

Editorial

This issue of Reformed World is a blend of articles that may not seem to have a common theme but fit well under the title “Brought to Life”.

The first two articles come out of the aboriginal Taiwanese Christian community. They show a theological understanding that is deeply rooted within the ancient cultural traditions of the aboriginal society.

The third article does not come out of an Indigenous community as it is now understood. The article is about the Deaf Christian Ministry in South Africa. The article however shows how this community asks for a real contextual theology.

The fourth article deals with the understanding of Calvin against the background of the Indian society. It develops a new approach of Calvin’s theology within that context.

The fifth article about the relation between Christian theology and Islam focuses on the question whether we can structure our theology in a way that we can include Islam equally as a partner in our struggle for a just and peaceful world.

The sixth article is a review of an important publication on Calvin that appeared recently in Hungary.

The seventh and final article seeks for an understanding of what it means to obey God more than human authority.

Indeed, at first sight no common theme, although one could say that all the articles work out in a different way what happens when the Word of God is brought to life. We have chosen that as the theme for this issue.

Douwe Visser



The Hope of Taiwan Indigenous Theological Education in the 21st Century

Chung-che Wu

Firstly I would like to apologize for the fact that an outsider like me is writing on this topic. It is true that I am often viewed as an outsider because I lack long-term experience in staying with an Indigenous tribe. I served among Indigenous peoples in 1979, I taught at Yu-Shan Theological College and Seminary, and often led Indigenous student missions to not only preach but also to conduct interviews with people from the various groups. Even with these invaluable experiences, I still think there are many things I should learn. Furthermore, not being an Indigenous person, I cannot say I completely understand Indigenous people's situations and feelings. Therefore, I may not be the most qualified person to write about Indigenous theology. However, as I sincerely want to learn more about this field, I would appreciate your assistance, consideration, and suggestions.

My missionary experience with Indigenous peoples

In 1975, I was assigned to two of the Taichung Presbytery's churches: Jhushan Church and Danan Church. As the youngest missionary in the presbytery at that time, I was appointed to serve in the Indigenous unit to work with Rev. Liao Huai-yi in performing various ministerial duties, preaching God's word, spiritual nurturing, youth guidance and bookkeeping. It was a long journey to go to the diocese from Shuili or Puli and so we usually stayed for one or two nights. Consequently, the two years I spent preaching among the Bunun people in Sinyi and Renai made me interested and passionate about Indigenous ministry. Additionally, when I was studying at Taiwan Theological College and Seminary, I met many Indigenous students. They were very friendly and we got along well with each other. Therefore, with the great impression I had about Indigenous people, I considered serving in an Indigenous church in the future. After the completion of my master's degree in theology, I was honoured by an invitation from Rev. Yang Chi-shou, dean of Yu-Shan Theological College and Seminary at that time, to serve God by working among Indigenous peoples in theological education, training missionaries and other people who wanted to serve in the church. Working at Yu-Shan, I was able to closely witness Indigenous people's cultures and their challenges. I started to think about how the Gospel could save and renew these people. Moreover, I became an

advocate for the rights of Indigenous people. Thus, I took part in protests against the Legislative Yuan¹. From these experiences, I truly understood how unfair our government has been to the powerless in lawmaking and resource allocation. Therefore, I finally realized how difficult it is for those in poverty to change their lives. Recently, even the lands these people live on (farming and culture) have become what consortiums and politicians covet for their own benefits.

The lives of Indigenous people are filled with hardship and they have no way out of this situation. Who can help them or, more importantly, who can help them “sincerely”? In fact, if we consider PCT’s (the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan) power or resources from the material point of view, it seems so meagre and powerless compared to political power, which can magically limit and weaken Indigenous people’s strength to survive. However, the goal for those trained by Yu-Shan Theological College and Seminary is to encourage and strengthen Indigenous people’s self-awareness. Therefore, Indigenous people need to learn to not only resist assimilation but also be able to show their uniqueness.

Nevertheless, we still see some Indigenous people who are tempted to exchange their uniqueness and rights to survive for some material gains. Indeed, it is not easy to undertake theological education for Indigenous people in the 21st century, which does not include the reflection. I am going to write about the work I was proud to participate in, as an observer. Therefore, I would like to say it again. I may write to teach or instruct but only to share and discuss my previous work.

From scripture to situation

Spirit, attitude, and mission are primary for 21st century Indigenous theological education! In Scripture, Jesus “again entered his own town” (Mark 2:1; Matthew 9:1): This is a description of a deep identification and sense of belonging. This identification and sense of belonging represent the starting point of power and strength. Jesus didn’t only go there occasionally but frequently. Why did he go there so often? What was his purpose? He was there to visit the weak, to care about their situation, and to find time to help them as much as he could. He was not there for sightseeing or for fun. He was also not there to do bad things to harm people. On the contrary, what about those who go among Indigenous people? Are they present to campaign for election? For land? For taking people away (e.g. child prostitutes in the past)? For making themselves feel lucky that they are not Indigenous? For assimilating Indigenous people? Or for treating Indigenous people as humans?

We should learn from Jesus. He went among the people with spirit, attitude, and mission. Because of this identification and sense of belonging with his hometown, the power of healing was shown. In the Book of Luke, after Jesus taught people with the word of God and emphasized that God’s power was with him, he could heal people

1 Taiwan’s unicameral legislature.



(5:17). God's power will come to a person who has this type of identification and sense of belonging to the land, especially when helping the weak with their hardships. Then the person will accomplish amazing things and give God the glory (praise God from the bottom of the heart). In fact, to praise our God, using our voice is not the only option; we can also praise our God by the real identification and sense of belonging to the land. Having a rooted life is part of the basic spirit, attitude, and mission for those who go to a place or go among a group of people. Otherwise, all the effort is only like a dragonfly skimming the surface of the water, it cannot go deeply into water. If we don't want to spend a long time serving in a place and building up a rooted relationship there, nothing can be achieved. A deep identification and sense of belonging can show God's power. As a result, a group's awareness will be recovered. Those subverted languages and cultures will be raised and rooted again. The writers of the Gospel used different viewpoints to describe the city of Capernaum, which gained energy after being visited by Jesus, who is the one with identification and a sense of belonging for those in hardship.

In the story of the healed paralytic the 'four people's faith' (fellowship and team) appears in Mark 2:3-5. However, the same group is referred to as "some men" in Matthew 9:2 and Luke 5:18. Only with sympathy, identification, and one heart can unbeatable power be shown. Look at the story; whether it is four people or some men (at least two people), these people were so passionate and positive to save the paralysed person (or achieve vision or goal). Was money the reason they tried so hard? I don't think so because they even tore the roof of the house where Jesus was. This is a crazy act but it shows determination. If they did it only for money, then they certainly would argue about how much they needed to pay to repair the roof. Obviously, the key of the story is "faith". Through other people's faith, a weak person was healed and could make a contribution to society in the future.

Similarly Indigenous groups also need people like these four men who have respect for God, sincere love for humans, and passionate faith. Without these kinds of people, it's hard to achieve the same kind of success among Indigenous people. Jesus admired these people because they worked hard to help other people survive and they worked for the land. The mission they achieved resulted from faith. What they were trying to do was to get the paralysed person as well as the society to live again. Who can play this role today? Where are these four people? This is an important issue to discuss. Those people with faith don't need to be the people we have a strong connection with - such as the relatives or friends we see every day. They can be the people we meet once in our life. These people need identification, faith in God, and hope in people (especially for those who are paralysed in life). Imagine if your body or the functions of society is paralysed and could never be healed or recovered, what would the future be like?

People might ask if Taiwanese Indigenous are paralysed. Maybe some people will think this kind of idea is unwarranted or looks down on the ability of Indigenous people. If

so, then these people should put their energy into discussing the Legislative Yuan's version of the Indigenous law that those lawmakers now want to pass. Why does the government insist on storing nuclear waste in areas that belong to Indigenous people, such as Dawu Township or Daren Township, but not in Taipei or other cities? There have been many public policies and laws that seem to paralyze the functioning of Indigenous people's society and cripple their lives. In fact, those who want to treat Indigenous people as humans or those who call Indigenous people "hybrids" can easily reverse these policies and restore lost resources to Indigenous peoples. But, why be nice to Indigenous people in order to win elections and then turn on them and paralyse them? Where is Indigenous people's self-awareness? Unifying strength? Where are the four people?

Those bigwigs in our society or in Indigenous groups are just like the teachers of the law and the Pharisees mentioned in the Bible; they only want to show off their power and hold onto it forever. For this reason, the teachers of the law and the Pharisees were afraid that Jesus might accuse them of misapplying God's authority. Therefore, those who were in power were simply misusing it. Ironically, they persecuted the very person (Jesus) who was trying to heal the paralysed person. Isn't this abuse of power completely unjustified? Some Indigenous officials and scholars have power; however, they don't want to protest, heal people, or build up faith for unity. They also don't want to be the "four men with faith" to bring the paralysed person to God for justice. On the contrary, they prefer to let people continue to lay there with no ability or energy so that the leaders can continue to contribute to their own personal benefit and comfort.

Jesus said, "Your sins are forgiven". The teachers of the law (who appeared in three of the books of the Gospel) and the Pharisees (who appeared in the Book of Luke) were privileged with authority (in Matthew 9:8, it says Jesus gave authority to men.): Authority is normally used by those with power and status but without a sense of security. Often the function of authority is to destroy the weak and keep them from functioning. Those in authority are consumed by their own self-centred ideas as well as by the benefits they want to grasp. Therefore, an individual's power and ability cannot be brought into full play. The authority given by the country and society is paralysed by humans' self-centred thought and greed.

At that time, the teachers of the law and the Pharisees were the elites in the society. They were the people who had the authority and grasped the social resources (just like our own lawmakers, government officials, public servants, and intellectuals today). In fact, if more of our leaders would say something or take action (for example, have a meeting), all the difficulties of those who are paralyzed by poor government policies or the disparities of economic development could be solved immediately. However, people in authority are not willing to do it because they feel guilty.

What about missionaries and Christians? As long as a person is in power, he/she has the opportunity to paralyze the true function of a church or an organization. No matter



if it is the board of directors, or the elders meeting or the elders-deacons meeting, all of these groups are able to bring the power of their authority into full play. Instead, they are paralysed by their partiality and greed for material gains. Therefore, they don't walk with God but join Satan and the devil to paralyze others. This behaviour is from people's sins; these sins make those who should be healed still lay there to taunt the society.

The courage Jesus presented in defeating the power of the teacher of the law and the Pharisees is what a missionary and theological person should learn. Theology in an ivory tower is just like being in a bed of roses. In the same way, speaking without action is just like an azalea entwined by vines. Sadly, some of those with authority, status, and resources prefer to cooperate with the teacher of the law and the Pharisees.

Authority, strength, and power are given to men (Matthew 9:8): This sentence really grabbed my attention: when Jesus healed the paralyzed, "because he gave the authority (εξουσίαν)² to men", the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe, and they praised God. This part is very meaningful. Jesus had faith (in God and in humans). He would not "patent" or "narrow" the authority. On the contrary, with the authority given by Jesus, people should forgive and heal each other. As a result, a healthy and sound person/tribe/community can be formed.

From the viewpoint of the reflection from theological education, what is this authority? The theological education practices at Yu-Shan Theological College and Seminary are actually conducting the mission to give authority. Learning their native languages can give students strength and ability. Moreover, the graduate certificate and the authority from the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan (pastoral license) give students the point of strength to evangelise and invite people to establish themselves in the kingdom of God together. Similarly, we have to remember that authority should be used to nurture followers, cultivate their ability, and give them power (authority) to create the Kingdom of God in their communities.

Why do fewer and fewer people have respect for modern missionaries? One of the reasons is that they painstakingly want to grab a certain amount of power (status or resources). By being among the power struggle for so long, they gradually lose the authority of their own personal power. This personal power is possessed by those living in a devout and holy life, loving God and people sincerely, having rich knowledge, having passion, devoting themselves sincerely, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Fighting to gain power will paralyse a person's ability, and will stop a person from bringing his/her function into full play. Jesus gave men authority to recover others' lives; this is the true practice of the kingdom of God. Also, it is the main purpose to study or practice theology as well as the inspiration from the books of gospel.

2 The word is used to describe the strength of a person physically, mentally, or spiritually, or to describe the ability of a person in society, religion, politics, or justice. The meaning is deep and wide. It has the meaning of ability/power/authority/right.

Take your mat and go home! “Going home” was what Jesus regarded as important; the paralysed person needed to go home. After the 8/8/2009 flood caused by Typhoon Morakot, victims were forced to leave their homes. However, the government’s policy has made it so they can never go home. The three gospel versions mentioned previously all recorded how Jesus told the paralysed person to go home. A home normally provides people with warmth, love, and support. Family, happiness, culture, and identification form the root of a person’s life. I wonder why Jesus didn’t ask the paralysed person to follow him. Why Jesus was not like some of the missionaries who want followers to trail behind them everywhere. Isn’t it nice to be treated like a hero and to have so many fans around you to worship you?

In accordance with the current situation of the Indigenous society, the most urgent mission for churches now is to build (or rebuild) homes for Indigenous people. Only by rebuilding a home can Indigenous people retrieve their native languages and cultures. Moreover, they will also avoid being assimilated by our society’s powerful cultures and values and material things. Obviously, the road to home is certainly full of challenges, just like the journey a salmon has to take to get back to its place of birth. A road to home takes the spirit, attitude, and mission of having faith in God. However, before people set off, it is important for them to value home, which is in the bottom of their heart, as this home represents the great house of God. They need to first face themselves, who are the incomplete ones. Thus, the paralysed selves can be healed by Jesus’ humbleness, devotion, and identification. They can then have the abilities and faith in their lives to serve God and what God created; they will no longer be paralysed. To achieve this, there are the following suggestions.

Diagnosis and reality

Although we cannot leave out ecumenical theological education (human rights education), it is essential for Indigenous theological education to have “rooting” education. Otherwise, these people are Indigenous only because of their looks. In Taiwan, with its strong Confucian education system, it is important for Indigenous people to define themselves clearly, from small places to the society as well as what the media has taught them.

In terms of Indigenous theological education, the primary mission is to nurture mature Christians. Only then can we achieve the first and the second points mentioned above. Otherwise, the people we train will only be Christians on the outside but not on the inside.

In Taiwan, Confucianism has become part of modern Indigenous people’s lives and behaviour (the usage of language, logic, and the way of thinking, values, viewpoint of the society, viewpoint of a country’s sovereignty, and viewpoint of the world). Hence, Indigenous people have a favourable impression of these things. As a result, they



feel strange or react slowly towards Christianity (especially towards the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan) and Indigenous cultures. Some of them even reject Christianity or their own culture. To say it in a plain way, the appetite of Indigenous people has changed. This is also an important element that paralyzes Indigenous culture and identification.

Suggestions for methods of improvement

1. The following are my suggestions: It is important to cultivate Christians' accomplishments in daily life, just like how Yu-Shan Seminary built the stone wall. First, we had to cut stones into pieces (which is like the step of accumulating experiences and wisdom). Then, the second step was the division of the work (the devotion of experiences and wisdom). As a result, a beautiful and solid wall was built. (We should learn from John Calvin and build a Christian city in the place we live.)
2. The education of returning to the tribe can be seen as cooperative education (3 months mainly). We can take the method adopted in nursing schools as a reference. (First, it is important to have trained teachers in the tribe for this plan because not every pastor can be the teacher. The teachers should already be spiritual and pastoral teachers.) The primary task of this idea is to rebuild a home and its life function.
3. The empowering of teachers is not just in their specialty. (Einstein said, "Otherwise he – with his specialized knowledge – more closely resembles a well-trained dog than a harmoniously developed person.") It is the same for theologians. If an expert cannot live among people and contribute to the society, they will become like well-trained dogs.
4. It is also important for Indigenous people to connect with the world. A pastor should not just produce and then live a life of isolation from the world, just like living in an ivory tower. Followers connect with the world every day through all kinds of media as well as the Internet; they absorb information and grow. Therefore, pastors should think how they can combine their knowledge of theology together with science, then nurture followers and evangelize through reading the Bible, group meetings, and preaching. The pastors we need are those who have abilities (instead of degrees) and those who can really do something.
5. We should live our lives like Paul: "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me."

Conclusion

This description of theology is from my past experiences, observations, and the results I got after reading the verses mentioned above. Therefore, instead of a formal essay, I should say these are only my opinions.

