the narrow slice of reality we attend to, our everyday life is merely a ‘finite province of meaning’, an ‘enclave’ enveloped on all sides by a usually hidden paramount reality of wider scope, to which our consciousness ultimately returns? What if our common-sense apprehension of ‘everyday’ mundane reality is as grounded in imaginal apperception as the ‘illusionary’ images experienced by mystics?”

According to classical possibilist philosophers (Menzel 2008), we ought to make an ontological distinction between *being* and *existence* (also known as “actuality”). *Being* is the primary attribute of all that *is*, about which logically coherent propositions may be made (including propositions about things that are merely *possible* but do not *actually* exist). Thus, *being* encompasses concrete and abstract entities, as well as fictional objects. *Existence* (or *actuality*), is the property of only some things which have being—all that exists has being, but not all that has being exists. All that is *actual* has concrete existence in the space-time of what Berger and Luckman call “paramount reality.”

Philosopher David Lewis offers an emendation to the classical possibilists’ starting point (Menzel 2008). He argues that no special ontological property separates merely possible worlds from actual. Rather, “other possible worlds and their inhabitants exist in precisely the same sense, and no less robustly, than the actual world and its inhabitants” (*ibid.*). According to Lewis, actuality is relational and relative—everything depends upon the spatio-temporal location of the percipient (*ibid.*). Thus “the fact that there are . . . [worlds] that fail to be actual . . . is no more

ontologically significant than the fact that . . . there are things that fail to be within five meters of me” (ibid., for a theologically-oriented parallel, cf., Wan 2006 on “relational realism”).

Neurophysiologist David Eagleman has developed a complementary philosophical approach, “possibilianism,” as a tool for generating novel scientific research questions. He defines possibilianism as a position “[emphasizing] the [active] exploration of new, unconsidered possibilities . . . holding multiple . . . [hypotheses] in mind; it is not interested in committing to any particular story” (Eagleman 2009). The emphasis of possibilianism is on “holding multiple positions at once if there is no available data to privilege one over the others” (Eagleman 2010).

I believe we can approximate the philosophical perspective needed for Merleau-Ponty’s lateral universal by combining Lewisian possibilism with Eagleman’s possibilianism and tempering both with William James’ pragmatism. James holds that the “supernatural region” is not simply imaginary, because “it produces effects in this world” and “that which produces effects within another reality must be termed a reality itself, so . . . we . . . [have] no philosophic excuse for calling the unseen or mystical world unreal” (2000, 289). His pragmatic method asks, “what would the practical (*i.e.*, adaptive) consequences be if this (or that) were true?” The only uninteresting questions are those for which there would be no practical difference one way or the other.

What if our adaptations are pragmatically useful to a larger environment than we habitually consider? If we take the possibility seriously, we must begin by searching our own culture’s resources for more familiar parallels which might serve as bridges between worlds of experience.

Theoretical Parallels and Precedents

The Jewish apocalyptic complex (*i.e.*, kabbalistic perspectivism) boils down to three propositions: (1) all of our physical world (including the non-human and inanimate), is suffused and infused with immanent consciousness; (2) our encounter with paramount reality (the really real) and the consciousness underlying the world of our everyday lived experience is highly constrained, and (3) sometimes (and some places), the restraints are loosened and we are able to experience more than we normally are of the paramount “absolute” reality and the consciousness(es) underlying it. Our culture is not bereft of

models generated by respectable scientists that support these propositions. Three mid-twentieth century scientists developed scientifically-grounded, though uncouth ways for thinking about consciousness immanent in matter.

In his posthumously published work, *The Phenomenon of Man*, Catholic Christian philosopher and paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (d. 1955) posits that, based on the evidence of consciousness in humankind (the exceptional case) and in light of the overall unity of nature, consciousness must have some kind of omnipresent “cosmic extension”—to some degree, there must be an “interior” aspect to *every* region of space-time, not just human beings—a “Within of things” that is “coextensive to their Without” (1976, 55, 56).

Czech-born engineer and inventor Itzhak Bentov (d. 1979), took the argument a step further in his 1977 book, *Stalking the Wild Pendulum*, where he proposes that we ought to think of consciousness as a continuum measured in terms of its most elementary unit—the ability to respond to stimuli: the greater the number of responses to stimuli, the greater the degree of consciousness. Thus, in Bentov’s thought, all of matter is imbued with a greater or lesser degree of consciousness (1977, 78).

Anthropologist Gregory Bateson (d. 1980) pointed out that “any ongoing ensemble of events and objects which has the appropriate complexity of causal circuits and the appropriate energy relations will . . . show mental characteristics” (1982, 321). Taken together, these three thinkers lead us to interrogate our culture-bound partitioning of reality into conscious and non-conscious domains, and lead us to conclude that the complex systems of material reality display characteristics of immanent mind.

The kabbalists hold that the consciousness immanent in the material universe is subject to restraints. Bateson similarly argues that all occurrences should be explained negatively, rather than positively, and in terms of restraints. His example of a monkey producing meaningful prose on a typewriter is suggestive: “perhaps the monkey could not strike inappropriate letters; [or] . . . the type bars could not move if improperly struck; [or] . . . incorrect letters could not survive on the paper” (1982, 407).

To explain analogous restraints specific to human perception and consciousness, Aldous Huxley developed the concept of Mind at Large, which bears a striking resemblance to kabbalist Moshe Codovero’s ideas regarding the concealment of the dazzling light of

the Infinite. According to Huxley, the brain should be thought of as acting as a “reducing valve” in order “to protect us from being overwhelmed and confused by . . . [a] mass of largely useless and irrelevant knowledge, . . . shutting out most of what we should otherwise perceive, . . . and leaving only that very small and special selection which is likely to be practically useful” (Huxley 1954, 23).

According to Huxley, the normal restraints on Mind at Large may be temporarily by-passed (spontaneously at certain times or places, through ‘spiritual’ training, by the use of drugs, etc.). In such circumstances, the immanent consciousness inherent in matter becomes manifest to human perception as a sharp exacerbation in the homogeneity of the universe, constituting what Mircea Eliade referred to as a “hierophany.” In hierophanies, there is a “revelation of an absolute [objective] reality” which reveals a “fixed [non-subjective] point” and therefore “ontologically founds the world” (Eliade 1959, 21). Eliade observes that, for mystics, the integrated quality of the universe is itself a sort of hierophany, characterizable as panontic. As the kabbalists put it, “Ein Sof . . . is intimated in everything” (El’azar of Worms, 13th c., trans. Idel 1988, 144 in Matt 1996, 29).

From a neurophenomenological standpoint measured by physiological correlates of experience, dreams, visions and other states of consciousness divergent from normal waking consciousness are perceived by experiencers as being “at least as solidly and as literally real as any other experience of reality” (Newberg, D’Aquili and Rause 2001, 160). Mystical experiences can be corroborated in much the same way as scientific ideas, and often just as critically

evaluated (Winkelman and Baker 2010, 51). As Winkelman and Baker point out, “mysticism . . . has empirical content, providing . . . rigorous methods to study the mechanisms that underlie the processes of the mind” (2010, 53). Each mystical approach to reality can be appreciated as “a science of the mind and consciousness, turning trained attention and observational processes toward a systematic examination of mental processes” (Winkelman and Baker 2010, 53).

A(n Excluded) Middle Way: Methodological Possibilianism

All human beings develop mental constructs, or “ideoverses” (labeled “Mental Organization” and “the Mind” in Fig. 2) to represent experiences to themselves. These overlap to varying degrees with the ideoverses of others by virtue of common experiences and ways of attending to the world (De Munck 2000, 23-24). Our ideoverses are constrained and conditioned by (a) the potential experiences actualized in our environment, (b) the capacity of our sensorium and by (c) what we attend to or ignore, and these restraints, in turn, further limit what we perceive and believe. This epistemological “critical realism” approach, proposed by physicist and theologian Ian Barbour (1966), developed by missionary and anthropologist Paul Hiebert (1999) and popularized by his fellow Christian anthropologist, Charles Kraft (1979; 2008), dovetails with the methodological approach I propose.

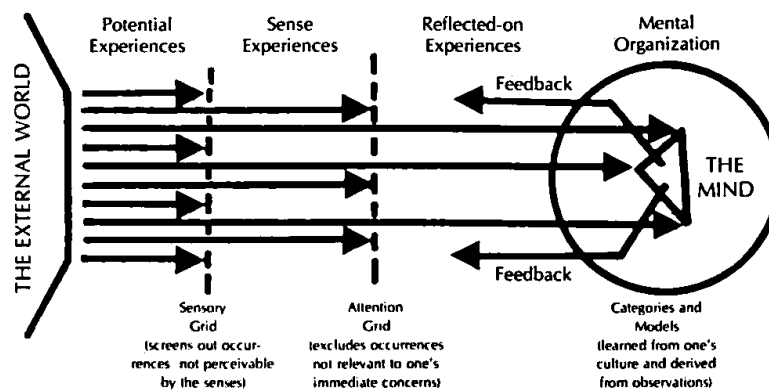


Figure 2.
Charles Kraft's (1979) Representation of a Critical Realist Model of Knowing, adapted from Paul Hiebert (1976).

While the Hiebert/Kraft model certainly *accommodates* it, their brand of critical realism does not *explicitly* address a domain of experience Hiebert identified elsewhere as crucial for Christian anthropologists to engage, a domain which is essentially the subject of the ontological turn in anthropology, what he termed “the excluded middle.” Hiebert develops an analytical framework for analyzing belief systems, utilizing three cross-cutting dimensions: dominant metaphor (mechanical/inanimate—organic/animate), a scale of immanence—transcendence, and a continuum of empirical—transempirical ways of knowing. He argues that the sector of this-worldly, transempirical beings and forces (e.g., “magic, the evil eye, earthly spirits, ancestors, witchcraft, divination,” and anything else “Beyond immediate sense experience . . . [or] natural explanation, [knowledge of which] is based on inference or supernatural experiences”²) occupies a middle zone excluded in the “two-tier universe” of dualistically compartmentalizing “modern people,” and constitutes an excluded middle sector which we find extremely difficult to understand or relate to, but that is very real and immanent to our interlocutors (Hiebert 1982, 39 ff.; 1985, 157-158; Hiebert and Meneses 1995, 12; Hiebert, et al. 1999, 47-72). In alerting Christian anthropologists to their blindness toward the excluded middle, Hiebert is, perhaps, an unheralded pioneer of the ontological turn.

Inspired by kabbalistic perspectivism, I propose that we adopt methodological possibilianism as an ontologically-oriented step beyond the mere phenomenological epistemology of critical realism, a stance which explicitly addresses the excluded middle. This proposal challenges both reductionistic biocultural theories, which see spiritual experience as merely cultural interpretations of neurological phenomena, as well as the absolute relativists’ (i.e., ontological anthropologist’s) “multiple worlds” position, which says, “what is real or true for them is ‘real’ in their own universe of experience, but not in mine (though I can regard it appreciatively).” Instead, the methodological possibilian acknowledges that cultural others might be

conscious of something ontologically *real*, perhaps that has phenomenological actuality in *a shared world*, which may, at present, be beyond the perception of the anthropologist, but need not necessarily remain so if the anthropologist develops (willfully or unwittingly) a consciousness resonant with it. In short, methodological possibilianism holds that:

1. the physical world is suffused and infused with immanent consciousness (there is no “external world” to the Mind, as in critical realism; instead, all is a matter-consciousness relation);
2. our encounter with paramount reality and the consciousness(es) underlying the world of everyday lived experience is highly constrained (an “ideoverse,” “mind,” or “mental organization” is an active experience, a verb-action rather than an essentialized noun-object, as in critical realism; its actions and experiences constrained or facilitated by other agents), and
3. sometimes the restraints are loosened and we are able to experience more than we normally are of the paramount “absolute” reality and the consciousness(es) underlying it.

The above-listed considerations enlarge the possibility space for anthropological explanation, encouraging generation of novel scientific research questions. Accordingly, methodological possibilianism additionally recognizes that:

4. In addressing any phenomena, as many speculative hypotheses should be generated as possible, none of which are necessarily to be taken as serious proposals (i.e., they are only *provisionally* held as thought experiments); no particular story is *ultimately* committed to, rather, multiple positions are held at once if there is no available data to privilege one over others, encouraging exploration of new, previously unexplored possibilities in partnership with the ethnographer’s interlocutors.

² Hiebert’s allowance for knowledge of the transempirical “beyond immediate sense experience,” through inference or supernatural (i.e., extraordinary) experience distinguishes his use of the term from standard usage, where it generally refers to something “beyond experience” altogether. It seems he may mean something more like *transpersonal*, i.e., “experiences in which the sense of self or identity extends beyond (*trans*) the personality or personal to encompass wider aspects of community, culture, and even cosmos” (Walsh 2007, 5). Transpersonal anthropology “is the investigation of the relationship between consciousness and culture, altered states of mind research, and inquiry into the integration of mind, culture, and personality” (Campbell and Stanford 1978, 28). I will use the two terms interchangeably.

Methodological possibilianism entertains multiple possibilities and generates novel hypotheses, simultaneously destabilizing the hidden ethnocentrism inherent in absolute relativist ontological anthropology's indiscriminate privileging of "strange worlds," by allowing us to remain critical in positing that cultural others might really be on to something which our own culture is unaware of (and so should be taken very seriously, at least provisionally), *although their perceptions and understanding of objective reality are just as restrained and (ultimately) potentially faulty as ours, simply focused on experiencing other aspects or portions of the overall system*. This allows us to explicitly engage the excluded middle through an embrace of the possibility that the intersubjective community of vision shaping our ideoverses may include more than just our human cultural consociates or consciousnesses like our own.

Applying Methodological Possibilianism

As practitioners of comparative theology appreciatively encounter the written and lived texts of others, they not only "receive insights from other religions," but they also "deepen [their own] repertoire of theological ideas" for their own theologizing (Clooney 2010, 113). How might (1) the insights of kabbalistic perspectivism deepen the repertoire of theological ideas for religiously committed anthropologists addressing the excluded middle in their ethnographic work? How might (2) employing methodological possibilianism help them better integrate the intellectual and affective dimensions of their faith with their anthropological labors? Only experimental efforts made in response to this two-pronged invitation will begin to tell.

Pragmatically speaking, it seems that any such efforts might most fruitfully be undertaken as engagements with what James described as "radical empiricism" (1976, 22):

To be radical, an empiricism must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced. For such a philosophy,

the relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted as "real" as anything else in the system.

Young and Goulet (1998) and Goulet and Miller (2007) have collected numerous case studies of ethnographers who found themselves thrust into radically empirical "experiential anthropology" as a result of having spontaneous "extraordinary experiences" while undertaking fieldwork (e.g., visions, dream communications, encounters with visible spirit forms, "psychic heat," healing prayer). Anthropologists with no prior framework for such experiences describe them as profoundly discomfiting and painfully challenging to their presuppositions, requiring significant intellectual labor to process and make sense of. However, anthropologists beginning from a place of religious experience are at a distinct advantage when confronted with "extraordinary" encounters on the field, as they already possess *some* personal framework for relating to and making sense of such experiences. At the very least, their prior commitments may make them more relatable to interlocutors experienced in navigating the excluded middle.³

A major challenge for anthropologists of faith contemplating working in environments where they may be spontaneously thrust into a transpersonal "participant-comprehension" orientation (e.g., settings where interlocutors are engaging in consciousness-altering practices which may affect the anthropologist, whether actively involved, or remaining passively peripheral to goings on), is the consideration that not all hypothetical beings or powers of the excluded middle sector would necessarily be "safe" to interact with, what they appear to be, or compatible with persons having a prior commitment to or association with other transpersonal beings (e.g., Jesus). A number of years ago, I was seated at a breakfast at the American Anthropological Association meetings next to Edie Turner, (in)famous for her account of seeing a visible spirit form in Zambia when she was unexpectedly "appointed . . . as one of the doctors" in a healing ritual that she was observing (something she had not "bargained for"), her profession that "spirits actually

³ As a Coast Salish tribal advisor told anthropologist Bruce G. Miller, "I don't see how an atheist who doesn't believe in any form of spirituality is able to respect [our beliefs] . . . Atheists have nothing to look at for similarity or for understanding metaphor. A Christian has a soul . . . A Christian can relate to our *shxweli* [spirit or life force] and the connection to rocks, trees and fish" (2007, 190).

exist,” and her conviction that their reality is the most parsimonious explanation for such experiences (see Young and Goulet 1998, 87). She was speaking about her openness to direct personal encounter with spirits, and her desire to experience any and all such potential encounters available to her. I asked, “Edie, if Chagnon was duped by the Yanomamo about names and kin relations, and Stoller by the Songhay about their language proficiency—if our human interlocutors can potentially *lie* to us (or not have our best interests in mind)—don’t we need to be concerned that spirits might do the same? Should we *trust* every spirit?” I will not divulge Edie’s response, but for most religiously-committed anthropologists, the answer must be, “No, we cannot blindly trust *every* spirit (or transpersonal experience)” (cf. 1 Jn 4:1). So, how to proceed? How should anthropologists of faith think *anthropologically* about transempirical forces, “spirits” and, especially, about spontaneous transpersonal experiences in the field that they had not necessarily bargained for (something not as uncommon as some readers might suspect, see, e.g., Goulet 1998, Grindal 1983, Meintel 2007, Young 1998)?

With deepest respect and admiration, I differ with Edith Turner in positing that, as with human beings, we should be mindful that not all persons or person-like beings/intelligences/agencies (i.e., “spirits”) necessarily have our best interests in mind, and it is

appropriate to foster some relationships and curtail or avoid others. Neither are all transempirical forces to be engaged heedlessly (just as unmindful dalliance with radiation or electricity can be fatal). As Hiebert, Shaw, and Tienou propose, it is important to “test the spirits” while at the same time, one’s attitude “should not be one of skepticism, but of openness to hearing the voice of God when he truly speaks to them” (1999/2000, 176).

In my fieldwork, when I find myself in situations where I may be passively present for or encouraged to participate in activities associated with transpersonal beings or forces (a commonplace while researching neo-shamanism, Jewitchery, or shamanic Judaism),

1. I first make sure that my interlocutors are aware that I have previous spirit experiences of my own. While I do not always divulge all of the details, I, like many readers of this publication, have a personal relationship with and commitment to *Elohim*⁵, the Creator God of the Hebrew Scriptures who Jesus addressed as “Father;” and also, as a 17-year-old Conservadox Jewish teenager, had a life-changing NDE (Near Death Experience) encounter with Jesus which has profoundly shaped my own spiritual path since,
2. I inform them that a condition of my presence or participation is that “the Spirit who guides me” (i.e.,

⁴ I will humbly step aside to allow the theologians to discuss how to think about these experiences theologically. However, I encourage them to consider Beck’s *Christian Animism* (2015), and Joerstad’s reflections on the relevance of “the New Animism” to the Bible in her article, “A Brief Account of Animism in Biblical Studies” (2020) and especially her book *The Hebrew Bible and Environmental Ethics: Humans, Nonhumans, and the Living Landscapes* (2021).

