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The Magic of Money and Ministry

The articles in this issue of AJET come from amongst the papers prepared for the March 1st, 2014 annual meeting of the Africa Society of Evangelical Theology (ASET) held at Africa International University. The theme of the meeting was “Ministry and Money”.

Gift Mtukwa, in *A Reconsideration of Self-Support in Light of Paul's "Collection for the Saints" (1 Cor. 16:1)*, concludes that when Venn's self-supporting church ideal results in isolated self-reliance, then it must give way to mutual interdependence because different churches in different parts of the world need one another in different ways at different times in their spiritual and material development.

Rosemary Mbogo tackles *Financial Sustainability in Ministry*, and uses Christian Higher Education Institutions in Kenya as an example of financial non-sustainability. We may ask, “If financial sustainability is defined as *the ability to develop programmes and delivery systems that meet the physical, social and spiritual needs of a given context, with consistent financial resources raised by each constituency, independent of special and/or occasional hoped-for donations from external sponsors and well wishers*, then is it even possible for Christian institutions to achieve financial sustainability, despite their efforts to develop self-reliance through various income-generating schemes? Given the call for mutual interdependence, should they even try?

Rodney Reed's *Giving to Caesar What is Caesar's: The Ethics of Paying Taxes from a Christian Perspective (Part One: The Bible)* focuses on the question, “When is it a moral obligation for a Christian to pay taxes and when is it not?” from a Biblical perspective. When is my money mine, God's, or the government's – and when is it not?

My own article, *The Ideal Life, Jesus, and Prosperity Theology*, engages the new/old enemy, the Health and Wealth Gospel, from a different direction by comparing its version of the ideal life with that of OT Israel, the ancient Canaanites, modern Western secularism, and with Jesus' attitude towards the good things of this life. Guess who wins from a heavenly point of view!

From an earthly point of view money is like magic, making inconvenient truths disappear and solving problems with a wave of the wallet. Of course, it can't buy you real love, but for love's sinful substitute and for everything else – there's Mastercard. Money is like a universal solvent, dissolving marriages, morals, friendships, families, churches and communities and much, much more. Money itself is not evil, but a wise man claimed, “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Tim. 6:10). A little earlier a wiser man said, “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money” (Mt. 6:24; Lk. 16:13). You can have ministry without the love of money, but you can't have both a love of money and a truly Christian ministry.

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A Reconsideration of Self-Support in Light of Paul's "Collection for the Saints" (1 Cor. 16:1)

by Gift Mtukwa

Abstract

Scholars have rightly recognized the importance of Paul's collection for the poor Christians in Jerusalem, and the fact that it is something to which he dedicated much of his time and energy. Paul's collections amongst the churches he planted partially reveal the economic relationships that existed among them. There is no doubt that "the collection for the saints" formed part of the glue that united various Christian congregations. This paper seeks to reconsider the call for the Church (particularly the African Church) to be self-supporting in light of "the collection for the saints". Since Paul did not write a treatise on money, we will derive his theology from his instructions to his fledgling churches to assist the poverty-stricken believers of Jerusalem (especially Rom. 15:25-32, 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8-9). The Roman Empire's economic systems will be described to help illuminate the subversive nature of Paul's practice in light of the region's dominant culture. It is anticipated that the Pauline approach can liberate the Church of Jesus Christ to use God's resources wherever they are and wherever they are needed for God's work. The study proposes that if Christian giving is properly done, it has the capacity to "equalize" our unequal world as resources will move from where they are to where they are most needed. Paul's approach can free the African church to be as missional as the Pauline newly founded church communities were.

Introduction

We will first look at calls for the church to become self-supporting and then discuss the difference between ancient and modern economies as a foundation for understanding the environment in which Pauline churches functioned. The paper will then discuss the economic relationships that existed amongst Pauline congregations in the Roman world. Then we will reappraise the principle of self-supporting churches and conclude with a call for mutualism as opposed to isolated self-reliance. The implications of Pauline collections will also be considered for the global church.

Calls for Self-Support

As early as the beginning of Christian missions in Africa calls were made for the church in mission areas to move in the direction of independence. This perception of independence targeted three areas now commonly known as "the three-self principle of the Church". Henry Venn of the Church Missionary Society made the first call for the church to be self-supporting, self-propagating, and self-governing in 1865. His vision was, "to establish in each

district and especially where there are separate languages, a self-supporting, self-governing, self-extending native Church".¹

It was hoped that among the three selfs, self-supporting would be the first priority since, if that was achieved, the others would follow. According to Andrew Porter, "Local 'native' churches should strive to become self-financing; this would justify and make possible their self-government; once in control of their own affairs, the implementation of their own mission would enable them to be self-extending or self-propagating."² As important as self-governing and self-propagating are, this paper's primary concern is on self-supporting since it deals with material resources and finances.

First Century Society and Economics

The issue of money, poverty and self-support in the Church cannot be discussed without delving into issues of economics in general and what it means to be poor. Support is usually needed where people are not able to support themselves. People living in abject poverty cannot meet their own needs and their neighbours' needs, never mind supporting the local mission.

Studies show the difference between ancient and modern economic systems.³ Meggitt defines economics, especially from an ancient perspective, as "*that which has to do with the satisfaction of material wants*."⁴ Here he agrees with Murray in accepting the "otherness" of economic life in the ancient world. Human interactions were quite important in making economic decisions.⁵

The word "economics", which comes from the Greek word *oikonomia*, combines two words - *oikos* (household) and *nemein* (to regulate), that which has to do with the regulation of the household. In Meggitt's understanding, "Such an idea is in distinct contrast to the contemporary, asocial, concept of the market, in which, theoretically, economic decisions are determined solely by the economic criterion of the price mechanism."⁶ In the first century many people were barely able to meet the "satisfaction of material wants", primarily because wealth was in the hands of the elites. According to Warren Carter:

Some 2 to 3 percent of the population possessed most of the empire's wealth. The overwhelming percentage of the empire's inhabitants lacked it and struggled constantly to sustain a subsistence-level existence. The struggle

¹ A. N. Porter, *Religion Versus Empire: British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 167.

² Porter, *Religion Versus Empire*, 168.

³ R. Burling, "Maximization Theories and the Study of Economic Anthropology," in *Economic Anthropology: Readings in Theory and Analysis*, eds. E. E. LeClair and H. K. Schneider, New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968, 168-187, esp. 168-179.

⁴ Justin J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 2.

⁵ Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*, 3.

⁶ Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*, 4.

was cyclic. They knew times when there was enough (or even a little surplus) and frequent times when there was too little.⁷

Simply put, the means of production was owned by the elites, and those who depended on them for their material wants were the non-elites. Carter goes on to observe:

Elites controlled the production, distribution (trade), and consumption of its products. That is, the economy was embedded in and reflected the hierarchical and oligarchical socio-political structures of the empire The ruling few gained considerable wealth, enjoyed lavish lifestyles, and consumed much of the production. The majority's hard manual work sustained the excessive lifestyles of the few. That is, economic structures were exploitative and unjust.⁸

The fact that 97% of the population were non-elites who depended on the 3% for their survival meant that the Roman Empire had many poor people. Many of these had been reduced to poverty by the economic system that favoured only the elite. Meggitt notes the difference in contemporary definition of poverty and ancient definitions. In the modern world poverty has to do with "relative deprivation", and in the ancient world it had to do with "absolute deprivation". He goes to note that, "It is present where the basic essentials necessary for supporting human life are not taken for granted but are continuous sources of anxiety."⁹ The poor are defined by Garnsey as, "those living at or near subsistence level, whose prime concern it is to obtain the minimum food, shelter, and clothing necessary to sustain life, whose lives are dominated by the struggle for physical survival".¹⁰

The involvement of "the powers that be" in determining the distribution of material resources was enormous. Following Max Weber who has termed this "political capitalism", Meggitt asserts that, "In the absence of market mechanisms, wealth could not be accrued by autonomous entrepreneurial activity: *profit-making was in the hands of the élite, the aristocracy* (the Senators, Equestrians and Decurions) and the pseudo-aristocracy, those arriviste groups such as the *Augustales*."¹¹ The result was that without political power, the poor could expect only abject poverty.¹²

In the first century Roman Empire wealth was transferred from the non-elite to the elite mainly through, "Taxes, tributes, and rents, usually paid in goods...".¹³ Michael Smith identifies different types of exchanges, mainly

⁷ Warren Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament: An Essential Guide* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 101.

⁸ Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament*, 101.

⁹ Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*, 5.

¹⁰ Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*, 5.

¹¹ Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*, 47.

¹² Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*, 50.

¹³ Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament*, 14.

reciprocal exchange, market exchange, unequal exchange (which included rent) and other exchanges that are based on coercion, as ways in which wealth transfer took place.¹⁴ All these mechanisms ensured that wealth remained in the hands of the few while the majority stayed poor. It is in this context that Paul exhorts the Roman Christians to, “Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed ...” (ESV Romans 13:6-7). Paul agrees with Jesus in giving to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.

We can conclude that there is a considerable difference between the economic systems of the ancient world and those of the modern world. This background gives us an appreciation of the environment in which the apostle Paul operated. Even though there was a small number of Christians who had means, the majority of scholars are in agreement that most Christians were among the non-elite. Given that most Christians were in the lower strata of society, the question is, *how did they deal with their plight?*

Paul’s “Collection for the Saints” – Sharing of Resources

Scholars have wrestled with the question of the social status of Pauline churches. Were they mostly poor? Meggitt argues convincingly that, “*Paul and the Pauline churches shared in this general experience of deprivation and subsistence. Neither the apostle nor any members of the congregations he addresses in his epistles escaped from the harsh existence that typified life in the Roman Empire for the non-elite.*”¹⁵ Even though Meggitt may indulge in a little hyperbole in describing the economic status of Pauline Christians, he does capture the fact that most were poor.¹⁶ If Pauline Christians shared in the general situation of people in the Roman Empire, then how did they cope? What kind of economic relationships did they develop and for what purpose?

Several options have been suggested: self-sufficiency, almsgiving, hospitality and mutualism.¹⁷ The term “self-sufficiency” is translated from the Greek word *αὐτάρκεια*, which appears only thrice in the Pauline corpus: 1 Timothy 6:6, 2 Corinthians 9:8 and Philippians 4:11.¹⁸ Paul writes in 1 Timothy 6:6, “But godliness with contentment is great gain,” (*Ἔστιν δὲ πορισμὸς μέγας ἢ εὐσέβεια μετὰ αὐταρκείας*). Here *αὐταρκείας* (contentment) is linked with *εὐσέβεια* (godliness). Certainly the contentment (*αὐταρκείας*) of the Christian is not like that of a Stoic who relies on himself instead of on God. F. Danker, commenting on its appearance in 2 Corinthians 9:8 (“And God is able to make

¹⁴ Michael E. Smith, “The Archaeology of Ancient State Economies” in *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33, No. 1, (October 2004): 73-102.

¹⁵ Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*, 75.

¹⁶ While there were a few elites among the believers in Paul’s churches, most of the people giving towards Paul’s collection for the saints were non-elites.

¹⁷ Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*, 155.

¹⁸ Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*, 156.

all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work”), asserts that αὐτάρκεια, “refers, in this context to the *material* self-sufficiency of the Corinthians.”¹⁹

In 2 Corinthians 9:8 *self-sufficiency* focuses more on contentment than on self-reliance. Tasker, commenting on “self-sufficiency” in Philippians 4:11 in connection to 2 Corinthians 9:8, says, “Here the apostle states that the believer by divine grace is rendered self-sufficient and competent to meet the demands made on his generosity, so that he *may abound in every good work*, i.e. be able to perform it.”²⁰ Furnish asserts, “Paul does not mean having enough resources to be independent of other people. Paul means having enough resources to be able to help other people, to be able to affirm one’s community with others by contributing to those in need.”²¹

It is important to consider the context in which αὐτάρκεια appears in 2 Corinthians - giving to the saints in Jerusalem. According to Gerhard Kittel, “Enough means not only a sufficiency for oneself but what can also be given to one’s brothers. The Christian αὐτὸς [self] cannot be considered in isolation. His αὐτ-άρκεια [self-sufficiency] arises only when the ἄλλος [other] has a share in it.”²² Meggitt notes that given the few occasions in which αὐτάρκεια appears in the Pauline corpus, it is not a major theme in Pauline Christian economic behaviour.²³ Almsgiving and hospitality were recommended for the Pauline Christians, but were still not by any means the primary economic relationship among them. We could say these forms of economic sharing might be found on the spectrum between αὐτάρκεια and mutualism.²⁴

Paul and Mutual Interdependence

Following Meggitt, mutualism is the most important relationship that is seen among Pauline churches. Meggitt defines mutualism as, “the implicit or explicit belief that *individual and collective well-being is attainable above all by mutual interdependence*.”²⁵ Collective wellbeing is what separates modern mutualism from the kind practiced and advocated by the apostle Paul. Meggitt summarises the essence of the Pauline “collection for the saints”,

Paul emphasises that *all the* members of the churches were contributors as, indeed, were *all the* communities (we hear of no exceptions) ... It was not

¹⁹ Frederick W. Danker, *II Corinthians*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 140.

²⁰ R.V.G. Tasker, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary, Vol. 8, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 127.