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Impressions on Yu-Shan Theological Seminary, Taiwan

Impressions of the life at Yu-Shan Theological College in Taiwan are expressed in three short articles. Yu-Shan Theological College was established to train aboriginal Christians in Taiwan to serve the church and community as a pastor, a social worker, a musician, or an educator. By being engaged in the study of aboriginal society and culture, the school devotes itself to the articulation of contextual theology that the Gospel of God's kingdom will be realized in the aboriginal society.

Get United: Praise the Lord

Yuhaw Piho

Pastoral Advisor, Yu-Shan Theological College and Seminary

Daily life at Yu-Shan Theological College starts with the sounds of birds singing and insects chirping. The breath-taking scenery of Laka Liyutan is just like the embrace of our God. Our day begins with morning worship where staff and students, including the Thao, Saisiyat, and Sakizaya people, as well as members of all the other Indigenous groups, together with Hoklos, Hakkas, Han Chinese, and Manchus, come together and worship.

The Bunun's Pasibutbut can always bring peace and sanctity into the worship. The special dance of the Amis, where students and teachers hold hands and dance in a big circle provides an excellent example of the multiculturalism of Yu-Shan. The morning worship, held 5 days a week helps us to unwind from our daily problems and worship God wholeheartedly.

The Dawu look at life like an ocean; therefore, it is often completely different theology and philosophy. Moreover, the Paiwan and the Pukai, who both originated from Tawu Mountain, carry themselves in a very noble manner. The Taroko and the Seediq always

present us with their gifted ensemble accompanied by the tone of the xylophone.

In everyday worship, with the praise from all the groups, we can truly experience that the kingdom of God is manifested in Taiwan. Therefore, we are inspired to work much harder in the environment of aboriginal theological education and devote much more to the missionary activities of this land.

Tell Our Stories: Share Beautiful Gospel

Pusin Tali

Dean, Yu-Shan Theological College and Seminary

The objective of Yu-Shan Theological College and Seminary, based on the Christian Gospel, is to cultivate missionaries and equip them with both academic knowledge and morality. Moreover, Yu-Shan also trains Christians for different professions to serve God in church and society. Yu-Shan is also devoted to aboriginal society, cultural studies, and the establishment and practice of Contextual Theology in order to practice the gospel of the kingdom of God in the society. Thus, the devotion to aboriginal society and culture studies as well as engagement in the establishment and practice of contextual theology represent the unique goals and objective of Yu-Shan.

Furthermore, the theological education in Yu-Shan is using aboriginal society and culture as the platform to reclaim and establish aboriginal theology. This platform also represents the current situation of Aborigines in Taiwan. In other words, there would be no preaching platform for aboriginal people without the aboriginal society. Similarly, without aboriginal culture, the linkage of Aborigines with Christian theology would not be possible. The social history and culture of Aborigines in Taiwan is the key feature in establishing aboriginal theology.

Yu-Shan has developed its uniqueness in theological education. In the course curriculum for each department/graduate school, the course “Aboriginal Studies” is included. This is a unique feature that other Reformed seminaries do not possess. All graduate students in Yu-Shan are required to take courses such as aboriginal history and society, aboriginal culture and religions, aboriginal issue studies, aboriginal local theology, and aboriginal languages. Aside from these courses, Yu-Shan also offers various elective courses such as aboriginal women’s history, ecological ethics and theology of aboriginal folktale, aboriginal governance, and Aborigines’ social advocacy.

All the courses mentioned above, whether aboriginal history, culture, religion, and education, or aboriginal ecological ethics, theology of aboriginal folklore, autonomy,



local theology, are supplementary and complementary with aboriginal theology.

Aboriginal theology of folklore is a good example. Some aboriginal Christian communities intentionally force the historical stories of Israel on Indigenous people in Taiwan for the purpose of denying the aboriginal culture here in Taiwan. Furthermore, in order to condemn aboriginal culture, some people even denounce Taiwanese aboriginal stories as ghost tales. Those who use religion to attack aboriginal folklore are in fact disrespectful to the uniqueness God gave the Taiwanese Indigenous people. According to Christian faith, every group is created by God. Therefore, God gave each group some uniqueness as a gift, and Indigenous groups in Taiwan are no exception. In fact, each group has its own stories to respond to God's mercy and love. Hence, Indigenous people's stories and culture are the proof of the uniqueness God gave the Taiwanese Indigenous people.

Certainly, the development and impetus of Taiwanese theology of aboriginal folklore never deny Hebrew Bible stories. Instead, the way Hebrew people value their history is inspirational. Each group should value its own culture; this is also an urgent matter for Taiwanese Indigenous Christians. Each person should value his/her own history, recognize his/her culture, and see it as the most wonderful gift from God. Hence, the aim of aboriginal theology is to recover the lost stories, broken history, and fragmented culture. Furthermore, the aboriginal stories and the Hebrew Bible stories should be put on the same platform to promote discussion and bring out the best in each other.

While reflecting on the theology of folklore, North America Indigenous theologians confirmed that the Gospel is not coming to destroy all the wonderful aspects in a culture. Similarly, while Taiwanese Indigenous people view their history as a wonderful thing and value their society and culture, they should know that the Gospel from Jesus is not meant to destroy the most beautiful, wonderful, and valuable parts of Taiwanese Indigenous culture. It is very similar to the attitude Jesus had towards Hebrew law, Hebrew culture, and the prophet culture of the Israelites. Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them" (Matthew 5.17).

According to the Holy Bible, we learn that Hebrew story culture formed its own uniqueness; similarly, Taiwanese Indigenous culture is equipped with the same function to build up its uniqueness.

When an Indigenous person shares his/her story, this person is defending his identity. In the devotion to theology of folklore, Yu-Shan is actually establishing the uniqueness of Taiwanese Indigenous groups and the theology recognized by them.

Native Language & Songs and Dance: Defend the Spirit of Native Culture

Yu Jin-fu

Director of Department of Music, Yu-Shan Theological College and Seminary

Yu-Shan has devoted much attention to aboriginal society and culture studies as well as aboriginal languages. An aboriginal language is not only an essential element of an Indigenous group, but also a lifeline for passing down culture as well as the spirit of a nation. Losing aboriginal culture means losing spirit. It will not only cause the loss of culture, but also rot the foundation of a nation. Furthermore, the national consciousness will be rooted out. Therefore, Yu-Shan shoulders important responsibilities such as cultivating talents and passing down culture. However, to achieve these tasks, native language training plays a vital role.

With the influence of the modern society, many students' native language abilities were barely satisfactory before they entered Yu-Shan. Generally speaking, those with weak native language abilities are between 20 to 30 or even 40 years old. Therefore, Yu-Shan has arranged a native language course, two to three hours each week. Undergraduate students are required to take the course for four years; graduate students need to take the course for three years. All the language teachers, whether they are teachers at Yu-Shan or pastors from other churches, are qualified in native languages. Students will be divided in accordance with their background to learn their own native languages, study the Bible in their own languages, and to have speech training.

There have been many interesting trends in our courses. When practicing their native language, students talk like foreigners speaking Chinese. Not only do they have funny accents but also very odd sentence structures. However, all the teachers have great patience to help students. Through aboriginal jokes, tales, proverbs, and songs, as well as the interesting teaching methods created by teachers, students really have improved a lot. What is more, we can often hear students talking to each other or to their teachers in their native languages.

Yu-Shan also puts a lot of effort on preserving aboriginal music, by publishing music scores, recording CDs, and promoting indigenization of music in church. To broaden the view of church music, Yu-Shan formed a choir called "Nalowan". The Nalowan Choir not only has won many national music competitions but also has been invited to many countries to share Taiwanese Indigenous songs and dances. Also, the choir hopes to be the cultural bridge between Taiwan and other nations.

In music classes, students not only need to learn native music but also need to know



the value of western music. Moreover, students study the theories and techniques of western music so that they can apply them in local churches. To preach the Gospel, Yu-Shan links up with churches in different places to hold music activities on a casual basis. Yu-Shan hopes that more and more people can feel united through songs to praise our God; further, they can be united and preach the Gospel. Therefore, the missions of "holistic education", "preaching the Gospel", and "leading people to God" can be fulfilled.

The reason for Yu-Shan to set up the native language and music-learning courses is to help students use their native languages to share their culture, art, and thoughts. Further, through the course, Yu-Shan can cultivate students' leadership and the ability to preach the word of God, and the belief take root in aboriginal society and culture, even the whole world

Translated by Tsai Sheng-Hsin

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A critical evaluation of Deaf Christian Ministry Africa's students after five years: A case study

Jan Oberholzer

The establishment of Deaf Christian Ministry (DCMA) on April 10, 2006 evolved from the vision of training Deaf people for the ministry. It has already been five years and we are challenged with the most critical question: How do we evaluate these students?

Hearing loss

In order to understand the context of this matter, certain points must be explained:

- It is estimated that 800 million people worldwide are affected by some loss of hearing. This number is set to rise rapidly over the coming years³.
- In the United States of America hearing loss is the third-largest chronic health problem (after high blood pressure and arthritis).
- Despite this, most people with hearing loss still wait far too long before seeking help. In 75% of cases, they take no action when they first notice a hearing loss. It takes, on average, seven years before hearing loss is finally recognized – a loss of time and quality of life⁴.

The categories of hearing loss

Marshark states that people with hearing loss can be classified into three categories according to the onset of hearing loss as well as the degree of the loss.

Hard of hearing people: Hard of hearing persons are those with a hearing loss of between 26 and 70 dB⁵. Onset of hearing loss can be either from birth or later in life. This category of people use hearing aids to amplify sound. They also use spoken language.

6. **Deafened people:** Marshark defines deafened people as people who have lost

3 Health Information Publications, <http://www.yourmedicalsourc.com/library/glueear>, 2004.

4 Health Information Publications, <http://www.yourmedicalsourc.com/library/glueear>, 2004.

5 Marshark M, *Raising and Educating a Deaf Child, A Comprehensive Guide to the Choices, Controversies and Decisions Faced by Parents and Educators*(Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 24.



their hearing after having acquired a spoken language (post lingual). Their hearing loss is so severe that they cannot benefit from the use of a hearing aid. The hearing loss is usually 91dB and more. Hearing loss can occur instantly or over a period of time. Accidents, illnesses, and so forth are possible reasons for this type of hearing loss. People who become deaf experience severe communication problems because they are still able to speak but cannot hear what other people say. The communication process is influenced negatively at times and new ways of communication must be sought. According to Marshark there are alternative means of communication such as lip-reading, which involves looking at the facial expression and lip movements of a person. This is not the most effective means of communication, because some people do not form their lips that helps others to “read” what is being said. It is also very difficult to lip-read people with moustaches and people who do not speak clearly. According to Fromkin and Rodman⁶, 75% of spoken words cannot be read accurately through lip-reading. If, for instance, the lip patterns made when producing letters such as “B” and “P” are identical, it will be difficult to distinguish between “BEN” and “PEN”. Communication in group situations proves to be difficult as you cannot lip-read everyone, and there will not be a possibility to communicate in the dark. Acquiring the skill of lip-reading is also very difficult. A second option for communication for deafened people is total communication. According to Marshark total communication refers to the method of communication where every potential or available resource is used for linguistic communication. This includes speech, signs, amplification of hearing, drawing and finger spelling. A third option for communication is sign language. Fromkin and Rodman define sign language as a language used where hand and body movements represent words. Sign language is a visual gestural system with its own rules and grammar regulating the language. Sign language as a method of communication is usually not an easy or the first option for deafened people because it is a new language that needs to be acquired not only by the person but by his/her family and friends. Deafness is medically defined by the extent of loss of functional hearing. A person is recognized to be medically or audiologically deaf when that person has little or no functional hearing and he/she depends upon visual rather than auditory communication⁷. Visual means of communication include sign language, lip-reading, speech-reading, reading and writing.

7. Deaf born people: Persons who were born deaf (congenital deafness) and people who lose hearing before the acquisition of a language (pre-lingual deaf) come under this category. Conductive deafness can be acquired in various ways. Otitis media refers to an infection in the middle ear. The infection can harm the eardrum or bones in the middle ear. Otitis media is common amongst children and not very

6 Fromkin V, Rodman R, *An Introduction to Language* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1998)

7 Marshark M, *Raising and Educating a Deaf Child, A Comprehensive Guide to the Choices, Controversies and Decisions Faced by Parents and Educators* (Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 22, 48

common among adults. It is curable if treated quickly. The hearing capacity of children who have repeated ear infections may be temporary, but in severe cases, it can lead to varying degrees of hearing loss or even permanent hearing loss. Glue ear is the second cause of hearing loss that is a common occurrence in children according to the websites of medical institutions. This may lead to an average degree of hearing loss for the rest of their lives. When glue ear starts, it is easy to be treated but if repeated treatment is necessary, it may result in permanent hearing loss.⁸ A third cause of acquired deafness is obstruction of the ear canal. Children sometimes put objects in their ears. Objects such as, plastic, seeds, crayons, and so on, are covered with wax and obstruct the canal, causing permanent damage to their hearing. In some people, the glands produce more wax than can be easily excreted from the ear. This extra wax may harden within the ear canal and block the ear. Wax can be pushed deeper into the ear canal and cause a blockage. Wax blockage is one of the most common causes of hearing loss⁹. Congenital or early-onset hearing loss occur prior to language acquisition and typically result from hereditary factors or from maternal illnesses or illnesses the infant suffered from early on. According to Marshark, these people are profoundly deaf¹⁰.

Marshark's views and that of publications by the University of the Free State¹¹ indicate that 90% of deaf children are born of hearing parents. Parents need to decide about ways of communication with their deaf child and in the family. Marshark states that 10% of deaf children born of deaf parents have very little or no communication problems because the parents use sign language, their first language of communication, with their children from birth¹². Sign language is acquired in the same way by deaf children as spoken language is acquired by hearing children.

In comparison with hearing children, deaf children of hearing parents have a backlog when it comes to language development because they do not have the same access to language acquisition as hearing children of hearing parents. This is because most hearing parents usually do not know sign language. This backlog increases during the school years. According to Gallaudet University, a large number of their students do not have the skills to use text books successfully on first year level. These students are functionally illiterate in terms of the basic reading and writing skills needed for one to function in the community.

8 Health Information Publications, <http://www.yourmedicalsourc.com/library/glueear,2004>.

9 House Ear Institute, <http://www.hei.org/health/healthyyear/outer.html>, 2004.

10 Marshark M, *Raising and Educating a Deaf Child, A Comprehensive Guide to the Choices, Controversies and Decisions Faced by Parents and Educators* (Oxford University Press, 1997)

11 "Application of South African Sign Language in a Bi-lingual Bi-cultural approach in education of the Deaf.", <http://etd.uovs.ac.za/ETD-db//theses/available/etd-03222011-153630/unrestricted/AkachPAO.pdf>.

12 Marshark M, *Raising and Educating a Deaf Child, A Comprehensive Guide to the Choices, Controversies and Decisions Faced by Parents and Educators* (Oxford University Press, 1997)



Marshark points out that it is important to keep in mind that reading and writing refer to performance in a second language for many deaf children. Evidence indicating that deaf children lag behind hearing peers in reading ability has been available for many years. According to Marshark it appears that more than 30% of deaf students leave school functionally illiterate. The most pronounced difficulties of deaf children compared to those of hearing children with regard to reading skills concern their knowledge of vocabulary and syntactic abilities.

Reading is a complex process. When a word is read, different processes take place to enable the reader to understand the word. In many instances words have a different meaning for deaf people than they may have for hearing people. They may even have no meaning at all because the words cannot be linked to stored data. Deaf people store data as signs (in visual format) and not as words.

For example: What happens when a deaf person sees a word "chair", in the following sentences:

There are three chairs in the room.

He chairs the meeting.

The deaf person will look at the word and visualize a chair (object). This, however, is not the meaning of the word in the second sentence. These lead to misunderstanding and to the conclusion that people born deaf find it difficult to read and understand the written word. This includes written material such as the Bible.

If we look at the methods of communication used in schools for the Deaf, namely Total Communication and Oralism, one can conclude that deaf children are not fluent in their own language (sign language). Therefore they have problems in learning a second language, i.e. a language in written format. Functional literacy is not enough to provide full access and understanding of literary work.

Research

In this study, deaf born people with sign language as their first language are the target group and therefore the different aspects regarding this group need to be taken into consideration. This will provide a clear understanding of the ways in which this group understands a language and how they function within the broader hearing community. Deaf with a capital "D" denotes Deaf people who see themselves as a linguistic and cultural group. Deaf with a lower case "d" denote people with hearing loss whose main means of communication is through speech reading supported by basic signs – generally they do not see themselves as a separate linguistic and cultural group. However, they may choose to be part of Deaf culture or live in both worlds. An all inclusive way to refer to all people with hearing loss could be D/deaf.