⁵ The Old Testament biblical name for God, *Elohim*, literally means “Source of Powers,” or “Forces.” For purposes of comparative theological reflection, it is worth noting that this meaning of the name is made much of by Rabbi (and neo-shaman) Gershon Winkler in a 2004 interview where he speaks of interacting with “the different powers and attributes of the spirits of the stones and trees and wildlife and people” (a belief and practice he grounds in the text of Job 12:7). The interviewer responds, “This is interesting, because the idea of spirits seems to go against the basic Jewish tenet that says, ‘God is One.’” Winkler counters: “Well, it’s true that we believe in one God, but that does not in any way preclude spirits . . . However, where we draw the line . . . is that, while we believe that all beings—from stones to stars to trees to people—are being spiraled into existence by their own individual spirits, we do not believe that these spirits are the source. Instead, they are empowered by *Elohim*, which is the name we have for God. Literally, ‘*Elohim*’ means ‘Source of Powers.’ Everything else, all other spirits, are just manifestations of that source in the physical world. Say I want to apply a certain herb for medicinal purposes. The first thing I would do is pray to the Source of All Powers and ask for access to the channels that flow from the Creator to the Creation, so that the spirit of this plant will be able to help the patient.” He is not the only contemporary rabbi to express this view. Ohr Somayach (2001) also contends that “The Hebrew word *Elohim* most often refers to G-d, but it is actually a descriptive word meaning ‘one of power’ or ‘force.’ Thus, it can also mean an angel (Genesis 32:29) or a powerful leader (Exodus 7:1). Other forces seem to exist—wind, fire, radioactivity, electromagnetism, *chi*, *yang*, etc.—so the Torah tells us that they have no independent power. G-d is all powerful and all other forces are merely G-d’s ‘agents’ and they should not be deified.”

the Spirit of *Elohim*) may veto my engagement in the setting or activities at any time, and

3. I ask if these terms will be acceptable. Usually this conversation happens at the outset of fieldwork. My terms have invariably been enthusiastically welcomed, as I am taking seriously the reality of spirits they know are real, but am also sensitive to proper, mindful relationships with the spirit realm.
4. After careful, prayerful consideration of what is involved, if it seems apropos for me to participate, I ask the Source of All Powers permission, and request that I may only experience that which is Creator's will for me. Only then (if I do not sense a "No" answer), do I engage as much as I can in good conscience with continuous discernment.

Allow me to present one vignette from my fieldwork of applying methodological possibilianism to an extraordinary experience I had within such a framework. In August 2016, I was deeply immersed in fieldwork with a group undertaking a three-year shamanic healing training. We had been charged by the circle's leader to attend to dreams as messages from the spirit world (and to keep a dream journal). I approached this practice using the protocol outlined above.

One Friday afternoon, I had a particularly painful interaction with one of my five children, a 'tweenager' who suffered from IED (Intermittent Explosive Disorder). I laid down for a nap, reflecting, "It feels like they're⁶ always verbally flinging [dung] at us!" As I closed my eyes and buried my face in my pillow, I asked Source of Powers (i.e., *Elohim*/God) for a dream to help me "handle" life with this emotionally challenging child. This was the first time I actively *asked* for a dream communication (prior to this incident, I was only attending to spontaneously occurring unincubated dreams). I was intentionally open to divine dream communication, but also open to the possibility that a dream could be more, less, or in some way, *other* than that, and that whatever dream I might have (if any) would be shared with and interpreted by the shamanic healing training circle. Here is an excerpt from my dream journal (8/19/2016):

I am outside. Just outside the door of our home . . .
From the right approaches the Sadhu, Mr. Black.
I've never met him before, but I know who he is

(though he's not well-known. I just *know* him). One of my children asks, in a worried . . . voice, "What's that?" (he's shuffling and ragged, but tall and stands straight—he could be mistaken for a zombie . . .).

"He's a Sadhu," I say, "His name is Mr. Black."

He approaches me purposefully. For some reason, just as we'd been going out the door, I'd given [name redacted (my youngest—not the child with IED)] a playful smack on the behind . . . [as] an attention-getting gesture, not really a swat or spank, but a reproof for . . . dawdling . . . [something I would not have done in waking life].

Mr. Black and I meet face-to-face . . . [He's] reproving me for what he just witnessed and I feel harshly over-judged:

"You are poisoning that [child]."

"What, that . . . ?! That was nothing. It was a playful expression of endearment."

"You are full of poison," Mr. Black says pointing with great intensity at my face, but not anger. I can tell he *knows* poison. It almost feels like his finger is a conduit for it as he points it toward me and I step to be sideways to him and let his gesture pass me rather than point *at* me.

In an instant, I realize . . . [any action] . . . can be a kind of poison when it is not mindful.

"We are *all* full of poison, Baba," I say, gently gesturing in a sweeping motion, a [mindful] gesture of compassionate non-judging extended to all beings, including Mr. Black.

"I am full of poison, he is full of poison, We are *all* full of poison."

The Sadhu walks away, seemingly satisfied with my response . . . I notice other Sadhus wandering up and down the street, looking for others to speak with, but finding none.

Needless to say, I found this dream simultaneously comforting and *alarming*. Alarming because *I had never previously heard the word "Sadhu," and had no idea what one was*. After writing the dream in my journal, I googled "Sadhu" "Black" "Baba" and "poison," and was shocked to see an image of the figure from my dream. I had dreamed an encounter with the long-deceased Aghori Sadhu, Baba Krishna Das (I only learned later that the name "*Krishna*" etymologically means "black"). The Aghori are shamans reputed to poison people and fling dung at them, with the intent of provoking ego-transcending

⁶ Gender neutralized for privacy purposes.

enlightenment regarding the ephemeral nature of this-worldly attachments (Svoboda 1986). This discovery helped me rekey my child's outbursts as invitations to let go of egotistical feelings of hurt and victimhood.

What was I to make of the dream? Had I really been visited by Krishna Das Aghori? A demon (or angel) in Sadhu guise?⁷ Had God given me a dream using the image of this stranger so I would know the dream was not "*just a dream*?" Would God *really* send the spirit of a *deceased shaman* (cf., 1 Sam. 28)?! Did I have Indian ancestors disclosing themselves (a theory popular in the neo-shamanic training circle)? Is the "me" of that phantasmagoric Aghori-saturated suburbia "real me," and the author of this article the dream? Did Krishna Das dream of *me*? Is all this just *God's* dream (as Rabbi Winkler would have it)? Had my subconscious tapped into the morphic resonance of a universal holographic field of intelligence (Sheldrake 2020, the second most popular interpretation in the neo-shamanic training circle)? Was this some kind of spiritual initiation or test (a third favorite among circle members)? Had I previously read about Aghori shamans, seen a picture of Krishna Das, and forgotten, only to have the image and associations reemerge in a hypnopompic illusion? Or, had the figure been more inchoate, and when I saw the photo, with a feeling of *déjà vu*, I falsely "knew" that this was the figure in the dream (the identification a foggy-headed confabulation)?

I could not (and still cannot) fully discount *any* of these possibilities (anthropologically speaking), nor commit wholeheartedly to any one of these stories, and have since had to hold all of them in tension, since there is no available data to privilege one over others.⁸

I have been able to process this real, extraordinary experience and its possibilities with interlocutors in neo-shamanic, neo-kabbalistic, Jewitch, Messianic Jewish, shamanic Jewish, Christian and Sufi Muslim field settings (some of these conversations generated additional hypotheses). Bringing these hypotheticals into various field settings has been immensely productive for generating new research questions in partnership with my field subjects, and for deepening relationships with interlocutors who take dreams seriously as messages, opening up avenues of conversation that would otherwise have been unexplored (e.g., I now know much more about Islamic theories—and *lived experiences*—of dreaming, ancestors, angels, saints, and demons than I would have, and my interlocutors in all my field settings now much more freely share their dreams and interpretations with me).

Conclusion

This kind of research setting and orientation, embrace of ambiguity, and speculative anthropological reflection is not for everyone. Certainly, I already had my own religious story which could interpret the experience (as may my readers). But accepting it as it was, leaving open where it came from, how, and why, not attempting to prove or disprove it, and instead focusing on what evidence supports one possibility or another has led me into an ongoing transformational process of personal comparative theologizing while opening up avenues of ethnographic dialogue and inquiry previously unconsidered and inaccessible.⁹ Some readers' theologies may readily embrace the

⁷ Or, as a Hindu friend wondered, Krishna Das Aghori's namesake?

⁸ It should be remembered that methodological possibilianism contends that, while *initially* all stories are to provisionally be taken equally seriously, *ultimately, none of these possibilities should be taken seriously*, as it is unlikely that *any* of them is actually correct. Where the ontological turn indiscriminately accepts *all* sincerely held ontological stories (indeed, privileging the "strangest worlds"), methodological possibilianism inverts this logic, positing instead that *none* of our stories are *ultimately* correct (including the anthropologists'), because all non-ultimate beings' perception is constrained and situated/perspectival (all fall short, because we only ever "see in a mirror dimly" and can ever only "know in part," 1 Cor 13:12).

⁹ Christian anthropologist R. Daniel Shaw's recent book, *Singing Samo Songs: From Shaman to Pastor* (2022) provides an example that could be seen as one aspect of methodological possibilianism in action in a circumstance *not* directly involving extraordinary experience. He writes of how, in the Samos' awareness, the Bible "corroborated their mythology" and "added another layer of truth *to what they already knew*" (p. 174, italics added). He quotes one Samo woman, Ulame, as saying, "So the myth is our story. Having heard the myths, people can know God . . . My story is true and if we follow the Bible and Jesus' footsteps, we will be safe in heaven. Our ancestors taught us that and so does the Bible . . . Our myth is true, it is what the Bible teaches" (174). Shaw then reflects on how *taking seriously the Samo ontology expands his own possibility space* and invites comparative theological learning: "Such a biblical theology in contexts goes far beyond anything I learned in seminary . . . It . . . enable[s] me (and all who read this

invitation to be alert for and attentive to one's own unbargained for spontaneous extraordinary experiences in the field, perhaps even open to humbly subjecting them to field interlocutors' interpretations. Others may reject this as anathema, or spiritually "playing with fire." Before jumping to any conclusion, I urge readers to deeply ponder the comparative theologies of Abhishiktananda (2007), Beck (2015), Griffiths (2004), and Yule (2005).

Much of what we call "knowledge" is, if we turn a critical gaze upon it, actually *faith*. But, as Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook wrote, "The essence of faith is an awareness of the vastness of Infinity. Whatever conception of it enters the mind is an absolutely negligible speck in comparison to what should be conceived, and what should be conceived is no less negligible compared to what it really is" (Kook 1961, 124 in Matt 1996, 32). Perhaps if we conceive a wider Infinity than we have heretofore allowed, we will have greater latitude to discover things about human nature, our universe, and the realities behind our respective ontologies than we heretofore imagined.

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book) to appreciate how the Samo internalized their understanding of the Bible in their time and place *and thereby expand[s] my own schema as it relates to knowing God*" (p. 174, italics added).

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The Embodiment of Kunya Among Hausa Women of Kano, Nigeria

Adriana Myland

The purpose of this study is to analyse the concept of *kunya* in relation to Hausa Muslim women in Kano, Nigeria, to understand their life from their experiences of *kunya*, and to identify its relation to the role of honour and shame. *Kunya* can be defined as multiple interrelated emotions such as shame, embarrassment, bashfulness, and shyness. *Kunya* can also refer to modesty, rudeness, and disgrace. An emphasis on *kunya* as modesty will largely be the focus of this paper in order to clearly define what this means for women who have been misrepresented previously as having a “hidden muted autonomy” (Callaway 1984, 449). An examination of the boundaries of the public/private dichotomy of space in the practice of *matan kulle* (gender segregation) is the primary way to understand the Hausa women’s embodiment of *kunya*. This dichotomy is integral to knowing what it means to be Hausa, and to understanding the role of honour and shame in their relationships. The Hausa display of *kunya* indicates a necessity for cultivating and preserving modesty—a key aspect of Hausa women’s identity within the community.

Context to Kano

The Hausa people are scattered across northern Nigeria, known as Hausaland, which includes the state of Kano, containing the second largest population in Nigeria after Lagos. Kano is one of the 12 *shari’a* states in the North. The long history of Islam in the core North is essential to understanding its strong patriarchal system, and I have studied the lived experience of women who are underrepresented. My 19 informants were either married or divorced women, including those who have children and those who do not, and single women.

A comprehensive understanding of *kunya* among Hausa women in Kano shows how it influences every realm of their life due to a high cultural value on modesty. *Kunya* is a complex emotion meaning shame, embarrassment, bashfulness, and shyness, but it is also known as an order of display for modesty, rudeness, and disgrace. The cultural practice of *matan kulle* meaning “women locked” involves gender segregation that highlights the meaning of symbolic space—the public/private dichotomy—and the metaphorical covering of a woman’s home that encompasses her sense of honour. This is the backdrop to learning how women embody *kunya* in

the context of perspectives and experiences of being Hausa.

The Significance of Kunya

My research (Myland 2022) focuses on the cultural value and display of *kunya* and the changing practice of *matan kulle* in order to determine a theologically and culturally relevant way to engage with the Hausa. The practice of *matan kulle* will highlight the depth of *kunya* displayed among Hausa women who have been previously labeled as having a “hidden” sense of autonomy, but whose complex lives illuminate their “Hausanness” through the role of honour and shame vital in understanding relationships. Recognizing the weight of *kunya* in the life of Hausa women will also equip Nigerian Christians for building relationships with them.

Barbara Callaway (1984) argues that there may be an enormous social advantage for women in private spaces (19). She writes, “Women are secluded, in part, to enable men to feel ‘in control.’ But, such physical and emotional separation means in a very fundamental sense that they are not dependent on men” (433). Callaway’s findings reflect today’s high rate of divorce for Hausa women, including some divorced women

who no longer live with a man. The divorce rate is very significant, since a woman living alone in Hausa society is very unusual, especially a woman without a male representative. The population of divorced Hausa women's voices has been neglected and that inevitably affects how women interact in the dichotomy of public and private space.

Callaway mentions fifty percent of Hausa women will divorce or be divorced in their lives, though their period of singleness after their divorce will not last long, as it is a cultural expectation for women to be married. She also points out that there is a different experience of gender segregation for divorcees that should be explored (1984, 443). Six of my 19 interlocutors scattered throughout the city are divorced and/or are currently in their second marriage. There is a sense of liberation in being married more than once, but the dichotomy of space remains for these women. Callaway suggests that women are often separated and independent from men, so, while they maintain a lingering ambiguous dependency on men, they still have autonomy in their secluded spaces (445, 449). I, however, have discovered that this "hidden muted autonomy" among women that Callaway describes is *not* representative of the women I met. Through exploring how this "hidden muted autonomy" is inaccurate by considering women's honour embodied in *kunya*, I will provide clarity as to the real experiences of underrepresented divorced women.

Chamo describes *kunya* as "a core value that one is expected to follow" (Chamo 2021, 49; cf. Musa 2019, 14). Dr. Maryam Yola explains *kunya* can be understood as both a negative and positive emotion (pers. com.). As previously stated, the context of *kunya* is necessary to understand its meaning. *Kunya* defined as shyness is positive among the Hausa and is part of being a morally good person with a sense of composure. Even more so, Yola describes this unique concept of *kunya* as being a "prerequisite" in her culture when describing a "nice person." On the other hand, Dr. Yola elaborates the meaning of *kunya* in terms of shame, a negative expression. For example, if someone says, "*ba ta jin kunya*," they mean, "she does not have any shame," or "she did not feel shame" and it is considered an insult. Aisha Umar Adamu identifies "*kunya* as a bashfulness that controls the behaviour of individuals. If a person crosses the line his behaviour will be tagged as loss of face *abin kunya* or rudeness *rashin kunya* that will bring dishonour to not only himself but to his family" (2018, 164). This overview of *kunya* as embedded in Hausa culture

illustrates the Hausa way of being within the world of honour and shame.

Ethnography (Abridged)

Through doing this ethnography I became aware of the invaluable role ethnography can play for ministry, as I was working under a Christian mission organization. I spent time with 19 informants throughout the city of Kano, typically in the mid-afternoon to evening. Most visits were informal and led by the women. We spent hours sitting together in their parlours, or in 'interrupted' time cooking, busy with children, receiving other visitors, or being involved in visits for births, condolences, or special celebrations like Ramadan.

The phenomenological method intertwined with a narrative approach, as well as Christ's example of "self-emptying" became essential to my awareness of being received as more than just a researcher and led me to be attentive to my ethnographic presence. The practice of bracketing my assumptions and ways of perceiving my informants' lived experience helped me "quietly contemplate" their stories and practice being present (Lester 1991, 1; Parse Coyne & Smith 1985, 173). Then the humility required in language learning, but above all in the example of Christ's humility displayed when encountering women in the Bible, is what informed my practice. Philip Clayton (2009) in his work *Transforming Christian Theology* focuses on Philippians 2:7 (NRSV) "but [Christ] emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, assuming human likeness." The Greek noun *kenosis* means self-emptying. I believe that as I sat attentively listening to the Hausa women, my attitude reflected Jesus' humility and humanity as I encountered each woman who became more than just an informant.

Is Matan Kulle Necessary?

While I visited Fatima, by telling me her life story, she gave me clear examples of the practice of *matan kulle*. She described how she grew up in Kano but later moved to Cameroon when she married a relative. Later she divorced, returned to Kano, and eventually remarried. Her father was not entirely pleased when she decided to remarry, since he wanted her to receive an education. However, she remarried anyway. She shared how one evening, she and her friend Khadija went to a neighbour's house to do their hair. Khadija knew her husband would be home around 9 pm since

he was visiting a friend with Fatima's husband. Khadija planned to be back home well before he arrived. Unfortunately, she did not make it back on time. Neither did Fatima. When Fatima returned home late, her husband yelled at her, but she covered her ears with a pillow and went to sleep. In contrast, Khadija's husband locked her out of their house, leaving her outside as he continued to shout at her. Soon Fatima's husband intervened by calling Khadija's husband, as they were next door neighbours. He urged his friend to lower his voice, stressing that the other neighbours would hear. Fatima laughed as she recounted her night and the intense drama she hoped to avoid. She explained *matan kulle* is *dole* a "must" required by her religion, in the same way women are required to wear the *hijab*. She admitted to being tired of having to follow these practices but was still faithfully and obediently practicing both.

A constant balance must to be maintained in managing space at the beginning of a new relationship and in the marriage relationship itself, especially as observed in both Fatima and Khadija's experiences. Fatima and Khadija seem to dance within what seems to be a somewhat fading and changing practice of *matan kulle*. According to a female Hausa professor at Bayero University in Kano this practice is "still there but it's not as tight."

This was particularly true of Fatima: she sought to hide from her husband her life outside of their home, while her husband attempted to maintain a sense of control over her movement. Fatima tried to balance her desires to do things outside the practice, such as going to get her hair done, while not getting into trouble at home and seeking to maintain harmony in her marriage. The power Hausa women have to enter one another's homes is significant, as gatherings with neighbours, especially with Fatima, would often occur in her small parlour. If her husband came home, he would often retreat to their bedroom or sit outside their home with other men (known as *hirar majalinsa*—respected public space for men). Many traditional Hausa homes built decades ago have a long corridor or entrance known as the *soro* to separate women inside the home.

On the other hand, another interlocuter, Nabila who lives very differently than Fatima and Khadija said, "*Gaskyia* [honestly] in my own view we don't really have that *kulle* now." She described how she goes to work each day and how frequently she and her husband go out together. She recalled that during her time growing up, she saw that her parents' experience

was very different from her life now. Although Nabila comes from a high socioeconomic class, she is very well educated with a Ph.D. Thus, her experience is very different than Fatima's and Khadija's. Still, Nabila did not believe the practice of *matan kulle* differs between classes.