²¹ Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*, Anchor Bible Commentary, Vol. 32A, (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984), 447.

²² Gerhard Kittel, “αὐτάρκεια, αὐτάρκης” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (eds. Gerhard Kittel, G.W. Bromiley, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968) 467.

²³ Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*, 156.

²⁴ Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*, 156.

²⁵ Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*, 157.

intended to be the work of a few wealthy members or congregations. And it was premised on the assumption of *mutual interdependence*. It was not a one-off act of charity. *The material assistance given was understood as something that would, in time, be returned, when the situation was reversed.*²⁶

This act of mutualism in Paul is actually a redistribution of resources. All the resources belong to God and those who have them do so because of his grace. Carter notes the contrasts between Paul's redistribution of wealth and that of the Roman Empire, when he observes:

Four contrasts with Rome's taxing practices are immediately evident in Paul's collection: (1) the flow of resources from Macedonia and Achaia to Judea counters the flow of resources from the provinces to Rome; (2) the collection is a willing contribution rather than coerced taxation; (3) it is not given by non-elites to support extravagant lifestyles; and (4) the intent is to relieve suffering rather than cause it.²⁷

Richard Horsley describes Rome's economic system as one that moved resources "vertically" from the "have-nots" to the "haves" who were higher up "the ladder" thus exacerbating the poverty of the poorest. Paul's approach is diametrically opposed to that of Rome in that he "organized a horizontal movement of resources from one subject people to another."²⁸ The concern here again is wellbeing. The people of God cannot be comfortable when they know that their brothers and sisters are suffering.

Meggitt sees mutualism as a survival strategy, but in Paul mutualism is more than this. It is at the core of what it means to be a Christian. If in the process people are able to cope or survive, well and good, but the ultimate concern is to do the Christian thing by sharing resources knowing that, "Your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, *that there may be fairness*" (2 Cor. 8:14 ESV, emphasis mine). As to whether there would be a situation in which the tables were turned, Ralph Martin cites Harris who says, "It was not inconceivable for the Jerusalem Christians some-day to become the donors of financial aid and the Corinthian Christians the recipients."²⁹ This possibility exonerates Paul of the potential accusation of creating dependency.

Taking the context of patron-client relationships at Corinth, Lim Kar Yong writes, "By stressing the notion of reciprocity, Paul underscores the belief that no one should out give another in order to attain a higher status over the

²⁶ Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*, 159.

²⁷ Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament*, 21.

²⁸ Mitzi L. Minor, *Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary: 2 Corinthians* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2009), 155.

²⁹ Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians* in *Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 40, (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1986), 266.

other, but should give out of a cheerful and willing heart.”³⁰ In 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 Paul dispels any thought among the patrons³¹ at Corinth that this is an opportunity for them to make people indebted to them as he calls on, “all to participate in accordance with their ability.”³² The elite at Corinth might be tempted to increase their honour rating, so Paul dispels any misconceptions that could have developed. For Paul, giving is a matter of fairness:

For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of *fairness* your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be *fairness*. As it is written, “Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.” (2 Cor. 8:13-15)

To support this idea, Paul draws on Israel’s experience with God’s manna distribution in the wilderness (2 Cor. 8:15, ESV). The word translated “fairness” is ἰσότης, which “means ‘equality, fair dealing’ and is linked with justice and righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) in Philo.”³³ It is possible that Paul is thinking about the inequality of his day as he writes to the Corinthians. He clearly understands that at the moment there is no fairness, however through their giving, a measure of ἰσότης (fairness) can be achieved.

But Israel’s experience of fairness or equality in the wilderness and the experience of equality in the NT church are very different. Harris observes:

“The equality that the people of God of old experienced in the wilderness was the result of a divine miracle and was enforced and inescapable. The equality to be experienced by the new people of God, on the other hand, would be the result of human initiative and would be voluntary and so not automatic.”³⁴

It is clear that God’s economy is not run like human economies that create “haves” and “have-nots”. The people of God are to participate with God in actions that reverse the effects of economic systems that rob the “have-nots”.

Some scholars like Martin do not think that Paul has material blessings in view in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, but a number of prominent scholars, including Plummer, Hering, Windisch and Lietzmann, support the idea that Paul has in

³⁰ Lim Kar Yong, “Generosity from a Pauline Perspective: Insights from Paul’s Letters to the Corinthians.” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 37, No. 1, (January 2013), 20-33.

³¹ Patron-client relations are, “social relationships between individuals based on a strong element of inequality and difference in power. The basic structure of the relationship is an exchange of different and very unequal resources. A patron has social, economic, political resources that are needed by a client. In return, a client can give expressions of loyalty and honor that are useful for the patron.” Halvor Moxnes, “Patron-Client Relations and the New Community in Luke-Acts” in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (ed. Jerome H. Neyrey, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 242.

³² Richard B. Hays, *Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: First Corinthians*, (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997), 285.

³³ Martin, *2 Corinthians* in *Word Biblical Commentary*, 266.

³⁴ Found in Yong, “Generosity from a Pauline Perspective”, 29.

mind that one day the Gentile churches may receive material blessings from the mother church.³⁵ Romans 15:27 is usually cited in support of an exchange of spiritual for material blessings.³⁶ In that case in Romans, Paul is saying that the spiritual blessings have already been received from the Jerusalem church, so this would square the exchange. But in Corinthians Paul makes it clear that the tables will be turned, and the mother church may be a blessing in the future, not the past. Therefore, material blessings are in view here.

This is also an unhealthy dualism where blessings are divided into spiritual and physical blessings. It is unlikely that one who lacks grace and is materially rich will be able to give to anyone in need, and the opposite is true - the one who is spiritually rich may not be able to do much for the poor. The Hebrew concept of *shalom* is relevant here. To have *shalom* is to be blessed, that is, to have well-being (not just spiritual but physical as well), to be at peace with oneself, others and God. In the words of James Dunn, "for Paul it was the character of grace that it should come to expression in generous action. Grace...had only been truly experienced when it produced gracious people."³⁷

The issues of economy and the poor are pertinent to our understanding of the Pauline churches and Pauline Christians. Most of them, if not all, were among the non-elites, meaning they would have been considered poor in the Roman world. It is assumed in this paper that self-support is not just an issue of self-reliance in funding ministry, but also self-reliance in meeting everyday needs. In Paul's context the two were inseparable, meeting the needs of the poor was as much a part of ministry as starting new churches.

Apart from mutualism being a way of living the Christian life, Paul also saw it as way to unify the Christian communities. In the words of Longenecker, It was a great act of kindness, comparable to that undertaken by the Antioch church much earlier. But more than this, Paul seems to have viewed it as a symbol of unity which would help his gentile converts realize their debt to the mother church at Jerusalem and give Jewish Christians an appreciation of the vitality of the faith existent in the Gentile churches."³⁸

This is quite important given the issues between Jew and Gentile in the Pauline churches. Following the promise of God to Abraham to be a blessing to the nations, the Jewish people have already blessed the Gentiles by showing them the Messiah, so now the Gentiles are a blessing to the Jews. The metaphor of the church as a body is quite appropriate, one part of the body cannot be ailing and the other parts not be concerned.

³⁵ As described in Martin, *2 Corinthians* in Word Biblical Commentary, 266.

³⁶ "For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings." (ESV, Romans 15:27)

³⁷ J.D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 707.

³⁸ Richard N. Longenecker, *The Ministry and Message of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 74.

In Paul Christian giving is critical because it is grounded in the Christian faith itself. Yong, citing 2 Corinthians 8:9, says Paul appeals to the example of Jesus' incarnation in calling the Corinthians to remember the poor.

In retelling the story of Jesus, Paul is attempting to inculcate in the Corinthians the kind of behaviour that he wishes them to emulate. Jesus himself is the model for generous giving. The 'self-lowering other-regard' paradigm reflected in 2 Corinthians 8:9, as suggested by Horrell, is paradigmatically demonstrated in the central story of Jesus himself, whose self-lowering takes the movement from one extreme to another: from being rich to being poor.³⁹

The incarnated Christ is an example for the rich and well-to-do to follow, to empty themselves for the sake of the poor. In Gorman's words, God says to his people, "'You shall be cruciform for I am cruciform,' says the Lord." He explains that, "Cruciform holiness is inherently other-centred and communal".⁴⁰ To take another track is failing to be Christian. 1 Corinthians 9:13 makes it clear that for the Corinthians, "the collection for the saints" is nothing less than "the obedience of your confession in the gospel of Christ" (τῆ ὑποταγῆ τῆς ὁμολογίας ὑμῶν εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ). For Dunn this is another way of saying, "the obedience of faith" (ὑπακοὴν πίστεως Rom. 1:5).⁴¹

Yong also asserts that Paul's instructions on the Lord's Supper reveals his understanding of the economic relationships that ought to characterise the people of God. Paul's instructions are given at Corinth where, "close associates of the patrons would receive choice wine and food, and the most honoured seats in the dining area, whereas the patron's clients and those who are poor will receive lesser treatment and will most likely dine separately in the courtyard of the house."⁴² Paul's counsel is that the rich should eat at home and also wait for the poor at the Lord's Table. This way the Lord's Table becomes a place of distribution of resources. "Unless the community embodies a concern for others, particularly the poor and less fortunate, rooted in the model of Jesus himself, it cannot proclaim the Lord's death."⁴³

The above discussion has demonstrated that Paul was concerned about the inequality and suffering of people in his world. As a result he called on those churches who could help to offer their aid. This giving was not meant to burden the givers, for when circumstances change, the receivers could in turn be a blessing as well. In short, the apostle Paul was calling the churches to redistribute resources differently than the elites of the Roman Empire. For Paul even the Lord's Supper was an opportunity for redistribution of resources. Now

³⁹ Yong, "Generosity from a Pauline Perspective", 20-33.

⁴⁰ Michael J. Gorman, "'You Shall be Cruciform for I Am Cruciform': Paul's Trinitarian Reconstruction of Holiness" in *Holiness and Ecclesiology in the New Testament* (Kent E. Brower and Andy Johnson, eds., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 163 and 164.

⁴¹ Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 708.

⁴² Yong, "Generosity from a Pauline Perspective", 31.

⁴³ Yong, "Generosity from a Pauline Perspective", 32.

we turn to reconsider self-support in light of Paul's "collection for the saints". We start by affirming the principle of self-support.

Affirmation of Self-Support

This discussion reveals Paul's approach to material resources, namely that they are to flow to the "have-nots". Self-support in the understanding of Henry Venn meant that local missions were to be financed by local resources. According to Zablon Nthamburi, Venn "was concerned about missionary paternalism and racism that seemed to colour their thinking on the building of a strong church. He wanted to save the young church from 'the over-powering weight of the mission machine'."⁴⁴ Nthamburi laments the paternalism in the mission church when he says, "There has also been a certain degree of paternalism with regard to the distribution of God's resources to the world-wide church. This has created the concept of 'receivers' and 'givers', with the latter taking all the decisions and exercising a certain amount of control."⁴⁵

The All Africa Conference of Churches that met at Mombasa in 1991 linked the mission of the church to self-reliance:

The dependence of our communities has implications for the maturity of the people of God, especially in areas of theological discernment, finance, and personnel. Such continuing dependence distorts both the meaning and the nature of partner relationships which link us to the churches on other Continents...It is sinful to surrender our power, our thoughts and even our action initiatives to overseas partner churches. If we are to participate fully in the universality of the Church, we must mobilize our own resources and become conscious of who we are as Church in Africa.⁴⁶

It is quite true that if resources are not locally generated, all the local church can think about is its own survival and not the *missio Dei*. Many times the donors have dictated what can and cannot be done with their resources. There has not been much of a difference between donor agencies like the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank, and mission-founded churches that are funded by foreign missionary agencies.

Paul's churches are an example for the African church since it was these young churches that were taking care of the mother church. Resources were not coming from the mother church to the newly founded churches. Paul's congregations were self-supporting in the sense that they were able to take care of their own needs and also support the needy. Certainly local missions need to be supported by local resources if those resources are available. Even to the African church Paul could say, "Be self-sufficient" (αὐτάρκεια) in a way that is predicated on the grace of God.

⁴⁴ Zablon Nthamburi, *The Pilgrimage of the African Church: Towards the Twenty-First Century*, (Nairobi: Uzima Publishing House, 2000), 118.

⁴⁵ Nthamburi, *The Pilgrimage of the African Church*, 118.

⁴⁶ Nthamburi, *The Pilgrimage of the African Church*, 128.

Reconsideration of Self-Support in Light of Paul's Collections

Certainly the African church needs to build strong and healthy congregations that are able to take care of their own needs, leadership, financial resources and mission. However receiving support is not necessarily a bad idea. If Paul's fledgling churches were the ones in need, Paul would not have prevented the mother church from helping them. The issue is not whether the church should receive support, but what ought to be the relationship between the giver and receiver? If the giver is going to behave like a patron and the receiver in turn acts like a client, certainly this is not Christian and the apostle Paul would be the first to oppose such giving.