Perspectives on people with hearing loss

According to Van Herreweghe and Vermeerbergen¹³, the term “deaf” can mean that a person has a hearing loss or that a person belongs to a specific community. However, the differences between these meanings are indicated by the use of either an upper or a lower case “d”.

A lower case “d” is used when referring to deaf people viewed according to the pathological view. The pathological view considers deaf people as disabled and imperfect because they do not have normal hearing. People supporting this view spend time and money seeking a cure and use various devices that enhance auditory perception. The focus is set upon speech, while the use of sign language is ignored. Support is also given to the integrated socialization of deaf persons with hearing persons and those who can fix the defects of the deaf people so that they can be normalized, is considered professionals. The pathological view led to the historic, systematic oppression of the Deaf¹⁴.

Within the cultural view, the capital “D” is used to indicate that the deaf person belongs to a specific community or cultural group. In this case reference can be made to Deaf people. The cultural viewpoint concerns the view that deaf people are different from the hearing community. Supporters of this view see deaf people as a culture group (a linguistic and cultural minority) with its own norms and standards.

Deaf people do not see themselves as disabled¹⁵. One of the most important factors that bind deaf people together is their (sign) language. The term “loss” is a negative one, since many of these people were born deaf and never “lost”. Culturally it is true that a person, irrespective of type or degree (even hearing people) of hearing loss, who embraces Deaf culture and sign language fully is seen by the Deaf community as Deaf.

The target group of this study is deaf people seen in terms of the cultural view, who form part of the Deaf community and Deaf culture in Southern Africa. According to Humphrey and Alcorn¹⁶ a community is a social system where people live together and share certain aims and responsibilities in respect of each other. The term “Deaf community” has demographic, linguistic, political and social implications. South Africa has a national community of deaf people with shared characteristics, and there are deaf communities in almost every city and town.

13 Van Herreweghe M & Vermeerbergen M, *Tuishoren in een wereld van gebaren* (Gent.: Academia Press, 1998)

14 Humphrey J & Alcorn B, *So you want to be an interpreter: An introduction to Sign Language interpreting*, (Amarillo, Texas: H&H Publishers, 1996) p. 56-60.

15 Marshark M, *Raising and Educating a Deaf Child, A Comprehensive Guide to the Choices, Controversies and Decisions Faced by Parents and Educators* (Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 22.

16 Humphrey J & Alcorn B, *So you want to be an interpreter: An introduction to Sign Language interpreting* (Amarillo, Texas: H&H Publishers, 1996)



Deaf clubs and organizations play an important role in the Deaf community. They are the places where socialization takes place, and where information is shared. Because the Deaf have limited access to information, deaf clubs and organizations form a platform where information can be made available with the assistance of a sign language interpreter. To belong to a Deaf community a person needs to socialize with deaf people, know their language, understand their frustrations and work with them. Professionals, sign language interpreters, parents of deaf children, deaf people, and so forth can become part of the Deaf. A community consists of different cultural groups and therefore the deaf community consists not only of deaf people but also of hearing people. Lane et al. states that the deaf community is very closed and that membership has to be earned¹⁷. Members of the core of the Deaf community are profoundly deaf people who use sign language, share the same beliefs and follow the traditions and ways of the Deaf. People can be born into the Deaf community, for example, deaf children of deaf adults, or can become part of the Deaf community. Deaf children of hearing parents, for example, only became part of the community when they go to a school for the Deaf where they are exposed to the ways of the Deaf.

Lane states that sign language plays a very important role in the Deaf community. Within the Deaf culture there is a total disassociation from speech when socializing with each other. Some deaf people might choose to use speech when interacting with hearing people in certain situations but it is seen as inappropriate behavior when communicating with a deaf person.

According to Van Herreweghe & Vermeerbergen cultural values for deaf people are not available in written format. There are no books children can read to learn about values and norms of the Deaf community. Children learn these sets of behavior from older children in Deaf schools and from deaf adults through sign. Deaf people learn about their behaviour based on what they see and not on what they hear. The visual orientation of deaf people is a very important substance of the Deaf community and should therefore also be included in education.

The National Institute for the Deaf (NID)'s prescribes the following communication tips when interacting with the Deaf community:

- Touch a Deaf person lightly on the shoulder to get his/her attention. Make eye contact and stand still so the Deaf person can see your face.
- Breaking eye contact either indicates that the conversation has come to an end or that you are rude.
- Consider that many Deaf persons speech read. It is therefore important that the Deaf person can see your lips and take note of your facial expressions and body language.

17 Lane H, Hoffmeister R & Bahan B, *Journey into the Deaf World* (California: DawnSignPress, 1996), p 124-130.

- When communicating through sign language, permit some space for signing. If a Deaf person becomes excited or angry, signs may become bigger.
- If sign language is not used, try speaking a bit slower and more clear than usual.
- Make sure you are not standing in front of a light source (e.g. a window) so that there are no dark areas on your face.

According to Baker-Shenk and Cokely¹⁸ the avenues to become a member of the Deaf community are the following:

- The audiological avenue indicates that a person must be deaf. A deaf person will be accepted much more easily in the Deaf community than a hearing person unless the hearing person complies with the other avenues to be listed.
- The linguistic avenue. If a person wants to be a member of the Deaf community that person must have the ability to understand and use the language of the Deaf. The level of fluency seems to be related to the level of acceptance into the Deaf community because values and goals are transmitted through sign language.
- Socialization and participation with the Deaf in the Deaf community is the third avenue to become a member of the Deaf community.
- Political engagement. According to Baker-Shenk & Cokely this is the potential ability to exert influence on matters which directly affect the Deaf community on a local or national level.

DEAF CHRISTIAN MINISTRY AFRICA (DCMA)

DCMA was born out of a great need. Most Deaf people in South Africa (almost 400 000 in total) are cut off from the normal means of spiritual care due to their communication needs¹⁹. The four Dutch Reformed churches and a few small Deaf groups in the country cannot serve the needs of this big group of people²⁰.

In 1998 the law for schools in South Africa changed to limit the religious education in schools to giving of information on all the different religions. Deaf learners seldom have a home where they can learn about God outside the school. To reach the thousands of isolated Deaf people in South Africa with the gospel of Jesus Christ, DCMA was established on April 10, 2006, functioning as part of the NID.

Training and placement of Deaf ordained ministers and pastors of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ for the Deaf in a Deaf friendly way, by qualified, experienced persons

18 Baker-Shenk C & Cokely H, *American Sign Language, A Teacher's Resource Text on Grammar and Culture* (Washington DC: Gallaudet University Press, 1980)

19 DCMA Prospectus: 2011. p4

20 DCMA Prospectus: 2011. p4



and organizations who are involved in the world of the Deaf for sustainable ministry and community transformation to the Deaf in Africa in their own language and culture.

Using the material of Veritas College International

Finding a curriculum to suit our needs was difficult. We needed a program that did not require a grade 12 certificate. The program also needed to focus on developmental skills rather than mere academics and also had to train students in all aspects of ministry. We found a suitable program at the Veritas College International, which does vocational training and is based on competency. The program focuses on understanding three steps in Biblical ministry:

- the Bible in the form that it was written in²¹
- the message of the Bible (Hermeneutics)
- becoming skilled in bringing the message to the people today in all the different forms.

This includes sermons, Bible studies, teachings, leadership development and counseling.

An advanced diploma where the student is trained in leadership, spiritual skills and church/project management, is also available. This includes budgeting, fund raising and staff management²².

When educating the Deaf, practical experience is a necessity. Weekly practical work is done at schools for the Deaf, an old age home and a College for Deaf people from different cultures and backgrounds as well as at a centre for multiple disabled Deaf people.

Students get the opportunity to develop confidence and grow under the supervision of the staff and church leaders at DCMA. First years get to attend all church-related activities as observers. By the end of their first year they are allowed to deliver short sermons and do Bible studies. Second year students may help present the different activities under supervision. Third and fourth year students have to take full responsibility – in partnership with the local minister – of one or two church activities.

We try to our best make use of subject matter experts to present certain courses, to ensure quality training. Training is presented visually with sign language. Structural similarities in sign language allows for mutual understanding within classrooms filled with Deaf students from different areas and countries.

For the purposes of this study, students were asked to answer a series of questions. The students were evaluated in the following areas of their lives:

21 Exegesis, <http://www.veritascollege.org>

22 DCMA Prospectus: 2011. p13-14

- Personal growth: The student has a well balanced personality and character and is emotionally healthy and mature in all aspects.
- Theological knowledge: The student has a good biblical understanding and can do good exegesis, hermeneutics and homiletics.
- Life skills: The student is able to handle life situations in an appropriate way.
- Spiritual maturity: The student has a living, well balanced relationship with God.

All the students evaluated by the theological training proved to be competent. The material from Veritas College International was well designed and appropriate for Deaf education. Most students were satisfied with the training provided we improve on our visual materials and sign language skills. The thought process of a hearing person differs from that of the deaf person²³ and this becomes clear when a hearing person conducts training. All students reported a need for practical life skills such as computer skills, developing material that can be easily accessed by the Deaf, business and management skills as well as reading and writing. Working in the Deaf world is a big challenge, for which students can never be fully prepared. A solid relationship with God is essential to ensure that a Deaf pastor can face the challenges in ministry²⁴. All students noted that continuous mentorship and support is critical in order to ensure successful ministry.

Conclusion

This article has shown the immense need for trained pastors in the Deaf community. The case study that showed the need for follow-up of the Alumni is of utmost importance. The following five years at Deaf Christian Ministry Africa will be of utmost importance because we need to sustain the work that has begun five years ago. From now on new strategies and tactics should be put in place to insure that the students will experience the full support of Deaf Christian Ministry Africa's Advice Committee as well as the lecturers.

Rev. Jan Oberholzer currently works at the National Institute for the Deaf in Worcester, in the Western Cape, South Africa. He believes that he has a calling to work with Deaf people who use Sign Language as means of communication. He is involved in ministry with Deaf people for more than 18 years.

23 Written student reports: 2011

24 DCMA Prospectus: 2011. p16



What Would Calvin Say? Guidelines for Responsible Stewardship within the Indian Context

Sobana Kinson

If you are born, then live with the fame;

Those who have it not are better unborn

(*Thirukural* ²⁵ 24: 16)

One could almost say that John Calvin implicitly followed these words from the *Thirukural*. We still talk about his theological vision asking whether it has made positive or negative impacts in our world. It still influences and changes the world in some way. We are living in a world that is changing. Changes are inevitable. Since theology is integrally related to one's own historical context, our first and foremost task is to look at Calvin in his historical context and see how far Calvin's theology is relevant to our global context. Though it is impossible to exhaust this topic, this article sheds light on his thoughts on ecology and economy during his time.

Calvin's Historical Context

During the late medieval period European societies underwent tremendous social and economic changes. As a result, socioeconomic problems increased and social injustices intensified. These were intrinsically related to ecclesiastical problems. Calvin was one among those who formulated a radical theological thought to address these socioeconomic problems. Calvin experienced the world in which he lived as completely chaotic. It was a world in which everything turned around and nothing was sure, in short, a world where confusion ruled. This chaos particularly affected Christians, who lived like sheep among wolves.²⁶

Economic Conditions

During the medieval period, the European economy depended on agriculture. Land formed the basis of wealth²⁷. It was controlled both by the feudal lords and nobles

25 *Thirukural* is a masterpiece of ancient literature in Tamil. It is not only of great artistic and stylistic literary value, but it also a direct to the art of living with pieces of precious wisdom.

26 Herman J. Selderhuis, "Calvin's View of the Bible as the Word," *Reformed World* 57/4 (December, 2007): 271.

27 Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House,

of the church. But in the sixteenth century, for various reasons, the socioeconomic situation was radically changed. The European economy was no longer solely dependent on agriculture. New industries like mining, fishing, printing, etc. were flourishing²⁸. This economic change was soon followed by the organization of commerce and the introduction of a money-based economy.²⁹ In short, a new economic system which later became known as capitalism was developing. This can be compared with globalization in our present day context.

With the development of this new economic system, there emerged in the European society a powerful socioeconomic class which became popularly known as the bourgeoisie. Since economic power was in their hands, they became very influential in church and society. This new socioeconomic group seems to have dominated social, political and economic life in many of the cities and towns of the sixteenth century. Along with this came social and economic injustices. It was evident that the European society was overwhelmed with all sorts of problems and evils. Crime was rampant, murder was widespread among all classes, robbers were plentiful, prostitutes and sexual abuses were also common and food and other products were adulterated³⁰. In this situation, the church was not immune to these evils and was infested with injustice and corruption. In short, European society was passing through social, cultural and economic crises at that time of Calvin.

Ecclesiastical situation

The ecclesiastical situation in the later medieval period is hard to imagine now. Most church historians hold the view that the church was too worldly, the papacy too far at a distance, the clergy too greedy and the religion of the people too vulgar. Corruption of all kinds was seen almost everywhere.³¹ Simony (i.e. the buying and selling of church appointments) was common. Many bishops and clergy lived in open sin indulging in illicit love affairs. Chadwick noted the case of a priest who was observed publicly drunk in the town and yet was allowed to continue his ministry without rebuke.³² The clergy enjoyed luxurious living while their parishioners lived in poverty and hardship. In short, the late medieval church was sinful and corrupt. Ecclesiastical abuses increased with the sale of indulgences.³³

1967), 297.

28 Harold J. Grimm, *The Reformation Era* (New York: The Macmillan Co, 1959), 8.

29 Ibid.

30 H. Vanlalauva, op. cit., 162.

31 Gernard M. G. Reardon, *Religious Thought in the Reformation* (London: Longman, 1981), 1.

32 Owen Chadwick, *The Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon Publication, 2003), 24.

33 Indulgences were based upon the concept of works of supererogation. According to medieval Catholic teaching, there was at the disposal of the Church and her head abundant treasury of the merit of Christ and the saints which might be applied vicariously to anyone by the pope. Its sale was first practiced in the thirteenth century. It was at its peak in the early sixteenth century which provided the immediate occasion for the Reformation. H. Vanlalauva, op.cit., 168.



Thus, sixteenth century Europe faced enormous social, economic, political and ecclesiastical upheaval. And this socioeconomic context contributed to Calvin's ideas about reforming these situations. Calvin was a man of his age. Since all theology is, to some extent, conditioned by the historical context, Calvin's theology could not avoid having been influenced by his context. Against this background we will now consider the Indian context.

Present Context of India

India³⁴ is a land of irony. India offers a particularly intense example of the ambiguities and contradictions between religious world view and ecological ethics. Perhaps nowhere is there such an extensive sense of the sacrality. Its forests and rivers are seen as holy, even as embodied gods and goddesses. India as a whole is venerated as a sacred land. But its rivers are polluted, forests are disappearing, and cultivatable land has turned into commercial buildings. But, in the global aspect, India is marching towards becoming a super-power. Despite its rich natural resources and favourable geographical location, India is still one of the poorest nations in the world. The newspapers may suggest that India is shining, but in reality India is dying economically and ecologically. The 2008 global financial crisis has had ripple effects in India and has left millions jobless, exporters impoverished and the great Indian middle class bereft of appetite for consumption.³⁵ The employees who worked in the Information Technology sectors (IT) in USA were sent back to their home countries. Most of them were Indians. The careers and lives of many are threatened with great uncertainty. Why is there insecurity in their jobs? Why is there instability in the global and Indian economy?

Economic conditions

- Every month we are tense with bills.
- Every month some fees are unpaid.
- Every month economy is upset.

This is the cry heard throughout India today. With the rise of the new economic power, economic exploitation has increased and this has led to the increase of poverty in the Indian society. The domination and control of the economic system by the elite plays a crucial role for the existing poverty in India. Because of this human greed and sinfulness, the poor and the marginalized that constitute half the total population, go to bed hungry. An important observation is that behind the oppressive system and structure that appears to cause problems in society is human sinfulness. There is a

34 India is the seventh largest country in the world. On account of its vast size, it is called a sub-continent. Being a vast country, there are different climates. Like many other Third World countries, the country has been facing various socio-economic, political and religious problems.

35 Nivedita Mukherjee, "Please Sir Give Me More," *India Today* 6 July 2009, 36.

discrimination based on caste, sex, religion, and ethnicity. In the Indian context, there is a manifestation of human depravity.