Another View of Matan Kulle from A Divorcee

I met Safiya at a wedding, situated next to the Kofar Mata, one of the oldest city gates in Kano. Safiya was very forward and initially approached me, eager to find out why I was in Kano. So a week or two after the wedding I visited Safiya's house where she grew up. I was greeted by her 20-year-old daughter who was studying physics at a local university. Safiya herself had studied Hausa in college and currently taught at a local primary school. This made it easy for me to ask questions, since she was eager to help me learn Hausa.

During one particular visit I asked Safiya about *matan kulle*. I thought to myself, "What does she think of this topic and how open and honest will she be in explaining her viewpoint?" She quickly affirmed that most people "have it" meaning most women are living within the bounds of *matan kulle*.

Safiya shared that she married at the age of 22 in 2000, laughing as she told me that she gave birth to her first two children in the consecutive years following her marriage. She then had two more children in the next three years. She appeared downcast about her divorce, but did not reveal any more details about it. She almost always mentioned her dream to remarry, and bypassed the part of her story about her return to her mother's house, leaving a life of luxury behind, along with her joy living with her now ex-husband. Divorced women most often return to their family's home. According to another informant, Unmratu, it would be a shame for her to live alone, even if she could afford it.

Safiya clarified that *matan kulle* pertains only to married women but claimed that globalization has changed what the present practice looks like. She did not seem overly keen to discuss this topic, but I pressed her further to explain the changes she is noticing in her community. She gave me a prime example of her oldest daughter who can study at a university, along with other women who were beginning to have full freedom in society. She then quickly returned to sharing about her desire to remarry, implying that her freedom would change for the better. This seemed to contradict what she previously stated about a divorced woman's relative

freedom. She mentioned that her mother's house is private, but there would be a greater sense of privacy remarrying and having her own home. I think she may have desired to live separately from her mother while also finding security in living with a man and feeling protected.

The Jealous One, The Divorced Woman, and Yaji

A common theme arose among the stories of women who were their husband's first wife, and whose husbands chose to marry a second wife. For example, Safiya believed her husband was charmed with a physical object by her cowife, and Ummratu shared a strikingly similar story. At the tender age of 16 years, Ummratu married her husband (now her ex-husband) who was a wealthy man working in Lagos at the time. It was only two weeks before her ex-husband married a second wife and she found out about his decision. She described how his parents pressured him to obtain a second wife because his house was large enough and he could afford it. She gradually noticed his behaviour begin to change.

Her husband asked her to leave; however, this was not yet a formal divorce because he must say "*na saki ki*" three times. The woman must physically leave her husband's house each time he divorces her, up to three times. Nabila stated, "The first problem a wife makes is to go and report her husband [to her parents]. This is what we call *yaji*." *Yaji* is hot chilli pepper, but also describes the process whereby the woman's parents help her resolve her marital issue so she can return to her husband's house. The process clearly involves "heat" once the parents know about their daughter's marital issues. The daughter's family's response and involvement create this *yaji*. For example, Fatima's sister has now returned to her parent's house two times due to conflict with her husband, or more specifically with her cowife. Fatima explained the dread, stating, "*ina jin tausayi*," meaning she has sympathy for her sister, while also being concerned about her sister's three children as well.

Nabila, who has never been divorced, pointed out that the rate of divorce in Kano is *very* high. She shared her thoughts on this, "My own view for a woman who goes for *yaji* at home, when she comes back, it will not be the same again. It's like she is reducing her own value . . . Whatever happens let me just resolve it in my house. The moment you leave, then your parents will know about it."

Nabila has remained the only wife of her husband who she explains is only a "one wife-oriented" man. She explained how "a Hausa woman is supposed to be patient, whatever kind of situation she finds herself in. You shouldn't ask for a divorce." In elaborating on the process of *yaji*, she shared that her sister is divorced and returned to her parents' home. She explained that her other sister, who lives at home and is not yet married, will lose respect for her divorced sister, and that her late father used to be "sensitive of where she is going." There is an unspoken suspicion surrounding divorcees who may engage in unacceptable behaviour, as indicated by her father's concern for his daughter. Nabila implied that a divorcee may engage in inappropriate physical intimacy with a man because of her previous experience. She said, "people can just think, maybe she's doing something, you know . . . because she's *bazawara* [divorced]." By elaborating on her experience, as well as her sister's, she explained how there are far too many pressures women face who experience divorce or endure the challenges that seem to unfold from having a rival.

Being Bazawara (Divorced)

Dankwali ya ja hula

The head tie pulls the hat.

One day, while I was visiting Bilkisu, she handed me the phone to greet a man she knew. She smiled as I greeted him; later, I found out he was one of the many men she speaks to. As a divorced woman in Kano with three children and one adopted daughter, she was open about her desire to remarry. When I asked which man I was greeting and if this is the one she wants to marry, she jokingly responded, "*Dankwali ya ja hula* [The woman pulls the man]." The *dankwali* is the head tie women wear, and the *hula* is the traditional hat Hausa men wear. This metaphorically means the woman takes control and becomes like the head in a relationship that pulls or leads the man, which is the opposite of the cultural norm. When I asked Nabila about the saying Bilkisu used, she said that she had never heard it before. She then asked about the context in which it was used; I vaguely explained the situation. She stated, "Maybe she uses it because she is a *bazawara*." Being divorced creates a very different dynamic in terms of pursuing relationships and the pressures women endure in maintaining *kunya*.

I found it sad to hear Fatima say, “If a divorcee has daughters . . . if she is not married, she will not be honoured. Even her children will not be honoured, unless they get married.” This explains Bilkisu’s search and desire for marriage, along with Safiya’s, another divorcee.

Nabila affirmed the tremendous loss a *bazawara* suffers. She told me about her sister who was married to a man who chose not to support her education despite the fact that he was a lecturer at a university. Her husband began to control her in every possible way and not honour her desires. Because of this, she returned to her family’s house as a *bazawara*. Nabila explained, “For a normal Hausa household, when you are cooking lunch, especially lunch, you have to add extra in case there will be a guest. But in her husband’s case, he wouldn’t allow it. He would have to count how much meat she puts in her food . . . That is really un-Hausa like. So, the marriage had to come to an end.”

After several months of my meeting with Nabila twice a week, her colleague Salma stopped by to visit. They gave me a different perspective on *bazawara*. They said that there is a small percentage of high-class Hausa women who are educated but not married. They explained how their potential suitors feel inferior because they are not likely to be as educated as the women. Thus, the men would not have the sense of control that they wish to possess in a marriage. Nabila and her friend both agreed that it is very difficult for highly educated women to marry. They also shared that there is a small group of upper-class divorced women that use this to their advantage, not seeking to remarry. Instead, they find work and learn how to be self-sufficient. Salma also confirmed my assumption that if a *bazawara* does remarry, she will have freedom to choose her new spouse, unlike for her first marriage. Moreover, she pointed out that women who are fair-skinned, but uneducated, will likely marry off quickly. They then showed me photos of female relatives who are quite fair and therefore seen as very attractive.

Hanatu’s story also illustrates the many struggles a *bazawara* faces. I met Hanatu over a year ago in her father’s house and shared many conversations with her and all of her sisters. During one of these conversations, she shared that another part of remarrying after being *bazawara* was that your status as a divorcee may be hidden as much as possible in order to avoid losing worth and respect. She told me she was previously married for about fourteen years and has a young daughter who is now living at her father’s house. She explained how her ex-husband’s mother-in-law did

not like her. So, her husband divorced her, and she was forced to return to her father’s house. She emphasized how not many people are aware of her first marriage, except for her family. My Hausa teacher said that most *bazawara* are married after dark in order to maintain their hidden status as *bazawara*. She is now in her first year of her second marriage and has a new start.

Kunya



Kunya da adon mace.

Kunya is like an adornment for a woman.

Now a deeper understanding of *kunya* will be explained in order to make sense of the pressures described above that women who are *bazawara* must endure in light of cultural expectations. Nabila described the proverb above as referring to the aspect of shyness. She said *kunya* is “an extra quality or a value in a woman.” Fatima pointed out to me that there are many “branches of *kunya*.” Fatima also provided her own metaphor of a *tsani* (ladder) to indicate the levels of growth for a Hausa girl learning *kunya* throughout her childhood. Fatima described this valuable metaphor thus:

Uwa akwai kunya sosai. Uwa sani ce.

A mother is just like a ladder.

Uba shi ne jigo.

The father is the overall pillar.

Za ta dora yarta akan kunya.

She will train her daughter on shyness.

Kakar mace akwai kunya.

The grandmother of women has shyness.

Kunya tsani ce.

Shyness is [like] a ladder.

Ummratu also explained, “Kunya will take you to a higher level, to places you don’t expect. A good ladder, you have confidence and no fear. It will be the *tarbiya* [home training] of your parents that will influence you.” The value of *tarbiya* is highly spoken of in terms of its ability to ensure children possess *kunya* taught by their parents. On another occasion, Safyia distinguished *kawaci* meaning politeness from *kunya* meaning shyness. She explained, “*Kawaci* is always on your mind; it is something you think twice about.” In contrast, she said, “*Kunya* is your reality, like you are covered.” Women would almost always associate certain words with *kunya* as a concept. However, it became vital to see it in action within a specific context. The constraints of a *bazawara* would make adorning oneself in *kunya* difficult, with the loss of a woman’s protection and thus, worth.

Lacking Kunya

One time, when visiting Fatima’s best friend Bilkisu she escorted us to the road to catch a *keke* (three-wheeled tricycle). I was expecting to return home, but instead discovered that all of us were going to visit the man who, according to Bilkisu, showed interest in her. I suspected this interest was probably reciprocated. His home was close by, but as we got closer, Fatima suddenly realized it was his parent’s home, as Bilkisu was not initially clear about where we were going. Fatima became fearful and hesitant as we walked into the compound. Feeling extremely unsettled, she said to me, “*Bilkisu ba ta jin kunya*” (Bilkisu has no shame) because she is approaching the parent’s home of the man she likes and lacks the cultural value of *kunya*.

For Bilkisu, being married at the age of 11 for six years, having four children and becoming a *bazawara*, her engagement in the community is very different than Fatima’s even though they are both 35 years old. Fatima has said if her husband found out she was with other men, “*na shiga uku* (I am in big trouble)”. She knows her husband would disapprove of her being with other men, and because of this, Fatima had previously told me her husband does not like Bilkisu. I think Fatima felt fearful her husband could find out about Bilkisu’s relationship, not knowing who the man Bilkisu likes was, but also recognizing the many cultural boundaries of *kunya* Bilkisu has broken.



Labarin zuciya a tambayi fuska.
Ask the face about the heart.

I believe the proverb above illustrates well the life Hausa women lead. Closely observing a Hausa woman’s face will help explain her often hidden emotions. Clearly, Fatima went along with Bilkisu’s desire to greet the man whom she likes; but at the same time, her face showed surprise, shock, and perhaps even embarrassment. I will explore this below to understand what Aisha Umar Adamu (2020) calls “masking emotions,” along with the innerworkings of *kunya* described in the stories and experiences above. *Kunya* is part of being Hausa that is not easily put into words, but, as Fatima showed, it is clear when the code or boundaries of *kunya* are violated.

Anthropological Analysis

Being Seen: Matan Kulle



Confronting Kunya

The various women I spoke with who are either married or divorced or young or old have different expressions of Islamic faith which influence how they

perceive themselves in terms of the dynamic views of *matan kulle* (gender segregation). Fatima's perspective on *matan kulle* was that it is "*dole*" (necessary): she sees it as an essential part of her practice of faith, comparing it to how important wearing the *hijab* is to her. This demonstrates how often *matan kulle* is interpreted as a part of faith practice rather than culture. The *hijab* represents modesty to Fatima because it holds significant meaning to possessing *kunya*. Without the *hijab* or *matan kulle* which are a part of Fatima's faith expression and identity, respect and modesty, *kunya* would be lost.

In contrast, Nabila and Dr. Yola hold a different perspective on *matan kulle*. Nabila explained how *matan kulle* is no longer practiced and Dr. Yola described how it is not as prevalent today as in the past. In Sherry Ortner's "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?", she explains that by "shifting our image of the culture/nature relationships" women can be seen as participants and cultural makers, rather than as mediators of nature, which Ortner argues is the way women are viewed universally (1974, 85). Thus, I believe the majority of my informants, especially women such as Nabila and Dr. Yola with more education, would agree with Ortner's view and desire to see other women in diverse socio-economic backgrounds fully embrace their roles as cultural makers as well.

Ortner's understanding of women being viewed as closer to nature (1974, 72) is not necessarily viewed as a negative experience for the Hausa women I interviewed. They often express a sense of belonging and honour being married and having children. The social role of a Hausa woman becoming a mother is a valuable contribution to culture. To be childless and infertile is understood to be a shame and an anomaly within Hausa culture. In fact, the ways men recognize women's roles as mothers and teachers of their children needs further research. Women who teach their children *tarbiya* (home training) and *kunya* at a young age in the home play a significant role within the culture, since *kunya* is part of being Hausa for both men and women, though with greater pressure on women since they are responsible for teaching their children. Men learn *kunya* from their mothers and have similar expectations, including possessing *kunya* in different social settings and relationships (such as with in-laws or elders). Further exploration of men's experience of *kunya* is needed.

However, women who are wholly segregated from men, being closer to nature and experiencing gradual

change, such as Fatima, are socially distant from women such as Nabila who live and engage with a contrasting process of what Ortner describes as social actuality (Ortner 1974, 87). For example, Nabila's contribution to her culture is far less public than Fatima's due to her lower socioeconomic status and her husband not supporting her desire to enroll in college. Nabila's significantly higher education offers her a different cultural perspective, such as seeing the need for change to support women. She has influence in shaping that change, which Fatima may not have due to her lack of education. Women I met with are seen and known by their space, and how much she is seen or how wide her space is differs with each woman. *Kunya* is an important social and moral code for women within their designated spaces. Thus, I believe some of the women will face new challenges displaying *kunya* (especially understood as shyness) as they begin to be seen more, taking on roles outside their homes. The home is where women first find their sense of belonging and identity. Nonetheless, Ortner's view that women are universally associated with being closer to nature than men indicates that men need to change their cultural view to see that "women are more than natural beings but also creative cultural makers" (87).

Designated space for women is important across their diverse lived experience. However, it is crucial women create space to share their own cultural view with other women. This in turn would provide empowerment and honour cultural differences, while learning from one another in the context of maintaining *kunya*. Bruce Malina and Jerome Neyrey (1991) eloquently describe honour as displayed "in the places or space where the physical body is located" (34). Some Hausa women are explicit about how they see themselves in their spaces, longing for privacy, sharing how their designated space gives them a sense of honour. There is an "inward direction toward the centre" which is the domestic space, indicating a distinction for "gender-based honour" (41). Whereas women such as Nabila, Dr. Yola, and the women I met who are not married have opportunities to participate in a new and more public space where men can see them more fully and honour who they are as each woman acknowledges and upholds her role within society.

The First Mistake: Yaji

Hausa women are expected to maintain their own honour, and are valued in their designated spaces, by

upholding honour and harmony in relationships. Nabila described *yaji* as the process when a wife's parents' help to resolve her marital issue in order for her to return to her husband's house. However, both Nabila and Fatima pointed out that there is a loss of value when a wife returns to her parents' home. A deep sense of shame emerges, since a woman's honour is intertwined with the honour of her husband, which is disrupted once a woman experiences *yaji* (Malina and Neyrey 1991, 44). The Hausa woman endures a lack of honour when she is no longer secure in her home. A woman's children are also often at risk. Thus, *yaji* seeks to restore honour but often disrupts harmony.

A Hausa woman loses her honour even more significantly by becoming a *bazawara*. Malina and Neyrey (1991) describe this as the "precarious position divorced women enter losing their sense of female honour or 'shamelessness' as they now have a dishonourable reputation . . . outside the boundaries of [an] acceptable moral life" (44). This is strongly connected to the embodiment of *kunya* as Hausa women seek to live modest and moral lives. Fatima describes the lack of a *wakilinta*, or a representative, because her husband gives her worth. It also makes sense of the fact that Hanatu kept the secret of her divorce from me for months. Moreover, her new marriage has restored her honour and thus her embodiment of *kunya*. Nabila mentioned, "If you don't have *kunya* you are nothing."

There is a new perspective on *zaruawa* (divorced women) I was introduced to that is beginning to defy how women receive honour in relationships from their family, and how they display honour in their homes. The small percentage of Hausa women who are highly educated are superior to their potential spouses. Nabila believes women in this position are taking advantage of their singleness. These women are finding creative ways to contribute to culture. One of her colleagues and friends is unable to find a suitable spouse as she would surpass her future husband's education and financial stability. Although this makes being Hausa and holding honour in society very difficult, perhaps these exceptional women will help men understand women's roles as cultural makers too. For example, Nabila's husband holds respect for her role and supports her pursuits, however this sort of partnership in marriage is not common.

Hausa women define *kunya* as being part of who they are, and in general they support its value. *Kunya* has been described as something you are covered with, part of your reality, and what brings worth and

belonging to being Hausa. Women seek to display this sense of hiddenness that includes their emotions. My interlocutors were courageous to share vulnerable parts of themselves that would normally be masked or hidden, as *kunya* maintains one's modesty, including emotional expressions. Their varying experiences in their individual spaces, including their sense of belonging and honour, are part of what defines *kunya*. The silence in hiding or "masking" one's true emotions to maintain the display of *kunya* largely means modesty (Adamu 2020, 7). Further, this is also part of submitting themselves to their faith. Nabila shared that *kunya* gives identity; for a woman to function without the display of *kunya* would be to fail to model an important value within the Hausa culture.

Theological Analysis

Privacy and Proximity

Through my research, I came to understand more fully the Hausa practices of *matan kulle* and *kunya*. I now see the public and private spaces differently according to how the Hausa value distinct spaces. It is true that because of *matan kulle* women's sense of privacy does not silence who they are but rather strengthens their community in female friendship and being neighbours to one another. Koyama (1999) reminds us that theology is done in community (77). Hence, women segregated from men in domestic spaces can and do form a strong sense of connectedness with one another that honors God.

I recognized that being connected not only in proximity, but in relationship, creates intimacy. The Lord establishes sacred space for women to dwell in relationship and bears with them, offering His presence. There is illuminating light that reflects God's presence. Psalm 34:5 says, "Those who look to him for help will be radiant with joy; no shadow of shame will darken their faces" (NLT). Safiya and others shared how *kunya* is their reality, a covering and part of how they embody modesty. This sense of modesty stretches beyond physical dress but embodies who they are and how they carry themselves. The Hausa women are confident in the way they practice faith, and by the display of *kunya* that involves being modest, they seek to be morally upright women before God. Learning from the Hausa and understanding *matan kulle* provided a new way for me to honour them and the sacredness of their spaces. I developed relationships with them in their homes that were both intimate and

sacred as I sought to honour who they are in their dwellings.

Responding to Yaji

Jesus is aware of the process of *yaji* and the astonishing rate of divorce in Kano. The process of divorce does not elevate women nor their sense of dignity or honour. In contrast, Kraybill (2011) illustrates the ways Jesus restored the honour of many women he encountered throughout his life (204). Jesus' engagement with women in the Gospels, such as speaking with a promiscuous Samaritan woman in public, opposed all of the sociocultural norms of Jewish culture, such as men being forbidden to speak to women in public (John 4:1-26, 205). Jesus' response and acknowledgment of women, who were often socially marginalized, was direct and incredibly public. *Yaji* may be interpreted as a mistake and a risk to one's honour, but Jesus acknowledges women and renews their honour in a deeply personal way. The process of *yaji* would cease in Jesus' presence as he "penetrates social boxes [and] barricades of suspicion, mistrust, stigma, and hate" (Kraybill 2011, 212). Women who have faced stigmas because of going through *yaji* or being *bazawara* would all be embraced by Jesus.