If self-support is taken to mean isolated self-sufficiency the unfortunate result is that we rob the church of Jesus Christ of the opportunity to cooperate in the mission of the gospel. If the American church or European church exists on its own without any interaction with the African church or the Asian church, it means the unity that ought to characterize the universal church does not exist. Dunn, reflecting on Paul's "collection for the saints", says, "sharing and service are not limited to the local church or even to the churches of the region, but reach across the ocean to another church, one regarding which feelings were somewhat mixed. The interdependence of the body of Christ is not limited to relationships within individual congregations."⁴⁷

As noble as self-reliance is, it is important to take into consideration the inconsistencies that must arise as noted by Edward Stewart who observed: Americans ... quite often extol the virtues of self-reliance; they think of themselves as self-reliant and are so perceived by others. At the same time they accept social security, borrow money, and in innumerable ways show willingness to depend on others to various extents Cultural norms such as self-reliance have sometimes been called ideal values, those which a person strives for but does not expect to achieve.⁴⁸

Even Nthamburi who advocates self-reliance or self-support notes that, Speaking of self-reliance is not the same as speaking of becoming independent. For no church can ever become independent. We must always depend on each other as we covet each other's fellowship. We are talking more of inter-dependence of equal partners who are striving to do God's will as we understand it to be. We, therefore, must strive to become self-reliant, not autonomous, in order to be able to make our contribution to the universal Church. For every Church everywhere must find ways in which it could make a fitting contribution to the universal Church.⁴⁹

Unfortunately self-reliance is usually understood as becoming autonomous. In basic terms it is taken to mean becoming my own person,

⁴⁷ Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 709.

⁴⁸ David E. Maranz, *African Friends and Money Matters: Observations from Africa* (Dallas: SIL International, 2001), 11.

⁴⁹ Nthamburi, *The Pilgrimage of the African Church*, 129.

sufficient in myself and therefore needing nobody. This is self-reliance without need for others and also without need for God. In this sense of self-reliance, a person has no gift (*charisma*) for helping others that comes from God.

On the other hand, as Christians we have to think about the disparities in our world, a world in which some people live on less than a dollar a day and others on more than fifteen hundred dollars a day. Could Christian giving be an answer to the inequality in our world today? I fear that when Christians insist on self-reliance or self-support we are maintaining the status quo. The Christian church should not allow a situation in which resources are concentrated in one area of the world while other areas are languishing in poverty in the name of self-reliance. Christian-giving is an answer to the redistribution of resources or rather “equalizing the world” in the thought of the apostle Paul, or “bringing the world to right” in the words of N.T. Wright.⁵⁰

However Christian giving should not create dependency. It should free people to become who God created them to be. In Paul’s understanding it should create a situation in which the tables can be turned to allow for the giver to become the recipient. Certainly a life of perpetual receiving is not a dignified life. Christian giving should also not become a burden for the giver, as Paul instructed the Corinthians, “For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened...” (ESV 1 Corinthians 8:13).

On the other hand, giving should not leave the receiver indebted to the giver. If it does, then it ceases to be Christian giving. Christian organizations and churches ought not to operate like secular organizations that make those who take their resources indebted to them. David Maranz explains the requirements of the West when they give resources,

In the West the one who provides the assets makes the determination as to how they will be used...If at any time before the funds are spent, the recipient or fund manager wishes to use them for another purpose, he or she must go back to the provider for prior approval of the changes. If permission is not given, the funds must be used for the originally designated purpose or returned to the provider.⁵¹

Such close control of the donated funds is diametrically opposed to the general thinking of most Africans, including African Christians receiving “donations” from Western mission agencies, churches or individuals. This kind of “strings-attached” giving strikes many Africans as paternalism, and a sign of distrust. Generally, the African ideal is that when a donor has given money, it no longer belongs to them. In other words they have given up any claims to controlling its use. But for a Western mission or church not to demand such controls is bad stewardship, and a charity in the West who is labelled “a bad steward” will have its sources of support dry up very quickly. Though not

⁵⁰ N. T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2009), 78.

⁵¹ Maranz, *African Friends and Money Matters*, 38.

usually recognized as such by both Western donors and African recipients, these opposing cultural ideals and practices are like the irresistible force meeting the immovable object. The resulting clashes create endless misunderstandings and damaged or destroyed relationships. It is almost impossible to over-estimate the importance of this fundamental cultural difference. Although a final solution is beyond the scope of this paper, I suggest that both givers and the recipients ought to be guided by God, in their giving as well as their utilizing of these resources. However this should not be taken as a licence by the recipients to avoid accountability in any form from those who provide financial or any other assistance. Both donors and recipients are ultimately accountable to God.

Let me ask my fellow Africans, “Could it be time for the African church to be a blessing to the mother churches?”⁵² Whatever resources are in Africa must be harnessed for the global mission of the church. As the centre of Christianity keeps shifting to the global south, we in Africa must rethink how we train pastors and approach ministry. We must train ministers for the world and not just for the local churches. There is a world that is in need of the gospel. Self-support in Africa should free us not only to provide for our own requirements, but also to see where we can be a blessing. Only then could we see what Justo L. Gonzalez called, “missions from the ends of the Earth”.⁵³

Conclusion

Paul’s “collection for the saints” came from mostly poor and mostly Gentile Christians living in the heart of the Roman Empire. The money collected was destined for a group of mostly Jewish non-elites at the Empire’s margins. In a world where most resources were funnelled to Rome, this was subversive. Paul was indeed redistributing resources from one part of the world to another part of the world. Could it be that when we insist on “self-sufficiency” we are maintaining the status quo, keeping resources where they are while keeping other parts of the world languishing in poverty? Paul’s collection for the saints can be a lesson for the twenty-first century church to redistribute resources in a world characterised by inequalities. Even as the African church becomes self-supporting, it needs to find ways to become a blessing to the mother churches in the Western world both culturally and spiritually. Paul did not solve all the problems of his society but he dared to try.

⁵² The mother church for Africa is mostly the European church and the North American church. Unfortunately most African pastors who find themselves in the West are able to attract to their congregations only their fellow Africans in the *Diaspora*, not indigenes.

⁵³ Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Reformation to the Present Day*, Vol. 2, (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1985), 394.

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Financial Sustainability in Ministry

by Rosemary Wahu Mbogo

Abstract

The need to achieve a threshold of financially viable and sustainable ministries cannot be overlooked in the contemporary world, just as it was a concern in the history of ministry. A current example is financial non-sustainability in Christian higher education in Kenya. This paper addresses financial stability in ministry by addressing causes of non-sustainability and recommending some remedies. The author argues that one of the main causes of financial non-sustainability is a misunderstanding of issues such as “call to ministry versus vocation”, that has caused many to leave formal employment for “fulltime ministry” and unbalanced teaching on tithes and offerings among others. Additionally, the rise of professionalism and its uncritical adoption in ministry and mimicking of corporate models stifle the ability of churches and para-church organizations to sustain their ministries. The author hopes to trigger a discussion that will eventually lead to amicable ways to initiate and nurture financially sustainable ministries.

Introduction

The subject of money and ministry is interesting and at the same time contentious and somewhat enigmatic among many believers. Some biblical texts like “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” (1Tim 6:10, NIV), “you cannot serve both God and money” (Matt 6:24, NIV), and “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who rich to enter the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:25, NIV) have been used by some people to shun the topics of financial sustainability and entrepreneurship in ministry among others. Moreover, there is apparent silence or limited information on how God provided for Jesus and His disciple’s for the three years of ministry, compared to the more comprehensive stipulations on God’s provision for the Levites shown in the Old Testament. These have contributed much confusion, indifference and lethargy on the subject, in today’s financially demanding ministries. Despite the situation, financial challenges continue to thwart ministries globally. For example, in the area most familiar to us, Christian higher education, financial sustainability remains elusive for many institutions.

Christian Higher Education Institutions in Kenya: An Example of Financial Non-Sustainability

For my dissertation in 2011, I explored the relationship of spirituality, work conditions and the job satisfaction of selected Christian higher education personnel in Kenya, specifically those involved in extension/distance

education.¹ The study involved six Christian universities. One of the independent variables was amount of monthly salaries. Comparisons were made between personnel who earned monthly salaries of KSh 40,000 and below, with those who earned 61,000 and above on their job satisfaction.

Different facets of job satisfaction were measured through the Job Descriptive Index (JDI). Statistical tests, Kruskal-Wallis and ANOVA, were used to assess the effect of monthly salaries on various job satisfaction facets. The results indicated significant differences in the mean scores of global satisfaction and satisfaction with work itself ($H[2] = 8.36, p < .05$) and ($H[2] = 13.41, p < .01$) respectively. Post hoc analysis showed significant differences between those who earned a monthly salary of KSh 40,000 and below, compared to those who earned KSh 61,000 and above, in the global job satisfaction and satisfaction with the work itself ($U = 572.50, z = -2.45, p < .05, r = -.26$), ($U = 454.00, z = -3.50, p < .001, r = -.37$) and ($F = 11.57, p < .001, \eta^2 = .40$). The overall findings on monthly salary indicated that personnel with higher salaries had higher global satisfaction, satisfaction with work itself, and satisfaction with salary.

Qualitative analysis through interviews helped to shed more light on reasons for job dissatisfaction in relation to salaries. Overall, many personnel indicated that their universities were small, struggled financially and hence “underpaid” them. This perception of being underpaid arose because of the discrepancies in salary between local employees and foreign missionaries based in the institutions.

Respondent E indicated financial constraints hampered her work because they reduced the quality of the programs. “The remunerations are not quite attractive. So I am not able to get qualified staff.” K, from a different school, indicated that his institution had experienced high turnover due to poor remuneration. According to him, only new and inexperienced faculty were willing to accept the pay they received, and after gaining experience, they moved to other institutions where they were better paid. Similarly, M pointed out that his employer was “not paying equivalent to my colleagues in other places,” that their salaries were low, and that the employer needed to raise their salaries. Respondent P, who also taught part time in one of the institutions, indicated, “there are times when it takes too long to receive payment for what has been done.”

Respondent AR also expressed concern because the financial situation had made the institution depend on the “free” services of missionaries. He explained: “Sometimes we give courses not because the courses are needed

¹ This section is a slightly modified version of part of that dissertation - Rosemary Wahu Mbogo, *Spirituality, work conditions, and the job satisfaction of extension studies personnel in Kenya's Christian higher education*. An unpublished PhD Thesis, Talbot School of Theology, Biola University, 2011.

by the students but also because those who are available are not paid by the school. Hence we sometimes offer irrelevant programs and courses because of dependence.” AR also lamented that his low income had made him dependent on his wife. He wished he were able to provide both for his family and for other needy people in the community. Similarly, JM explained that she “moonlighted” at other universities in order to make ends meet.

In some ways, personnel compared their salaries with those of their missionary counterparts. B indicated that, “You would find two of us doing the same job, in the same post, and when you look at what a missionary from the US is earning [through their sending agency], assuming the qualifications are the same, but then they are not treated the same. And that discrepancy can cause some discontent within the nationals.”

L had a sense of humor when she explained that institutions transitioning from small Bible institutes to Christian universities were used to dependence on “free” missionary services, and abused the concept of service at the expense of personnel needs. Because her institution is a small university and because it was dependent on missionary services, a similar concept of “you are serving the Lord” and “you must be given to the Lord and sacrifice” is applied to nationals in order to justify lower salaries. L continued, “But I normally say that even serving the Lord must bring bread on the table and the Lord never sends one without equipping them. So the remunerations are not quite attractive.”

KA, from a different school, affirmed this attitude when he explained that he and his colleagues usually humorously argued that they were not “missionaries,” and therefore felt that their services should be well remunerated. K explained that, in addition to his family responsibilities, he had other social responsibilities due to the poor relatives and friends who usually asked him for help. AR, from a different school, agreed that difference in remuneration between equally qualified missionaries and Africans was a problem that demoralized national personnel.

Higher education is an example of how similar scenarios that could be narrated among many ministry organizations. Even though salary is not the only factor in financial sustainability it’s the component that usually carries the highest percentage of an institution’s operating budget. Discussing financial sustainability becomes important even in Christian higher education settings.

What is Financial Sustainability?

Adingi and Stork adapted Rosengard’s definition of financial sustainability in the micro finance industry as “the development of products and delivery systems that meet client needs, at prices that cover all costs of providing these financial services ... independent of external subsidies from donors or

government”.² They admitted the definition is fast evolving with time. Similarly in ministry contexts, financial sustainability could be defined as the ability to develop programmes and delivery systems that meet the physical, social and spiritual needs of a given context, with consistent financial resources raised by each constituency, independent of special and/or occasional hoped-for donations from external sponsors and well wishers. That God created resources to sustain humanity before He created male and female is a clear indication that ministry providence is part of His plan. Since the instigation of the three-self church in the modern era, many churches (and by extension ministry organizations) have clearly not become “self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating” for various reasons. According to Carter the concept should be the first step towards interdependence.³

But why do ministries struggle financially if God is concerned about ministry resources? To answer this question I would like to address two pertinent issues. The first issue is about the causes of financial stress in ministry including misunderstanding of “call” into ministry and the increase of materialistic trends. The second issue has to do with determining strategic ways of financial sustainability in ministry including: embracing “tent-making”/ multi-vocational ministries, and rethinking the apparent wholesome adoption of professionalism and corporate models of ministry.