Political situation

The economic situation is closely connected to the political situation prevailing in our country. For Samuel Rayan, even India's parliamentary democracy was devised by the elite: not meeting the real problems of our society but serving the interests of the privileged. While doing so our political system provided the formal groundwork for every form of repression and exploitation.³⁶ India has democracy as a namesake.

Ecological Destruction

Mother Earth, Mother Earth, what makes you spin?

In search of wealth, ruthless men dig deep in,

Dig out gold, oil, gas, petrol turn by turn,

Man-made issues spurt as volcanoes burn,

Earth quakes, Tsunamis, Hurricanes strike in

Tsunami the giant killer waves

A warning to mend our callous ways

In 2004 there were millions of lives swallowed by the "Sea Mother". After seven years the scars of the incident are still with our people in the coastal lands. The rehabilitation works are not yet completed. People haven't yet come back to normal life. The question that arises in our mind is: Why were innocent lives taken by God without any reason? Is it God's judgment? Or is it not because of the ecological imbalance in the environment?

1. Calvin's Ideas on Ecology: Calvin the Environmentalist

Calvin has been interpreted as a champion of ecological activism. Beeline Lane, in his unpublished paper and future book, "The World as a Theatre of God's Glory: Spirituality & Ecology in the Reformed Tradition," presents Calvin as an environmentalist.³⁷ While there is an implicit attempt to ground the present day environmental movement in an historical precedent, Lane does not approach Calvin with regard to an authoritative biblical text. Lane's primary concern is for the environment but Calvin and the Bible

36 Samuel Rayan, "Theological Priorities in India," in *Irruption of the Third World: Challenge to Theology*, edited by M. M. Virginia Febella and Servio Torres (New York: Orbis Books, 1992), p.31.

37 Beeline Lane, "The World as a Theatre of God's Glory: Spirituality & Ecology in the Reformed Tradition" (unpublished paper, Saint Louis University, 1998).

are incidental.³⁸



Creation praises the creator

Examining the ecological significance of worship within Calvin and his followers, Lane argues that praise, is instrumental in maintaining God's creation, and the created world as a Theatre of God's Glory. Within this Theatre, all creatures – non-human as well as human – participate with God in the delight over God's creation, maintaining God's glory and sustaining the world.³⁹ Calvin repeatedly used vividly visual terms to describe the believer's encounter with this manifestation of divine glory. And so he observes the Spirit's work throughout the creation: "He quickens and nourishes us by a general power that is visible both in the human race and in the rest of the living creatures."⁴⁰ Again, with regard to faith's true object: "The pious mind does not dream up for any god it pleases, but contemplates the one and only true God. And it does not attach itself to whatever it pleases but it contents to behold him as he manifests himself."⁴¹ And in a summary statement, Calvin says of nature: "Let us not be ashamed to take pious delight in the works of God open and manifest in this beautiful theatre."⁴²

Whole creation as "The Theatre of God's Glory"

Calvin's idea was of God's providential ordering of things throughout the whole creation as a manifestation of God. He even referred to the individual works of God in creation as "represented, as in a painting."⁴³ One of his favourite images was of the whole creation as "the theatre of God's glory." Calvin's most cherished image of nature was a "sort of mirror in which we contemplate God, who is otherwise invisible." Calvin's theology of nature might be thought of as contemplative. He was enthralled by the beauties of nature, which he encountered as the manifestation of God and God's glory. So a recent interpreter of Calvin instructively calls the Reformer "the creation-intoxicated theologian."⁴⁴

Responsibility of human beings

The responsibility of human beings includes how we deal with the earth, which is placed in our trust. We have received the earth from God "for our use"; we are virtually created under the "condition" that we "subjugate" it. (Commentary on Gen 1:26). While this mission is limited to the mandate of agriculture and does not confer upon

38 Ibid.

39 Lane's work focuses on the study of spirituality, and it is therefore important to him to include a personal account in this manner.

40 Calvin, *Institutes* 3.1.2 cited by Peter Wyatt, *Jesus Christ and Creation in the Theology of John Calvin* (Allison Park PA: Pickwick, 1996), p.64.

41 Calvin, *Institutes* 1.2.2 cited by Peter Wyatt, op. cit., p.87.

42 John Calvin, *Institutes* 1.5.11 cited by Peter Wyatt, op. cit., pp.95-96.

43 John Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.12 cited by Peter Wyatt, op. cit., p.9.6.

44 Peter Wyatt, op. cit., 91.

us an independence that would compete with God, Calvin on the basis of this text came nevertheless to the far-reaching and quite modern conclusion that if nature is subordinate to humankind, its fate is, come what may, dependent on people's action and inaction. "And we see how constantly the condition of the world itself varies with respect to men (sic)" (on Gen 3:17).⁴⁵ "The inclemency of the air, frost, thunders, unseasonable rains, drought, hail, and whatever is disorderly in the world, are the fruits of sin" (on Gen 3: 19).

The modern ecological drama is thus set before us as divine pedagogy. They impress upon us the current responsibility we have for the balance of nature and for a society prone to hunger and illness. The key anthropological concepts of integritas and rectitude remind us of the proper God given order and point once again to the cosmic horizon within which humankind finds its home. There is a spiritual solidarity that connects people with the universe; if the earth is pulled down together with human defection and rebellion, it regains its dignity as the site of God's glory once we return to God's ways, which were lost with Adam.⁴⁶

It is difficult to turn a page in Calvin's sermons, commentaries, or treatises without finding a reference to some aspect or creature of the natural world. The power and variety of creation, including the beautiful, the violent, the charming are regularly set before the readers of his theology. In Calvin's mind, the world of nature is never separated from the realm of divine revelation. For him, to borrow a phrase from Horace Bushnell, "the outer world is the vast dictionary and grammar of thought."⁴⁷

Calvin's insistence on God's gift of creation

God's will for creation flourishing is the constant measure of human society and humanity's engagement with the created world in all its mystery and depth. Central features of this vision are a fundamental affirmation of human equality and the celebration of difference between and among human persons. It includes an awareness of the profound interrelatedness of all aspects of creation, the call for human beings to embody just relations, and an enduring commitment to the affirmation of human dignity. At the heart of this vision lies a compassionate commitment to love, justice, responsible care and hospitality towards widows, orphans, and strangers: those who are defenceless, displaced, hungry, lonely, silenced, betrayed, powerless, sick, broken in body and spirit, and all those who suffer in our globalizing and polarizing world. "Where God is known, there also humanity is cared for" (On Jeremiah, 22:16). Calvin claims that we see Christ in all persons and are uplifted and judged by his presence

45 Christian Link, "Calvin between Humanism and Discipleship," *Reformed World* 57/4 (December, 2007): 259

46 Christian Link, *op. cit.*, pp.259 -260.

47 Horace Bushnell, "Preliminary Dissertation on the Nature of Language as Related to Thought and Spirit," in *Theology in America*, edited by Sydney E. Ahlstrom (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967) p.325.

p.in them, forever proclaiming in our words and actions the integrity of creation as “the theatre of God’s glory.”⁴⁸



2. Debate on theology of creation

In the 20th century, John Calvin’s theology of creation has been the subject of much debate. Calvin’s theology of nature can be thought of as profoundly visual, eagerly focused on the manifestations of God in every creature and on the goodness and beauty of every creature. For Calvin, the beauties of God’s providential works are apparent and manifest everywhere, in a great and glorious theatre or in a beautiful painting. Calvin espoused a remarkably vivid theocentric theology of nature. For him, the encounter with nature is first and foremost an encounter with God’s creation. But here comes the problem. For Calvin, the whole creation must also be understood in intensely anthropocentric terms. Calvin made the statement: The “end for which all things were created” was “that none of the conveniences and necessities of life might be wanting to men.”⁴⁹ Moreover, although he strongly emphasized the will of the creator’s providential power rule in and through all things, Calvin’s purpose often was to show ‘the God who elects the believer by grace alone for eternal salvation’, is operative providentially in nature, notwithstanding the apparent evils and experienced tribulations of life in the created order.⁵⁰

Read through systematic Barthian categories, Calvin’s thought on nature has been construed as conceptually negative, simply a thematic foil for an exclusive “anthropocentric” gospel of salvific revelation in Jesus Christ. Calvin espoused such anthropocentric motifs in the context of his theocentric views of creation, because that is how he read the scripture’s own testimonies to the goodness and the graciousness of God. For him, moreover, the two accents theocentric and anthropocentric held together harmoniously, however much those accents might appear today to stand in tension. Calvin heightened the anthropocentric accent even further. He understood the believer’s life in creation much more as the “active life (*vita activa*) than the “contemplative life” (*vita contemplativa*). For Calvin, the believer is called to work for new social forms and new configurations of the human environment, with a confidence born of an intense sense of chosenness and a divinely ordained historical destiny.

This vocational dynamism separated from its theocentric context later became the captive of forces essentially alien to it and an aggressive spirit of domination driven by a human will-to-power over nature. While it would be going too far to agree this as the cause of the modern project of dominion over nature, undertaken especially by the forces of burgeoning capitalism, it may be recognized that “the spirit of Calvinism” helped set the stage for secularized developments in Western mercantile and industrial

48 A Report on What is the Significance of Calvin’s Legacy? *Reformed World* 57/4 (December, 2007): 234.

49 John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, translated by John King (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Printing Company, 1847), p.196.

50 John Calvin, *Institutes* 1.16.5.

society for such are the ambiguities of the Reformer Calvin's theology of nature. Calvin profoundly was shaped by the sensibility of seeing nature as a manifestation, even a garment of the creator. But Calvin's theology was vulnerable, in a later more secular context, to destructive ideological constructions.⁵¹

3. Economic ideas of Calvin: work ethic and lending money at interest

Calvin was part of a society that had forbidden the lending of money with interest for 750 years (since the council of Nicaea in 775). During that period many laws were passed against usury but people found ways to work around it. It is in this context that Calvin brings new insight into society. Taking interest on loans was officially banned by canon law, but in practice was accepted by the community. In Geneva prior to the Reformation, interest rates were set at 5% per 3 months.⁵² By 1544 Calvin had "formulated a doctrine about lending money at interest."⁵³ According to Bieler, Calvin had been set free from the traditional views held by the medieval theologians. Calvin was no longer bound to the traditional views of the past and so was free to develop his own biblical ethics concerning the lending of money.⁵⁴

Turning to Scripture, Calvin found many instances in which the lending with interest was forbidden. These would have been the same passages to which canon law appealed; yet Calvin's interpretation was new, even revolutionary. Calvin allowed for the lending of money at interest. By applying new hermeneutical insights Calvin learned that the banning of usury was in relation to lending to the poor. God, according to Calvin, does not want his people to be tight-fisted to the poor. In his commentary on the law Calvin interprets the ban on interest in Exodus 22:35 to be a command of charity to the poor and not a total ban on taking interest.⁵⁵ In his commentary on Psalm 15:5 Calvin asks the question "Whether all kinds of usury are to be put into this denunciation, and regarded as alike unlawful?"⁵⁶ Again, Calvin points to the role of the rich and the necessity of kindness to the poor but goes on to say that a total ban on interest is not what the psalmist is advocating. If there is a total ban, the man in need of money, who will be sinning by borrowing money, will be "rendered bolder by despair, and may rush headlong into all kinds of usury . . ."⁵⁷

However, Calvin cannot cast off the perception of the moneylender as a terrible man.

51 H. Paul Santimire and John B. Cobb Jr., "The World of Nature According to the Protestant Tradition", in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, edited by Roger S. Gottlieb (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.123.

52 Andre Bieler, *op.cit.*, 55.

53 *Ibid.*

54 *Ibid.*, 56

55 John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Last Four Books of Moses: Harmony*, vol. 3, translated by William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), p.126.

56 John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of Psalms*, translated by James Anderson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), p.212.

57 *Ibid.*



He agrees with Cato that a moneylender is no better than a murderer, for they are both “bloodsuckers.” It is because those who lend money tend to turn to evil and lose all compassion for their brothers, God forbids usury.⁵⁸ Calvin realizes that the lending for investment is different from lending to the poor. Therefore, he allows money lending on a limited scale for the sake of developing business capital.⁵⁹ Throughout his teaching on usury Calvin is painfully aware of the sinfulness of man. Moneylenders turn into greedy and heartless men who will lend only to the rich, for they know they will receive a return on their investment. When lending to the poor, the moneylender plunders and devours them.⁶⁰ Calvin’s teaching on usury dealt with the growing industrialization of the European city and the need for capital but still kept the biblical teaching on usury in sight. This teaching was one of compassion for the poor and love for the neighbour.

The differentiation between consumptive and productive interest is a trail-blazing concept, including the realm of economic theory, which takes the new developments into account. It makes a difference whether people pawn the very shirts off their backs, or if they invest money in construction of a factory. While the basic principle prevails that “in lending, one should not make use of one’s neighbour’s distress”, capital is nevertheless needed for the business transactions that constitute the existential basis for merchants and entrepreneurs.⁶¹

The problem of the rich

When modern critics of Calvin declare him to be the father of *laissez-faire*⁶² capitalism they fail to understand the importance of this issue. The Marxists may claim as their slogan, “to each according to his needs, from each according to his capacities,” but Calvin understood that this was a biblical teaching. Visser’t Hooft places the charge that it is in the perversion of later Calvinism that Calvin’s teachings of social reform were abandoned and that the Calvinist churches did not for long maintain the courage and vitality necessary for the accomplishment of the prophetic mission entrusted to them – a mission which, for Calvin, had been an essential duty of the church. To Calvin the rich in a society had a primary responsibility to care for the poor. This admonition was not only to be applied actively by giving alms but also by ensuring that justice was done in the sight of God.⁶³

For those who want to know and understand the theology of John Calvin, they must get to know the heart and soul of this compassionate man. Calvin’s love for humanity and his compassion for the downtrodden is a trait seldom spoken of today. We are fed with

58 Ibid., 213.

59 Andre Bieler, *op. cit.*, p.56.

60 John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of Psalms*, *op. cit.*, p.213.

61 Christian Link, *op. cit.*, 258.

62 Mark Valeri, “Religion, Discipline, and the Economy in Calvin’s Geneva,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 28 (1997), pp.123-142.

63 John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, *op. cit.*, p.200.

a never-ending stream of references to “stern old John Calvin”,⁶⁴ even though he was a man who said of himself, “You know the tenderness or rather the softness of my soul . . .”⁶⁵ It is this tenderness which permeates the whole of Calvin’s theology and ethics and which is evident in all his writings, whether personal, theological, or ecclesiastical.

Calvin’s concern was that the glory of God be celebrated and witnessed by all levels of life, that all of creation sings God’s praises in concrete and vibrant ways, and that the beauty of God will be manifested in our patterns of life both grand and small.⁶⁶

4. Calvin’s views on ecological and financial crises and their relevance to the Indian context

Today in India, evil and destructive forces are so active. What the poor and oppressed groups need most is the God of power and love. When they wonder whether there is any future for them they can be encouraged by Calvin’s confidence in the power of God. Calvin’s God is both loving and powerful, upholding the life of every human being, at every moment. This, as Calvin rightly noted, is for God’s glory. But this glory is to be understood in the light of Calvin’s thought as the well-being of God’s entire creation.

God is taking care not only of human beings but also creatures, including the smallest part of creation. It should be noted that God’s sovereignty in Calvin’s thought opposes exploitation and domination. God in Calvin’s thought is the God of poor and the oppressed. Today, in Calvinistic culture the rich become the elect and the poor the reprobate. This is a reversal of Calvin’s thought, for his theology was originally the theology of the oppressed. His doctrine of God’s sovereignty is meant for the oppressed.⁶⁷

Calvin also wrote that oppressors would not go unpunished for “God hears the cries and groaning of those who cannot bear injustice.” It is doubtful whether many contemporary theologians have enough courage to take the side of the oppressed as Calvin did. God in Calvin’s thought is the defender of the poor and what is important is to rediscover the relevance of Calvin’s ideas to our context. What is the importance of Calvin’s view of ecology and finance in the contemporary Indian context? Despite having some weaknesses and limitations, Calvin’s views are, relevant to our Indian context.

64 Paul Frederick Scotchmer, “Reformed Foundations for Social Concern,” *The Westminster Theological Journal* 40 (1978): 318.

65 Stauffer, Richard. *L’Humanité de Calvin* (Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Niestle, 1964), 45.

66 A Report on What is the Significance of Calvin’s Legacy? *Reformed World* vo.57 n.4 (December, 2007), p.234.

67 H. Vanlalauva, op. cit., p.292.



Conclusion

The sixteenth century European situation was more or less similar to today's Indian context. If we misuse and dominate the environment and creatures, not only will plants and animals die but the whole of humanity will perish. Through this we are damaging the glory of the theatre which God created for everyone's good. It is the need of the hour that we should be sensitized to the economic and ecological issues in our country.