Understanding Honour and Shame in Kano

The importance placed on the preservation of harmony in relationships reveals why Hausa women's communities are so tightly woven together. The moral code and display of *kunya* keeps women within acceptable bounds and upholds the value system that the Hausa community follow to preserve harmony. The Hausa women have shown me the dynamic role of honour and shame present in Kano that is not usually acknowledged or understood in the literature. *Kunya* is interpreted as gender-based honour and, rather than providing "hidden muted autonomy", identifies women's positions in complex relationships.

The intricate display of honour and shame is reflected in stories of women who described their cowives charming their husbands. A Hausa woman may endure a great deal of fear when her husband is under the spiritual force of a charm—for example, the deep fear their relationship may be at risk or the fear of simply not knowing the effects of the charm. However, when listening to women describe their experiences to me, I noticed they sought to persevere in their relationships with their husbands at the time.

They endured the changes of their husband's behaviour, and remained in their marriages for a period, because their deep longing for honour and acceptance could only be found in their marital status. This reflects how important honour is for a Hausa woman in her home, but also shows how related their honour is to their husband's (Malina and Neyrey 1991, 34, 44). Additionally, the process of *yaji* and becoming a *bazawara* confirms the importance of the marriage relationship in establishing women's honour or shame. A looming silence surrounds the dreaded "precarious position" of divorced women, and around the sense of shame that also would affect a woman's sense of living morally according to *kunya* (44). Confronting the inner works of honour and shame in relationships is *dole* (necessary).

Honour and shame in relationships and the moral code of *kunya* is part of being Hausa. A biblical understanding of the way Jesus restores women's honour relates closely to *zaurawa* (divorced women). The Scripture acknowledges many women in precarious positions who lived outside cultural norms, such as the Samaritan woman, previously discussed, whom Jesus personally acknowledges. Therefore, it is crucial that the Gospel transform relationships, touching the lives of divorced women to restore their honour. It is a complex and heavy burden women carry through the process of *yaji* or the weight of the stigma of being a *bazawara*. Thankfully, a place of belonging for divorced women and the development of deep intimate community can be found in being in relationship with Christ.

Implications for Christian Practice

Narratives are central to this process; they require us to operate in grace and humility to understand each story. We can do this by refraining from prejudicial ways of talking *about* the Hausa Muslim community; rather, we can talk with the Hausa *directly* to avoid false assumptions and exaggerated generalizations. Knibbe and Kupari explain this further in their "Theorizing Lived Religion." They write, "We must abandon pre-defined understandings of religion as a starting point of analysis in favor of an emphasis on the activities and interpretations of individuals" (2020, 159). Each Hausa woman engages in faith and community differently from the others; thus, rather than make assumptions about Hausa women overall, we must learn to engage each person through individualized questions and attentive listening. Koyam

(1999) reiterates the experience of encountering lived religion, emphasizing the following: “We must study [Islam], of course, if we wish to understand the [Muslim]. Our ultimate interest must lie, however, with understanding the [Muslim] not [Islam] (93).” We must see the *Imago Dei* in the Muslim in front of us. Otherwise, we are doing the Lord a disservice if we do not recognize that He is the Creator of our Muslim neighbours. Excluding certain groups from being seen as created in the image of God is grievous to the Holy Spirit, and ultimately, limits who God is (Genesis 1:26). We must refrain from denying our neighbours their sense of self by avoiding labelling people exclusively using religious categories.

The Confusion of Silence

The embodiment of *kunya* is displayed most often in silence known as *kara*. This is also true when a husband expects wives to endure heated words or hatred among his cowives, but says “*ki yi hakuri* (sorry)” expecting them to endure, words which I have heard from Hanatu. I have learned to listen within the spaces in which women dwell and now understand more about when, why, and how they want to be heard, and by whom. It is all too easy to misinterpret how women live and embody *kunya*, and it takes time to comprehend the complexity of their lives.

Following the way of Jesus means we as Christians must take a risk to become uncomfortable. For example, the woman bleeding for twelve years touched Jesus’ cloak, to which Jesus responded by saying, “Daughter, you took a risk of faith, and now you’re healed and whole” (Mark 5:21-34, The Message). This may mean facing persecution to embody the presence of Christ for our Hausa Muslim neighbours. To reinterpret the confusion of silence, and understand the roles of the women, we ought to be present and actually “move into their neighbourhoods” (John 1:14, The Message). A Hausa Christian shared this proverb: “*Ba ma ma’amila da wanda ba sa kallon gabas.*” It can be translated: “The Muslims don’t associate with those who don’t face East [the direction they face when doing their five daily prayers].” Therefore, many Muslims do not have relationships with those who do not practice Islam in Kano. Christians and Muslims have not interacted easily in Kano. Christians have endured incredible persecution over the decades and currently continue to face increasing discrimination because of their faith.

The Lord’s involvement with creation includes an understanding of an “affirmative and ordered response on the part of created man [and woman] to the creative, ordering work of God” (Niebuhr 1975, 192). This parallels Ortner’s plea that women should be cultural makers and be involved in participating in culture on equal terms with men. Both men and women can participate in culture while seeking the redemptive and transformative ordered work of God because He is engaged with both creation and culture. This means he has “entered into human culture that has never been without his ordering action” (Niebuhr 1975, 193). God is supremely aware of the cultural circumstances in Kano and His involvement in creation and culture must prompt Christians to engage their Muslim neighbours outside their comforts.

Jesus’ Way

Jesus’ said to the Pharisees, “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her” (John 8:3, 7 NIV) when he encountered the woman caught in adultery. Jesus ascribes honour to the woman and gives her a sense of belonging, despite her immoral act. In the same way, the numerous Hausa women of Kano can receive a foretaste of the honour Jesus ascribes when they experience it in interfaith relationships with their sisters. There is no “precarious position,” such as divorced women who are no longer connected to the honour of their husbands, as Jesus’ sees them (Malina and Neyrey 1991, 44). This parallels the experience of the woman caught in adultery. Jesus completely turns the tables and simply says, “Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin” (John 8:11 NIV).

Honour and Shame and the Christian Church

Understanding the role of *kunya* and the honour the Hausa bestow in their relationships will help the Nigerian church more fully identify the spiritual needs of the Hausa. Scripture is written from a lens that the Hausa can identify with, as both honour and shame play a role in the narrative. Muslim-Christian relationships will be strengthened as Christians comprehend how the Hausa relate with one another and see themselves. There is significant opportunity to share in community about the numerous ways Christ sees the Hausa and identifies their desire to live modestly, maintaining their virtuous character in a way that is both honourable and understood by God.

There is significant need for the Christian community in Kano to understand the relevance of building relationships with the Hausa in terms of the role of honour and shame. Jerome Neyrey (1998) in his work *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* paraphrases the Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew 5:3-20 in a way that was culturally relevant for the hearers of the time, and certainly is so in the present day in Kano. He says, “Honored *by God* are those who are shamed for being socially dispossessed and underprivileged, because (believe it or not!) all the honorable blessings of God actually belong to them” [emphasis his] (164-228). Jesus relates well to the experience of the Hausa and sides with them, especially the *bazawara* woman who are seeking to be accepted since they have lost their sense of honour. Jesus graciously extends honour and desires to bless them, knowing that they belong to Him.

Likewise, Neyrey (1998) continues to paraphrase how Jesus addresses the persecuted. He places additional emphasis on the weight of honour and shame that was relevant to the culture of the time. He writes, “Honored *by God* are you when people revile you, banish you from community, persecute you and slander your name by falsely uttering all kinds of evil, all on account of me. Amid this temporary shame, rejoice and be glad since the heavenly reward that vindicates your true worth is great” [emphasis his] (164-228). The scope of God’s love, grace, and restorative honour cover the vastly populated corners of Kano, including the Hausa women who deserve to hear and experience a fresh perspective on being in the world and to see a faith that turns everything upside down. They can then be invited to learn how Christ identifies with their experiences, in His self-emptying and taking on human flesh. I recognize the weight of God’s call on the persecuted to rejoice in the midst of violence and discrimination, but the Lord graciously promises to stay with us, to never leave nor forsake us, and that provides renewed hope (Hebrews 13:5). In the same way God honours those who are persecuted, so the persecuted may seek to honour those who are socially misunderstood and appear hidden.

Conclusion

Two years ago, I did not have a clear understanding of the various ways the Hausa display the masked emotion and complex moral code of *kunya*, related to modesty. The Hausa women have vulnerably shared their experiences and stories and have given me new

light to understand their lived space differently based on how they engage with others in community and family. These women have contributed their valuable perspectives on a topic that has not previously been well represented in the literature. The Hausa women have offered a variety of ways of understanding *matan kulle*, which influences how *kunya* is displayed in their relationships and engagement in community. The Hausa women who have shared with me during our numerous conversations, answered my questions, and told their stories have demonstrated the complex emotion and practice that is *kunya*. *Kunya* is a major part of maintaining honour in terms of what it means to be Hausa and of upholding the cultural expectations for modesty from childhood all the way to death. *Kunya* is a masked emotion, a display and moral code, that gives context to the intricate workings of honour and shame in community, marital relationships, and the changing practice of *matan kulle*.

There are many remaining questions about the experiences of the Hausa women, especially the vast and growing number of *zaurawa*. I deliberated on Barbara Callaway’s (1984) concept of “hidden muted autonomy” of the “ambiguous social polarisation—physically and legally subordinate and socially almost invisible [women].” She claimed “[the Hausa women] are also tenaciously self-determining, independent, and strong willed” (448). Callaway sees this “hidden muted autonomy” to be the needed “change in the social structure of this society” (449). I believe Callaway failed to see the Hausa women from the perspective of honour and shame, with their constant obligation to maintain the code and display of *kunya*, specifically the gender-based honour that is interpreted through the practice of *matan kulle* and the embodiment of *kunya*. She also missed the ascribed honour that comes from a women’s husband who offers her the physical and metaphorical space and security where she finds belonging. This does not mean women are confined or “muted.” Rather, the Hausa women reflect a deep sense of honour and obligation to respect their husbands and family.

Thus, the high rate of divorce in Kano challenges current social-cultural expectations of the desired honour that most often comes from a woman’s husband. I would say that change in these expectations has already begun to happen. Women are beginning to display autonomy in the midst of a culture that upholds family honour. This is reflected in Nabila’s description of the small number of exceptional women who are either not married or divorced and who are

seeking a new way of being in community. In a society that strongly values marriage, these exceptional women are striving to find a place in the public sphere and choosing not to marry. I am certainly eager to hear from this small but seemingly growing population to understand how they are navigating change amidst the expectations of *kunya*.

Still, the moral code and display of *kunya* will likely always be a high and distinguished part of being Hausa, and continue to give women value and respect, since, “*kunya da adon mace*,” meaning “*kunya* is like an adornment for a woman.” I especially hope the Christians in Kano honour this valued part of being Hausa and support those who have become a *bazawara* and may have lost their sense of adornment and honour. An important part of the response from the Nigerian church must be in understanding the transformative role of Jesus in relationships. In the same way Christ offered restored honour to the promiscuous Samaritan and did not condemn the adulterous women, surely He calls us to offer grace and truth to women in polygamous marriages, in multiple marriages, or who are *zaurawa*.

The Hausa women’s experience illuminates profound truths that are part of women’s everyday experience and that offer Christians in Kano a deeper understanding of ways to relate to them that honours their culture. I believe Nigerian Christians have much in common with the Hausa and will gain valuable insight from Scripture that changes the way they can imagine how Christ transforms culture.

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The Pentecostal Prosperity Message and Inter-Church Proselytism in Southeast Nigeria

Kanayo Nwadiolor and Benjamin C. Nwokocha

The rate at which Christians in southeast Nigeria migrate from one Christian denomination to another calls for scholarly investigation; this migration is noticeable from the main-line churches to the Pentecostal groups. This study was conceived to interrogate this proselytizing venture with the view to finding the causative factors behind the inter-church movement. The study employed qualitative research methods on primary and secondary sources of data collection. Findings show that the prosperity message of the Pentecostal movement is a major player in proselytism. The continuing rise of Pentecostal groups in southeast Nigeria and the unbridled desire of some Christians for health and material prosperity give rise to the inter-church movement. The study further discovered that some Pentecostal pastors take advantage of the economic hardships in southeast Nigeria, particularly since the Nigeria-Biafra war, to manipulate the people into believing that religion, especially Pentecostalism, has solutions to all human health and economic challenges. Worried that the practice is aggressively attacking the cherished Christian kerygmatic understanding of the Church, the study recommends some practical steps that could be undertaken to save Christians from this seeming “holy deceit” as well as to rescue the image of the universal Church from being associated with religious commercialization.

Introduction

The Christian presence in southeast Nigeria has not only been concerned with the propagation of the gospel, it has equally focused on the material welfare of the people with a “Bible and Plough” policy as promulgated by the leadership of the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.) Igbo mission (Thomas Fowell Buxton and Henry Venn). As such it appears that Christian missionary activities in the early period of missions in southeast Nigeria laid the foundation for the high quest for wealth in today’s church especially in the Pentecostal circle. Perhaps it was for this reason that Nmah (2008) argues that the undue pursuit of wealth, especially with Pentecostals, may have been occasioned by many factors, one of which was the caption, “For Glory, Gold and God” by the early Europeans to regions of sub-Saharan Africa.

Aside from the propagation of the gospel by early European missionaries in southeast Nigeria, the scramble was also for gold and markets—a quest intensified by the industrial revolution and supported by the mixed mercantilist and free-trade theories of the

period. A historical account by Dike (2012) sheds some light on what seems to be a missionary origin of materialism induced inter-church proselytism in southeast Nigeria as he reports that some basic amenities like schools, hospitals and job opportunities were given on the ground that one must be a member of a given church. Some Christians were denied health care for the reason that they refused to leave their church of baptism. Still others denounced their church of baptism as a condition for admitting their wards into some mission schools. It then appeared that being a member of a given church contributed to the enjoyment of a good life. In that case some churches that did not have the means to take care of the material needs of their members lost them to the ones that had better opportunities. This must have created a high level of insatiability amongst the Christian faithful and a background for the wanton inter-church proselytization that is being experienced today.

Today, the adoption of commercial strategies in winning converts has taken a different turn by some Pentecostal preachers who have used prosperity messages as tactics to draw members from their

churches of baptism, in most cases from main-line churches, to the Pentecostal circle, a practice that became widespread from the 1970s following the devastating effects of the Nigeria-Biafra war.

Southeast Nigeria was chosen for the study because it was the region that was most hit by the war. Given the devastation and despondency in the aftermath of the war, people tended to take up religious approaches to solving their socio-economic problems in reminiscence of their traditional way of employing religious mechanisms in addressing human existential challenges. Though the advent of Pentecostalism in southeast Nigeria predates the war, Pentecostal movements began to witness a great boom after the end of the war.

The term inter-church proselytism is employed in this study to denote the movement of people across Christian denominations. Akindele (2002) defines the term as a religious expression that involves the movement of people from one church to another in search of solutions to the existential problems of life. Inter-church migration when understood as proselytism is classified as a pejorative term by some church historians, by contrast with the word, evangelism. Moors (2007) has indicated that, used pejoratively, inter-church proselytism implies that in most cases the practice is promoted by a church's attempts at conversion by unjust means that violate the conscience of the human person, such as coercion or bribery. Udechukwu (2015) for his part defines the term more simply as the attempt to convert people from one Christian tradition to another. Others who use the term in this way generally view the practice as illegitimate and in contrast to evangelism, which is converting non-Christians to Christianity. However, Akindele (2012)'s position appears to be the most suitable to the arguments of this study because of the simplicity of his definition of inter-church proselytism as a situation whereby one changes his/her church membership to another church denomination.

The prosperity gospel is an umbrella term for a group of ideas—popular among Pentecostal preachers in Nigeria—that “if you give your money to God, God will bless you with more money.” Pentecostal preachers quote such scriptures as Acts 20:35, where it is written, “it is more blessed to give than to receive”. According to Smith (2021), over the past few decades in Nigeria, many millions of people have joined Pentecostal churches, and the most popular brand in recent years is known as the ‘prosperity gospel’. But while these hugely popular churches promise

economic as well as spiritual rewards, their prosperity message is a source of worry to the present researchers. Rotimi, Nwadiolor and Ugwuja (2016) talk of the prosperity gospel as one of the most controversial themes in today's Christianity. For them, it is the gospel or message, popular among Pentecostals, that advocates financial blessings, good health, and wealth as the unmistakable plan, program, and desire of God for all. David O. Oyedepo, one of the pioneer preachers of the prosperity message in Nigeria avers that God takes pleasure in the prosperity of His people since no father is happy to see his children in lack. Rotimi, Nwadiolor and Ugwuja have quoted Oyedepo thus:

Why then do you think that your lack excites God? Which father is excited to see his children begging all around? Have you ever seen somebody giving testimony saying, “I thank God, two of my children are beggars?” Your children's children will never beg. I want you to know that the prosperity God has planned for you has nothing to do with your profession, your career or your family background. (2016, 12).

Prosperity preachers, therefore, proclaim that it is the will of God that people should prosper, and giving to the church is sometimes a precondition for this blessing. How far this message has helped to combat poverty in Nigeria remains an unanswered question.

In south-eastern Nigeria, Pentecostal Christianity is firmly established and still growing. New churches seem to spring up nearly every day. Sunday services overflow and people attend all manner of additional prayer meetings and Bible studies. Television and radio stations broadcast extensive Pentecostal programming. Billboards and banners everywhere announce evangelical crusades, deliverances, miracle-working and opportunities to participate in spiritual warfare against the devil. Prosperity churches promise the faithful not only spiritual salvation but also improved social and economic circumstances.

At the same time that these churches are popular, there is the spectre of corruption especially for non-members. This concern is fuelled by media accounts of church scandals, rumours of church leaders' extreme wealth and the perception that corrupt elites join these churches in an attempt to legitimize their ill-gotten riches through religious performance. Reflecting this unease is a common joke in south-eastern Nigeria. It suggests that for many unemployed

graduates their best prospect for a lucrative future would be to found a church. But while some Nigerians view prosperity churches as profit-making enterprises for preachers and religious cover for elites' illicit wealth, members of these churches certainly do not see things this way. Instead, they commonly interpret the riches that accrue to church founders, pastors and successful fellow congregants as evidence of God's blessing. Further, they see their own faith as yielding many benefits, even when they are not visibly prosperous in monetary terms (Smith, 2021).

Southeast Nigeria at a Glance

Southeast Nigeria is one of six geopolitical zones in the country. It consists of five states which include: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. The region is otherwise known as "Igboland" and is regarded as the third most populous ethnic group in the country. It borders with Cameroon to the east and the Atlantic Ocean to the south. The people's dominant language is Igbo, although most of the people in the region speak English as a second language. Geographically, the region is divided by the lower Niger River into two unequal sections—an eastern and western section. The major religion of the people is Christianity, while a handful of the people practice African Traditional Religions. However, given the vastness of the area under study, the study focused on Anambra state. Meanwhile, relevant information was taken from other states of the southeast to provide a holistic and an in-depth study. Anambra was preferred because of its location which is considered the cradle of Christianity in Igboland.