Continuing Financial Constraints

Salmi addresses financial sustainability in higher education asserting the continuing constraints in high education globally.⁴ Such constraints will continue to foster an unequal playing field in the quality and scope of higher education (including Christian higher education) offered by various countries and institutions. Disparities between developed and developing countries, large and small, and public and private institutions will persist. He therefore advocates reforms in higher education financing by governments and provides three possible scenarios.

First is the supply-side financing scenario where financing in higher education is allocated to public institutions for the benefit of many. He asserts

² Jonathan Adongo and Christoph Stork. Factors influencing the financial sustainability of selected microfinance institutions in Namibia. (Ausspannplatz, Windhoek, Namibia, 2005.), 1, 26. Available from http://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/page_attachments/jonathan_adongo_christoph_stork-1_0.pdf

³ John F. Carter, “The indigenous principle revisited: Towards a coactive model of missionary ministry,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*. 1:1 (Jan. 1998), 73-82. Available from http://www.aps.edu/aeimages/File/AJPS_PDF/98-1-carter.pdf

⁴ J. Salmi, “Scenarios for financial sustainability of tertiary education”, in *Higher Education to 2030. Centre for Educational Research and Innovation*. (Paris: OECD, 2009), 285-322.

that the approach becomes unsustainable if performance levels are not monitored.

Second is the transformational scenario which is for countries that have already introduced cost-sharing ideas but need to vigilantly address systemic challenges in different facets of the institution. In this case governments share the cost of higher education with other stake-holders such as the parents and private donors among others. One challenge may be encountered in ensuring equitability at the vetting and allocation stages.

The third is the demand-side financing is scenario where financing is given based on student numbers in an institution. In this case, the government may allocate funds to various institutions dependent on the size of the student body. Salmi recommends some principles for sustainable financing in higher education including mobilizing sufficient resources from multiple sources, performance-based funding mechanisms and competitive allocation, and transparency in allocation policies.⁵ One inference that can be made from Salmi's observations is that financing Christian higher education and other ministry organizations requires reforms and applying multi-faceted solutions in fund development and allocation.

Causes of Financially Unsustainable Ministries

There are various causes of financial stress and non-sustainability in ministry. These include misunderstanding of what constitutes a "call" to ministry, how that call is similar to and different from employment, and the escalating rise of materialism.

1. The "Call" to Fulltime Ministry

In this age where professionalism has become widespread in ministry, it is important to reflect on the meaning of a call to ministry and the implications of that call on our lives. Many believers associate the call to ministry with total change of career, from "secular" to religious. Such a narrow view of ministry has been a cause of much distress among some believers. According to Hayes⁶, a call to ministry is meant for every believer but there are historical evidences of "special calling" for some people, where God assigns specific tasks to people. Hayes emphasizes that such instances are exceptional. There are different ways in which God has called people for specific reasons. For example, the direct divine call of Moses at the burning bush was for the purpose of delivering Israel. Jeremiah was called in his youth to be a prophet, and Paul on his way to Damascus was called to reach out to the gentiles. In all these cases, the persons heard God speak to them and sometimes in spectacular ways. However these cases are few, even in the Bible.

⁵ Salmi, "Scenarios for financial sustainability of tertiary education", 302-330.

⁶ Edward L. Hayes, "The call to ministry" in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157, no. 625: 97 (2000), 89. EBSCOHOST (accessed December 3, 2013).

Most people receive an indirect call to ministry, for example through others: like the Levites through Moses, Jehu through Elisha, Peter through his brother Andrew, Nathaniel through Philip, Paul and Silas at Antioch through teachers and prophets, Timothy through Paul, and Matthias through the disciples at the upper room. Other times people are called through significant events in their lives such as the amazed Elisha after Elijah's was "taken up" and the perplexed Peter after experiencing the miracle of catching many fish. Notably, regardless of the method of call the author/initiator is God. Every person can receive confirmation from God about their call to ministry and regardless of the method of call to ministry, the purpose for which people are called should be clear.

When a person receives a call from God, I believe it is important to ascertain the direction God is leading. I believe Moses needed the dialogue he had with God to be convinced that he was to do the work. Jeremiah too raised some questions. God was willing to respond without condemning his servants. Therefore, waiting to sense God's direction is not a weakness, but rather, a strength, especially in the practice of self control. It is clear that God calls people to accomplish a specific task and the fact that we have biblical and historical records of many individual's ministry is evidence of the divine call and activity in their lives. All of those recorded had to consistently work hard in the ministries God called them to. One important litmus test for a call into fulltime ministry is therefore clarity about the purpose of the call. Taking time to identify and crystallize the assignment is necessary for those who feel called.

God has always provided for the needs of those he has called. Clearly, unlike the miraculous provision needed in Elijah's case, primarily due to famine and later persecution from Jezebel and Ahab (1 Kings 17:6), God usually provided "naturally" for his servants. The patriarchs had to work hard as farmers. Moses worked as a shepherd for some time, though it is not clear how he was supported after going back to Egypt. Usually, the Levites had to work their farms in addition to the rations given to them from tithes and offerings. Often the NT disciples had supporters and/or collections from wealthy and poor believers. Similarly, God provides for those called into fulltime service in mostly contextually defined ways. For example, although many evangelical churches pay their pastors from the donations of congregants, those called in other ministries such as teaching, counseling, hospitality, administration and many others have not always been remunerated, though the trend is slowly changing. Many therefore have found a home in para-church organizations but have to scavenge for support locally or depend on foreign support for the most part. The question of provision therefore has to be raised at the onset of a call to ministry.

When individuals receive a call to ministry, they need to ascertain or discern whether their call is in what Matthewson⁷ called an equipping ministry (primarily among believers), or a marketplace ministry (primarily among the “not-yet” believers). In cases where people have received a unique calling from God, provision for their ministry has not always been mentioned in the biblical text, implying God never intended to create a formula to provide for His servants. However, such cases are equally scanty so the Biblical individual’s apparent instantaneous departure from one venture to another should not be imitated mindlessly.

Unfortunately, many young people have hurriedly and haphazardly left employment for the “fulltime” ministry. The loss of income coupled with a lack of clarity on how God intends to use them has often time frustrated genuinely ignorant but zealous youth. This factor is a leading cause for unsustainable ministries. Many have consequently abandoned the ministry and many continue to languish in bitterness towards God, who seems to have rewarded their obedience with financial and material deprivation. Practically, the timing to join the fulltime ministry or, in the words of Matthewson⁸, the “permanent” ministry, should be considered. The timing should not be rushed immediately after a “missions’ conference, a time of prayer and fasting, or any other spiritual activity that may have heightened a sense of call. The significance of waiting to discern the Spirit, prepare for the task, and plan for the ministry cannot be overemphasized.

Notably, after establishing a call to fulltime ministry, many believers will seek to work with an existing ministry or some may begin their own ministry, either before or after training in ministry. Regardless of the route taken, the important question of remuneration causes many believers to lose sight of the call to ministry, due to the overlap between employment and ministerial work.

2. Employment versus Ministry

As ministry engagement strategies continue to broaden, those working in ministry need to often reevaluate their call to ministry with the purpose of remaining focused. While ministries, including church ministries, have also been forced to adhere to some statutory requirements such as advertizing for employment opportunities, potential personnel need to regularly ponder on their calling. The main question to consider is about whether one is called or employed! In Africa today, some ministry organizations, including Christian higher education, have found themselves with three categories of personnel: Volunteers, “Employees”, and “Called” staff. Volunteers are usually understood to be those working fulltime in the marketplace who feel called to help those who are working in equipping/“fulltime” ministry. Such people include fulltime school teachers, medical doctors, and IT specialists, among

⁷ D. Mathewson, *Call 2 ministry: Exploring the myths, the mystery and the meaning of following God’s call into vocational ministry*. (Maitland, FL, Xulon Press, 2003), 24-25.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 25-26

other professionals, who choose to give part of their free time to church, para-church and other ministry-oriented organizations. Employees are normally regarded as those possessing professional technical skills that they are hired to offer in the organization. The Called are perceived to be those who have left a vocation, to dedicate their time in a different vocation, which usually entails moving from a non-religious to a religious vocation. Unfortunately, these categorizations have negatively impacted the work of the ministry. Volunteers see themselves as called in a “limited” way. They can only give a limited time to the work of the ministry. They however, do not invest their time and resources to develop their skills for the ministry. If employed elsewhere, they perceive themselves as doing ministry only at the place where they volunteer. Moreover, some who are not formally employed elsewhere may volunteer with the intention of getting employment. Their call to ministry may be dubious.

Employees, even in Christian organizations, do not see themselves as called to ministry. They perceive employment as a separate thing from what they do at church or during mission outreaches. These people usually get their jobs primarily by applying for them and presenting their convincing credentials followed by a convincing interview, and negotiating a handsome wage. Many of them see their employment as an indicator of their giftedness or qualifications and may not consider the place of employment as a ministry context. Such workers regularly change jobs wherever they perceive a chance to earn higher salaries or better working conditions. Some in the employment category join organizations due to their relationships with an influential person in the organization. The “godfather” may have hired such people after identifying giftedness, or as a benevolent action towards a friend or a relative. At times, the godfather extends his benevolence after an emotional verbal or written communication where the job seeker is suffering extenuating circumstances such as an orphan who suddenly needs to provide for siblings, a retrenched worker, or a worker abused by a former employer. Such employees owe their allegiance to the godfather and may leave employment depending on the stability of the relationship or the tenure of the godfather. The “employment” is another cause of non-sustainability in ministry, either due to the overhead costs as Christian organizations struggle to retain personnel, or due to godfather “protection” over non-performing employees.

The “called” ones in ministry are mostly associated with a definite divine experience that marks their calling. They draw their motivation for ministry from that experience. While these tend to commit their energies to ministry, their definition for ministry is usually narrow. Those who changed careers tend to see ministry as an engagement with a religious body. Some even see ministry as limited to teaching, preaching, praying for the sick, counseling, discipleship etc, while they do not see cleaning, cooking, accounting, information technologies and other “clerical or technical” work as ministry. They tend to give much time to “equipping ministries” (in the words of

Mathewson mentioned earlier⁹) to the neglect of “market-place ministries that demand evangelism. They also do not invest adequate time to furnish themselves with skills needed to understand changing societal trends for the purpose of remaining relevant. With time, their approaches become outdated. Additionally, some may have failed to distinguish the “voice of God” from a strong felt need to change their over-demanding, unfulfilling, or low-paying careers. For example, some may have felt called to ministry to escape stressful circumstances at work. Others may have gotten tired of their monotonous routine and hence opted out of employment. Therefore some of those may have just needed to change their careers to something else and not necessarily for the work of the ministry.

3. The Rise of Materialism

One of the biggest challenges for ministry sustainability is the apparent obsession with wealth among full-time ministers. This may have been as a result of various contextual and personal influences. The popular prosperity gospel has been a major contributor to unsound and unbiblical patterns of thought among Christian workers and congregants. Many Christian workers these days associate involvement in full-time service with the right to become wealthy. Financial struggle is understood as indication of God’s non-involvement in one’s ministry or as sign for lack of call.

Abuse at the hands of senior ministers has caused discontentment among “junior” staff. For example, many of those who begin with sacrificial giving of themselves at the genesis of their ministries begin to reflect on the disparity between their own provisions and those of their seniors. When they begin to notice that the “senior” or the full-time minister has begun to climb the economic ladder, apparently without considering them in sharing their “kill”, indifference begins to set in. They sometimes desire to break out of poverty, especially if they observe upward social and financial mobility among their seniors. This is especially true for senior ministers who build ministries from scratch and with limited resources. They may gradually develop an “entitlement” attitude where they feel the ministry ought to repay them for their sacrifice. This attitude is furthered if no administrative structures have been developed to provide accountability checks and wean the ministry out of individual ownership into corporate/community/ecclesial ownership. As the ministry becomes endowed, they begin to amass wealth to themselves, often at the neglect of their juniors. The neglect of junior ministers is further propelled in a “retaliatory” attitude, where the senior minister may argue that upcoming ministers need to suffer economically just like them to test if they are truly called by God. This is kind of retaliation approach to personnel management opines that: “Because I suffered financially when I got into ministry, others must suffer if they are truly called”. Other senior pastors take a

⁹ Mathewson, *Call 2 ministry*, 24.

blithe or carefree attitude, arguing that since God miraculously provides for them to be super rich, their assistants should also trust the same God to meet their own needs. This has become a source of great pain among some junior ministers. Unfortunately some gradually arrive at similar extreme tendencies where, instead of sacrificial giving of themselves and their resources, they become passionate hoodwinkers and misers, and some leave that ministry altogether. The reaction of an offended junior may lead to burnout, church and ministry splits and/or ministry attrition, and revenge which potentially become catalysts for non-sustainability in ministry. This non-sustainability is mainly due to these hurting ministers giving premature birth to their own new micro-church or para-church organization.

Towards Financial Sustainability

There are various ways of enhancing financial sustainability in ministry. For ministries to be financially stable, leaders have to be proactive in developing mechanisms to ensure fund development. Fund development is wider than fundraising; it includes friend-raising, fundraising and financial stewardship. It must encompass generous giving, consistent saving, wise investment, realistic spending, and accountability. However, ministries must curb the vices that hinder financial stability by embracing tent-making/multi-vocational approaches to ministry, balancing professionalism with ministry, and countering extreme corporate models of doing ministry.