I would like to conclude with the statement released by the President and General Secretary of World Alliance of Reformed Churches on 8 July 2009⁶⁸:

In our world today, many are hurting because of injustice in the economy long before the current meltdown in the financial markets. This has indeed been further aggravated by the financial crisis and job losses in many countries while those who benefited from the system before continue to be bailed out. To this Calvin stated a fair distribution can become reality if the rich do not greedily swallow up whatsoever they can get together; if they do not rake up on every side what belongs to others to satisfy their greed...

In our world today where humanity is blatantly ignoring the environment and in fact destroying God's creation, Calvin's words can be instructive: whoever owns a piece of land, should harvest the fruits in such a way that the soil does not suffer any damage... as God's stewards... if we follow this line, nobody will behave immoderately and destroy through misuse what God wishes to preserve.

John Calvin wrote these commentaries in the 16th century. They continue to be relevant today. That is the legacy for which we thank God. That is our hope that, inspired by this we who live in the 21st century will also be faithful to God in our commitment to Christian unity, to confronting the forces of evil and injustice in society, and to doing everything we can to be God's agents of transformation, making a difference in our communities. We may not eradicate the injustice in the world but our responsibility is to motivate people to live their life in fullness. George Hoffman said, "You can't change the whole world but you can change someone's world somewhere." With the hope of these words we can follow the footsteps of Calvin, to transform the world.

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68 <http://209.157.64.200/focus/religion/2289590> accessed on July 15th.

A Book Review on “Awakening of Calvin”

David Balázs Magyar

Gaál Botond, *Kálvin Ébresztése* (Debrecen: Hatvani István Teológiai Kutatóközpont, 2010). ISBN 978-963-88961-0-0. pp 212.

Botond Gaál, *Awakening of Calvin* (Debrecen: István Hatvani Institute for Theological Research, 2010). ISBN 978-963-88961-0-0. pp 212.

The year of 2009 in Hungary was the onset of an extended commemoration period of the Genevan Reformer’s theological and spiritual legacy called ‘Hungarian Calvin jubilee years’ (Kálvin Emlékévek 2009–2014).

This multi-faceted Hungarian Calvin-remembrance provides an individual, special opportunity for a great number of Calvin scholars to scrutinize, elaborate, and clarify the significance of John Calvin’s stewardship to the church and culture in the 21st century. By no means is it surprising that the present Hungarian’s admirable heritage has created a new “Calvin-Renaissance,” that is characterized by an enormous number of new Calvin biographies, monographies and volumes of essays and studies that have been published. Let me give some examples: Sándor Fazakas (ed.): *Kálvin időszerűsége* (Relevance of Calvin), Árpád Galsi (ed.): *Evangéliumi Kálvinizmus* (Evangelical Calvinism), and Ábrahám Kovács (ed.): *Calvinism on the Peripheries: Religion and Civil Society in Europe*. Nevertheless, it is taken for granted that the revival of the Calvin research will reach its peak with the publication of the new Hungarian translation of Calvin’s magnum opus, the Institutes, and his biblical commentaries. This is the current historical and theological context in which the latest book by Botond Gaál – *Kálvin ébresztése* (Awakening of Calvin) – was added to John Calvin’s collective memories.

“From Western-Europe, from the foot of the Alps, from Calvin’s City, who held the Hungarians in a great affection, we bravely cry out, on the basis of our pious books: »Wake up sleeper (...) and Christ will shine on you (Eph. 5:14)«” – Jean-Henri Merle d’Aubigné wrote to the Hungarian Reformed Church in the middle of the 19th century. However, this quotation originated from the early period of the liberal theology in Hungary – which ended 120 years ago, – the author of the book was still very convinced that he should compile his previously published articles under the title *Awakening of Calvin*. However, despite the fact that Botond Gaál, Professor of Dogmatics at Debrecen Reformed Theological University (DRHE) is an outstanding scholar in the



field of dialogue between theology and modern science; his extremely strong feelings about the life and work of John Calvin made him one of the most qualified Hungarian Calvin researchers.

By raising an important question in his preface (p. 11–13), namely: “what does Awakening of Calvin mean”, Botond Gaál sets out to reveal the background of the book. Readers will find that the author has a deeply rooted conviction concerning the spiritual descendants of the great Reformer keeping his highly relevant heritage fresh not only for our present time, but also for future generations. As Botond Gaál puts it: “even today John Calvin awakens us and we are challenged to preserve his spirituality for future generations” (p. 11). It is not without good reason to point out how the author finds him highly remarkable. Botond Gaál is very clear that this “kind of pedagogy” can be the only goal that justifies every Calvin jubilee. Accordingly, Botond Gaál takes into account the statement: “this anniversary should encourage us not to look back but rather forward as Calvin did” (p. 11–12). I therefore understand the reason behind his dedication of this volume to his theology students who represent the future generation.

Until recently, the most well known question concerning Calvin’s personality and theology was: “Calvin. Was he a Saint or a Sinner? Or an Enigma (-McGrath) who was a man of only one book (-Doumerque), the Institutes?” The book consists of ten articles by Botond Gaál in which he develops his essential conviction, namely: “the goal of this book is not to endow Calvin with infallibility” (p. 199). Even though, this collection of essays scrutinizes the Reformer’s stewardship from a wide point of view, we cannot speak about a forced unity of papers or themes. Having found an adequate approach, the author stresses, “these papers make it clear that John Calvin was neither a Saint, nor a Sinner. He was a distinctive reformer of the church, the secular world, and the culture with special regard to modern scientific thinking.”

“Calvin was a man of only one book, it is true, but this book was the Holy Bible” – the author reveals in the first two surveys (Calvin as a Reformer of the Doctrine of the Church p. 15–26; Sola Scriptura as a Normative Principle of Theology p. 27–42) and this fundamental belief is visible throughout the whole book. The Reformer wholeheartedly adopted the doctrine of Sola Scriptura (p. 30) as a normative principle of theology which has influenced his way of reading. “Calvin’s goal was to reform the doctrine of the church (...) and the ethical life of its people,” Botond Gaál claims, and he continues, “all of these changes were »re-formed« based on the teaching of the Scripture” (p. 12). For this reason the author’s clear biblical insight plays a leading role in his argument that testifies how ineffective it is to start long, endless theological debates without consulting the Scripture (p. 36–37).

Going through the three central articles of the book (Christian Baptism According to the Scientific Theological Thinking p. 43–62; The Calvinist Doctrine of Eucharist p. 63–81; Is Calvin’s Teaching of the Presbyterian Church-Government Sustainable on the basis of the Scripture p. 81–104), we come across the most valuable block of the

volume where more relevant and interesting issues emerge from. Although the World Communion of Reformed Churches strives to unify the great number of Protestant Churches all around the world, the Uniting General Council at Calvin College, Grand Rapids (June 18-28, 2010) revealed how multi-coloured and dissenting the interpretation of John Calvin's theological heritage is (p. 63). Treating the most crucial questions of Protestantism, Botond Gaál makes an important effort to clarify what the authentic teaching of the Reformer is in terms of Baptism, Eucharist and the ideas of the Presbyterian Church-Government. By no means is it surprising that the author, as a first step, seeks to expound the soteriological message of Christian Baptism as an essential gift from God. According to Botond Gaál, Baptism together with Eucharist advocates God's peculiar grace pointing to Christ's sacrifice and resurrection (p. 61).

Explaining the Calvinist teaching of Eucharist, Botond is driven by the key chapters of the *Institutes* (II. xiii.; IV. xvii. etc.), for instance IV. xvii. 32. where Calvin writes: "now, if anyone should ask me how this [true nature of the corporal presence] takes place, I shall not be ashamed to confess that it is a secret too lofty for either my mind to comprehend or my words to declare (...) I rather experience than understand it (trans.: Ford Lewis Battles)." Consequently, following the so-called "red thread" in the *Institutes*, Botond Gaál emphasizes the collective, spiritual identity of the Protestants on the basis of Eucharist, namely: "unio mystica cum Christo" (p. 79) that means a special unity of the Spirit with Christ and with each other as well.

In his study on the Presbyterian Church-Government, firstly the author illuminates the fundamental biblical texts in terms of several church-governments, from which he examined the Episcopal, the Presbyterian, and the Congregational models. By stressing the importance of the elders, Botond Gaál refers to IV. iii. 8 where the Presbyterian Church-Government was highly esteemed in the eyes of Calvin. The Reformer accepted that "governors were, elders chosen from the people, who were charged with the censure of morals and the exercise of discipline. (...) Each church, had from its beginning a senate (trans.: Ford Lewis Battles)", therefore the author claims: "Calvin sketched the system of the Presbyterian Church-Government and the Scripture testifies him very profoundly" (p. 103).

Turning to the article *The Role of Calvinist Thinking in the Development of Natural Sciences* (p. 105–114), readers will find a study on a relatively neglected field of current Calvin research which reveals how important John Calvin's impact was on natural sciences. Like Alister E. McGrath also, Botond Gaál examines the accuracy of Andrew Dickson White's vigorously polemical statement concerning Calvin's alleged question in his *Commentary on Genesis*: "Who will venture to place the authority of Copernicus above that of the Holy Spirit" (p. 106)? Botond Gaál's research points out that this polemical statement was published in a book by Gass, entitled *Geschichte der protestantische Dogmatik* in 1854. Nevertheless, the author, – a faithful student of Thomas F. Torrance, – has a very critical opposition in his mind. On the basis of



several texts of the Institutes (for instance: I. v. 2; I. viii. 1.; II. ii. 15.) he reveals that Calvin is undoubtedly the spiritual father of modern natural science as well, because he positively encourages the scientific study of nature, since he eliminates the so-called »controlling factors« of scientific research for instance: biblical literalism (p. 110, 113). It is with this good reason that this study by Botond Gaál was translated into English under the title *John Calvin and the Development of Natural Sciences in Europe* in honor of Hans Schwarz (Craig, Nessan ed.: *Doing Theology in a Global Context: A Festschrift for the Reverend Professor Dr. Hans Schwarz on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday*, p. 41–46.).

Without any doubt, the most interesting part of the book examines the genetic determination of man and the predestination from the viewpoints of Christian theology and modern biology (123–143). In this pioneering chapter, Botond Gaál focuses on the relationship between genetics and Calvin's doctrine of predestination. Although, the teaching of predestination felt like "to jump into cold water" for many Calvin researchers, Botond Gaál grasped the extensive theological consequences of predestination firmly. According to his conviction, predestination like Baptism and Eucharist is God's special means of grace in which he saves the human kind by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (p. 138). At this point Gaál cites Calvin who wrote in his Institutes: "if we seek God's fatherly mercy and kindly heart, we should turn our eyes to Christ (...) if we seek salvation, life, and the immortality (...) then there is no other to whom we may flee (...) he alone is the fountain of life" (III. xxiv. 5.; trans.: Ford Lewis Battles).

There are three more articles, the first two of which describe the general role and importance of Calvinism from a historical point of view. In the first survey (*The Role of Calvinist Minorities in the Cultural Life of Hungary* p. 115–122) readers will become acquainted with the Reformer's cultural and spiritual impact in Europe and even in Hungary where many people became followers of the Helvetic Reformation from the 1550s (p. 116–117). This study was originally presented on an international Calvin conference held at Debrecen Reformed Theological University (DRHE) on 23-24 April 2008. Readers can find this study in the conference proceedings in English entitled *Calvinism on the Peripheries: Religion and Civil Society in Europe* (ISBN 978-963-236-183-3), edited by Ábrahám Kovács.

The monumental closing study (*Calvinist Features on the Spiritual Face of the Hungarians* p. 145–185) intends to present the spreading of Calvinism in Hungary from a historical, literary and theological point of view. Botond Gaál tried hard to collect and summarize the messages of the main events of former Hungarian Calvin commemorations (1864, 1909, 1936 etc.). This is a remarkably useful survey because it contains a list of Calvin's works in Hungarian translation. At the same time, there is another piece of good news for English readers: the survey entitled "Calvin's Truth and Hungarian Religion: Remembering the Reformer" (p. 97–125) has already been published in English in the volume 38. of Brill's *Series in Church History: Sober, Strict,*

and Scriptural Collective Memories of John Calvin 1800–2000, edited by Johan de Niet and Herman Paul (ISBN 1572-4107).

The Awakening of Calvin ends with a short, summarizing chapter (Life of Calvin and his spiritual heritage p. 187–197) in which the author, Botond Gaál makes some useful remarks concerning John Calvin's biography and his spiritual legacy for the theology of the universal church.

On the whole, I am convinced that Awakening of Calvin is immense to be summarized in a relatively short review. Though the Theology of Calvin by Wilhelm Niesel was translated in to Hungarian as early as in 1943, Botond Gaál's book is one of the most outstanding introductions to the life and work of John Calvin. The author makes a remarkable contribution not only to Hungarian, but also to the International Calvin research. In short: this is not a book which can be neglected, thus, we ought to pay attention to Awakening of Calvin.

God Bless the International and the Hungarian Calvin research!

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Debilitating Past and Future Hope: Calvin, Calvinism and Islam

Charles Amjad-Ali

Calvin's Ka'aba - A controversial art

In the Netherlands, as part of Calvin's 500 year birth anniversary on July 10, 2009, an artwork was to be unveiled in Dordrecht, linking Calvin and Islam. Dordrecht was the site of the Synod of Dort in 1618-9, which critically established the five points of Calvinism (viz., TULIP⁶⁹) over against Armenianism. The artwork was commissioned by the city from a Moroccan artist, Aziz Bekkaoui, and was entitled "Het Mekka van Calvijn" (Calvin's Mecca). It was a reflective glass cube measuring 4x4x4 meters, more or less a replica of the Ka'aba, the shrine of Muslim pilgrimage (Hajj) in Mecca, Saudi Arabia.⁷⁰ This generated deep controversy and soul-searching in Holland. All of a sudden the Calvinist identity became of critical importance in that highly secular political and social context, so much so that the Prime Minister Jan Balkenende confessed that he was a Calvinist in a political speech. One of the main questions that surfaced during this controversy is what exactly does Calvin have to do with Islam? This is the critical question which I want to address briefly in this paper.

The resurgence of Islam: an epistemological challenge

Islam emergence as the new binary enemy in the post-1989 era was given its first full blown articulation by Samuel Huntington in his "The Clash of Civilizations?"⁷¹ This phrase has almost universal currency today, and is used ubiquitously with little reflection

69 TULIP stands for 1. Total depravity; 2. Unconditional election; 3. Limited atonement; 4. Irresistible (or Irrevocable) grace; and 5. Perseverance of the saints.

70 It must be mentioned here that most of the reporting of this event was highly negative and offensive. The artwork's unveiling was repeatedly postponed from July 10 till September 4, 2009. Ironically the street signs to the monument had two different arrows: one for Calvinists and another for non-Calvinists, perhaps shades of "double predestination." Both those in favor and those against the monument tried to justify their positions, though they ultimately made little or no sense.

Cf.: <http://www.nd.nl/artikelen/2009/september/04/yoga-rondom-het-mekka-van-calvijn-> as accessed on October 28, 2009.

71 Cf., Foreign Affairs 72:3 (Summer 1993): 22-28; which was later converted into a highly popular book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

on its full meaning or implications.⁷² Islam is being defined as the new enemy of the West, especially in Europe where the debate rages across papers and conferences from universities to ecclesial centers, etc. Ironically the debate is located largely in a conceptual paradox: on the one hand, religion is seen as a residual superstition which will be done away with when science and reason fully prevail, and on the other, it is also seen as the sole source of all conflict and violence in societies. Islam has shown itself to be anything but a residual superstition, and as the new enemy has forced itself not only on to the political and economic arenas but also into the socio-cultural consciousness and debate. It poses a threat to reason, to security, and some even go so far as to say the survival, of the modern Western state. Het Mekka van Calvijn has symbolically brought all these issues to the fore.