The Coming of the Christian Missionaries to Igboland and the Background to Religious Commercialization

Historically, Christianity came and settled in southeast Nigeria in the middle of the 19th century. Ozigbo (1999) writes that Christianity was first preached in Igboland in 1841 at Aboh during the first Niger expedition. The religion was, however, established at Onitsha in 1857. With Rev. Ajayi Crowther and other C.M.S. missionaries, they established their first mission station at Onitsha which later became the bridge-head through which Christianity gained entry into vast areas of southeast Nigeria. The second efforts to Christianize Igboland were by the Roman Catholic Holy Ghost Fathers from

France in 1885 (Anyancho 2008). The Methodist Mission came into the Oron part of Nigeria in 1893 and had spread to Igboland in 1910 through Ibibioland. The Qua Iboe Mission also came into Igboland in 1917 to help in the Christianization of that area (Ozigbo 1999). Furthermore, beginning in the 1920s and 1930s, a number of Christian sects, mostly from the United States of America and Britain, came to Igboland. Some of these sects were: The Salvation Army, Christ Apostolic Church, Faith Tabernacle, Seventh Day Adventist and Jehovah Witness. From the 1930s to the 1960s many of the New Religious Movements also came into existence (Ozigbo 2010). The New Religious Movements are otherwise known as Indigenous churches.

Amongst the indigenous churches are some groups which later adopted the Pentecostalism that originated in Azusa Street, U.S.A. They are called "Pentecostals" due to their belief in and testimony to the second experience of the Holy Spirit accompanied and characterized by speaking in tongues (Milne 1993). The adherents share a common belief in the possibility of receiving the same experience and gifts as did the first Christians on the day of Pentecost. However, this multiplicity of Christian religious groups and traditions is regarded as one of the major reasons for the rise of the practice of moving from church to church in the Igbo region. Each of these churches and their founders claimed divine origin and superiority over one another. This seems to have promoted a sense of competitiveness, confusion and dissatisfaction among Christians in the area. This sense of dissatisfaction, competitiveness and confusion are the basis for continued inter-church proselytism.

In southeast Nigeria, Christianity is thriving in all shapes and sizes but it seems that Pentecostalism prospers the most, and the number of Pentecostals has continued to rise on a daily basis. This is clear from the fact that in southeast Nigeria, eight churches out of ten in a street are Pentecostal. This rise in the number of Pentecostal worshippers could be attributed to their prosperity gospel. In recent years, Pentecostalism has become a viable entrepreneurial venture as (mostly) young men, and in some cases young women, start churches to offer spiritual solutions to poverty, sickness, business failures, impotence, barrenness and premature deaths, while the founders of such churches become very wealthy within the few months in which they are able to gather a sizeable congregation. Unfortunately in present-day Igboland, the present researchers fear that many Pentecostal churches have

become instruments of exploitation and manipulation of people for economic gain.

This can be linked to what Kalu (2008) describes as the market theory where he traces the commercialization of the gospel to the attitudes of Africans to pioneer Europeans who came to Africa, along with some factors that attracted the indigenous people to the message of the Christian missionaries. Apparently, the 3Cs strategy of Christianity, Commerce, and Civilization adopted by the early missionaries helped to expand the frontiers of Christianity in Igboland, and Nigeria in general, but that made it seem as if those who embraced Christianity did so for monetary and material reasons. For Okeke (2006), Thomas Buxton's advocacy that the missionaries should take the plough and the Bible into the interior while they preach the gospel was misunderstood to mean that the church is an ultimate provider of wealth.

Isichei (1971) earlier noted that Africa had known the Europeans as people with immense power, wisdom, and wealth. In commercial wares brought by the Europeans, in their bearing and comportment, there was every sign of wealth, and this wealth Africans were already having a taste of in the gifts brought by the European explorers. In that way, Africans seem to have followed Christianity for economic and material benefits. The present researchers believe that this is a strong background factor in the commercialization of the gospel in Nigeria now as some people started seeing Christianity or the Church as a place one could turn to for material benefits. The Pentecostals don't pour out gifts to members. In fact, in most cases, it the members who give gifts to "God" through the pastors. Yet they do that because they have been made to believe that if you give to "God" through his "representative" on earth, God will double your blessings. Kalu (2008) argues that the "Bible and Plough" approach interfered in the spiritual formation of the African people. In Eastern Nigeria for example, the British missionaries apparently went as far as guaranteeing economic provisions to the early converts. In some other places, there were stiff competitions and monopolies on the provision of some social services.

In the New Calabar (Elem Kalabari) in the Niger Delta, for example, Chief Amarchree invited the Church Missionary Society in 1875. But in 1885 they were made to withdraw to Okrika because the supposed financial and infrastructural aid for their invitation was not provided. They had been invited

because they believed that the presence of the white men on the western part of the river paid economic dividends, but when the expected results were not forthcoming they were forced to withdraw. Similar circumstances also led to the closure of the missions in Brass, Quidah and Porto Novo (Tasie 1978).

The Nigeria-Biafra War and the Pentecostal Prosperity Message in Southeast Nigeria

Pentecostalism began in southeast Nigeria during the early twentieth century as a renewal movement from the prominent mission founded churches. From 1910, Pentecostalism began to flourish in the region due to the efforts of an Anglican deacon who launched an indigenous prophetic movement that later became the Christ Army Church. According to Nwadiolor (2019), the impetus for introducing early forms of Pentecostalism in Igboland was provided by the Prophet-Evangelist Garrick Sokari Braide. He was an Ijaw man who had to learn the Anglican Church Catechism in the Igbo language, the then official language of the Niger Delta Pastorate.

At first, the growth of Pentecostalism was in part an effort to break free from Western missionary control. However, following an influenza epidemic in 1918, revivals flared up in the mission churches resulting in the expansion of spirit-filled movements known by the Yoruba as Aladura (praying people). One of the early Aladura churches included the Church of the Lord founded in 1930. Around 1918, an Anglican form of prayer group known as the Precious Stone (Diamond Society) was formed to heal influenza victims. The group later left the Anglican Church in the early 1920s and affiliated with Faith Tabernacle, a church that is based in Philadelphia (Anderson 2001). The Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), also one of the earliest Pentecostal churches in southeast Nigeria, laid the foundation for charismatic in the present Igboland and they have prospered based on the marvels, material blessings, and beliefs that are rooted in the African worldview.

Pentecostalism in Igboland began to take a commercial form soon after the Niger-Biafra war. Nwadiolor (2019) notes that the war demystified the already bifurcated traditional religion to such a state of utter disillusionment that, in consequence, many Igbo people became disillusioned with the traditional religious practices and potency. There came a new desire for alternative religious affiliation. The praying houses that began to proliferate in Igboland in the

wake of the war became an alternative to Igbo traditional religious spirituality.

Burgess (2008) says that shortly after the end of the civil war in 1970, many Igbo charismatic leaders began to found new religious movements with Pentecostal persuasions. The Igbo believed in a spirit world that has direct contact with and control over the physical world. This accounts for why the Igbo would do all things possible to entreat the spiritual beings, either to curry their favour or to avoid their punishment. Mission Christianity played down such belief and dismissed it as mere superstition, thereby creating a religious vacuum in the Igbo spiritual world. These praying houses with their characteristic visions, prophecies, dreams and ecstatic worship appealed to the Igbo religious yearnings after the war, thereby boosting the popularity of Pentecostal movements. Kaing (cited by Inyama) puts it this way:

Dreams, visions and prophecy all relate to the desire for meaningful and personal communication with God. Tongues are considered to be a visible sign that God is present and has given the Holy Spirit to an individual. Healing indicates that God's power is available. Signs and wonders are sought not for their own sake, but for their ability to transform the lives of Christians and to draw unbelievers to Jesus Christ. (Inyama 2007, 89)

So in their efforts to implore divine intervention to provide solutions to their desperate situation, the Igbo resorted to visiting prayer houses and healing homes. The popularity of these prayer houses rested on their close affinity to Igbo traditional piety, their pragmatic approach to religion, and their promises of protection and security. Many people, also in need, took to opening prayer houses, not for sincere religious/social welfare services to the people but as a way of alleviating their own problems, since people would contribute money to the prayer houses. Burgess (2008) says that in southeast Nigeria where the population is comparatively dense, and which was reeling from mass poverty and political instability particularly in the 1970s, the people underwent a Pentecostal revolution. Many young entrepreneurs started Pentecostal churches and sold the promises of health and wealth to the poor and afflicted. The period was characterized by severe economic hardship for the Igbo society, and Pentecostalism presented the gospel as an answer to financial hardship caused by economic decline. The prosperity teaching which links faith with the

expectation of material wealth and success contributed to the Pentecostal appeal especially among young people concerned with success and progress. Thus, the Pentecostal emphasis on the Bible, innovative worship style, community ethos, and proclamation of a holistic gospel appealed to the Igbo people who were faced with disintegrating social and economic situations.

Following the multiplication of these Pentecostal churches in southeast Nigeria, the idea of religious means of making wealth became a veritable means for winning converts. The people who seek a spiritual means of making wealth turn to the prosperity preachers for succor. The preachers claim they will transform the lives of their members financially, and so attract converts. In rural and urban areas, they create prayer houses to meet the demands of their clients for prosperity, health and success in their endeavours. According to Ndiokwere (1994), the Pentecostal churches, through prayers and miracles, would promise to meet their members' demands for prosperity, health and success in their life endeavours. In a situation where a large percentage of the people were poor, such assurances for wealth and economic wellbeing will seem to herald a new day for millions of the Igbo Christians.

Following this development, then, the Pentecostal movement, in a bid to gather as many people as possible, has adulterated and commercialized the word of God to attract those that are desperate for wealth, healing and deliverance without any serious transformation in their lives. Interestingly, it appears that this health and wealth theology has been connected with Pentecostalism from its very beginning. Its roots can be traced to a nineteenth century American tradition spearheaded by Waldo Emerson and William James. From the early 20th century in the Azusa Street of the USA, the faithful were inspired by a relationship between thoughts and experiences. With evangelists like Essek William Kenyon at the centre, the prosperity theology was developed. Years on, the prosperity gospel became a globalized phenomenon, commercialized by the likes of Kenneth Hagin and Kenneth Copeland (Smith 2021). Gradually, the tradition gained ground in Nigeria through Archbishop Benson Idahosa before it gained a wider publicity amongst the Nigerian Pentecostal preachers. It later influenced other Christian movements, including the mainstream churches and the New Religious Movements.

Pentecostal Prosperity Theology and Inter-church Proselytism in Southeast Nigeria

Prosperity theology is a form of Christian teaching that emphasizes God's will for the prosperity of all believers, to be attained through faith, devotion, tithing, and positive confessions. In Nigeria, it was spearheaded by the likes of Benson Idahosa in the 1970s. Today, its main proponent is Bishop David O. Oyedepo, one of the most popular pastors in Nigeria. He has been known to be vocal on the church's position on tithing and was reported in one of his messages to have said, "if you are not a tither, you will end up a beggar." In his church, as in other new generation churches, tithing is a core doctrine and a reasonable number of the congregation pays 10% of their monthly income as tithe.

Prosperity preachers in the context of Pentecostalism emphasize that giving unto God is the first step towards unlocking one's divine destiny. The message is that when one gives, God will attend to the person's material and spiritual needs. Across the spectrum of Pentecostalism in Igboland, this theology is sacrosanct for its followers. The wealth and get-rich-quick syndrome is very much embedded in the prosperity gospel which has become synonymous with Pentecostalism. The uncontrolled quests for the conversion of Christians from the mission founded churches by the Pentecostals through the banner of materialism can be argued to be the major reason for inter-church proselytism in southeast Nigeria. So it can be argued that the rise and steady march of the Christians from the main stream churches into Pentecostal movements is most often induced by what the converts have been made to believe they would gain in the way of healings, miracles and prosperity rather than by a selfless quest to worship God "better".

Above all, the recent economic quagmire in Nigeria has made many Christians migrate from church to church in search of relief from the socio-economic miseries of their existence. Following the decline of the oil boom in Nigeria, people turned to the church for relief. This is particularly so because an average Igbo person believes that to get answers or solutions to existential problems religious people need charismatic persons to interpret the divine mind.

A few people the researchers interviewed provided reasons why people change their churches. One of our informants who migrated from the Catholic Church to the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Awka, Anambra State, itemized his reasons as follows: lack of

satisfaction with the method of worship, search for greater spiritual solutions to socio-economic challenges, and insufficient pastoral care. Another informant who migrated from the Anglican Church to the Assemblies of God Church in Onitsha, Anambra State, maintained that he left because there was too much levy or contribution required in his former Anglican church without corresponding spiritual solutions to members' everyday life challenges. Another two people we interviewed both insisted that it was because of the boring homily/worship and lack of prophetic visions that they left their Methodist church of baptism to go to David Oyedepo's Living Faith Church (Winners Chapel). E. Nwokike stated that she migrated from the Anglican Church to Mountain of Holy Ghost in Aba, Abia State in search of pregnancy. O. Igboanugo said that it was a friend who introduced him to Christ Embassy where it is believed that absolute faith in God manifested in seed sowing could transform his dwindling business and fortune. Based on these responses, it appears that boring worship, lack of pastoral care, and pressure for contributions along with the quest for miracles and spiritual solutions to everyday life challenges are push-pull factors in inter-church migration in this region.

There is also an inspirational quality surrounding the prosperity gospel that makes it so attractive. These churches are attended by people from across various social classes, and for the less privileged, watching the wealthier believers testify and attribute their successes to their adherence to the prosperity gospel makes it worth adopting. For those employed by mega churches—pastors, drivers, teachers, technicians, musicians, amongst others, this theology has become an important source of livelihood. Inter-church movement now seems acceptable because of the inter-mix of religion and everyday life among the Igbo (seeing religion as a problem solving activity). Since they scarcely get solutions to these practical life challenging situations from the mission established churches they migrate to Pentecostal movements.

Prosperity in Christian Teaching and Living

Although we have been expressing concern about the prosperity gospel, it has to be noted here that prosperity is good and it is an aspect of Christian teaching and living. Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. He

multiplied bread and fish, and turned water to wine in order to address the material needs of those who came around him. The Bible further affirms the relevance of prosperity in some passages. But the Pentecostals seem to believe that prosperity is the full proof of the calling of Christians which has been enacted in both the Old and the New Testament scriptures.

In Deuteronomy 8:18, for instance, it is written that, “thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is He that giveth thee power to get wealth that He may establish His covenant which He swore unto thy fathers, as it is this day.” Isaiah 60:5 corroborates thus: “Then you shall see and become radiant, and your heart shall swell with joy; because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the Gentiles shall come to you.” This is further declared in the New Testament: “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9). In John 1:2 it is written: “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.” However, the word “prosper” in the context used by John in the scripture above means to excel. Consequently, a Christian is to do well in the totality of their being—spirit, soul, and body. So, the above promise is neither to be understood solely in terms of money, riches and other material wealth and earthly possessions, nor an invitation to freelance evangelization or commercial interpretation of the scripture in order to reconvert those already converted to other Christian denominations. It is simply indicating God’s intent for the totality of the well-being of the Christian, materially and spiritually.

Regrettably, in what seems to be a desperate bid to circumvent the biblical guidelines of attaining sustainable wealth which is anchored on dutifulness, some Pentecostal leaders appear to have adopted a contextual meaning of “prosper” that suits a narrative of a Christian of affluence and wealth with a capacity to possess anything that money can buy. This narrative has been attributed to the Holy Spirit who they believe is present in their midst. “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions” (Joel 2:28). Members are persuaded by the prosperity message in what in Pentecostal parlance is known as testimonies of those whom the Lord has blessed with wealth and other material possessions. This teaching, besides the fact that it has been conjured

to fit into the self-serving purposes of the leaders of such Pentecostal assemblies, seems to go against the initial ethos of the Pentecostal movement which is anchored on a personal encounter with God through Jesus and marked with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The Bible makes no mistake in saying that love, joy, peace, patience, meekness, kindness, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23) are the fruit of the Spirit, and not necessarily the wealth which some Pentecostal leaders seem to be propagating. The Pentecostal Christian therefore should firstly be marked by the fruits of the Holy Spirit. “Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit” (Matthew 7:16-17). If it then pleases God to add wealth and material possession to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, then it should be understood as an extraordinary grace.

Implications of Inter-church Proselytism on the Integrity of the Universal Church

The wanton and desperate pursuit of wealth and its consequent prosperity preaching by some Pentecostal preachers has given rise to scandalous and misleading insinuations against one another in a bid to remain more popular in the system. Furthermore some of the messages delivered by these preachers to retain members who are desperate for money have created an atmosphere of tension and mistrust amongst members of various denominations thereby increasing the rate of migration from one church to the other as a result of dissatisfaction. Many followers of these prosperity preachers continue to believe that wealth and other material possessions are the only way to demonstrate God’s love for His people, while the preachers emphasize the importance of sowing of seeds with the biblical injunction in Malachi 3:10 as support.

It is a matter of concern to the present researchers that more of these Pentecostal prosperity preaching movements are springing up on a daily basis across the length and breadth of southeast Nigeria. According to data from the Pew Research Centre Database 2003 (cited by Burges 2008), Christians in Nigeria in the 1990s, primarily attended mainstream churches. But a higher percentage of the Christian population in Nigeria today belongs to the Pentecostals and other independent religious movements. The implication of this development is that these new movements are almost equal to the number of the entire Protestant

churches put together. Apparently, the impressive growth of the Pentecostal and the new generation churches founded mostly in the 2000s has brought about a huge decline of the mission founded churches (Achunike 2004). This is largely because the Pentecostal churches have had a field day in reconverting the dissatisfied members of the mission founded churches; even some of those who still retain their membership in the mission founded churches may have done so for socio-political and socio-cultural reasons. More so, it can be seen that the quest for wealth and material possessions are strong indications for this high rate of Pentecostal growth and development. By aligning the growth and development of these movements, the prosperity gospel could be said to have, in many ways, fostered the proliferations of Pentecostal churches. Detailed investigations have also proven that about 57% of the people who are not satisfied with their present church denomination complain that these mission founded churches lay less emphasis on prosperity (Burgess 2008). It is therefore unlikely that the popularity of prosperity gospel will wane anytime soon.

More worrisome is the fact that some church ministers and pastors within the mainline churches have tried to adjust the established Christian standards in order to stop their members from leaving. Some of these measures have included relaxing traditional and orthodox beliefs to accommodate the new theology and method of worship where prosperity, signs and wonders are the order of the day. This demonstrates how serious the matter has become. Yet, the idea of relaxing orthodox beliefs and embracing the new way with a new theology of miracle and luck instead of hard work and honesty has, instead of solving the problem, created more confusions and mistrusts amongst the adherents of the mainline churches.

Some of the charismatic groups created by mainline churches to help curb this menace, though they could be said to be spiritual arms of the mainline churches, yet in some cases end up either forming their own distinct churches or attacking the ecclesiastical structure of their parent churches. For example, the Evangelical Fellowship in Anglican Communion (EFAC), created by the Anglican church to help curtail this practice has not really achieved the target, but instead created room for more migrations because they disagree with the church on certain theological and liturgical issues. The Catholic Charismatic Renewal, which was created by the Catholic Church for the same purpose of retaining the dissatisfied

Catholics and preventing them from migrating to other churches, has equally not achieved the objective.