1. Embracing Tent Making/Multi-vocational Ministries

Siemens sees tent-making as a ministry model adapted from Paul, where career missionaries go to otherwise closed nations for the purpose of missionary outreach in the context of their work and during their free time.¹⁰ She contends that the same reasons that motivated Paul to use the approach should be the same reasons that motivate Christians to do tent-making today. These reasons are credibility, identification and modeling.

There has been an abuse in some evangelical circles of what it means to live by faith. For many, living by faith has implied detachment from income generating or wealth creating activities, whether through business or employment. The main reason seems to lay in a misinterpretation of the Bible.

In the gospels, Jesus is himself presented as an itinerant minister with no description of any daily occupation. Jesus is seen as one who calls Peter, James, John and others from their careers to make them “fishers of men”. The gospels are silent as to whether the disciples totally abandoned their fishing career immediately, given that Jesus seems to have met Peter on several occasions before “leaving” his fishing gear behind. Moreover, Jesus asked

¹⁰ Ruth E. Seimens. The vital role of tentmaking in Paul's mission strategy. *International Journal of Frontier Missions*. 14, No. 3 (July-September, 1997), 123-124. EBSCOHOST (accessed December 3, 2013).

Peter to fish to get money for their tax, and later after Jesus had died, the disciples had gone fishing (Matthew 12:24-27).

While itinerary preaching demanded quite a bit of travel, the New Testament is clear that other forms of ministry are complimented by daily occupation. Paul clearly made tents sometimes to make ends meet (Acts 18:1-3). For example, he teamed up with Priscilla and Aquila in tent making to supply his needs and of those he served with. He did not want to be burdensome to the church. Sometimes, Paul accepted donations from those of sincere hearts like the Philippians. He also raised funds from churches to help the needy in Judea. All these were different roles demanded by his ministry. Patton grapples with the question of multi-vocational engagements and wonders whether people have to move to only one specified role in ministry:

What if, instead of defining these roles as multiple and parallel, we could consider them in active, organic relationship with each other, mutually relating to and supporting one another? Remember the seesaw? If one side of that seesaw starts to drop while you are balancing in the middle, you adjust by putting weight on the other side. The two sides connect and directly interact; there is no such thing as a one-sided seesaw. Is it possible, by analogy, that there is no such thing (or should not be any such thing) as a one-sided expression of ministry? Is it possible, our readings of popular biblical texts aside, that God calls us not in spite of our other commitments, but because of them? Because of who we are and what we already do? Because of where, and with whom, we already spend our time? What if God's call to us actually takes all of that, all of us, into account?¹¹

Patton's argument is worth considering.

The Old Testament shows that Levites, who were called to be in ministry, carried out different roles. Aaron and his sons, the priests of Israel, were to prepare the articles in the Ark of the Covenant for daily use and for travel. Kohathites were to take care of and carry the most holy things in the tent of meeting, among other responsibilities (Numbers 4:4). The Gershonites and the Merarites were to take care of the tabernacle and to move it (Numbers 4:24; Leviticus 7:7-8). Clearly, the ministry aspects of the Levites were not limited to teaching and preaching, as some tend to think of ministry today. Even during the time of David when fulltime musicians were appointed from among the Levites (1Chronicles 20: 1), others still took roles as security officers and cleaners among other duties (1 Chronicles 20). In contemporary settings, few people want to participate in the administrative and clerical aspects of ministry. There is need to consider that even Aaron the high priest did not spend all his time in the Holy of Holies or sprinkling the blood on the altar. For instance, an Israelite bringing an offering slaughtered the animal, but the priests offered it

¹¹ Alison Patton and J. Buttrick, "Call and compromise: "balancing" ministry and family" in the *Chicago Theological Seminary Register*, 94, No. 2-3 (2007), 53. EBSCOHOST (accessed December 3, 2013).

on the altar. Additionally, the priests were to offer morning and evening sacrifices daily. This was not a conceptual act, it meant physically slaughtering and roasting the meat. It was hard work, equivalent to that done in a slaughter house or by a cook in the kitchen, for a significant amount of time daily! The Levites were also community health workers, land surveyors, statisticians and judges among other roles mentioned in the Scriptures (Numbers 4:1-20; 1 Chronicles 20; Numbers 8:5-14). These were the roles of full-time ministers.

The early missionaries who came to Africa seemed to understand this concept of ministry. They came as missionaries but did not invariably abandon their professions. Those who needed to change their careers to match the needs of the African context did so. They came as teachers, doctors, technicians, etc. However, one area that was left remains a challenge today - business engagement. The Christian businessman seem to have been left raising money to support the missionaries, while secular companies established industries in Africa along with the gradual demand for protection from their mother countries. This ultimately culminated in the colonization of Africa. Later, mission agencies encountered financial distress as the masses began to demand education and other services. The situation forced the missionaries to ask for financial help from the government. This became the genesis of the secularization of the education sector as governments demanded more control of the education sector that they were now financially supporting.¹² The ability to raise sufficient funds among missionaries met limitations of investment capital and time among missionaries who were overburdened by the need to offer essential services for their mission stations and their environs.

In the church, clergy began to agitate for more pay as they observed their missionary counterparts endowed with more material wealth raised from the west. The situation propelled the missionary movement into advocating that African churches should become “self-governing, self-propagating, and self-supporting.” However, churches and their clergy continued to depend on the congregants for tithes and offerings with little effort being directed to income generating projects.

The focus on tithing as only the giving of 10% of an income without clear guidelines on how the tithing principle applies to those in the business and informal sectors demonstrates a lack of sound biblical teaching. The generosity expected of the Israelite community is sometimes underestimated and many texts that address tithing are not used in preaching. The various types of offerings are usually perceived as ritualistic with little application for today. However, biblical texts show various types and uses of tithes and offerings in the Old Testament (Dt. 14:22, 28; Num. 27:30-33; Dt. 12:6; Dt.

¹² J. Allan Gottneid, ed. *Church and education in Tanzania*. (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1976), 184-185.

12:17; Num. 18:21). Hence, the principle of generosity is in both the Old and New Testaments. Lopsided teaching on tithing has meant that people who could give more are content with giving just 10% in obedience to the law. Generosity is sacrificed on the altar of half-baked teaching on tithing. Unfortunately, many in the informal sector are not trained in faithful stewardship of their practical skills to make tithing and other giving consistent. Worse still, some para-church organizations have even been under-supported since their inception. Removed from the tithe pie by local churches, they have had to depend on well-wishers for “left over” funding. Therefore, lack of proper teaching on financial stewardship has culminated in un-necessarily limited giving which continues to cripple ministries financially.

Overall, donations have been perceived by religious organizations and “full-time ministers” to be the more “spiritual” means of God’s providence as opposed to business and other income generation endeavors. Worse still, without training or models for income generation, ministries have suffered economically and even more so after independence from the colonial power. For many years Christians have wondered whether those in business are “properly” saved. The challenges embedded in trying to combine business with ministry are enormous as experienced by many ministries in history. However, the challenges seem to be due to the separation of calling and vocation. When those who devote themselves in “full-time” ministry begin to create business ventures to overcome financial challenges, those ventures rarely succeed without involving those whose calling is to do business. Those called for business can, with the support of the wider church, do it with the diligence and skill needed to succeed. Thankfully, the business approach to missions and ministry is becoming common with the growth of the movement: “Business as mission”¹³. There is, however, the need for business as mission to be integrated with sound theological thinking¹⁴ and ethical business practices without compromising standards of excellence. The evangelical church has to engage spiritual business thinking and practice to become salt and light in the world, both as an example for wealth creation and for the purpose of influencing business policy and practice in the national arena.

2. Balanced Professionalism in Ministry

With the rise of mega churches, the demand for professionalism has shifted the focus from those who are “called” to people who “possess skills” to accomplish certain tasks. Appraisals are also done, not on the basis of the minister’s vibrant, growing relationship with God, but on how professionally the ministry is accomplished. While there is no problem with professionalism, there is a big problem when professionalism becomes a god, the center of

¹³ Tom Steffen and Mike Barnett, eds, *Business as Mission: From Impoverishment to Empowerment*. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2006), 15-16.

¹⁴ J. Andrew Kirk, *Mission under scrutiny: Confronting contemporary challenges*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 49-56.

focus in ministry. We therefore need to apply integrated models where we balance between professionalism and spiritual formation. The challenge with the former is that it produces project-oriented ministers where the focus is primarily on fulfilling donor-dictated goals to the neglect of God-directed mandates. The other challenge is that ministers who focus on fulfilling such goals may soon be overwhelmed by the demands of their projects. Busyness therefore becomes a major threat to ministry, inhibiting time with God and stunting spiritual growth. We need to maintain a balance and remind Christian workers of their mandate to “be with Christ” in order to “become His disciples”.

A big difficulty with the skewed professional models is the tendency to be highly secularized. For example, salaries are determined by comparison with other professional organizations. The comparison usually leads to inflated budgets due to the high cost of salaries. The cost of paying professional ministers gradually becomes unbearable, making many ministries unsustainable. This situation is evident in many institutions dedicated to Christian Higher Education. For example, five of the six institutions involved during my dissertation research reported remarkable budget constraints.¹⁵ Some had moved from or were in the process of moving from small Christian colleges to full-blown chartered universities. The move introduced national government standards that pressured them to compare not only their programmes, but the qualifications and salaries of their counterparts in other chartered universities. This results in increased salaries for personnel. The situation has stretched many budgets to the limit, especially in wages.

3. Counter Extreme Corporate Models

A key challenge in ministry sustainability is copying the corporate (NGO, company, etc) model. The growth of Christian NGOs has impacted lifestyles in significant ways. From the onset of para-church organizations, leaders had to look outside the church for financial support. Individuals or groups of people who spotted gaps in ministry often campaigned by convincing those of like minds to support their causes financially and otherwise. In some cases, support was overwhelmingly given and many of those organizations have been sustained, primarily through endowment funds. Such organizations include the YMCA, World Vision, and the Red Cross. But many of these organizations nowadays operate as NGOs. While NGOs are meant to deal with pertinent social-economic issues that are not adequately addressed by other sectors in the community, NGOs have grown to become the biggest manufactures of aristocrats. Unfortunately, many Christian organizations that originally sought to help the needy, usually operating with a great deal of volunteer assistance have gradually imitated NGOs. Overheads are usually huge due to big salaries. Many of these are often forced to use uncouth

¹⁵ Mbogo, *Spirituality, work conditions, and the job satisfaction of extension studies personnel in Kenya's Christian higher education*, 246-248.

methods to fundraise. While their main source of income is donations from average income earners, they pay high remuneration packages that raise their staff up the economic ladder way above ordinary citizens in a community. The situation pressurizes other Christian organizations and non-profit and charitable organizations to increase salaries due to a high turnover rate of personnel into the “well paying” institutions. Evidently, the NGOs’ complex remuneration policy is due to the presence of various categories of personnel, especially local and expatriate. The desire to be fair to all employees results in high pay packages for some local people. The situation is often similar for organizations hosting foreign missionaries and local personnel. As locals agitate for equal rights, salaries become bigger. The disparities created during colonial days between the incomes of missionaries versus local ministers, or between colonial masters and local laborers, have created tensions that seem to bring about the quest for more pay. Additionally, deteriorating economic conditions globally have further complicated the situation. As ministry leaders we need to continually beware of the corporate model and encourage those who serve to be committed to service and to continually reflect on the implications of their call in the context of the increasing pressure towards materialism. This calls for bold steps to counter greedy and gluttonous trends towards ever more wealth. Even the most idealistic believers called to ministry find themselves caught up in the materialistic pursuit like the rest of the world.

Conclusion

Ministry leaders find themselves at a critical point in their ministry where financial sustainability is a challenge. While global economic recession has played a major role, there are contextual issues that have to be addressed to attain sustainability. These include: clarifying the call to ministry, rejecting materialism, encouraging the establishment of multi-vocational ministries, balancing professionalism and discarding corporate models in ministry. My hope is that the challenges discussed in this paper will generate aimed a continuing discussion on the topic. Further research is needed on pertinent issues including, but not limited to, partnerships and collaborations, merging of small ministry enterprises, performance-guided but cooperative models of ministry, and efficient processes in ministerial service delivery. Such discussions and subsequent reflections will eventually encourage those in ministry not to be obsessed about money/wealth, position/power and the allures of social strata/class. Attention should be given to attaining biblical goals in ministry while endeavoring to work with “all might, strength and soul” and to do “everything as unto the Lord”. The governing work ethic should be guided by love for God who created work for human enjoyment, and as instrumental in dominating the earth and collaborating with God. The ultimate desire is that ministry organizations will grow towards financial sustainability.