In recent years Islam has once again thrust itself into our prejudices, fears, language, and indeed our imagination. Studying Islam and its impact on the West (however "West" is envisioned) has become big business. Faced with what happened on September 11, 2001, we are looking for answers from history to provide us with clues in how to proceed in a highly shrunken world which is now totally globalised, while at the same time infused with an ever-prevalent threat of the "clash of civilizations" engendered in part by the role which the now self-admitted US Empire plays.⁷³

Crisis of meaning and the threat of Islam

An article on Calvin, Calvinism and Islam has to assess the fuller context of the Reformation. This was a period which saw world-changing events from the collapse of the Holy Roman Empire to the diminution of the Roman Catholic Church. Not only did it have religious, theological and spiritual aspects but clearly showed early political and nationalistic tendencies, as well as movements demanding social reforms. This was also a period of major rethinking, not just of existing doctrines and the understanding of Christian faith, but also of the theological epistemology and of the socio-political nature of the church. This situation had prevailed beginning with the Edict of Milan in 313 A.D. and the subsequent "conversion of Constantine." Some of these issues are still being worked out in the context of the post-Constantinian and post-Christendom church and Christian epistemology today.

The Reformation thoroughly challenged the singular political system of the Holy Roman Empire and the single understanding of Christianity controlled through the papacy and the Catholic Church. In the former case from its precursor, it led to the emergence

72 For a critical assessment of the history and widespread use of the phrase "clash of civilizations" see the present author's, *Islamophobia or Restorative Justice: Tearing the Veils of Ignorance* (Johannesburg: Ditshwanelo CAR²AS, 2006), esp. 2-5 and "Christian Ethics and Witness in the Context of Globalism, the Clash of Civilizations and the American Empire," in Alan Boesak and Len Hansen, eds., *Globalisation: The Politics of Empire, Justice and the Life of Faith*, (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2009) pp. 83-114, esp. 93ff.

73 For a larger discussion of these three issues see Amjad-Ali (2009), pp. 83-114.



of the nation-state in the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) and to a denominational state in cuius regio, eius religio (whose region/realm, his religion). This concept was fully expressed in the Peace of Augsburg of 1555 for the Catholic and Lutheran princes and was then expanded in the Treaty of Westphalia to include the Calvinists in this concord.⁷⁴ This much we all learn in our theological formation, in our church history and doctrinal and theological development. What we tend to overlook, and I am now more than ever convinced that we do so consciously, is the critical role of Islam during the medieval times and particularly during this period.

Born in the early seventh century, Islam quickly expanded to take over almost the whole of the Mediterranean, and most of the Roman Empire. Islam took over large chunks of the Western Roman Empire including all of North Africa, ruled for 800 years in Spain, made forays into France and as far as Otranto in Italy, attacked the Eastern Roman Empire and took over Byzantium, including Constantinople in 1453, which Islam called Rum, and understood to be the Rome. From there it moved eastward and northward capturing all of the Eastern Roman Empire and by the time of the Reformation it was sitting at the gates of Vienna threatening the core of what is now Western Europe. It is therefore not surprising when we read that one of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V's prime purposes in calling the meeting at Augsburg in 1530 (at which the Augsburg Confession was presented) was to rally the support of the Catholic and Lutheran princes against the Turks.

So overall, these were seen as apocalyptic times by the Reformation fathers. And it is in the context of seeing the world coming to an end and the persecution of the saints, that we also truly understand both their anti-papist as well as their anti-Jewish polemics. The latter were ever-present in the Reformers' condemnations, though weaker than those directed against the Catholic Church, for the Jews had no status of power except a theological one.

It is quite obvious when one looks at the huge amount of research and publications generated by Calvin's corpus that little has been written on Calvin's understanding of Islam. There is substantial material which scrutinises quite thoroughly the overall and immediate social, political, economic and ecclesial context of Calvin; however, given the huge shadow Islam cast over all these issues at the time, the lack of writing on Calvin and Islam is significant in itself. Possibly Calvin himself, struggling existentially on many fronts simultaneously, gave little or no attention to Islam, but that in itself requires some research as to why there is such a major contextual lacuna in Calvin. The other issue worth pursuing is how aware Calvin was of the existing, and I might add quite distorted, medieval understandings and interpretations of Islam. The simple fact that some critical figures of this medieval period had been substantially influenced by Islam was evident in people like Thomas Aquinas, Nicholas of Cusa, or for that matter Luther himself. The latter after all was witness to the first siege of Vienna by

⁷⁴ Anabaptists rejected this and were persecuted equally by all the princes, and therefore ended up migrating to the New World, finding no safe haven anywhere in Europe.

the Turks, which was also not too distant from Calvin and his contemporaries. The question is whether Calvin continued to hold these distorted and negative views of Islam and simply perpetuated them, or did he make a judgement from his humanistic and theological positions. Clearly Islam was an enigma and its very existence posed a political threat, a social challenge, and an existential theological problem for medieval Christianity.⁷⁵

The fact that Islam was a post-Christian religion (born over 600 years after Christianity yet claiming a continuity and abrogation of "Judeo-Christian heritage," now fulfilled in Islamic revelation), and a highly successful one at that, was a deeply perplexing crisis of faith for the West. The obvious solution to this problem was to see Islam as having apocalyptic significance towards the end of the world; or as a heresy, an aberration or obscene denigration of Christianity; or as a schism; and as a product of a corrupt person (viz., Muhammad) or the devil himself. When they did show any positive reading of some aspect of Islam, it was invariably followed by a highly negative ontological statement about Islam.

Because of its post-Constantinian mono-religious context, medieval Western Christianity seriously lacked any resources with which to counter Islam. The huge plethora of anti-Jewish polemical literature was inadequate to deal with the challenges posed by Islam, as the latter was a post-Christian and the former was a pre-Christian religion. The West, in spite of some 300 years of crusades and quite a long duration of dwelling in the Middle East, as well as several centuries of Muslim neighbours within Europe, with Spain on the one side and the Ottoman Turks on the other, on the whole had neither acquired knowledge of the main sources of Islam, nor the linguistic abilities to access them. Their cultural prejudices and the fear of contamination generated by the church in its polemics for crusades, kept the West steeped in ignorance and at the same time growingly frightened.

Alongside huge territorial gains, Islam had acquired power and massive material wealth, as well as intellectual traditions stemming from the Zoroastrian Persia (which itself filtered some of the Indian and Chinese knowledge base) and through its capture of both the northern and southern part of the Mediterranean had acquired Greco-Roman knowledge and scientific learning. By the 11th century all these had been brought together in Baghdad as a highly mature and sophisticated academic learning and from there it began to transmit this knowledge around its own world, and even to the West. All this was happening while the West was still caught in a deep period of intellectual stagnation. The West did finally learn these traditions and claimed this intellectual heritage for its own, though it was transmitted by and drawn upon the thoughts and

75 For a detailed discussion of Islam in the medieval world, see among others, J. U. Sweetman, *Islam and Christian Theology*, Vol. 1 (London: Lutterworth Press, 1955); Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1960, 1966); and R. V. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962). The last of these is especially critical to grasp the full impact of Islam on Medieval Christianity.



work of the schools of Avicenna (Ibn Sina 980-1037 from Bukhara), Algazel (Al-Ghazali 1058-1111, from Tus in Persia), Averroes (Ibn Rushd, 1126-98 from Cordova and Morocco) and other Muslim philosophers. Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd, in particular, were central to the introduction of Plato and Aristotle to Thomas Aquinas and medieval Europe, which at the time was restricted largely to neo-Platonic sources, possibly with fragments of Plato and Aristotle. Some have argued that this is the beginning of the Renaissance which then led to the Reformation. The West has seldom acknowledged this indebtedness, even though this intellectual tradition is now open knowledge.

Given the lack of source material, the only way for the West to understand Islam was to see it through a biblical prism. Islam was either seen as part of the negative apocalyptic elements of the Bible, as a mirror for the self-critical reflection of Christendom, or as the Rod of God. Thus Islam was deliberately misrepresented and this now forms a tradition of its own, over a thousand years old.

By the 12th century however, Islam became the object of intellectual inquiry because of the immediacy of its threat to the West, after the reverses in the crusades. Even then, these scholarly approaches were almost entirely negative. These medieval scholars act as precursors to the understanding of Islam prevalent in the Reformation leadership. I cannot cover these medieval scholars in any depth, but I will try here to give a sense of what is happening from the middle of the 12th century up to Calvin.

Peter the Venerable (c. 1092-1156), made a new beginning to combat “the heresy” of Islam by seeking the first translation of the Qur’an into Latin, ironically named *Lex Mahumet Pseudoprophete* (The Law of Mohammad the Pseudo-Prophet, c. 1143) translated by Robert of Ketton (c. 1110-1160); he also wrote *Summa Totius Heresis Saracenorum* (The Summary of the Entire Heresy of the Saracens) and *Liber Contra Sectam Sive Heresim Saracenorum* (Refutation of the Sect or Heresy of the Saracens).

Roger Bacon (c. 1214–1294), is considered to be one of the earliest modern scientists. He was deeply influenced by and acknowledged the Islamic scientists and Jewish scholars in the tradition of Ibn Sinna, Ibn Rushd and Musa bin Maimun (Maimonides).

The most critical person in all this was Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-1274) who was educated in Naples and Paris in the tradition of Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd, who introduced him to Plato and Aristotle. He wrote the *Summa de veritate catholicae fidei contra gentiles* (Treatise on the Truth of the Catholic Faith, against Unbelievers) between 1258 and 1264, popularly known as *Summa Contra Gentiles*, at the beginning of his academic and theological career. It was philosophical apologetic, even polemic, in defense of Christianity against the Jews and Muslims (Moors) in Spain.⁷⁶ It also targeted the

76 It is worth mentioning that the Vatican Council of 1869-70 while dealing with revelation employed almost verbatim Thomas’ treatment on the subject in this work. I find it very fascinating that most of the Christian polemics against Islam makes some reference or repeats the argument of this work even today without either having read this material or having any knowledge of the work itself or even of its existence.

Greek masters, whom he used with impunity in *Summa Theologica* (especially Aristotle), as well as his Muslim teachers, particularly Ibn Rushd. He later wrote two further works against Ibn Rushd and radical Aristoteleanism: *De unitate intellectus, contra Averroistas* (The Unicity of Intellect, against the Averroists; 1270) in which he blasts Averroism as incompatible with Christian doctrine; and *De aeternitate mundi contra murmurantes* (On the Eternity of the World, against Grumblers; 1270-72) which dealt with the controversial Averroist and Aristotelian theory of the beginninglessness of the universe. It can be argued that some of the central epistemological and hermeneutical roots and contributions of Thomas were deeply influenced by Islam, like his innovative doctrine of the perspicuity of the scriptures, which is now one of the central tenets of evangelical and fundamentalist churches; and his concept of the magisterium as the ultimate judge of the value of textual interpretation and limits to an ever-growing number of individual interpretations, which is still central to the Catholic hermeneutical tradition.

Raymond Lull (c. 1232-1315) wrote books in Arabic and was a missionary to the Muslims in North Africa. He wrote *Liber del Gentile e dels Tres Savis* (Book of the Pagan and the three Sages, 1277) in which a Jew, a Christian and a Muslim each make an apologetic of their respective religion to a Pagan. No less a figure than Samuel M. Zwemmer, who taught Mission at Princeton Theological Seminary, considered Lull to be the first missionary to Muslims.⁷⁷

Ricoldo of Montecroce, (c.1243 - 1320) was a Dominican missionary to Muslims in Baghdad. He wrote the *Contra Legem Sarracenorum*, a comprehensive refutation of Islam, which was translated into German by Martin Luther in 1542. Ricoldo attempted to translate the Qur'an, although it is not known if he completed it.

John of Segovia (c. 1400-1458) was concerned about finding the best way of converting Muslims to Christianity. For this he also commissioned a translation of the Qur'an into Castillian by a fellow Muslim Segovian. He then translated it into Latin, which presumably forms the basis for his *De mittendo gladio in Saracenos* - a refutation of the Qur'an.⁷⁸

Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464) wrote *De pace fidei* (On the Peace of Faith), shortly after the defeat of Constantinople in 1453 by the Turks, in which he proposes that true faith can be manifested in different religions, specifically including Islam, although Christianity is of course the greatest of these. He also wrote *Cribratio Alchorani* (Sifting the Koran, 1460), a detailed review of Ketton's Latin translation of the Qur'an mentioned earlier. Of course, he used this to prove the superiority of Christianity, but he did treat Judaism and Islam as sharing in the truth. Nonetheless, Nicholas supported Pope Pius II's call for a crusade against the Turks, even though this was a period when

⁷⁷ C.f., *Raymond Lull: First Missionary to the Moslems* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1902).

⁷⁸ See, Leonard Patrick Harvey, *Islamic Spain, 1250 to 1500* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) pg 79-85.



the value of crusades was being broadly questioned.

It is also worth noting in passing a somewhat weak tradition which viewed Islam as a mirror for the critical self-reflection of Christendom and as a rod of God, just as Assyria was for Israel in Jeremiah and Isaiah.⁷⁹ This attitude was especially present in the works of John Wycliffe (c. 1320-1384) and to some extent Erasmus of Rotterdam (c. 1466/69-1536).

Reformation and Islam

While Peter the Venerable, Roger Bacon, Thomas Aquinas and Nicholas of Cusa lived almost exclusively in the context of Medieval Christian Europe, Raymond Lull living in Spain and working out of the context of North Africa, Ricoldo of Montecroce working out of the context of Baghdad, and John of Segovia coming out of Spain, were all allowed to continue to operate in these Muslim contexts without being seriously threatened. This is a point to note in itself especially given the various texts that they published, some of which are quite derogatory of Islam, even by medieval standards. This may reflect a level of tolerance in the Islamic context which was not always reciprocated for Muslims operating in the Christian context and it is not usually recognised in scholarship. On the other side it must also be mentioned that the schools of Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, and Al Ghazali, etc., were able to operate in Paris and Naples during medieval times, influencing almost all of Europe, in spite of the prevailing negative attitudes towards Islam. It is further important that we look at this tolerance in the context of the contemporary Christian-Muslim dialogue and joint efforts for socio-political reconstruction and political virtue.

Martin Luther (1483-1546), at the beginning of the Reformation displayed all the medieval tendencies towards Islam mentioned above. However, his existential context makes these attitudes more poignant and vociferous. He does reflect a slightly more positive interpretation of Islam, although in his overall ontology and geist he remains totally negative. He regarded the Qur'an as a "foul and shameful book,"⁸⁰ and sought to translate it into German in order to expose its perversities. Luther could see nothing of value in Islam. Whatever its moral piety and good behaviour, it could not be salvific, for salvation only comes through Christ.

He saw the Turks as the rod of God, sent to punish Christendom's transgressions, and advocated prayer and repentance. His opposition to the crusades was not because of any pacifism towards Islam but rather because of his vociferous opposition of the corruption of the sale of indulgences which financed these crusades. Following the defeat of Belgrade (1521) and Hungary (1526) by the Ottomans, he called upon the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, to wage war against the Turks. Some have suggested that the reformation hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" (c. 1527-1529), based on

⁷⁹ C.f. Isaiah 10:5 and Jeremiah 2:46

⁸⁰ LW 46: 176.

Psalm 46, was written in the context of the Turkish siege of Vienna in 1529.

Luther saw Islam as a deceitful and murderous religion advocating utter disregard for marriage, and as the enemy of Christianity. However, he felt that many of these failings were not just unique to the Turks, but were traits equally prevalent in the papacy, Jews and even the radical reformers.

Calvin's attitude towards Islam

Calvin displayed his first reformation instincts as early as 1533, when he was forced to flee Paris. He fled to Basel in 1535 from whence he published the first version of his *Institutio Christianae Religionis* (Institutes of the Christian Religion) in 1536. The Turks would have been a very real and not too distant a presence for him, since the siege of Vienna took place in 1529, around the same time as he took up the study of law in Bourges. Following the Ottoman's victory at the Battle of Mohacs in 1526, Hungary was under constant Ottoman threat and occupation. Hungary had a strong Lutheran and some Calvinist presence, and Reformers elsewhere in Europe provided significant funding for the war against the Ottoman Turks. Much to his chagrin in 1536, Francis I of France made a Franco-Ottoman alliance with Suleiman the Magnificent against the Holy Roman Empire. In this context the fall of Buda to the Turks in 1541 was seen as highly momentous.

All this is to say that it is quite surprising that Calvin, a humanist with legal training, shows only a very casual understanding of Islam. People like Jan Slomp⁸¹ argue that Calvin had little opportunity to come into contact with Muslims and know Islam. However this does not explain the lack of inquiry, or simple curiosity, about those who had been seen as a persistent and long-standing threat to Europe. Calvin clearly shows the influence of medieval polemics, and like Luther, largely re-articulates them, but with little or no appreciation for Islam whatsoever. So Calvin follows Luther's tack that Europe should defend itself against the Turks without an aggressive war or crusade-like situation, and the church should organise days of prayers and penitence.