Furthermore, the situation has made the church to look like a problem solving institution where one attends based on certain benefits or inducements and if he/she fails to get what is expected from a given church can always migrate to another church with supposed greater opportunities. All of this is a very big challenge to the integrity of Christianity in Igboland because it now appears as though the church is emulating the traditional worshippers who replace or abandon their deities once they hear of a more powerful one. This, as a matter of fact, has made it difficult to differentiate between Christians and non-Christians since the way Igbo traditionalists move from shrine to shrine in search of solutions to existential problems is almost the same as the way these proselytizing Christians move from church to church in search of miracles.

Thus, there have been opportunities for freelance evangelizers to resort to commercializing the church as a business enterprise. In some extreme cases these freelancers have gone as far as employing diabolical powers as a means of retaining and maintaining their large number of followers. To support this claim, A. Igbokwe reported a case of a popular man of God, known as the “miracle pastor,” who was caught burying charms in someone else’s house. The name of the pastor was Prophet Paul Abam from Umuida, Enugu Ezike Local Government of Enugu state. If it had not been that some villagers had caught him in the act and raised the alarm before he was apprehended and paraded round the village, he might have convinced the owner of the building that family cleansing was needed to remove some charms and in that way might have increased the size of his congregation. There was also the case of one Onyebuchi Okocha, popularly known as Onye Eze Jesus who was arrested for indecent religious activities. The said Onyebuchi Okocha, who was the founder of Children of Light Anointing Ministries of Nkpor, in Idemili North Local Government Area of Anambra State, was arrested on the 27th of January, 2021 by Anambra State Government following his suspected evil activities in the name of church. The actual reason for his arrest was that he produced videos in which he not only claims to change the economic status of his adherents by magical means, but also throws a lot of Nigeria’s currency notes into the river and compels his adult followers, both male and female, to bath naked in the river, all the while recording them on video which he later distributed

through the internet and other means. What is the motive behind the distribution of the video clips of his magical disposition if not to attract the gullible and desperate ones into his fold?

For this reason, one could argue that certain elements of the church have almost lost the purpose of Christ in establishing the church on earth. Christ's mandate is not to reconvert already converted Christians but to convert the sinners and the lost people. But, it appears that the focus of some of the churches in Nigeria today has shifted to increasing the size of one's denomination against the others.

Response to Prosperity Induced Inter-church Proselytism in Southeast Nigeria

Renewal of the Church's Mission Mandate

Having analyzed some of the causative factors for inter-church proselytism in southeast Nigeria and its implications for Christianity itself, the first step forward should be to refer to the mission requirement of the church; the missionary mandate given by Christ Himself. When he finished His earthly ministry, Jesus sent out His apostles to continue his ministry. He gave them charge to go to the nations and make them his disciples and baptize them in the name of the Holy Trinity. The apostles in obedience to the command of their master preached the gospel to all they encountered. The mission mandate of the church is ultimately grounded in the eternal love of the Most Holy Trinity. This implies that the church on earth is by nature one. The ultimate purpose of the church therefore is none other than to make all people share in the communion between the Father and the Son in their Spirit of Love. It is from God's love for all people that the church in every age receives both the obligation and vigour of its missionary dynamism.

However, through this research it can be seen that there is a huge discrepancy between the message of the gospel and the human weakness of those to whom the gospel has been entrusted. Watt insists that it is only by taking the narrow way of the cross that God can extend Christ's reign, thus, "for just as Christ carried out the work of redemption in poverty and oppression, so the church is called to follow the same path if she is to effectively communicate the fruits of salvation to men" (2015, 350). Watt further insists that, "the church travels the same journey as all humanity and shares the same earthly lot with the world, she is to be leaven and, as it were, the soul of human society in its renewal by

Christ and transformation into the family of God" (p.351).

Developing a Strong Prayer Life

Prayer and a strong faith in God are unquestionably the best responses to all life situations, including when they have gotten beyond human control. One needs no argument to prove that prayer is the universal human reaction to any crises or desperate situations. Prayer helps to sharpen one's faith in God, and living faith largely depends on a life of prayer. If a person does not open up to God in prayer, he/she will not be able to develop a strong and vigorous faith. Prayer in the time of trouble is the best approach to difficult and hard times. A Christian can be exposed to both hard and easy times. Praying for only wealth and material prosperity may not actually be the perfect will of God (Bounds 1984). In a nutshell, it could be said that the Christian God does not encourage laziness, but responds to the needs and aspirations of his creatures that trust in him. So it is good for Christians to be properly guided in their quest for prosperity or wealth acquisition.

Everybody goes through stress and anxiety (worry) at one time or the other, even Jesus did. On one occasion, he had to pray for hours to enable him to overcome his challenges (Mathew 14:23, Luke 6:12). That means that the prayer of a Christian must not be based only on wealth, comfort and earthly possessions, since Jesus never prayed for riches nor did his disciples. On the night before his death, his distress grew so deep that he had to pray earnestly to God for succour. Jesus' reaction to his personal challenges is what this study suggests is the best form of approach to life's uncertainties. Persevering in prayer therefore is the best form of approach to existential issues, not running helter-skelter from one church to the other.

Expanding Employment Opportunities

One of the reasons why Igbo Christians vehemently pursue wealth is unemployment. Due to the high rate of unemployment in the country, the people see the church as the next available option. Rural-urban migration, especially of young people, has increased the rate of unemployment among city dwellers. Because religious matters are taken seriously among the Igbo, and because the Igbo are often disposed to parting with money especially when they believe the order is coming from God through his representatives,

church business seems to be an easy way to find an income. Furthermore, unemployment has forced many people, especially the youth, to either found or join churches that will guarantee their financial freedom. This financial freedom comes when the newly founded churches begin to gain large congregations especially with members who are willing to donate to the churches in desperation to attract blessings from God, most especially school drop outs and illiterate men and women who could be said to be the most gullible in the society.

Conclusion

Bearing in mind the high levels of poverty in Nigeria and the considerable wealth of prosperity preachers, one can establish the nexus between the prosperity gospel and poverty, as studies have shown that poor individuals are more likely to be drawn to the prosperity gospel than wealthy ones. Against this backdrop, it is easy to understand why the prosperity gospel has spread, offering people in hardship a means of controlling their seemingly uncontrollable situations. It promises health and wealth for a believer who abides by its tenets. For those living in poverty, this message of hope can be very powerful and indeed comforting. It is also worth recognizing that many Nigerians find fulfilment in the prosperity gospel. Still centred on a relationship with God, it provides spiritual satisfaction along with the positive message of hopefulness in difficult situations.

It has to be noted here that there is nothing intrinsically wrong with Christians turning to God for material prosperity and good health, especially in situations where the people lack other practical approaches to solving these existential challenges. The message of Christ is holistic in that it offers salvation of both the soul and body. His earthly ministry was replete with miracles of healing and material provision, as were the ministries of His apostles. The synoptic gospels confirm that Jesus healed the sick and multiplied food items for the satisfaction of His followers. Equally, He cursed a tree for not producing fruit for people to eat and be satisfied. However, the problem of the prosperity gospel is a multi-dimensional one. It is only embarrassing to the universal church and a disservice to the message of Christ to insinuate that God only answers prayers in designated church denominations. Most worrisome is the fact that the practice is aggressively attacking the cherished Christian kerymatic understanding of the

church which is outlined in accordance with the standard and practices of the primitive church. It is in defiance of the pattern of the church as recorded and transmitted in both the scriptures and the early Christian traditions. Christianity as a religion is a belief in Christ. It is not solely an avenue for the satisfaction and attainment of our expressed needs; neither is it a platform for religious competitions, signs and wonders as a means of migrating members from one denomination to the other. Rather it is a place where spiritual and material assistance should be rendered to all and sundry irrespective of one's denominational affiliation. Jesus never performed his miracles under religious considerations; rather He extended his help to all who sought Him. He therefore commands His disciples to render their spiritual services free of charge/without conditions, because they were given the power freely.

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NEWS & OPINIONS

Pain-free Songs in the Evangelical Approach to Suffering

Edwin Roy Zehner

Text

The contemporary worship music that since the 1970s has enjoyed increasing popularity in evangelical congregations around the world almost entirely lacks direct expressions of pain and suffering. Yet the worship styles employing this music are perceived by many evangelicals to be part of the church's effective response to their personal pain, and these styles and songs have been part of the church's effective evangelistic appeal even in areas where, to many Americans' thinking, pain and suffering are a regular way of life. They merit attention not only for this reason but also because they reflect and influence the mindset that many American missionaries take to the field.

These styles express a re-emergence of musical creativity after several decades of relative quiet. As you may know, at the turn of the twentieth century theologically conservative Christians in North America essentially stopped writing popular worship music, beginning to do so again only some 60 to 70 years later. This is evident in almost any church hymnal's listing of the dates the lyrics and tunes were composed. Most evangelical churches' hymnals contain a large number of songs from the middle and late nineteenth century, and then almost nothing from the early decades of the twentieth century.¹ The re-emergence of popular sacred song-writing came from an unexpected source, the out-pouring of creativity sparked by the confluence of rock-and-roll and protest music in the 1950s, 1960s, and after. Initially vilified by evangelicals as the work of the devil, the new music turned out to provide the dominant new idiom for expressing the spiritual

preoccupations of evangelicals as the world moved into the twenty-first century.

This efflorescence is found not only in the music composed in explicitly contemporary styles; even relatively traditional-sounding worship music has found new expressions. John D. Witvliet has observed that "more hymns in traditional forms have perhaps been written in the last thirty years than in any period except during Charles Wesley's lifetime" (2004, 164). Yet it is the style that is commonly labeled "contemporary" that I want to focus on here. This is the style that, in lieu of hymnbooks, employs so-called "praise choruses" written, typed, or downloaded for overhead projection and accompanied by amplified guitars, keyboards, and percussion, or as much as of the three as can be assembled, sometimes supplemented by additional instruments.

Today, a significant and still growing number of Christians in North America and around the world worship in these idioms. And what I want to note is that it was not just the musical settings and presentation styles that changed with the times. There have also been changes in the preoccupations of the lyrics.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the musical handling of pain and suffering. Expressions of pain, and the notion that additional pain might be expected in the future, were fairly directly expressed in hymns from the nineteenth century. In the new music, by contrast, these expressions are almost entirely absent, being expressed obliquely, if at all.

Consider, for example, "My burdens at last I'll lay down" in *The Old Rugged Cross* or the reference to "many dangers, toils, and strife" in *Amazing Grace*. Consider also the beleaguered imagery of *A Mighty*

¹ There are, of course, some well-known exceptions, such as *Oh, the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus* and *How Great Thou Art*. But the volume of musical production, and the rate of adoption of new pieces in worship settings, was not as great as it has been more recently.

Fortress Is Our God, the violent imagery of *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, and especially the angst of the Negro spirituals that have been borrowed into the liturgical language of white churches (*Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child*; *Tell Ol' Pharaoh to Let My People Go*). To take just one of the latter songs at random, in the Negro spiritual *I Want Jesus to Walk With Me* there are references to “trials,” to a time “When my heart is almost breaking,” and references to “When I’m in trouble” and “When my head is bowed in sorrow.”²

The contrast is even more apparent if we consider the expressions of pain in the pages of scripture. They are readily available in most of the Psalms (e.g., Psalms 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and many more), much of the prophets, the books of Ecclesiastes and Lamentations, and of course in the voices of the martyrs beneath the altar in Revelation 6:10 (“How long, Sovereign Lord . . . until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?”). Consider these examples of ongoing angst:

How long, LORD God Almighty,
will your anger smolder
against the prayers of your people?
You have fed them with the bread of tears;
you have made them drink tears by the bowlful.
You have made us an object of derision to our
neighbors, and our enemies mock us.
(Psalms 80:4-6)³

Save me, O God,
for the waters have come up to my neck.
I sink in the miry depths,
where there is no foothold.
I have come into the deep waters;
the floods engulf me.
I am worn out calling for help;
my throat is parched.
My eyes fail,
looking for my God.
(Psalms 69:1-3)

Oh, that my head were a spring of water
and my eyes a fountain of tears!
I would weep day and night
for the slain of my people.
(Jeremiah 9:1)

And, of course, the Apostle Paul expresses the pain of his personal sufferings in the following passage in Romans:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?
Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine
or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;
We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”
(Romans 8:35-36, quoting Psalms 44:22)

By contrast, in the songs that have made the top 25 lists compiled by the CCLI (Christian Copyright Licensing International) from 1989 to 2004, the expression of suffering is largely replaced by the expectation of victory, by talk of the bliss of the presence of God, and by songs magnifying the person of God.⁴ It is not that pain is overlooked altogether, but in these songs it is not nearly as up-front and in-your-face as it is in the pages of scripture.

The primary themes of this music are such things as the greatness and goodness and majesty of God (*Majesty, Awesome God, Glorify Thy Name, All Hail King Jesus, Above All*), our love for God (*As the Deer, I Love You Lord*), and our offerings of praise and gratefulness to God (*Give Thanks, We Bring the Sacrifice of Praise, He Is Exalted, Lord I Lift Your Name On High, Here I Am to Worship, I Exalt Thee, Arise and Sing*). There are also references to the blessings that God has bestowed (*He Has Made Me Glad, Thy Lovingkindness, Forever God Is Faithful*) and to the need to allow God to rule in us (*I Give You My Heart, Lord Reign In Me, Lord Prepare Me to Be a Sanctuary* [titled *Sanctuary*]). These titles could be multiplied with additional references.

² Wording is as it appears in *With One Voice*, published by Augsburg Fortress, number 660.

³ All Biblical quotations are from Today’s New International Version (TNIV), copyright 2005 by the International Bible Society.

⁴ CCLI is a relatively good tool for monitoring popularity, for CCLI is the primary means of registering and paying royalties for songs that are reproduced individually within congregations rather than purchased in pre-packaged books by people outside. This format is more consumer-driven than publisher-driven, and for that reason may be a good way of getting at the pulse of what is being done in the churches.

It is not that there are no references to pain at all. For example, the line “And As I stumble in the darkness / I will call Your name by night” from the song *God of Wonders*. And in the song *Blessed Be Your Name* there are repeated references to pain, as in lines such as “when the darkness closes in” and “When I’m found in the desert place” and “On the road marked with suffering / Though there’s pain in the offering”—all of these are pretty straightforward expressions of awareness of suffering.

But in the newer music most such expressions tend to appear in individual lines rather than in extended passages. Even in *Blessed Be Your Name*, which was reportedly written in response to the death of a loved one, the lines expressing pain are outnumbered by the lines expressing praise to God. You can even count them. Out of 28 lines in the lyric sheet, there are 15 that contain the words “blessed” or “blessing” or “praise,” more than the number of lines expressing pain, suffering, and loss. Moreover, each couplet expressing pain is balanced by another couplet expressing a blessing. So this song, which might have been intended as a lament, devotes 3/4 of its lines to expressions of praise and gratefulness.

Among the other most widely used songs, references to problems are often expressed as troubles that happened in the past and are already giving way to victory. We see this assurance of victory in titles like *I’m Trading My Sorrows*. We see it also in the repeated refrain “Nothing is too difficult for Thee” in the song *Ah Lord God*. We hear it in the verse “Arise and sing ye children of Zion / For the Lord has delivered thee” from the song *Arise and Sing*.

There are also references to God as a place of refuge, as in the lines “You alone are my strength my shield,” in the song *As the Deer*. And there are times when the sense of God as refuge overlaps with needy-sounding expressions of love for God, as in the song *Breathe* (“And I I’m desperate for You/And I I’m lost without You”).

But this is about as edgy as it gets. In the corpus of the most widely used worship songs, there are no equivalents of the imprecatory Psalms, nor are there sustained lamentations of the kind that are common in the Bible. So oblique are the expressions of need that sometimes it is not clear if the songs calling for God’s aid are speaking of material help or of a metaphorical kind of assistance provided through salvation, as in these lines from *Give Thanks*: “And now let the weak say/ I am strong / Let the poor say / I am rich / Because of what / The Lord has done for us” (is it speaking of

weakness of soul? or of material needs?). And the idea of a peace of mind coming from God is stated boldly in songs like *Holy Ground*: “Peace of mind can still be found / If you have a need / I know He has the answer / Reach out and claim it child / You’re standing on holy ground.”

The preference for praise and the avoidance of direct expressions of pain has been observed among evangelicals not only in North America but also abroad, where American songs are often used in translation. Take this example from an observer of churches in Russia:

I recently visited a Baptist church in Siberia. Most if not all the songs that were sung in the service were translations of praise choruses which I have heard sung in American churches. I no longer hear so many of the Russian hymns that express the deep suffering of the people of God during times of trouble and persecution, the hymns which express a deep longing for God in the darkness of this world. (Marsden 2005)

The emphasis on the positive—which at one time was expressed even in the use of the term “praise and worship” as the commonly used term for contemporary worship music—has led some commentators to complain that in worship services today the musical and lyrical palette has gotten so reduced as to be insufficiently grounded in biblical notions of God. While the complaint is aimed most often at contemporary styles of music, some apply it also to present-day uses of the more traditional formats, suggesting it expresses a deeper cultural pattern.

Terry York (2003, 54), for example, in his book *America’s Worship Wars*, has complained that the contemporary worship style is often “imported” as a kind of “para-worship,” layered onto or replacing what had gone before as a “shortcut” that builds on work done by others (to be fair, he applied this complaint to all styles of worship, not just to “contemporary worship” styles) rather than developing it out of the congregation’s own life (to tell the truth, I’m not sure what he is asking for—pre-packaged worship has been around as long as there have been hymnbooks and liturgies—but the complaint is worth noting).

And there is concern that the purpose and meaning of the songs may be drowned out in the very act of singing them, though this problem, again, is not unique to the contemporary style. John D. Witvliet has recounted an anecdote in which he used a printed

bulletin to ask the children of a congregation, apparently one using a relatively traditional style of service, to identify what was happening in the various parts of the order of service. After identifying prayers as “talking to God” and scripture readings as “God talking to us,” the children identified the opening hymn as simply “there we are singing,” even though the words were expressing a prayer. Witvliet concluded, “So often we experience music in worship not as a means of praying or proclaiming the Christian gospel but as an end in itself. This is not only a problem for children in worship but also for adults—and for the musicians that lead them in worship” (2004, 170).

For example, Marva Dawn, in her well-known work *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down*, complains of a tendency for contemporary worship to overfocus on “happiness” and “upbeat worship” (1995, 87-89). In a complaint that apparently applies, again, to the full range of worship settings, not just to contemporary styles of praise and worship, she calls for widening the lyrical repertoire to include references to God’s justice, his mercy, and his truth, and she calls for lyrics to provide more specifics on the ways his love is made manifest. In particular, she calls for a greater use of songs of lament and repentance (1995, 90-93), saying,

In our present world, in spite of the cultural optimism of the United States, we find ourselves facing the realities of loneliness, unemployment, violence, worldwide political and economic chaos, family disruptions, brokenness and suffering, the fragmentation of postmodern society. Keeping God as the subject and object of our worship enables us to deal with the darkness by lamenting it, by complaining about it. (1995, 91)

She goes on to suggest, following Walter Brueggemann (1984), that the failure to use such music is an expression of what she calls “the shallow fearfulness of some contemporary worship” (1995, 92).