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Giving to Caesar What is Caesar's:

The Ethics of Paying Taxes from a Christian Perspective

Part One: The Bible

by Rodney Reed

Abstract

This research investigates the question, "When is it a moral obligation for a Christian to pay taxes and when is it not?" from a Biblical perspective. It examines the types of taxation, the history of taxation, and the response of the biblical writers and the Old Testament people of God to taxation. In the New Testament the three passages in which taxes are a central feature of the stories are examined. Other NT passages in which taxes are not mentioned, but which are relevant to the topic are also examined. The key focal images of Community, Cross, New Creation, Liberation/Justice, and Holiness are brought to bear in their relation to the topic. Conclusions from this research are that it is a general duty of Christians to pay taxes, but under exceptional circumstances when a government is so oppressive and "anti-Christ", resistance, including tax resistance, may be warranted.

Introduction

In 1989, US-based television evangelist, Jim Bakker, was convicted of multiple counts of fraud, including tax evasion, which eventually led to the downfall of the whole PTL Ministry and the theme park, Heritage USA, he and his wife, Tammy Faye Bakker, had created. Estimates of the amount of tax money Bakker defrauded the US government of during that period went into the millions of dollars.¹ Bakker's conduct was roundly denounced by the secular and Christian news media. Contrast this with Mahatma Gandhi's refusal to comply with the colonial British government's salt production monopoly and tax in 1930-31, culminating in his famous 400 mile March to the Sea to protest that tax and policy. This protest was a key event that turned world opinion around and eventually led to Indian independence.²

One man was condemned by society, including the Christian community, in part for not paying his taxes while the other was applauded. Why? On the one hand there seems to be the natural assumption that Christians should pay taxes to their governments. But on the other hand, there seems to be a case for refusing to do so. Therefore, this research seeks to investigate the question, "When is it a moral obligation for a Christian to pay taxes to a governing authority and when is it not?"

¹ Colin Evans and Ron Formica, "Jim Bakker Trial: 1989", Great American Trials, 2002. *Encyclopedia.com*, 31 Dec. 2013, <<http://www.encyclopedia.com>>.

² Kenneth Pletcher, "Salt March", *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed 21 February 2014: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/885370/Salt-March>.

The theoretical framework - or as I would prefer to say, the “moral framework” - guiding this research is one which has its roots in the Wesleyan Tradition going back to John Wesley himself. What has often been called the “Wesleyan Quadrilateral” will form the core of this method of making moral decisions. The “quadrilateral” refers to the alleged four sources of authority for life to which Wesley consistently appealed: scripture, tradition, reason and experience.³ This research will be the first part of two and will focus on understanding what the Bible has to say about paying taxes.

The Bible is not silent on the issue of taxation. Both the Old and New Testaments speak of it considerably. Most of the main forms of taxation that are used around the world to this day were already being employed in Biblical times, including income taxes, property taxes, poll taxes, and welfare or wealth-redistribution taxes.⁴ A comprehensive review of taxation in the Bible is beyond the scope of this research. In this section, the Old and New Testament concepts and key passages related to taxation will be reviewed with a view to shaping a biblical foundation for the payment of taxes.

What does the Old Testament Say About Paying Taxes?

1. Theocracy and Taxes in the Old Testament

Before discussing particular types of taxation or passages in which taxation is mentioned in the Old Testament, it is important to note a fundamental difference between life in ancient Israel and life today. Today, most people live in countries run by ostensibly secular governments that have put in place basic protections for religious liberties. This principle, often called “the separation of church and state”, has accustomed us to think that money given to our religious institutions is a voluntary contribution while money given to the state is a compulsory payment. The former is typically called a “tithe” or an “offering”, while the latter is called a “tax”. This bifurcation of sacred and secular spheres is not known in Old Testament Israel and in most of the Ancient Near East. Even under the kings of the united and divided monarchies, Israel/Judah was still operating as a theocratic society, where the King’s rule was God’s rule and vice versa.⁵ According to Oden, “for this

³ Don Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason, & Experience - A Model of Evangelical Theology*, (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2005).

⁴ For general accounts of taxation in the Bible, see Manuel L. Jose and Clark K. Moore, “The Development of Taxation in the Bible: Improvements in Counting, Measurement, and Computation in the Ancient Middle East”, in *Accounting Historians Journal* 25.2 (December 1998), reprinted in *Taxation: Critical Perspectives on the World Economy, Vol. 1*, Simon R. James, ed., (London: Routledge, 2002), 20; Robert E. Oden, “Taxation in Ancient Israel”, *Journal of Religious Ethics* 12.2 (Fall 1984): 162-181; Geoffrey P. Miller, “Taxation in the Bible”, *New York University Public Law and Legal Theory Working Papers*, (November 1, 2012): 1-12.

⁵ Obviously, there are many biblical examples of when a king’s rule diverged from God’s rule. Those examples of evil or wicked rulers underscore what God’s original

religious community any division between royal and priestly, between the palace and the temple, between secular and religious taxes is impossible.⁶ Jose and Moore confirm, "In the theocracy of ancient Israel, tithing in a religious context was the same as taxation in a governmental context. It is impossible to distinguish religious and governmental taxation since religion and government were one and the same in ancient Israel." They go on to quote Hartman who writes, "In a strictly theocratic state there is no real distinction between the treasury of the sanctuary and the treasury of the government." Consequently, almost anything that is said in the Old Testament prescribing certain offerings can be interpreted as forms of taxation.⁷ For the purposes of this research, any gift that was compulsory for the people of Israel is considered as a tax. Those that were voluntary are considered an offering.

This may rub Christians today the wrong way. We may chaff at reading about a comparison of tithes and taxes. That is probably because of our bifurcated or compartmentalized worldview (sacred versus secular). Modern people almost universally have negative attitudes toward payment of taxes. But one of the first lessons we should take from a study of the Bible on the issue of taxes is that the payment of taxes is meant to be understood as an expression of devotion to God.

2. Types of Taxes in the Old Testament

2.1 Tithes and Firstfruits: Among the various forms of taxation in the Old Testament are tithes and first fruits. Leviticus 27:30, 32 says, "A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord. . . . Every tithe of the herd and flock - every tenth animal that passes under the shepherd's rod - will be holy to the Lord." Deuteronomy 18:1-8 describes how the Levites and the priests were not to have an inheritance of land, but were to live on the offerings presented by the rest of the Israelites in their worship of God and primary among those are the firstfruits of the land. "You are to give them the firstfruits of your grain, new wine and olive oil, and the first wool from the shearing of your sheep, for the Lord your God has chosen them and their descendants out of all your tribes to stand and minister in the Lord's name always" (Deut. 18:4-5).⁸

intention was for ruling and they also provide biblical case studies for what God's people are to do when the ruling authorities are not ruling as God would want them to.

⁶ Oden, "Taxation in Ancient Israel", 164.

⁷ See Oden, "Taxation in Ancient Israel", 8: "That these [tithes and offerings in Old Testament Israel] are mostly or entirely best interpreted as taxes is clear. As Elon argues in his excellent study of Jewish taxation generally, if we include in the definition of taxation any sense of 'an imposed duty to contribute toward the needs of an individual or of the public,' then all biblical offerings qualify as taxes" (1975: 663-664).

⁸ Because the tithe and firstfruits were given in proportion to the productivity or increase of the land or flocks and herds, it is an example of a type of income tax.

2.2 Atonement Money: Exodus 30:11-16 refers to an amount of money every Israelite was to bring to the place of worship every time a census was taken.

Then the Lord said to Moses, 'When you take a census of the Israelites to count them, each one must pay the Lord a ransom for his life at the time he is counted. Then no plague will come on them when you number them. Each one who crosses over to those already counted is to give a half shekel, according to the sanctuary shekel, which weighs twenty gerahs. This half shekel is an offering to the Lord. All who cross over, those twenty years old or more, are to give an offering to the Lord. The rich are not to give more than a half shekel and the poor are not to give less when you make the offering to the Lord to atone for your lives. Receive the atonement money from the Israelites and use it for the service of the tent of meeting.'

Under Nehemiah's leadership this tax seems to have been reintroduced as part of the restored community's covenant with the explicit requirement that it was to be an annual contribution. By the time of the New Testament this had become known as the "temple tax" and was itself the source of governmental revenue and the occasion for a key text in the New Testament on taxation.⁹

2.3 Property Tax: In 2 Kings 23:35 it says, "Jehoiakim paid Pharaoh Necho the silver and gold he demanded. In order to do so, he taxed the land and exacted the silver and gold from the people of the land according to their assessments." According to Jose and Moore, "Note is made of the difference between the income tax and this property tax. The former was based on the increase or yield of property, while the latter was a function of the value of property. Since it was related to value, increase or yield was immaterial."¹⁰

2.4 Forced Labor as Tax: For those who were too poor to pay monetary taxes, forced labor was the only means to pay such taxes. However, even if one had the means to pay, conscription was sometimes used to ensure that there was sufficient human labor to accomplish various national projects. Commenting on this, Oden writes,

As often in the ancient Near East generally, one of the ways in which national projects were financed in biblical Israel was through the utilization of forced labor. That forced labor is a type of taxation, indeed, perhaps the basic and original tax, hardly needs to be established; but it is worth noting that Heichelheim's survey of ancient economics includes forced labor among the fundamental taxes of antiquity (1958:176), and that the biblical word for "forced labor," *mas*, is now the modern Hebrew term for "tax."¹¹

Oden goes on to meticulously show the extent of the use of forced labor in Israelite history, including and especially during Solomon's reign. For example, in 1 Kings 4:6, Adoniram is listed as an official in charge of forced labor and 1 Kings 5:27-28 indicates that Solomon conscripted 30,000 men and "sent them

⁹ Because this was a tax levied on each and every Israelite without regard to wealth or other considerations, it is an example of a poll tax or head tax.

¹⁰ Jose and Moore, "The Development of Taxation in the Bible", 22.

¹¹ Oden, "Taxation in Ancient Israel", 165.

off to Lebanon in shifts of ten thousand a month so that they spent one month in Lebanon and two months at home."¹² This is significant because Solomon's tax policy, especially including the use of forced labor, is directly related to the major "tax revolt" in Israel's history - Israel's rebellion against Rehoboam.¹³ This will be discussed later.

2.5 Tribute: Throughout the ancient Near East even up to the present when one nation subjugated another militarily it often demanded some form of tribute payment. This payment was not only a token of the submission of the defeated nation but also a tax imposed on it to cover the expenses of its continued subjugation and to add wealth to the conquered nation's treasury. The Bible records several examples of this tribute in both the Old and New Testaments (e.g., Judges 3:15; 2 Samuel 8:2, 6; 1 Kings 4:21; 2 Kings 3:4; 2 Kings 15: 19-20; 2 Kings 17:3; Ezra 4:13, 20). In some of these instances, other nations were paying tribute to Israel and in others Israel was paying tribute to other nations. In the latter case, these taxes were particularly resented and seen as oppressive, and in the case of Eliud (Judges 3), seemed to be the cause of Israel's rebellion against her oppressor.

2.6 Harvest, Sabbatical Year, and Jubilee Year Provisions: Most nations today use some taxes as a means of caring for the less fortunate and redistributing wealth from the rich to the poor. In ancient Israel these took the form of laws governing the use of the land and the harvests from the land. For example, Exodus 23:10 says, "For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops, but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove." These provisions and others like them were Israel's version of a social security system or welfare for the poor. Only instead of paying a tax and having that money redistributed to the poor, they were to leave the land fallow or to not harvest all the way to the edge of their property or to return the land to its original owner after a certain number of years. The extent to which these provisions were enforced may be a matter of debate but the intent of these laws is clear: God's concern for the poor and less fortunate was to be demonstrated among His people through actions and policies which required the wealthier to care for them and, in fact, shifted resources from the "haves" to the "have-nots" of society.¹⁴

3. Historical Development of Taxation in Israel

During the period of the Judges, the political structure of Israel was that of a loose tribal confederation. There was no centralized government. People lived by their own devices until some emergency (e.g., oppression from a

¹² Oden, "Taxation in Ancient Israel", 166.

¹³ See also Joshua 16:10 and 17:13 for examples Israel extracting forced labor from conquered peoples.

¹⁴ See Oden, "Taxation in Ancient Israel", 168-69.

neighboring nation) called them to collective action. As a result there was little need for taxes. Even the worship of Yahweh at the tabernacle in Shiloh was “low maintenance” and was supported only by the sacrifices and offerings of those who came to worship there.

In the period of the United Monarchy this changed dramatically. The construction of royal residences, an elaborate temple, and other national infrastructure projects (e.g., fortress cities, fleets of ships, viaducts), along with the maintenance of a centralized government and a standing army, all required money to fund. Hence, the need for taxes.

The words of the prophet Samuel when Israel petitioned him for a king, predicted this would be the case:

Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king. He said, “This is what the king who will reign over you will claim as his rights: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants. Your male and female servants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, but the Lord will not answer you in that day” (1 Sam. 8:10-18).

This prophecy became a reality. Taxes were levied on native Israelites, foreigners living among them, and from other nations subdued by Israel. According to Dickson and Nwaobia, royal taxation in Israel seems to have peaked during Solomon’s reign.¹⁵ 1 Kings 4 elaborates on Solomon’s royal tax system and the daily provisions he required. This trend continued through the Divided Monarchies (e.g., 2 Chronicles 24: 8-12), through the times when other nations oppressed Israel/Judah and collected tribute from them (e.g., 2 Kings 23:33-35), and during the restoration period (e.g., Nehemiah 10:33-34). Forced labor, produce, livestock, articles of value, and money were all used as forms of payment of these taxes. At times, the tax burden seemed light and the people were happy to comply; at other times it was oppressive.