A major stigma on Calvin's career in Geneva is the execution of Michael Servetus (b. 1511), who was burnt as a heretic in 1553. Servetus, a Spaniard, was truly a renaissance man, well-educated in many fields, of which he is best known for his contributions to medicine and theology. The former at the time was heavily influenced by Muslim knowledge and science and the latter led to his conflict with Calvin. He decried trinitarianism in order to make a Christian apologetic to meet the needs of Jewish and Islamic unitarian monotheism. The Islamic influence behind his non-Trinitarian Christology has not received due scholarly attention, nor has Calvin's anti-Islamic sentiments that may lie behind this travesty. During Servetus' trial, he was asked why he had studied the Qur'an and whether or not he believed it to be full of blasphemies.

81 Jan Slomp, "Calvin and the Turks" in Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck and Wadi Z. Haddad, eds., *Christian-Muslim Encounters* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995) pp. 126-142.



This question, probably authored by Calvin⁸² indicates the perception of Servetus' Islamic links, which informed his theology, for which he was executed. A further problem was Servetus' critique of Calvin's exclusion through double-predestination, which he felt violated the grace of God and his inclusive Christology which made it available for both the Muslims and the Jews.

Both Calvin and Luther, though highly critical of Islam, encourage Christian believers to greater faithfulness by prescribing the zeal of Muslim faith practice. This acquires particular importance in Calvin because of his emphasis on sanctification which is reminiscent of the Muslim obligations of piety, righteousness and sanctification, as articulated in the five pillars of Islam.⁸³ Of course this recommendation does not come at any point as an overall appreciation of Islamic faith, doctrine, etc., and the condemnation even here is associated with the Papists.⁸⁴ What is interesting to note is that there seems to be little evidence in Calvin's work to suggest that Christians should either preach to Muslims or try to convert them. This lack of missionary zeal is equally valid for the Papists and the Jews, all being apostates, and as such God's problem not ours.

His equation of the Turks and the papists is also based on their search for truth outside of the scriptures, which are used as a litmus test and applied equally viciously on the Turks, the papists and even the Jews. While for the latter this attack is based on their apostasy of denial of the fulfilment of the Old Testament, the former two are accused of seeking sources outside the Bible as having revelatory power, and as central source for doctrine, theology, and guidance for faith praxes. For the Catholics, this extra-scriptural source is tied to their understanding of the sacramental role of the church as well as the Petrine office; for the Muslims, it is the Qur'an and Muhammad. Therefore for Calvin all three have to be attacked not only because they are wrong and apostate but because in fact they deny two things central to his theology:

- 1) the centrality and coherence of the scriptures in themselves; and
- 2) the God of the scriptures, which is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Epistemologically, Calvin has a lot more similarities with the Muslims than with the Papists or even the Lutherans. For him the scripture as the word of God seemed to acquire a status that Luther was never willing to give it, despite the latter's emphasis on sola scriptura. Luther was willing to regard part of the canon either as problematic or to be "put on the shelf" until the Eschaton (cf., the books of James and Revelation). Unlike the Catholics, and along with Luther, Calvin did not acknowledge any other source of revelation and grace than Jesus, and vicariously the scriptures. At times though, he

82 Calvin's *Opera* (CO) 8: 765

83 viz., 1. *Shahada*, - the creedal confession that "I bear witness that there is no god but Allah and Mohammad is the messenger of Allah"; 2. *Salat*, - ritual prayer performed five times a day; 3. *Zakat*, - almsgiving; 4. *Sawm*, - fasting during the month of Ramadan; and 5. *Hajj*, - pilgrimage to the Kaaba.

84 C.f. *Supplementa Calviniana* (SC) 1:18; SC 5:127; SC 7:153; CO 41:270; and CO 49:672.

seems to elevate the text to such a high revelatory status that the secondary logos tou theou (the word of God) of the Scriptures almost seems equal to the primary logos tou theou of Jesus Christ. For the Muslims, as we all know, the Qur'an is the primary logos tou theou (in Arabic kalam Allah), but this is the direct word of God unmediated through human agency except the Prophet Muhammad who simply recited the message given to him by the angel of God. Again unlike Luther, Calvin has a demand for a certain piety and sanctification for the believers normally referred to as the "Third Use of the Law," which for Luther was clearly an anathema against the comprehensive power of grace, which he articulated in his call of sola gratia and sola fidei, the latter itself being the gift of grace.

Calvin is particularly hostile towards Muhammad, regarding him as a deceiver and corrupter who had led the Turks away from Christianity towards a twisted and distorted heresy,⁸⁵ and described him as the "lawless one" of 2 Thess. 2:8.⁸⁶ Calvin linked Muhammad to the Pope, calling him "the companion of the Pope," both of whom preach false doctrine and poison the minds and souls of the people.⁸⁷ However, it is quite possible to see parallels between Muhammad and Calvin, which is most clearly manifested in the way they conceived the relevance of their preaching and teaching for constructing their society, community and even state which would bring the centrality of the divine injunction for the proper order of things. This is especially true for book four of the Institutes which even challenges the usual interpretation of Romans 13 by allowing the lesser magistrates to challenge the king if he does not fulfill the covenant and obligation of justice. This, for example was applied by Oliver Cromwell and the Puritans in what Michael Walzer rightly calls the "Revolution of the Saints" in England.⁸⁸ This revolution led to parliamentary democracy which even after the Restoration could not be done away with. This Calvinist doctrine was also used by the Puritans to set up a new society in America. They saw the crossing of the Atlantic from England to the New World in Calvinist covenantal terms as going out of the "Ur of the Chaldees"⁸⁹ of Charles II's England to the Canaan/Promised Land of Portsmouth Bay and Cape Cod of Massachusetts. What is interesting is that the Puritans chose this Abrahamic reference rather than the seemingly much more applicable metaphor of the exodus: Moses leading the Israelites out of persecution in the oppressive Pharaoh's Egypt (Charles II) through the Red Sea (Atlantic) into the Promised Land (America).

One has to wonder why there is such a continuous bad interpretation of the Reformed heritage and its claim to double-predestination theology, which underpins US domestic and foreign policy so substantially, though now clearly devoid of the doctrinal basis

85 CO 54: 138

86 CO 52: 197

87 CO 53: 340; also c.f. CO 47: 335

88 See, Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press, 1982)

89 Gen. 15:7, where the Lord says to Abram: "I am the Lord who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess."



in Calvinism but socially engineered and structured around it. Will Herberg, a Jewish theologian, rightly argued that in America it does not matter whether you are a Jew, or a Catholic, or a Protestant, in significant ways everybody falls prey to this theology and its justification.⁹⁰

This understanding of the divine injunction for the proper order of things is also true of how the Afrikaners followed Abraham Kuyper's interpretation of Calvin, and constructed a highly oppressive evil apartheid internal structure and related foreign policy. So at least in these two contexts Christians claiming a Calvinist heritage saw themselves as God's chosen people with the right to other's land and even labour (slavery), and the original people as being under the permanent curse of negating predestination.

Based on this poor reading of Calvinist double-predestination theology, the US and its allies have been involved in three wars, violating the international laws which are based on solidarity and the inviolability of nation states, starting with the Treaty of Westphalia. Two of them are geographically specific, namely Afghanistan and Iraq and the third is carried out in terms of a specified enemy but unspecified territoriality, i.e., the War on Terror. What is fascinating is that this kind of double-predestination theology and its implications for internal and external policies is equally dominant among the more conservative, fundamentalist, jihadist Muslims. They also justify all kinds of violence, terror, destruction of property, loss of life, torture, maiming and killing of innocent civilians, etc., as largely fulfilling their vocation as God's agent in history and working towards God's demand for a just and righteous society. As such there is no demand for confession or acknowledging of their sins, and any reconciliation is seen as a dilution of God's mandate.

Another issue that brings Calvin and Muslims together is the popularised social contribution as seen through the works of Max Weber, especially Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism.⁹¹ Weber sees a direct connection between Calvin's theology and emerging capitalism, especially when Calvin's social construct is deprived of his theological asceticism; it produces a rapacious capitalism and the iron cage of bureaucracy. Some Muslims scholars have argued that Islam has a similar ascetic ethics and following Weber's approach have regarded themselves as being Islamic Calvinists, and see the blessings of God as a rewards for their ascetic piety.⁹² I really appreciate Weber's positive contribution of religion to the construction of human sociality and to the sociological episteme, unlike those who see religion as a residual superstition which will be done away with when true rationalisation and scientisation of society fully takes place. I also think that Calvin actually makes a two-fold move simultaneously:

90 See, Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1955).

91 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. T. Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons: 1976).

92 Cf., Gerald Knaus, "Islamic Calvinists" in *Prospect*, 14 July 2007, Issue 130

- 1) to ask all Christians to develop a monastic morality; and
- 2) to do so without this morality becoming celibate asceticism.

So in fact Calvin does do away with the difference between the religious orders and the secular priests of the Catholic Church, and sees the morality of the religious orders as the one applicable on all Christians as a part of the third use of the law, piety and sanctification. This understanding is very similar to Islam, which finds celibate asceticism absolutely unacceptable, but moral piety as an absolute imperative. So for Muslim scholars and orientalist scholars of Islam this sort of application of Calvin's ethics should be put in its proper perspective, i.e., that is to see rapacious capitalism as having no direct link with Calvin's understanding of piety and blessings.

As we read through the Reformation fathers and particularly Calvin, we can see a high level of antipathy not just towards Islam, which of course has always been present, even prior to the Reformation, but also towards the Pope, Catholicism and Judaism. They use atrocious, and to our present ears crude and vulgar language, idioms and vocabulary. No amount of current justification can or should be used to rationalise or protect these major figures of church history. Those who do so end up either giving some very puerile arguments to defend them, or come across as still totally prejudiced but now conscious of the modern constraints of language, idiom and metaphor.

In the post-ecumenical and post-conciliar church, a church living in post-Christendom (a fact oft stated, but seldom epistemologically recognised), we cannot afford a theology which begins with exclusion, whatever the status of double-predestination theology is in Calvinist scholarship. We have experienced the horrendous implications of such exclusion in the recent history of our times, and so can never see it as having any worth at the foot of the cross.

Reformation theology more than anything else emphasises the sufficiency of the grace of God in Christ, and prepares us to openly acknowledge the overall inclusive character of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the centrality of the *missio dei* in that context of inclusivity. The Reformation understood this, preached this, and developed mantras to this effect, but the Reformation was still a child – even though the last gasping child – of Christendom. Both the major reformers Luther and Calvin had drunk deeply from that fountain. So even though they talked about *sola gratia* and *sola fidei*, this was used for exclusivising purposes rather than the radical inclusivity that such a theological concept must entail, for it is not based on human efforts, volition, or even ecclesial sacramental presence, but is located in the reconciling God of 2 Cor. 5:17ff and the kenotic God of the Philippian hymn (Phil. 2). This inclusivity has to be part of our piety, our sanctification and should be seen as a Christian imperative and part of the third use of the law.

Conclusion



In recent history the shifting focus of theology, ecclesiology, and missiology has been seriously involved in the retrieval both of the ecumenical vocation as well as the imperative of inclusivity. Thus we have begun a very constructive dialogical relationship with the Catholics. For this we must be grateful to God. Even more radically, over the last seventy years or so, we have recognised the continuing sin that has taken place against Judaism in the church for some seventeen hundred years, and its vilest manifestation in the Holocaust. However, the latter is not always a true ecumenical discourse but rather is undertaken largely out of guilt, which still undergirds our attitude towards the state of Israel, and therefore our total inability to challenge the very vices which we condemned in our recently coined hyphenated understanding of the continuity of the Judeo-Christian faith.⁹³ For me the imperative is to develop a sympathetic ear of inclusion, and a dialogical and vocational partnership for the sake of the world that God loved/loves and for God's shalom, and I hope this becomes part of the new imperative for Reformed theology and part of its sanctification. Normally when I pose this to my colleagues and friends I am quickly reminded that this will only happen when Islam also seeks it. This answer truly grieves me because our sanctification and our piety cannot be based on reciprocity or *quid pro quo*, but must be a part of our faith expressing itself, and not depending on what others do. So whether this is an imperative for Muslim faith praxis, piety and sanctification is for them to decide and to struggle with, but it is clearly required of us as part of the core imperative and the dialectic of love of God and love of neighbour.

Even the worst anti-nomians among us have to recognise the absolute quality of these two commands. And yet when it comes to Islam, whom we have maligned and hated for some 1400 years, even at our best moment in history, the Reformation, we did not show any compassion or humanity towards them but continued unabated in our prejudices and our hatred. Should we continue in this prejudice and hatred, hiding behind the fact that it is part of our Reformation tradition, history and heritage, or should we look to this same Reformation through its call for *Ecclesia Reformata, Semper Reformanda* (The Church Reformed and Always to be Reformed) to overcome these prejudices and seek out a brave new world. So just as we are seeing our Catholic and Jewish brothers and sisters as an integral part of our own theological biographical imperatives, is it not the time now, to consider Muslims as equally part of a contemporary biographical and theological reality, and see it is our theological and missiological imperative with that inclusive eye? Further we must recognise the truth of their history: that Islam is not a new entrant on our horizon because of new immigrants, and part of colonial heritage, but has been intertwined in the foundational moments of our contemporary history and thought, especially as the churches of the Reformation. Such a task is both exciting and challenging, and may even jeopardise our security, and our sense of worth over

⁹³ After much research, and challenges to my graduate students, the earliest reference to anything Judeo-Christian that I have been able to find was in 1939. Prior to that this concept does not seem to exist and whenever Judaism was mentioned it had negative and pejorative context thrown at it.

against the other. But such an understanding comes from the depth of the theology of the cross, with its fountain at Golgotha and not in some monarchical pattern generated through Constantinian Christianity. It is not generated out of power to dominate and to win, but with the power to love and to die for, with a resurrection and Pentecostal hope for all.

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“We must obey God rather than any human authority” (Acts 5.29)

Douwe Visser

In this article, the words of Peter as written in Acts 5:29 will be assessed from a biblical-theological perspective, against the backdrop of the meaning of the word “obedience” in the Old and New Testament. Peter implies with his choice of words that he cannot remain silent about the salvation of God in Jesus Christ, and appeals to a deeply anchored fundament of Israel’s religion.

Obedience

If one does a Google search on the word ‘obedience’, one would mostly stumble upon sites having to do with dogs. These sites deal with ‘obedience training,’ a term that a lot of dog owners would be familiar with. The faithful dog, man’s best friend, who joined the family when he was just a puppy, accompanies his master to a course in obedience training. The dog has to learn not to: pull on the leash when running around in a field, come when he is called; not jump on strangers with his dirty paws, not disturb guests at home, and especially leave those guests alone that do not particularly like dogs. Also, the dog must not bite the heels joggers or cyclists; indeed, he must ignore people out on the street. The ideal behavior of a dog is well known to most dog owners, but often it is not attainable. To train a dog in the correct behavior, a strong measure of consistency is necessary: you must not be led astray by that cute little dog that can do no harm, and, moreover, certain breeds have much higher standards. However, the biggest problem is that many dog owners have so much affection for their dogs that they think freedom to be the highest good their dog can attain, and they think it is cruel to force their dog into a straitjacket of obedience. This is the reason that majority of dogs have become an annoyance in our society—a society that soon will be not as understanding anymore of all of these ‘liberated’ dogs that only trouble others. If only there were ideal, obedient dogs, then dogs would not be a reason for so much annoyance. At the same time, it is easy to train a dog and make him obedient. It would take a year of training, and the dog will remain obedient for the rest of his life.

Upbringing and Obedience

The term ‘obedience training’ is not applicable when dealing with the upbringing of children. It is noteworthy that the Google search results consist mainly of the sites

mentioned earlier, namely, sites concerning the training of dogs, and hardly any sites about the upbringing of children. It seems as if obedience is not an appropriate word to use when talking about bringing up children. Few parents would probably answer the question, "What do you want to achieve with the upbringing of your children," with, "That they'll become obedient children." Parents want their children to become happy, to be free to make their own decisions, to develop their talents, to be rich in wisdom and understanding, to be pleasant company, but not necessarily that they will become people who know how to obey others. The word obedience is not a popular word in the context of upbringing, and it is not associated with pleasant feelings. As a reaction against too much 'training' in obedience of children in the past, the style of upbringing has become liberating. In the meantime, this larger freedom has lost its popularity, but the word 'obedience' did not return. Children have to learn to listen and they must do certain things when told to do so, but obedience as part of an attitude is not pursued. Obedience does not square with freedom or personal development, and it especially does not square with individuality.