So it is remarkable that this music, so free of direct expressions of pain, should be so popular in churches around the world, for much of the growth in evangelical Christianity has come in areas—such as Africa, Latin America, and Eastern Europe—where by American standards difficulty is a normal way of life (on the growth of the church in non-North American areas, see Jenkins 2002; Johnson 2005). And even in countries where the economic and cultural tenor are more optimistic, as it allegedly is in the United States

(though I should note that in the city where I live the optimism is harder to find these days), the music appeals even in churches where many of the congregations’ members live in personal experience of pain.

Thesis

For many in these congregations there is a feeling that singing this music expresses not an *avoidance* of pain but a *response* to their pain. I first became aware of this response in the place where I first encountered the music—among the evangelicals in Thailand, primarily but not exclusively the Pentecostals.

When I encountered this music in the 1980s, it was being used in church worship primarily by self-identified Pentecostals and charismatics. (Widespread use by non-Pentecostal churches came later.) Even in the United States, this worship form was still relatively new. Just 15 years earlier, the use of contemporary rhythms, even in youth choirs, was often viewed as a novelty to be tolerated, at best. But by the middle of the 1980s the “contemporary Christian music” format had become popular on the radio here in the United States, and the music had become widely incorporated in Pentecostal and charismatic services. So much was this the case that in the middle of the 1980s services employing contemporary choruses tended to be called “charismatic” even if they were not associated with distinctively charismatic practices such as speaking in tongues.

Whatever its uses today (and we know that cultural forms can diffuse independent of their meanings), at the time I first encountered the form it was associated with an explicit theology of accessing divine power, and it was taught that active participation in the music could bring a special measure of the divine presence. Thai worshippers spoke of using the occasion as an opportunity to *samphat Phrajao*, which might be translated as “receiving a touch from God” or “feeling God’s presence.”

In conversion stories I collected from Thai converts to Christianity, and not just Pentecostal ones, there were frequent references to emotional release in the context of worship. For these people, worship created space—both in the singing itself and in the physical space where it happened—in which emotions could be expressed that might not have an equal outlet at home. In some cases, especially for relatively new converts, this perception of emotionality was linked directly with the sense of the presence of God. For

example, listen to this account from a conversion story I recorded. In this case, it was through observing the emotional release of a fellow-worshipper that the young woman said she first perceived the presence of God, an experience that played an important role in her conversion story. The following gives an idea of how it was said to work:

When I was in the meeting place for the worship service, I didn't know anything about what they were doing, so I watched them, wondering why they were doing this and that. Many people had their eyes closed.

While she did not provide details of the service, the following comments are worth noting:

My friend had said to me that if I wanted to know God, then I should try thinking of God and see what happens. So I turned my thoughts to God, and I felt love. It came on its own. I felt warmth (*op un*), too, like there was some great and important person that was present there.

I looked around at the others who were in the midst of worshipping God. I looked at the friend beside me, who was kneeling on the floor and crying, the friend who had brought me. I didn't understand why she was crying. She said that she had been singing along with the others, and the tears had started to flow.

I still didn't understand, [but] it was like there was a warmth in the middle of me. It's hard to explain.
(reprinted from Zehner 2003, 110-111)

Now the context of this account hints at the kind of unregimented yet programmed freedom that at the time was associated with charismatic worship services. Here we are, in the midst of a service, in the midst of the songs, and we have a person kneeling and crying at the sense of God's presence and another person being warmed by observing her and also by the context in which it happened. This was actively encouraged in that setting.

Note that this sense of presence could be associated quite strongly with the kinds of contemporary songs we have been talking about, for, as we saw earlier, popular praise songs have been oriented explicitly toward that

awareness of God. The language of the time spoke of God "inhabiting" the praises of his people, and suggested that in him and in his praise was a "sanctuary," a place separate from the mundane. Whether or not the songs actually invoked God's presence in any material sense, which the language of the time implied, they certainly encouraged an *awareness* of that presence.

Some converts cited this collective awareness of the presence of God as one of the most attractive things about the Christian services. It was as if the worship songs brought God near. As one Pentecostal preacher told me, for many visitors new to the format, it was as if in the worship service they had gone to heaven, a place apart from the cares of daily life. When the worship was "working," it provided a kind of displacement of troubles, encouraging people to focus on God not only as escape but as a step toward potential solutions, and of course as a practice of spiritual deepening.

Whether this should be viewed as most fundamentally a case of escape or of spiritual deepening is separate from the issues I am prepared to discuss here, and there were many even in the leadership of such churches who questioned the extent to which this sense of God's presence actually provided spiritual or emotional resources people could take home with them. However, I should note that this expectation that worship should invoke a sense of God's presence is not unique to the Thai churches of the 1980s. Indeed, it may be a universal evangelical yearning. John D. Witvliet (2004, 168), for example, refers to churches in the United States "striving to make God *present*" (emphasis in the original) through the worship experience, regardless of the style of music employed.

In the Pentecostal setting as I encountered it in urban churches in Thailand, there were a number of techniques being used to invoke this presence while opening up spaces for personal expression. One was the repetition of songs, which for some worshippers created a meditative space in which they could reflect on the meaning of the refrains. Another was the practice of simultaneous congregational prayer, which at the time was common in the urban non-Pentecostal churches as well.⁵ A third was a set of practices that combined congregational singing with prayer. For

⁵ Joel Robbins encountered a similar practice among the Urapmin of central highland New Guinea who had experienced a Pentecostal revival some years earlier, though in this case the communal prayer happened only at the close of the service. "One person leads the prayer by speaking loudly, but everyone else prays quietly to themselves and in their own words. The excited

example, the women might pray while the men sang, or vice versa. Or the congregation might be asked to pray while the musicians continued to play. Finally, in the Thai Pentecostal services, there was the possibility of a prophetic or exhortative word being uttered, usually (depending on the style of the particular congregation) at a particular expected moment in the service, and expectation of such a word further encouraged the sense of God's active presence.

It was in these contexts of programmed openness to diverse expressions of direct, personally-managed interaction with God that people might feel the freedom to kneel or to cry while others sang, often after having been encouraged to place their burdens on God. In such a manner people could find space to express their own praises or laments, despite the overall positive words being sung.

Having said this, I should address the issue of the provenance of the songs. As I have already noted, both the songs and the forms of the service were explicitly borrowed. Nobody seemed to know for sure where the prayer style came from (though some attributed its origins to the "Little Flock" movement in China). But the music was clearly borrowed from songs originally published and performed in English. This might be expected to raise issues of authenticity. Yet the foreign provenance made the songs no less authentic in the minds of the relatively young worshippers then being attracted to the services. Though most of the songs were translated from English, comments I heard suggested that people associated this music more with modernity than with "the West." And it is not surprising that this should be so. To those who adopt it, the modern is never "inauthentic." Rather, it is up-to-date, and not-old-fashioned. Except in the case of identity politics, judgments of inauthenticity are usually made by outsiders (see Appadurai 1996, 14-16; Abu-Lughod 1999, 122-123). And in this case the churches took ownership of the process in that they chose the songs and styles.

Thus, though I understand that the market for local Christian compositions has improved, at the time there was a clear preference for translated songs.⁶ These songs were often directly translated by the churches using them, which meant that different churches could be using slightly different translations. Due to the small size of the Christian market, there was at the time no standardized published version of any of these pieces.⁷ Nevertheless, the wordings from church to church were roughly the same, despite some variations. I do not know how much explicit borrowing there was between the churches' worship teams, nor how the borrowing might have been done. However, it is important to bear in mind that the music was selected by the local congregation, just as it is in North America, and in the Thai church where I spent the most time the music was perceived—rightly or wrongly—as an integral element of the congregation's vitality.

Now, why should the music be perceived as effective in this way? Even for those who are not Pentecostal, it could be that a focus on an ethereal object of affection may in itself have therapeutic value. And I wonder if that emphasis on hope may have been honed in the years of evangelical marginality on the fringes of social discourse? If so, it might explain some of the thematic appeal of this newer music across classes and cultures. Evangelicals could not offer power or wealth—but they could offer awareness of the presence of God. Offering not necessarily a removal of the problems, but a sense that God is with us in the midst of them, providing love and giving the strength to continue. That emphasis may be part of the continued attraction of theologically conservative Christianity around the world today.

And in this the contemporary practice of turn-of-twenty-first century evangelicals parallels that of several other religious traditions. Note that many of the songs have absolutely nothing to do with day-to-day life (*Awesome God, Bless His Holy Name, I Exalt Thy Name, Lord I Lift Your Name on High, Father I*

buzz that rises is not unlike the resonant roar produced when the Urapmin play their drums. People finish their personal prayers one by one until only the leader is left praying [alone]" (2004, 266).

⁶ This despite the fact that some of the churches seemed to have considerable songwriting talent, which often drew on popular local musical idioms. The few times I heard such songs performed, usually composed by and for smaller groups performing for the larger congregation, they seemed to have been learned much more quickly and sung more heartily than the translated songs. However, at the time the foreign songs seemed vested with a sanctity that was not ascribed to the local ones.

⁷ This was also shortly before CCLI came into widespread use in the United States as a means of collecting royalties for legal on-the-spot reproductions of music for use in congregational worship settings, which was itself a signal of how widespread the practice had become in the United States.

Adore You, Awesome God, Shout to the Lord, etc.). The popularity of such songs expresses at one level the notion that God should be praised simply because he deserves praise. At another level, especially in cases where refrains were sung repeatedly, I found myself wondering whether the service style had stumbled on a practical equivalent of contemporary popular meditation practices, which suggest emptying of the mind of day-to-day worries through the substitution of a positive (or at least non-mundane) focus, all while framing that action in a larger, comforting web of what used to be called “ultimate” meanings. Though Buddhists have been more explicit about these possibilities (as a popular Buddhist meditation movement in Thailand advertised in the 1980s, “if you could just stop thinking, then you could *really* think [*tha dai yut khi, kau khi dai*]), Christians have never been entirely ignorant of the quasi-meditative aspects of focused attention. Consider, for example, the lyrics of the classic song *Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus* which note that “the things of earth will grow strangely dim / in the light of his glory and grace.” And one might ask whether a similar outcome is being encouraged in more liturgical services, where it is the form and the setting that provide the machinery of the sacred, at least for those who have been raised in those environments.

Whether the same emotional effects are obtained in services where the songs are sung briefly or without the expectation of intensive singing is a separate question. Yet the message’s focus on the relationship with God and the centrality of his person are expressive of central evangelical themes, as are the assurance of victory or at least of meaningfulness. The idea is that the worship is an encounter with God through encounter with the music, and the themes are expressive of these evangelical emphases. And there may be many days, and many participants, for which the ritual simply does not “work.” Therefore, I do not wish to characterize all who use these worship styles, neither in Thailand nor anywhere else. I simply wish to emphasize that in that particular place, and at that particular point of time, the style of worship was thought to have a certain magic in and of itself. Whether it was derivative of the West, or expressive of local understandings of modernity, or considered another form of popular musical styles (though, if you pay attention, you may notice that the music used in churches is always just a bit off the cutting edge of popular music), whatever one’s view of these things, it is important to realize that in this particular setting there was also a rhetoric of encounter with God

through encounter with the music. The songs were about God, and the singers were to experience God.

So what of those formerly Russian Orthodox evangelicals in Siberia that I cited earlier, who were singing praise songs in place of the emotionally richer palette of the Orthodox tradition? From an outsider’s perspective it indeed appears that much is lost. Yet these songs are also expressive of the heart of the evangelical tradition, with its emphasis on a personal relationship with God and on what God can do to change lives and circumstances. The increased evangelical Christian emphasis on the personal over the course of the twentieth century is expressed in the personal, relational nature of these songs. Besides which, it might be thought, why go to church to experience a downer, similar to what might have been felt elsewhere?

Coda

Of course, it can be asked, Does the approach actually alleviate pain? Does it change the mental frame with which people address their troubles? That I cannot say. And I should admit that the focus on the positive is not entirely new. R. Kent Hughes (2002, 145) cites a list of the hymns most frequently published in the United States between 1737 and 1960 (drawing on a list appearing in a draft of what would subsequently be published as Blumhofer and Noll 2004), and that list is similarly devoid of songs of personal suffering, including such titles as *Jesus Lover of My Soul* (ranked first), *We’re Marching to Zion* (ranked second), *All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name* (ranked third), and so on. Here, also, there was expressed an expectation of blessing and victory similar to that seen in the more recent praise songs. So what may be new is a matter of degree. And perhaps also a matter of perceptions. But that positive focus builds on a longer precedent.

Today, songs of lament are getting increasing airplay on Christian radio. And it is probably a good thing that Christian radio expresses that kind of emotional depth, because it is certainly heard in popular songs. But I would be surprised if these songs find a major place in congregational life any time soon, for they are simply incompatible with the message evangelicals have been expressing. Out of the array of potential messages provided in the Bible, evangelicals tend to focus on hope, both in their singing (focusing on the presence of God and one’s relationship with

him) and in their actions (ideally focused on helping others). That is part of the reason for the continued evangelical emphasis on missions, for in addition to the imperative of conveying the message of salvation through Jesus Christ, we consider our involvement in missions an expression of that message of hope.

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Dr. Edwin Roy Zehner holds a Ph.D. in Cultural Anthropology from Cornell University (2003). He is also a specialist in Linguistic Anthropology, the Anthropology of Comparative Religious Communities, and Asian Studies, currently with a focus on southern Thailand, southern Thai Muslims, and intercommunal religious relationships. His first visit to Thailand was as a summer missionary in 1980, and on a research sojourn in Thailand in 1984-1988 he first became intensively exposed to the kinds of contemporary Christian worship music analyzed in this article. He participates in relatively liturgical churches, and over the years he has visited churches and religious institutions in the Greek Orthodox, Dutch Reformed, Unitarian-Universalist, African-American AME Zionist, LDS (Mormon), Lutheran, Christian Science, Episcopalian, Roman Catholic, evangelical Latino, African-American Baptist, Assemblies of God, Thai Buddhist, and Thai Muslim traditions, and more. In 2013-2018 he was Lecturer and sometimes Chair of the Ph.D. Program in Asian Studies in the School of Liberal Arts at Walaialak

University, Tha Sala, Thailand. He is also a strong believer in supporting local church movements: In 1984 he was a member of the independent Thai Pentecostal Hope of Bangkok Church, the core congregation of the future Hope of Thailand and Hope of God International movements. Later, in 2013, he became a lay participant and lay minister in the Grace of God Church of Tha Sala District, in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province, in southern Thailand, a semi-Pentecostal local church (most Thai churches today are effectively semi-Pentecostal) whose monolingual Thai pastor publicly identifies as “Baptist.”

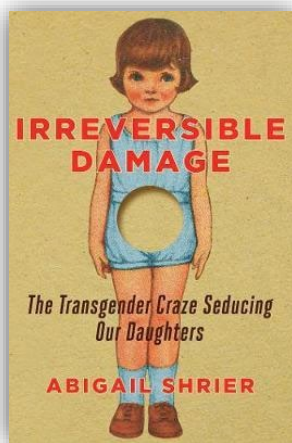
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BOOK REVIEW

Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters

By Abigail Shrier

Reviewed by Vincent E. Gil



Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing
2020

I first came across Abigail Shrier's work when the vitriol that encircled its prepublication in 2020 was loudly heard. It was ugly; it was merciless; and it ignored, as those feeling threatened often do, any careful data collection or year's worth of investigation by Shrier. When the book was finally released the acrimony persisted, with such as Barnes & Noble and Amazon taking it off their websites—only to have it

returned after much backlash from parents¹ and some professional peers, all of whom felt she was telling truth.²

This review begins here because as a medical and psychological anthropologist, as a specialist on sexuality and gender, I believe Shrier's work raises the very questions that should engage us as anthropologists and as Christians amidst cultural protests. As OKHJ puts it, "to examine the underlying reasons for humanity's destructive behavior toward self, others . . . and the role divine redemption and hope play in human lived experience and practice."³

Shrier's work circles back to earlier work by Lisa Littman, who coined the term "rapid onset gender dysphoria" to name a phenomenon she had noted, then investigated—one that was quickly surpassing statistical odds-ratios in gender identity problems among tweens and adolescents.⁴ *Gender dysphoria*—a severe and usually historical discomfort with one's biological sex—was dramatically increasing, from less than 0.01 percent of the population and afflicting almost exclusively males a decade ago, to groups of young females, tweens, teens, in high schools and colleges, "coming out" as "trans." The U.S. prevalence of adolescent gender dysphoria has increased by a thousand-fold over the last decade. In 2016, natal

¹ Genspect.org was founded by parents who felt their children needed a wider range of treatment options and more evidence based approaches for gender questioning children and young people. <https://genspect.org/position/>.

² Perspectives by Laura Edwards-Leeper and Erica Anderson, interviewed by Daryn Ray for *The Washington Post*. "The Mental Health Establishment is Failing Trans Kids." November 24, 2021.

³ On Knowing Humanity Journal. "Editorial Policies," Section: Focus and Scope. <https://okhjjournal.org/index.php/okhj/editorialPolicies#focusAndScope>.

⁴ Lisa Littman, "Parent Reports of Adolescents and Young Adults Perceived to Show Signs of a Rapid Onset of Gender Dysphoria." *PLoS One*, 13 (8) DOI: e0202330.

females accounted for 46 percent of reassignments (surgeries); a year later it was 70 percent, according to The Trevor Project.⁵ Across the pond, the UK reported in 2018 a 4,400 percent rise over prior decades of children wanting gender change.⁶

Shrier's work investigates the reasons behind what she has called a *wave of social contagion* among the young,⁷ fueled by the social isolation of tweens and teens today, their incessant consumption of social media via smartphones, blogs, and web platforms, all of which *encourages* and *makes it cool to be trans*. "If you are a female, and teen, it prompts you to deny birth gender as a salvo for all that afflicts you and keeps you not popular." Shrier's tome is an excellent teleological exploration of the ways and means in which the overarching social contagion she describes repurposes media avenues by which adolescents cope with their sense of self, isolation, and emotions, in the internet saturated world of the 21st century.

Shrier is an investigative journalist and attorney. She isn't an anthropologist, but proceeds in her investigations much as a social scientist would. Her work has been called "unscientific" by those who oppose what it concludes, this despite her clear and early detailing of her methodology (which I address below). She is verbal, graphic, and conclusive; sometimes anecdotal; yet her findings corroborate much of what Littman and others have also been reporting, and what I myself have discovered through my own anthropological and sexual scientific research.

The work combines well-researched unobtrusive data and hundreds of interviews with parents, trans persons, teachers, physicians, politicians, and gender specialists, along with personal stories of informants: of

the "craze" (her word) and its results; of mental health profession's "betrayal" of the Hippocratic Oath of *doing no harm* via gender affirming therapy, bypassed guidelines, and "off label" hormone therapies. These, sans longitudinal clinical research so necessary to validate them.

Shrier also looks at the effects of media on the young—particularly on GenZ and iGeners—and the 'influencers' who've achieved celebrity status in social media by means of their gender transition. Like a noble anthropologist (again, she's not), Shrier dives deep into her unobtrusive sources: social media platforms, blogs, Instagram, TikTok, etc., to discover how these facilitate trans thinking and offer advice. We hear their mantras: "If you think you are trans, you are (44)." "You can try out trans by using a binder to flatten your breasts (46)." "Testosterone is *amazing*. It may just solve all your problems. You don't have to be certain you're trans to go on hormones (47)." Most subversive are the posts and instructions on how to lie to your parents; how to fake symptoms and pass therapeutic tests of dysphoria by saying the "right things." Like those gatekeepers we anthropologists identify in many social spaces, here influencers are quick to reward those who elevate their platform's numbers. "If you've ever felt different, anxious, or afraid, or felt like you don't fit in, there's a transgender community ready to accept you and become your new family" (50).⁸

Perhaps to Shrier, the more insidious and "reckless" (her word) part of this gender moment is the new "affirmative care" standard of mental health that has been adopted by most medical accrediting associations for gender-diverse presenting youth.⁹

⁵ The Trevor Project. <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/public-education/>.