4. Responses to Taxation in the Old Testament

The responses to taxation in the Old Testament are varied and depend much on the circumstances in which they were levied. At least from the

¹⁵ Theodore U. Dickson and A. N. Nwaobia, “Impact of Heavy Taxation on Israel During Solomonic Era: Implications for Nigerian Tax System”, *Asian Economic and Financial Review*, Vol. 2, No. 2, (June 15, 2012): 339-342. See also Oden, “Taxation in Ancient Israel”, 166; and Jose and Moore, “The Development of Taxation in the Bible”, 29.

perspective of the authors of the Biblical texts, there is a general attitude of acceptance of taxation as part of the fulfillment of one's covenant duty to God and God's ruling representative(s). Taxation (including compulsory tithes and offerings) was seen as justifiably necessary for the operations of Israel's key institutions (including religious) and for national development. There was civic pride in Israel when taxes were brought to the designated storehouses and shame when they were not.¹⁶

However, there are important hints of discontent with an unjust system of taxation within the Old Testament. Certainly when Israel was being oppressed by a foreign power and paying tribute to that power, there was discontent. It is illuminative that Judges 3 describes Ehud as assassinating the Moabite ruler immediately after presenting to him the tribute of the people of Israel. No doubt during the period of the Judges, the payment of tribute was a primary reason for Israel to cry out for deliverance. Further, in Nehemiah 5:4, we find the complaint of the restored community, "We have had to borrow money to pay the king's tax on our fields and vineyards. . . . Some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we are powerless, because our fields and vineyards belong to others."

Perhaps the clearest denunciation of oppressive taxation is found in Amos 5:11-12, "You levy a straw tax on the poor and impose a tax on their grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine. For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins." Here we find taxation that oppressed the poor while enriching others unjustly, as well as God's anger against this sin of Israel and the declaration of God's soon-coming punishment for it (and other sins). What is not answered here is what would God have permitted the Israelite taxpayer to do in response to it.

But that is perhaps answered in what is really a remarkable story of tax rebellion found in 1 Kings 12. As we have noted, the splendor of Solomon's reign came with a price tag and that price tag was a very heavy tax regime. At the time of his passing and Rehoboam's ascension to the throne, the people gathered and in not so many words petitioned for a tax reduction. The "heavy yoke" is a reference to those taxes and the forced labor (v. 4). And when Rehoboam refused to lighten that yoke, those from the northern tribes revolted. In the words of Dickson and Nwaobia, "Taxation and corvee angered the populace [sic] no wonder, then, that the pent-up resentment of the people eventually exploded into revolution by the end of Solomon's reign. This, it would seem, is what Samuel meant when he said the people would pay dearly

¹⁶ Whether the support for paying taxes in these passages was the actual perspective of the people or merely the perspective of those who authored the sacred texts, we may not be able to know for sure. However, as the canonical text is what Christians believe to be inspired by the Holy Spirit, this research will generally assume that the text, as we have it, adequately reflects the will of God.

for having a king.”¹⁷ So great was their resentment that when Rehoboam sent out his officer in charge of forced labor, the people stoned him to death (v. 18)! Oden thus describes the key role that taxation played in the history of Israel: “...that the two Kingdoms of Judah and Israel divided forever after the reign of Solomon does support the conclusion that this royal taxation system was felt to be manifestly unjust.”¹⁸ Most importantly, the rebellion of the people against an unjust and oppressive tax regime is clearly portrayed as being justified or at least permitted in the sight of God (v. 24).

5. Principles of Taxation and Tax Paying in the Old Testament

From our study of the Old Testament, the following general principles can be deduced:

- i) It is a duty to pay reasonable taxes to a legitimate ruler or government.
- ii) The majority witness of the Old Testament is that taxes should generally be proportionate to income so that those who are wealthier pay more taxes (e.g. the tithe, and Joseph’s 20% “famine tax” in Genesis 41:34).
- iii) Taxes must not be oppressive or place an unbearable burden on the people, especially the poor.
- iv) Using the legal code, including the tax code, to correct the inequitable distribution of wealth so that the poor of society are less vulnerable is a legitimate social welfare strategy.
- v) Illegitimate and/or oppressive governments do not deserve tax compliance and if the occasion permits, tax rebellion may be warranted.

What does the New Testament Say About Paying Taxes?

When we turn to the New Testament the situation is one in which Palestine as a whole was an occupied territory of the Roman Empire and as such its inhabitants were required to pay Roman taxes. In addition, there were also “local” taxes levied by the appointed provincial kings and governors like the Herods. Further, there were still some of the same temple and worship taxes. The relationship between these forms of taxation was very complex and made even more so by the dating of some of the New Testament texts. Let the following summary suffice to introduce the topic and to set the stage for discussion of the New Testament’s teaching on tax paying and tax policy.

¹⁷ Dickson and Nwaobia, “Impact of Heavy Taxation on Israel During Solomonic Era”, 342. Dickson and Nwaobia “Impact of Heavy Taxation on Israel During Solomonic Era”, 341; Miller, “Taxation in the Bible”, 3; and Oden, “Taxation in Ancient Israel”, 166-67, all suggest that part of the reason for discontent of the northern tribes was that if one reads at face value the manner in which Israel was divided into tax districts under Solomon’s reign it appears that the people of Judah were exempted from paying taxes. Thus, “If this is the case, then this particular tax is one of striking inequity, since the very area which benefited the most from the tax was exempted from paying it,” Oden, “Taxation in Ancient Israel”, 167.

¹⁸ Oden, “Taxation in Ancient Israel”, 166-67.

1. Roman Rule and Taxation in First Century Palestine

Just like every transnational empire before it, Rome instituted taxes. It was just so that taxes could be estimated and collected effectively that a census was taken that led Joseph and Mary to return to Joseph's hometown, Bethlehem to be registered.¹⁹ Just like in the OT when the people of Israel resented the payment of tribute to the foreign nations who had conquered them, the Jewish people of the first century A.D. resented the payment of taxes to Rome. So much were these taxes and the occupiers who levied them hated that a resistance movement called the "Zealots" arose in response to it. Their creed was, "No Lord but Jehovah; no tax but that to the temple; no friend but the zealot."²⁰ Zealots were among Jesus' early disciples and may have hoped that he would be the one to free them from Roman tyranny and taxes.

It was in large measure the payment of taxes that eventually led to the Jewish revolt against Rome in A.D. 66-70. "The heavy taxes," according to Burg, "apparently resulted from Emperor Nero's fiscal excesses, including the costs of rebuilding Rome (perhaps half destroyed by the great fire in July 64), and most especially the costs of constructing Nero's new palace, the Domus Aurea (golden house), with its resplendent art, adornments, and grounds."²¹ Burg also noted, "One form the Jews' resistance took was their refusal to pay the tribute (tax) due the emperor."²² For some the payment of taxes was complicity with Rome and was viewed not just as political betrayal but religious apostasy.²³ This tax revolt and other insurrectionist activities eventually led to the arrival of Roman legions in Palestine. Consistent with Roman tradition, after the destruction of Jerusalem including the temple and the end of the rebellion, Rome instituted new and even heavier taxes on the Jewish people.²⁴ In fact, Rome had the gall to require the Jews to continue to pay the "temple tax" even though the Jewish temple had been destroyed. But now (after A.D. 70), as if to add insult to injury, the tax instead was officially collected in support of the temple of Jupiter in Rome.²⁵

¹⁹ James Stevenson Riggs, "The Zealots and Taxes in Judea" in *We Won't Pay! A Tax Resistance Reader*, ed. by David M. Gross, (N.P.: David R. Gross, 2008), 1-2.

²⁰ Riggs, "The Zealots and Taxes in Judea", 2.

²¹ David F. Burg, *A World History of Tax Rebellions: An Encyclopedia of Tax Rebels, Revolts and Riots from Antiquity to the Present*, (London: Routledge, 2004), 31.

²² Burg, *A World History of Tax Rebellions*, 33.

²³ Note Adolf Hausrath's description of the belief of Judas the Galilean who led the Zealot insurrection, "It is idolatry to reverence Caesar, idolatry to pay the denarius to the Gentile state, a breach of the purity of clean goods to pay toll or tithe to the unclean, and he who demands it is an enemy of God, enemy of Israel, doubly punishable when he is a Jew.", from "Judas the Galilean" in *We Won't Pay! A Tax Resistance Reader*, ed. by David M. Gross, (N.P.: David R. Gross, 2008), 3.

²⁴ Burg, *A World History of Tax Rebellions*, 33.

²⁵ Warren Carter, "Paying the Tax to Rome as Subversive Praxis: Matthew 17:24-27," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 76, (December 1999): 8, and Rob Haskell,

With all of this as the general background of the NT, it should not be a surprise that in Judean society as witnessed in the NT, tax collectors were generally considered to be among the parasites of society, the instruments of Roman oppression. They were all the more despised because they were Jews who were seen as betraying their own people and because they often over-taxed the people to line their own pockets. The conventional view as noted in the NT writings was that tax collectors fell into the same category as prostitutes and sinners (e.g., Matthew 9:10-11; 11:19; 21:31; Mark 2:15-16; Luke 3:12). Tax collecting was therefore a “sinner’s vocation” - a job which was virtually impossible to do in a righteous manner. We now turn to some key NT passages in which taxes are explicitly mentioned.

2. Paying the Temple Tax (Matthew 17:24-27)

This passage of scripture, which is unique to Matthew’s Gospel, is the subject of much discussion. Scholars diverge in their opinion about the dating of this passage, the tax to which the passage refers, and the meaning of what Jesus says in relation to the tax. The interpretive options seem to be these:

i) The core of the passage at least dates back to a time prior to the Jewish Rebellion and destruction of the temple in A.D. 70 and the tax that the tax collectors ask Peter if Jesus pays refers to the Jewish Temple Tax (going back to the atonement tax in Exodus 30:11-16 and Nehemiah 10:32). According to this interpretation, when Jesus discusses the payment of this tax with Peter, his words seem to imply that though he is the Son of God and would naturally be exempt from the payment of such a tax, as a matter of good form he instructs Peter to go to the lake, throw out his line and the first fish he catches will have in it’s mouth the necessary money to pay the tax for the two of them. For Matthew and his largely Jewish Christian audience, the message was that though they are now “free” children of God and are no longer subject to the Jewish law, so as to not cause of offence to their Jewish brothers and sisters, they should continue to pay the temple tax. The tax, and by implication the response of the Matthean community to it, is basically non-political or religious in nature.²⁶

ii) The Book of Matthew was written after the destruction of the Jewish temple and Jews, including Jewish Christians, were now being required to pay the new “Roman version” of the temple tax to the god, Jupiter. In this case, Matthew was using this story as a literary device to teach his readers

“Matthew 17:24-27: A Religio-Political Reading,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 32/2, (April 2008): 175, 177.

²⁶ See examples of commentaries on this passage from the Bible Gateway website: <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/IVP-NT/Matt/Upholding-Societys>. However, it important to note that even the Jewish temple tax during the time of Jesus was widely seen as being misused by those who were the beneficiaries of its collection, the Chief Priest and religious hierarchy. Hence there were mixed views regarding the obligation to pay it: it was a religious duty of all good Jews but was being abused in how it was used.

how Christians should respond to this highly offensive tax and to Roman rule in general. Evidence to support this view is that in v. 25 when Jesus discusses what has happened with Peter, he refers not to the temple tax but to the “tolls and taxes” of the “kings of the earth”. Here again the message seems to be that though Christians are citizens whose ultimate allegiance belongs to God, so as to “not offend” they should pay these taxes. In other words, even though the text should be read politically, the church should take a submissive or passive role in response to Roman rule.²⁷

iii) Still others seem to favor a more politically subversive interpretation in which it doesn't really matter to what tax the text is referring. The key point is that Jesus' teaching is not meant to be understood as sanctioning the oppressive status quo. The emphasis is on the fact that Christians are “free sons” of the true King and any claims of the “kings of the earth” are dramatically relativized. In this case the text is to be read politically and is meant to be subversive of the political order.²⁸

There is not space here to delve into the merits and demerits of these interpretive options. The view taken here is something of a hybrid from which are gleaned key truths that are valid regardless of whether one takes a pre- or post-destruction of the temple date for the origin of the passage:

i) Jesus' admonition to Peter to pay the temple tax “lest we offend them” makes almost unavoidable the implication that Jesus understood that there was at least some relative obligation to pay these taxes to either the Jewish temple or to Rome. Why would Jesus feel obliged to pay the tax to Rome? If for no other reason than that to fail to do so could bring the wrath of Rome, which is exactly what happened in the Jewish Revolt of A.D. 66-70.

ii) Despite the relative obligation to pay the tax, it is highly likely that Matthew and his audience viewed the temple tax (whether Jewish or Roman temple) as oppressive.

iii) Christians belong to another kingdom and their absolute allegiance belongs to God alone. The payment of taxes to earthly authorities is only a qualified obligation.

iv) Christians live in a world in which sometimes oppressive authorities make unavoidable claims on them. Christians are to do their best to live free from complicity in that oppression. But sometimes it is not entirely possible to do so. This is the reality of life inherent the “already but not yet” of the Kingdom of God.