Hearing

Obedience begins with hearing, and listening to what you hear. This is no different in the Bible. In the Old Testament the noun 'obedience' is not explicitly used, unlike the words 'hearing' and 'listening'. The God of Israel does not make himself visibly known, but audibly known. One must hear his words and act according to those words. For God's words are not there because they contain an interesting news item; they are spoken because these words must be kept and lived. At the same time, and this is often the case in the Old Testament, people do not listen to those words of God at all, or perhaps they do listen but do not act.

Sometimes it seems as if God demands an impossible level of obedience from humans. An example of this can be found in Genesis 22, the story of the sacrifice of Isaac. To obey God in this story seems to be stretching it too far in a bizarre way. Neither obey nor obedience is used in the story, but in verse 1 the obedience of Abraham is obvious in the short dialogue: "Abraham," said God, 'Here am I,' Abraham answered." The story has at this point been introduced with the statement that God wanted to test Abraham. The lengths to which such testing can go becomes clear in the rest of the story, but would it have been possible to go to an extent to which Abraham would have actually sacrificed Isaac? As it is, Abraham's obedience is absolute: he builds an altar, arranges the firewood, binds his son, Isaac, and places him on top of the altar, on the wood (verse 9). Abraham even goes further: he picks up his knife ready to slaughter his son (verse 10). Simultaneously, Abraham's trust in God goes to the extreme. In response to Isaac's question, on the way to the place of sacrifice, where the lamb for the sacrifice was, Abraham answers that God will provide a lamb for the burnt offering (verse 8). This response became the name of the place of sacrifice after the ram,



stuck in the thicket with his horns was taken by Abraham and sacrificed. "YHWH⁹⁴ will provide" (Verse 14) becomes the name of this place of sacrifice. So the place of sacrifice is not called 'the obedience of Abraham,' or something similar. If Abraham had to actually sacrifice his son, God would have become fundamentally unreliable. And that is the message of this story: God must provide, otherwise he would have become untrustworthy. You can listen to God and trust God, for listening to his words does not lead to perdition. Nonetheless, even apart from all kinds of explanations, this remains a story on the edge, or slightly over the edge. To obey God seems absurd. That has some grounds in reality, since, in this world, listening to the words of God seems often absurd. Within that absurdity, being obedient to God goes very far. But it did not go further than the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, about which Paul says—Philippians 2, verse 8—that Jesus Christ was obedient to death, even death on a cross. That is also a road in which obedience and trust went to the extreme.

Hearing with Joy

The actual hearing of the words of God is often the hearing of the law or the commandments of God. In the act of hearing, keeping, and living according to those words, the Israelites found their life's joy. "The decrees of YHWH are firm," says Psalm 19, verse 9, they are a "joy to the heart." And in Psalm 40, verse 8, the poet writes, "I desire to do your will, my God; your law is within my heart." And in the lengthy psalm, Psalm 119, which begins with the words, "Blessed are those whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of YHWH," the joy of obedience is declared with great enthusiasm. What is the reason for the joy of listening, the pleasure of obedience? It is a pleasure so great that the poet of Psalm 119 (vv. 47-48) can say, "For I delight in your commands because I love them. I reach out for your commands, which I love, that I may meditate on your decrees."

Judaism even celebrates a feast that is aptly named 'the joy for the law', fully in line with these and similar words. The law is not a tedious collection of rules, but far from it! The point of the law, the Torah, in the tradition of Israel is to present life lessons that enable justice, freedom, and the space to live. The law of God makes life good. "The law of YHWH is perfect, a source of vitality," says Psalm 19, verse 8. What could give more joy than to be able to draw from a source of vitality? And that source is the Torah, the law of YHWH.

Paul

It is unmistakable that according to many, Paul took away the primary connotation of joy from the concept of the law, in his writings on the law in the letter to the Romans.

⁹⁴ I use the four letters (tetragrammaton) of YHWH, instead of LORD or other names. I'd rather not write down YAHWEH because there are doubts whether this is the correct vocalization, but also because the name of God must keep some of its mystery.

The law is there to “teach us about sin” (Romans 3, verse 20). The law ignites sinful passions that bind human beings (Romans 7, vv. 5-6). In these expositions, a term like ‘joy for the law’ does not fit.

There are two important questions to be asked in this context:

Firstly, is Paul not primarily debating the dry, legalistic understanding of the law? An understanding that leaves no room for a necessary perspective of this obedience, as is, for instance, given in Psalm 19, verses 11-12: “By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward. But who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults.” This clearly shows that obedience and assurance of salvation do not necessarily follow each other, one as the consequence of the other. Ultimately, assurance of salvation is found more in God’s grace an idea that is also already fully present in the tradition of Israel. It can be found, for example, in Psalm 103: “YHWH is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. (...) He does not treat us as our sins deserve, or repay us according to our iniquities.”

Secondly, is Paul not often seen as someone who made a break with the legalistic tradition of Israel in traditional Christian interpretation? Paul’s new perspective—where God’s grace, anchored in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, opens up new spaces to, once again, listen to and follow God’s law—is much more in line with Israel’s tradition than hitherto was suspected.⁹⁵

Israel’s Disobedience

In the midst of this great joy, given by hearing God’s words and living according to his commandments, stands the fiery passion of all those prophets in Israel’s tradition, fulminating against the lawlessness and disobedience of the people. To obey YHWH, or not, is a matter of choosing life or death, blessing or curse. In Deuteronomy 28, blessing and curse are presented as opposites, as an antithesis. The chapter begins as follows, “Moses said: ‘If you fully obey YHWH your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, YHWH your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come on you and accompany you if you obey YHWH your God’...” A long list of tangible blessings follows; these blessings will come upon the obedient people. After this first list, a second list follows, introduced with these words (verse 15), “However, if you do not obey YHWH your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come on you and overtake you...” The list of possible curses is much longer than the list of blessings. Is this, then, a simple case of ‘quid pro quo’ (tit for tat), or is this more profound? What is at stake when the Israelites do not hear, when they do not listen to YHWH, their God? Let us look at an analogy as a prelude to the answer to this question.

⁹⁵ E.P. Sanders in particular has been instrumental in showing, with his book *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977), that Paul and his ideas about the law found himself much more in the Jewish tradition than was thought traditionally, and this mistaken idea lingers still.



Many people know the feeling that no one is listening when they are talking, and this can be literally true. A group of people can be noisy, everyone is talking at the same time and they do not hear you because you do not raise your voice. It could also be true, however, that they do hear you but they carry on, pretending as if they do not. People who regularly get the idea that they are not heard, can begin to doubt themselves so fundamentally that they feel as if they do not exist. "You treat me like I don't exist!" could be an exclamation used by such a person.

However, obeying is more than hearing. But it starts with hearing, with listening. In the relationship between Israel and YHWH, hearing is also fundamentally acting. This is already locked up in the Hebrew word *dabar*, which not only means word, but also act. Israel's religion is fundamentally a religion of doing. In this relation of doing, Israel exists as a people of YHWH. Likewise, in this relation of doing, YHWH exists as the God of Israel. When the people of Israel do not listen, what is at risk is the relationship between Israel as people of YHWH on the one hand, and YHWH as the God of Israel on the other hand. Does this mean that YHWH's very existence is also at stake? In a certain sense, yes, because the question of whether YHWH exists apart from the relationship with Israel as his people is an abstract question, and is pointless in light of the entirety of the Old Testament. YHWH wants to be heard, and the texts of the Old Testament are responses to that hearing, as it happened within the hearing community—the people of Israel. In the end, the contemporary reader is also invited to participate, by hearing, in this community of hearing. At this point, it is not of primary importance to search for the reality behind what is heard, like the question of God's existence, or wondering about the historicity of the described events. What is important is the reality of myself as a reader, who also becomes a hearer.

In the Old Testament, the primacy of the relationship between the speaking God and the listening people is also found in the origins of the Old Testament texts, and how they were formed into one collection of texts. By all probability, the Old Testament only took shape literarily in the period of time immediately following the Babylonian exile (586 AD). The exile was a time of deep reevaluation for the people of Israel. In this process of the origination of the Old Testament, older material, some about events in the far past, were used again in light of the theme of exile and return.

Exile and return are, therefore, the fundamental theological themes of the Old Testament; they also return in the New Testament, because the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus can be seen as types of exile and return. But this theme of exile and return can be a theme for every community, and even for every individual. One could become conscious of the latter by reading the Old Testament, for exile and return are much more than mere historical themes: they are actual themes. And when they deal with hearing in the sense of obedience, I can now also join that community which obeys YHWH unto salvation.

In the Old Testament, hearing God and the subsequent obeying is a matter of the heart,

and, consequently, much more than merely a rationally considered process. Human beings who obey God are bound to it with wholeheartedly. It is not simply a process of deliberating, after which one rationally comes to the conclusion that it is more beneficial to obey God. Hence, Samuel can say to King Saul, "To obey is better than sacrifices" (1 Samuel 15, verse 22). Frankly, it is a remarkable contrast. The sacrifices of the people are also a symbol of obedience, but when the heart is no longer in it, the sacrifices turn into a case of a measured 'do ut des' (I give so that you may give). YHWH has nothing but aversion for such deliberated sacrifices (Isaiah 1, verse 13). Hearing God, obeying him, is a matter of the heart.

New Testament

In the New Testament as well, a word is used for obedience which basically means 'hearing.' Additionally, before the Greek word for 'to obey' a verb can be placed which means 'to persuade' in the active voice, and 'to be persuaded' in the passive voice. Final translation means 'to obey.' This verb is used by Plato, when he lets Socrates say to the judges: "I must obey God more than you." In Acts 5, verse 29, yet another verb is used, one that has more affinity with the second verb mentioned above, than the first. In Peter's and the other apostles' response to the Sanhedrin, the meaning of being persuaded seems more significant than hearing. "I believe more in God than in people" directly signifies that it is important to obey God more than people. However, there is no contradiction or opposition between the two verbs, hearing and being persuaded. To persuade someone involves words, even though this seems real for a word culture, than the image culture we live in.

The connection between believing and obeying is strong in the New Testament. So much so, that the two words are almost synonyms. In Acts 5, verse 32, Peter says that the Holy Spirit was given to them, who obeyed. The same verb is used in verse 29. What does it mean to obey here? To obey is the opposite of not believing what is written in verse 31, "God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins." To obey is to believe that Jesus is the Christ. In the same way, Paul uses obedience and faith in the same breath, when he writes in Romans 1, verse 5, "Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake." In the Greek it literally says 'the obedience of (or in) the faith.' To believe, then, is to regard as true but also to obey.

Also in the New Testament, to obey is not something that must be done for obedience's sake. God desires no obedient people, solely for the sake of the attitude of obedience. He desires people who believe in him, trust him, listen to him, and therefore obey. The foundation of this is faith in Jesus Christ, of whom Paul says that he was appointed Son of God and clothed with power by the Holy Spirit (Romans 1, verse 4). 'To believe' is supreme; 'to obey' follows that. The first act is that I believe that I am accepted by

God. I obey God because I trust him.



No Opposition

On this point, no improper opposition should be maintained between the Old and the New Testament. Also in Israel's religion, what is primary is faith in God as trust in him. In Genesis 12, Abram listens to the voice of God, telling him to leave his familiar surroundings, to a new land. The act of listening is, for Abraham, an issue of trust. This act of going, this wander of Abraham remains formative for the people of God, no matter how settled their ways of living are later, because they will have to keep affirming, "My father was a wandering Aramean" (Deuteronomy 26, verse 5). That wandering is a sign of freedom and independence, but also of a deeper faith than merely trusting in the certainty of lasting possessions. The source of Israel's religion is still found in the nomadic existence, where the wandering Aramean decidedly trusts someone he cannot control, whom he cannot grasp, but whom he can and wants to trust. The wandering Aramean returns in the person of Jesus, who says of himself, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (Luke 9, verse 58). And finally, in that same vein, the writer of the letter to the Hebrews says we have no enduring city here (Hebrews 13, verse 14).

The two fundamental ways of existence in the history of humanity are nomadic and sedentary. The latter provides more wealth, more culture, more development and a more certain existence. However, it also comes with the cost of an ultimately complex system of regulation and control. This nomadic form of existence gives more freedom, independence, self-consciousness, and surprise; the latter because the way of life is uncertain. The nomadic existence has in today's world become a marginal phenomenon. Nonetheless, no matter how sedentary a human is, he is continually traveling, either voluntarily, for example going on holidays, or vital, when he has to flee from something. Even the well-rooted human understands the unrest of a nomad who wants to move on. Besides, the more he seems to have control over everything, the more he will experience the fundamental uncertainty of existence. The desire for a guide, whom he can trust and who will show him the way, lingers on.

And in that way, the fundamental unity of the Bible, and also of the Old and New Testament, is found in the unity of the wandering Aramean, the son of Man who has no place to rest his head, and all of us who have no enduring city here. At that point, hearing-believing/trusting-obeying find their place.

Climax of the Salvation History

The words of Peter and the other apostles, saying they must obey God more than humans, in Acts 5, verse 29, have a prehistory of a number of events. The story begins in Acts 3. Peter and John go to the temple and they meet a man there who has been

paralyzed since birth and is begging. Peter tells him he has no money for him, but that he will give him what he does have; he tells the paralytic, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk" (Acts 3, verse 6). The paralytic receives strength in his legs and is able to walk. A lot of people come to him having heard the rumor of this miracle and Peter proclaims the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Peter anchors this message firmly on the promises that were given to Israel in the past, "Indeed, beginning with Samuel, all the prophets who have spoken have foretold these days. And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed'" (Acts 3: 24-25).

During this proclamation, Peter and John are arrested by the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees and are interrogated the following day. Peter talks frankly about Jesus and the members of the Sanhedrin are surprised by this confidence; moreover, an actual miracle has taken place and their hands are tied, so they command the apostles to keep their silence. This elicits the following response from Peter and John, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4: 19-20).

Even before Acts 5, verse 29, the apostles have already implicitly said that one must obey God more than human authority. The argument for this is that one cannot keep silent about what was seen and heard. In Acts 5, this motive returns because the apostles continue performing signs and wonders. They also continue preaching the gospel with confidence and this leads to another arrest. After nightfall, an angel opens the doors of the prison and brings them outside, saying, "'Go, stand in the temple courts,' he said, 'and tell the people all about this new life'" (Acts 5, verse 20). The apostles respond to this call.

For their obedience, the apostles appeal to what they have seen and heard. We can assume without hesitating they are convinced that everything they have seen and heard comes from God and is part of God's work for human salvation. Because what they are proclaiming, especially the resurrection of Jesus, is what was promised to Abraham: through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed. The climax of salvation history has come and you cannot keep silent, even if it will cost you your freedom, or worse. They do not speak out of rebellion against the governing powers; they speak out of love for people. Ultimately, the only thing they ask of the judges is to be allowed to speak and do good. It should be kept in mind that the goal of the apostle's speaking is to win others for the faith in Jesus Christ. The results are occasionally mentioned in the course of the story, "More and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number..." (Acts 5, verse 14).

Evangelizing

Therefore, to obey God also means to evangelize, to convert people. These two words



are not the most favorite of the Christian community at large. "Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season..." (2 Timothy 4, verse 2); that is the way of obedience to God. That obedience entails more, but it certainly entails not being silent about the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to try to win others for this cause. Against the backdrop of the Old Testament, even that is probably not a novelty, "For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her vindication shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch. The nations will see your vindication and all kings your glory" (Isaiah 62: 1-2). In the vein of this prophecy, which is the same vein of the proclamation of the gospel, 'evangelizing' means to not be silent because of the righteousness that was revealed in Jesus Christ. The proclamation of the gospel is a complete package; the proclaimer does not offer it wrapped in such a way that he himself does not need to suffer. In the course of the story about the apostles in the Sanhedrin, the storyteller, Luke, also takes the time to say some things about the life of the first community, and how all of them shared everything they had. The proclamation of the gospel always takes place in a real context. In the book of Acts, that context is first of all a Jewish happening. After that, the context widens and non-Jews join the story as well. The proclamation changes as a result. Fast-forward 2000 years to our time, and we speak of an entirely different context yet again, or more accurately, of a variety of contexts. The proclamation of the gospel within a deeply Islamic setting is a completely different situation than the one the apostles found themselves in. And yet, obeying God still means to not be silent about that gospel story, even though this transpires with modesty, or almost in complete silence, or, especially, incidentally; this could still be sufficient for a particular moment in a particular situation. When the passion to obey God by not being silent about what you have seen and heard, is lacking, the Spirit is quenched. This is self-evident, because a church that is silent, dies.

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