⁶ Gordon Rayner, "Minister Orders Inquiry into 4,000 Per Cent Rise in Children Wanting to Change Sex." *The Telegraph* (September 16, 2018). <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2018/09/16/minister-orders-inquiry-4000-per-cent-rise-children-wanting/>.

⁷ I've likened it to a *culture bound syndrome*, a term borrowed from medical anthropology, where it means a combination of symptoms that identifies a condition, all of which only occur within specific, bounded cultural spaces. I'm referring to the series of social actions that affirm *expressive individualism* above any biological, social, or other designation; and which therefore are symptomatic of a belief that you are your own (best) master; and that no other criterion matters as much. Consequently, "feeling trans," "not wanting to be one's natal sex," is sufficient to manifest distress despite no earlier history of gender disconnect. The manifestation *deviates* from the usual behavior and beliefs of individuals in the culture. See Vincent E. Gil, *"A Christian's Guide through the Gender Revolution: Gender, Cisgender, Transgender, and Intersex"* (Cascade Books, 2021).

⁸ All quotes are from various sections of Shrier's work as reported in the Kindle book edition.

⁹ APA. "Guidelines for Practice with Transgender and Gender-Nonconforming People." <https://www.apa.org/practice/guidelines/transgender.pdf>.

Among these associations, the American Psychological Association (APA) has mandated therapists *adopt* the novel gender ideology themselves: these must *affirm* the patient's self-diagnosis (which often means bypassing *gender exploration therapy*, once the standard for mental health evaluations of gender conflicts.) Issues that surround affirmative therapy are well explained by Shrier: denying gender exploration therapy initially; ignoring other possible emotional issues in the tween or adolescent that may be contributing to the confounding of gender identity; ignoring that for a good number of younger tweens and teens, over 80% stop identifying as another gender as they get older; ignoring the hesitation and pause of many in the profession who—at a great personal and professional cost—have questioned affirmative therapy and a rapid move to hormonal transitions.¹⁰ She isn't alone in her concerns.¹¹

Should You Read Shrier's Work?

I've argued earlier in this journal that Christian anthropologists—social, psychological, medical, missional—should be attentive and keen to engage social issues and concerns as a means of bringing the lived experience and practice of our subject to better light.¹² Such is especially relevant in the arena of gender today. Moreover, the church is not immune to the tsunami of gender change that now accosts young persons, here and in developed countries especially. Neither are missional families immune.¹³ Just as we've seen with other sexual issues (homosexuality, bisexuality, involvement in porn, sexual abuse), sexual *and gender* conflicts will also emerge as our young continuously experience a fractured world and internet dependency, all which Shrier so deftly delineates.

The problematic of sex and gender as rendered today beckons anthropological inquiry. Christian anthropologists are in a favored position to also bridge the understanding of socially destructive behaviors

with the hope divine redemption can play in human outcomes. Shrier isn't arguing from a religious platform, but she will resonate with Christians—Christian academics in sociology, anthropology, psychology, theology, missions—as well as clergy and those who are parents. Put aside your academic persnicketies and yes, agree she isn't an anthropologist doing an investigation on a sociocultural phenomenon. But do also agree she does a great deal of credible work in providing clarity to the issues she explores. Even if you don't have academic interests that align here, but you *do have family*, have *adolescents*, *grandkids*, as Shrier also asks, "I invite you to read this dangerous book and decide for yourself"! (Foreword, xvii).



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¹⁰ Darin Ray. op. cit.

¹¹ Emily Bazelon. "The Battle Over Gender Therapy." *The New York Times* (June 15) 2022.

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¹³ See Dwight P. Baker and Robert J. Priest. 2014. "The Missionary Family: Witness, Concerns, Care." Evangelical Missiological Society Series. William Carey Library. Note especially Part Three: "Forum on Sexual Orientation and Missions: An Evangelical Discussion," pp. 205-293.

Professor Emeritus, Dr. Gil continues to research, train, and write. His most recent work, *A Christian's Guide through the Gender Revolution* (Cascade, 2021) assists Christian parents, pastors, therapists, and individuals in understanding the 'gender moment'. His nonprofit, *Faith and Sex Science*, continues to engage with counseling, training, and information for Christian institutions. Dr. Gil's website is <http://drvincegil.com>, and he can still be reached through the email below.

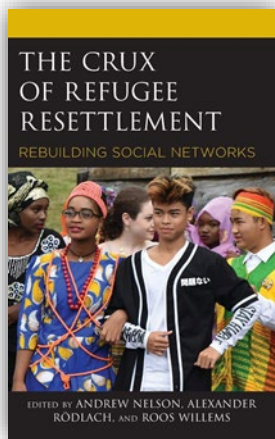
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BOOK REVIEW

The Crux of Refugee Resettlement: Rebuilding Social Networks

Edited by Andrew Nelson, Alexander Rödlach, and Roos Willems

Reviewed by Meagan Mann



Lanham, MD: Lexington Books
2019

The Crux of Refugee Resettlement: Rebuilding Social Networks is a thoroughly thoughtful and very applicable tool for those interested in helping to assess and reform refugee resettlement policies. Written by 39 different contributors, the book is broken up into 12 chapters, clearly labeled with the topic discussed within. Each chapter discusses an element of resettlement and how it specifically contributes to or harms the creation of social networks for refugees. Using ethnography as the main descriptor in each chapter, *The Crux of Refugee Resettlement* allows the reader to learn of resettlement realities from the perspective of education, health care, theology, administration, politics, social work and most importantly, the refugees themselves. Each chapter, though various in its content, points to the same conclusion: global refugee resettlement policies currently lead to exclusion and austerity. Instead, there needs to be a shift in the culture of policy development

to account for the realities of experienced displacement and resettlement.

Outlined in the introduction, resettled refugees lose social capital through the loss of their networks, community reciprocity, and social trust. This leads to a depleted emotional and social support network at a time when it is badly needed. Andrew Nelson, Alexander Rödlach, and Roos Willems write in the introduction that, “Such loss can be traumatizing, and can further isolate individuals and communities already reeling from the conditions and experiences surrounding forced displacement. The maintenance and reconstruction of an extensive base of social capital, then, is essential for successful resettlement” (4). In Chapter 1, Martin Renzo Rosales and Juana Domingo Andrés look at Guatemalan Mayas in the American Midwest and their creative intercultural networking. They describe through ethnography three different kinds of social network: bridging, bonding, and linking (40). Bonding social networking refers to the ties that connect individuals with those of similar demographic characteristics or affective closeness (friends, close relatives, neighbors, and work colleagues). Bridging networks refers to the ties that connect more diverse groups in terms of sociocultural or economic background. Finally, linking social networks refers to the individuals’ connections with contacts who are outside their social network and have some degree of power over them. In linking relationships there is normally an element of “receiving” on the part of the refugees in the form of resources, ideas, and information.

This typology of bridging, bonding, and linking social networks is confirmed in the following chapters through several ethnographic case studies. The idea of “home” was examined in the two accounts of refugees in Ohio and North Carolina. These ethnographies call for a more thoughtful and detailed approach to

integration for refugees settling into a new space. Resettlement agencies globally have an appointed window of interaction with the refugee that is no more than 90 days. It is concluded in this book that the 90 day window of care is not adequate to actually establish enough care (particularly social networks) for newly arrived refugees. There is a role anthropologists can play here. Kelly Yotebieng, Surendra Bir Adhikari, Jaclyn Kirsch, and Jennifer Kue state, “The role anthropologists and ethnographic approaches can play in engaging community social networks is an important one. They not only bring in diverse perspectives for a more holistic approach, but they can also help to identify, and devise ways to address cultural and linguistic barriers between refugee communities and mainstream service providers” (71).

In terms of social networks, the information on how to establish them and to get community support may be available to the refugee community, but if the refugees do not know where to find the information or do not have digital access, the information is useless. Additionally, there needs to be more cultural sensitivity in the approaches and theories used in resettlement. Particularly in the United States, the merits of self-sufficiency and economic success have marked the designs of successful integration. If a refugee does not show signs of either they are not succeeding and are therefore not a successful resettlement case. Social value is marked by economic development. This however, is not possible—even systematically impossible—for many refugees.

Here is another central theme in the writing. Refugee resettlement is not necessarily built on what the refugee needs, but what the resettlement country wants to produce from the refugee. Georgina Ramsay, who has worked in spaces of resettlement with Central African Women in Australia notes that, “Whilst providing refugees with physical safety, resettlement does not automatically result in a sense of belonging” (174). Throughout the ethnographies of various refugees, it is clear that it is not the governmental organizations that are currently creating a sense of belonging. Because of the heavy limitations set on governmental resettlement agencies, it is impossible to help create social networks, assist in creating belonging, or adequately assess mental health needs in the 90 days of exposure they have with a client. Instead, it is the community (bonded, bridged, and linked) that creates the sense of home and brings forth truly successful integration and resettlement. Roos Willems writes about the importance of these social

networks that are community-based, “As the crux of refugee resettlement, assisting with and helping the development of resettled refugees’ social networks will allow for their increased well-being and swifter all-round integration, to the benefit of both the refugees themselves as well as their host society” (281).

This book leaves the reader with an inspired view of what the future of resettlement could look like. For NGOs and 501c3s working specifically to create social networks, this book is a strong encouragement. The collected ethnographies, data, and summaries create a unique and personable insider view into what it is like to be resettled as a refugee. Even more than understanding what the experience of a refugee is, the reader is left with the knowledge of some of the major gaps that are still to be filled in terms of the resources provided for incoming refugees. In particular, the need for social networking is highlighted time and time again.

This collection was published in 2019, before the global pandemic of COVID-19 and the major fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban in 2021. The world of resettlement has shifted dramatically since then, particularly for Europe and the United States. During COVID-19 when resettlement was locked down, many resettlement agents were let go from their positions, offices were closed, and the infrastructure shrunk significantly. Thus an extra layer of confusion and complexity to resettlement has been added since the publication of this book. Mandatory isolations, the increase in digital communication, and social distancing have all altered how social networks are thought about and pursued. Additionally, the unprecedented number of Afghans who were evacuated globally to receiving countries has altered how social networks are pursued. During the evacuations from Afghanistan, Afghans went through different channels than an average refugee would to be resettled in the United States. The sheer volume of Afghans arriving suddenly and without proper paperwork or funding overwhelmed the already fractured infrastructure of resettlement agencies. Additionally, some do not have refugee status, but rather a Humanitarian Parole status (HP). This adds to the complications involved in building identity, social networks, and a sense of belonging. Still, the data from this collection is valid today. It just needs to be viewed through the lens that the events of 2019, 2020 and 2021 brought to the world. The world is ever changing and shifting, so resettlement policies for refugees must ever change and shift to keep up.



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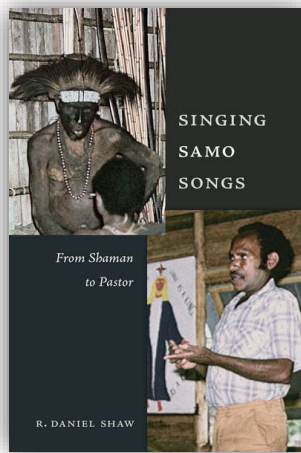
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BOOK REVIEW

Singing Samo Songs: From Shaman to Pastor

By R. Daniel Shaw

Reviewed by Jill Hurley



Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press
2022

Singing Samo Songs is rife with thick descriptions (Geertz 1973) of the Samo culture. What stands out to me is the ontological shifts from shaman to pastor and congregation to collective shamans—the nuances of which will have a profound impact not only on how Christians perceive shamans in their native contexts, but more importantly on how the Western Church perceives, understands and negotiates thin places in spiritual landscapes. This will be evidenced by how the Western Church reacts to a simple footnote, in which Shaw writes,

If Shamans, in association with the ancestors, express their compassion for human interests and mediate ancestral concern from the spiritual realm, how might the Samo relate to God who created the shamans and the ancestors they channel? . . . For them, it was a short conceptual shift of allegiance from the ancestors to Jesus while continuing to appreciate the watchful eye of their ancestors, even as the book of Hebrews affirms (Daimoi 2004) . . .

The Samo understanding of Jesus as the ultimate shaman is a case in point (Shaw 2010c)."

I can envision the apoplectic fits from Evangelical parishioners as the hypothetical 2023 version of the "Names of Jesus Daily Calendar" comes out and they flip to some arbitrary day and read the title for that day's devotion, "Jesus, The Ultimate Shaman." Humor may provide a relief valve to the tension that this footnote brings, but as scholars we must remain vigilant as we analyze the implications made by such statements. This book review does not provide adequate space to delve into these issues fully, thus this article must stand as a signpost for fellow travelers guiding their conversations along their way.

In recent years, theologians and anthropologists have been attempting to make peace with the phenomenon known as an ontological turn. Scholars have discussed merits or the lack thereof when using terminology like syncretism, hybridity, polyontologism (Shaw, Nguyen, Hutnyk, Klimova, McIntosh, and Burrows). Once again I am reminded that there is something problematic when we define religions by bounded-set systems. In a 2018 article entitled, *Understanding Christian Conversion as a Post-Relational Ontological Re(turn) to Relations*, I wrote, "In Christianity, we like to think of people as saved or not saved, believers or unbelievers, members or nonmembers of the church. In reality, people live a dynamic experience wherein each moment, emotion and circumstance through years of living can culminate in a gradual transformation into something brand new. Individuals may not be entirely aware that the challenges and frustrations that happened in one circumstance could be what motivated them to seek out a new circumstance" (Hurley 2018, 2). The reality is that this is true not just of Christianity but of every religion or belief structure. In many ways, we could interpret the story of the Tower of Babel in the Old Testament, as a reflection on humanity's attempts to

build religions (religious structures) to interact with God. Instead of embracing the mystery, we attempt to control it and end up in chaos and confusion. As such, conversations about syncretism, hybridity and poly-ontologism are many times simply adventures in missing the point.

In *Modernity at Large*, Arjun Appadurai gave us a new framework to understand globalization by creating a world map that illustrates the flow of culture across boundary lines, much like jet streams. As a graduate student, I contemplated Appadurai's -scapes and I realized that religion is just as fluid as any of the other motifs he described. I wrote, "I am left feeling curious if there is an important -scape that is missing from this text. I wonder if it is possible to describe a sixth -scape as *theoscapes*." Our nation-state boundaries are helpless against the jet stream flows of politics, finances, technology, family values and certainly religion. Thus the effects of globalization will have an impact on each person's religious beliefs because we are a communal people. It is categorically impossible for an idea to remain constant. Even with no outside influence, time in and of itself will cause an evolution in thoughts. The journey of humanity as we attempt to understand and know God cannot be understood any longer by a myopic lens. McIntosh (2019, 112-20) attempts to describe the onion layers by writing,

The concept of syncretism appeals to contemporary scholarly enthusiasm about cultural "creolization," "hybridity," and "boundary crossing," and, to be sure, such pursuits have been vital to dismantling older social-scientific assumptions of cultural boundedness, fixity, and homogeneity and to redefining—even celebrating—the flux and bricolage that make up cultural life. Indeed, a common rejoinder to earlier conceptions of "syncretism" is that religious practices—like cultural practices in general—are always already porous, and hence every religion is fundamentally syncretistic.

Ironically, it is this porous nature that could be the very key to summing these religious structures that humans have built, because we realize that porosity is not only a horizontal phenomenon between peoples and cultures but it is also a vertical phenomenon between us and the Divine. The abstract for *Porosity*

Is the Heart of Religion, a new article published by Tanya Luhrmann et al. (2022, 247-53), says,

When scholars and scientists set out to understand religious commitment, the sensation that gods and spirits are real may be at least as important a target of inquiry as the belief that they are real. The sensory and quasisensory [sic] events that people take to be the presence of spirit—the voice of an invisible being, a feeling that a person who is dead is nonetheless in the room—are found both in the foundational stories of faith and surprisingly often in the lives of the faithful. These events become evidence that gods and spirits are there. We argue that at the heart of such spiritual experiences is the concept of a porous boundary between mind and world, and that people in all human societies have conflicting intuitions about this boundary. We have found that spiritual experiences are facilitated when people engage their more porous modes of understanding and that such experiences are easier for individuals who cultivate an immersive orientation toward experience (*absorption*) and engage in practices that enhance inner experience (e.g., prayer, meditation). To understand religion, one needs to explore not just how people come to believe in gods and spirits, but how they come to understand and relate to the mind.

This porosity pinpoints precisely the thing that humans desire the most, a transcendental encounter with God. It is the spark of inspiration, a moment of comfort, an out of body experience where people come face to face with the mystery, and so much more. This porosity invades conversations, mundane moments, everyday circumstances and transforms people into evangelists, and the theological landscape of peoples lives change in an instant. Porosity is why America is experiencing a psychedelic renaissance and why the American church is dying. People are craving an encounter with the divine. People are starving for transcendental, mystical experiences that reveal their place in the mystery. Porosity is why Tibetan Buddhists spin a prayer wheel, why Hindu's place mangos on the altar of the local shrine, why Muslims travel to Mecca, and why Christians sing "How Great Thou Art" at the top of their lungs as they watch the sunrise in the mountains. Worship is the only tenable

response to encountering the mystery.¹ The noetic response is universal.

In *Singing Samo Songs*, Shaw shatters the neat and tidy paradigm of Western Christianity by conflating the roles of pastor and shaman. While this revelation fits so perfectly inside the Samo culture, the implications for worldwide Christianity are tremendous. The identification of Jesus as the Ultimate Shaman goes well past describing Jesus as our advocate or savior. If the basic understanding of Christianity is that Christ invites us to be like him, then we become peacemakers to emulate Jehovah Shalom (The Lord our Peace) and we become people filled and motivated with compassion as we emulate Jehovah Nissi (The Lord our Banner—and “his banner over us is love”) and stretch our banner of love over the hurting and the dying. What then is our response to this new identity of Jesus as the Ultimate Shaman and what is our path of emulation?

Jesus invites us to become like him, to become shamans—people who are not afraid of the liminal space and are willing to create a porous, or thin place, theology, to be guides to those around us who find themselves lost and in need of an encounter.

We are witnessing a porous moment where Samo Christianity finds itself mystically penetrating the hearts of Western Christians and in the next twenty years, we will see an evolved, more mature, and healthy, albeit a syncretistic-hybrid-polyontological, version of Western Christianity that fully embraces engagement with these liminal and porous places, and Christians themselves will finally be able to say with all intellectual humility, let me point you to the mystery.

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Jill Hurley has an MA in Theological and Cultural Anthropology from Eastern University and dual bachelor degrees in Religion and Anthropology from Eastern New Mexico University. Her research has covered the ontological turn in Christian converts in Nepal and the inter-generational trauma of the nation of China from a psychohistorical perspective. She is currently working on a project that explores the theological and ethical implications of Christians using psychedelic plant medicine in a medical context, such as using psilocybin to treat PTSD due to religious or other forms of trauma.

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¹ A quote from a conversation with Benjamin McCauley, director of Denovo Psychedelic Therapy Clinic in Lubbock, TX on December 28, 2022.



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