²⁷ David Hill, *The New Century Bible Commentary: The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 271-72.

²⁸ W. Carter, “Paying the Tax to Rome as Subversive Praxis”, 414; Haskell, “Matthew 17:24-27: A Religio-Political Reading,” 184; Edward J. Carter, “Toll and Tribute: A Political Reading of Matthew 17.24-27” *Journal of the Study of the New Testament* 25/4 (2003): 430-31.

v) By implication of #4, Christians may be required to pay taxes that they wish they could avoid. Where possible they should avoid them. Where they cannot, to do so is not sin, unless Jesus sins by authorizing the payment of this tax.

3. Giving to Caesar What is Caesar's (Mt 22:15-22; Mk 12:13-17; Lk 20:20-26)

Ironically, the most famous passage in the Bible related to paying taxes and the one from which this research takes its title, probably provides the least help in guiding the modern Christian through the moral maze of paying taxes. In this familiar story according to Matthew and Mark, the Pharisees and Herodians are seeking to entrap Jesus by asking him whether "it is right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" Jesus, knowing their intent, asks them for the coin used to pay the imperial tax and once it is produced, he asks whose inscription is on it. When they reply, "Caesar's", Jesus famously responds in turn, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." In saying this, Jesus marvelously evaded their trap, for truly to speak against paying the tax would have put him in jeopardy with the governing authorities, but to speak in favor of the tax would have alienated him from the people who so much resented it.

While Jesus' words were intended to help him avoid being entangled in the very sensitive politics of his day, do they offer any guidance for Christians today who struggle with their relationship to the state and the state's taxes? Here again the divergences in interpretation are wide. Some scholars find in these words a Jesus who is carving out a separate sphere of authority for Caesar from that of God and by implication the Christian is obligated to serve Caesar in Caesar's sphere of authority.²⁹ Others find in these words an anti-establishment Jesus who was craftily teaching that since everything belongs to God, there is actually nothing left that we owe to Caesar!³⁰ In general it seems like we are pretty good at reading into the text "the Jesus we want to see."

Once again there is not sufficient space in this research to elaborate on the passage. But let the following suffice as a summary of its value for the subject under investigation.

i) The general resentment of this tax among the populace is overwhelmingly evident. The people understood this tax as an expression of Rome and its subjugation of the Jewish people. Jesus seems to share that view. Any interpretation of this passage that implies that Jesus held a benign or positive view of Roman rule is mistaken.

ii) When Jesus asked whose "image" was on the coin, he was likely making a deliberate contrast to humans being created in the image of God. In the

²⁹ Hill, *The New Century Bible Commentary: The Gospel of Matthew*, 304, approximates this view when he writes, "The reply of Jesus . . . represents a positive and general appreciation of the role of the State . . ."

³⁰ See William T. Cavanaugh, "If you Render Unto God What is God's, What is Left for Caesar?" *The Review of Politics* 71 (2009), 607-619.

words of one commentator, "Coins bear the image of the emperor, but humans bear the image of God. Give to the emperor what is his (money), but give to God what is his (our very lives)."³¹ And when Caesar's claims on us irreconcilably conflict with God's, we should know which to obey.

iii) Jesus is not introducing a "two kingdoms" theory of state and church relations or a "sacred versus secular" bifurcation of human life. Foundational to Jesus' preaching is that the Kingdom of God is at hand and that Kingdom demands the Christian's full loyalty. Jesus' whole life is a demonstration of total dedication to the will of the Father, rather than divided allegiance. Clearly, for Jesus, God trumps Caesar. And when push came to shove, in obedience to the Father, Jesus died at the hands of Caesar's agents. This points to the tendency of governing authorities toward self-idolatry, which often takes the guise of patriotism. Christians must be vigilant against offering the state what belongs only to God.³²

iv) Yet despite the implicit relativizing of the claims of Caesar on the Christian's life in this passage, Caesar still makes a claim. For the immediate audiences of the three synoptic gospels it is likely this passage was intended to convey a message that Roman taxes are inevitable and so long as they are not leading to something directly contradicting God's ultimate rule, the Christian should pay them.

4. Submit to the Authorities: Romans 13:1-7

Allan A. Boesak, a critic of apartheid, tells the following story:

On 19 October 1977 I was visited for the first time by the South African Security Police. They stayed from 3:30 till 7:00. At one point I was challenged by the Security Police captain (who assured me that he was a Christian and in fact an elder of the white Dutch Reformed Church) on my persistent resistance to the government. How can you do what you are doing, he asked, while you know what Romans Thirteen says? In the hour-long conversation that followed, I could not convince him. For him as for millions of other Christians in South Africa and across the world Romans 13 is an unequivocal unrelenting call for blind unquestioning obedience to the state.³³

There is probably no passage in all the Bible that has been more (mis)used by governing powers to justify oppression of people who respect the authority of Scripture than Romans 13:1-7. Paul writes in v. 1, "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that

³¹ Grant MacAskill, "Taxes and Caesar (Mark 12:13-17)", Theology of Work Project, Inc. 2011, <http://www.theologyofwork.org/new-testament/mark/economic-issues/taxes-and-caesar-mark-1213-17>.

³² Cavanaugh, "If you Render Unto God What is God's, What is Left for Caesar?", 612, 619; William L. Lane, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 424-25.

³³ Quoted in Jan Botha, "Creation of New Meaning: Rhetorical Situations and the Reception of Romans 13:1-7" in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* [serial online] 79, (June 1, 1992): 24-37.

which God has established.” He goes on to argue (v. 6-7), “This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.”

On the one hand, we can understand this coming from Paul. He was a Roman citizen and in fact made use of Roman governance, jurisprudence, and soldiers more than once during his missionary travels. In fact, it was his right of appeal as a Roman citizen that took him all the way to Rome to argue his case. Paul did, indeed, benefit from Roman rule on occasion. On the other hand, Paul also knew the tyranny of Rome - he was beaten, imprisoned by, and at times was a fugitive from Roman authorities. It is hard to imagine this side of Paul writing these words in his letter to the Romans.

Again, a detailed discussion of Romans 13:1-7 is beyond the scope of this study. Let the following stand as the key points of relevance:

i) As Paul moved about the Roman Empire spreading the good news, he saw the positive side of the *Pax Romana*. He made use of the roads, the means of communication, the security apparatus, the economic infrastructure, the legal system, the culture of free enquiry, and governing structures all put in place by Rome. Perhaps most importantly he had benefited from the Roman edict that allowed the free exercise of the Jewish religion throughout the Roman Empire as the legal vehicle for the spread of the Christian faith. He could see perhaps better than the average Jew in Palestine who so hated the Roman taxes what exactly those taxes were paying for. In keeping with this, any Christian reflection on the ethics of paying taxes must not focus so exclusively on the burden of taxation that the benefits of governance are lost sight of.

ii) There have been many attempts to qualify Paul’s call of subjection to the higher authorities so that his message seems more palatable to the modern liberationist mind-set. Some of these attempts have merit and will be mentioned below. Having said that, it is impossible to escape the plain and obvious sense of Paul’s message in these verses. As much as we would like him to be a social prophet, in this passage, at least, he is not. Paul calls for submission to the ruling authorities. Why? Paul gives three reasons: (a) because they are appointed by God, (b) because they are God’s servants to do you good (and to restrain evil), and (c) because of conscience (v. 5). Regarding the appeal to conscience, Paul seems to be saying, “Your conscience tells you that it is your duty to respect your government.” And part of this duty is to pay taxes.

iii) In fact, Paul describes the duty to pay taxes as something that the individual “owes” to the governing authority (v. 7). This “owing” implies not just a legal obligation, so that one can be thrown in prison or fined for tax evasion. It is a moral and spiritual obligation because God has established

this governing authority. Hence tax evasion is not just running away from the "tax man". It is running away from one's duty to God.

iv) Paul contends that God establishes the governing authorities (v. 1), and that they are "God's servants to do you good" (v. 4). But what happens when they do not rule according to the will of God? What options are available to the Christian when those authorities are not acting at all like "God's servants to do you good" but rather like "Satan's servants to do you evil"? Paul does not answer these questions. Perhaps he did not do so because such language in a "public letter" like most of his epistles were, especially to Christians in Rome, the capital of the Empire, could bring the wrath of the governing authorities down on him or the intended recipients of the letter. Some have even argued that Paul's silence on the question of what to do about bad governance was specifically meant to lead his readers to "read between the lines" to seek answers to such questions.³⁴ Many scholars have speculated on what Paul might have said had he answered those questions. And while they are only speculations, they deserve a hearing. Perhaps the most common line of argument is that when a governing authority ceases to rule in a manner consistent with the character and will of the One who established it (God), then its establishment ceases. In other words, when a government ceases to be God's servant doing good to its subjects, it forfeits the right to command the allegiance of those subjects. Some scholars even further this argument by underscoring Paul's own use of "conscience" (v. 5). The same conscience that calls for obedience to a good government can also call for reform or resistance to an evil government.³⁵

v) Another interpretive method used to qualify Paul's seemingly unqualified call for submission to the governing authorities is to distinguish between *submission* and *obedience*. This view admits that Paul calls for unqualified submission to the ruling authorities, but argues that one can submit to an authority, but refuse to obey it.³⁶ In essence, this is the tactic of civil disobedience so skillfully employed by persons like Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. With all due respect, they subjected themselves to government authority, but refused to obey unjust laws and led many people to strategically disobey laws their governments had enacted.

³⁴ William R. Herzon II, "Dissembling, A Weapon of the Weak: The Case of Christ and Caesar in Mark 12:13-17 and Romans 13:1-7" *Perspectives In Religious Studies* [serial online] 21/4 (December 1, 1994): 339-360. Available from: ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, Ipswich, MA. Accessed January 25, 2014.

³⁵ Herzon II, "Dissembling, A Weapon of the Weak", 354; Botha, "Creation of New Meaning", 34.

³⁶ Robert L. Deffinbaugh, "The Christian and Civil Government (Romans 13: 1-7)", from the series, *Romans: the Righteousness of God*, published August 18, 2004, accessed at <https://bible.org/seriespage/33-christian-and-civil-government-romans-131-7>.

5. Other Relevant Texts

The truth of Scripture relevant to this topic cannot be exhausted by referring only to those passages in which taxes are explicitly mentioned. Perhaps there are many passages that could be called upon to speak to this topic but this research will limit itself to two clusters of texts.

5.1 Loving Others: The Great Commandment and The Good Samaritan.

When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, his response was, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind [and] Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt. 22:36-40). This command to love must permeate all aspects of a Christian's life, including his/her societal relationships. The payment of taxes is one very tangible way in which love can be expressed. The purpose of most taxes is to provide services to the community/society and through these services infrastructure is built or maintained, law and order secured, health enhanced, education provided, poverty alleviated. Consequently, if taxes are put to proper use, they become one of the most comprehensive expressions of neighbor-love available to the Christian.

The story of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10: 25-37) is a great example of neighbor-love. While other supposedly religious Jews passed by and refused to help the Jewish man who had been set upon by thugs, a Samaritan, who has no ethnic or cultural bond that would obligate him to care for the victim, does so out of sheer disinterested love. He comes to the aid of one in desperate need. One of the purposes of taxation is to generate revenue to assist the poor and needy and those who unjustly treated by society. Health and welfare programs, justice systems, job-creation programs, student loans and educational grants are all examples of how taxes can assist those who symbolically have been beaten and left half dead along the road of life. By paying their taxes, Christians become Good Samaritans to those in need.

5.2 Allegiance to God: Daniel and the Three Hebrews/Peter and John before the Sanhedrin/Resisting the Beast.

Paul and even Jesus did not answer the question of what to do when a ruling authority requires something that is directly contrary to the will of God But that does not mean the rest of Scripture is silent about it. The Bible gives ample illustrations for us to follow.

Two of them are found in the book of Daniel. Most scholars agree that the final compilation of the book of Daniel was during a time of intense persecution of the Jewish people. It was a resistance document written to give hope and encouragement to the Jewish people. In both the story of Daniel being thrown into the lions' den and the story of the three Hebrews being thrown into the fiery furnace, the cause of these calamities was the refusal of Daniel and his colleagues to obey a law that would have broken their primary allegiance to God. It is probably important to note that it was not the payment of taxes that they were refusing. In fact, it is likely that all of them accepted the obligation to pay taxes and Daniel, at least, was probably in charge of collecting and using

tax money in his role as a key administrator in the Persian government. In both cases it was religious duties that were in question. This should probably make Christians cautious about using the burden of taxes as the reason for refusing to pay them. But we see in these passages the principle that disobedience to governing authorities is allowable in some circumstances. Even more foundational is the idea that only God can claim our ultimate allegiance.

Essentially the same message is presented in Acts 4. After Peter and John preached and healed in Jesus' name, they were brought before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council, and commanded "... not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus" (v. 18). Their reply gets to the heart of the issue of where the Christian's allegiance is to fall: "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God" (v. 19).

Finally, couched in the most dramatic symbolism of all, is Revelation 13 where the dragon and the beast are "given power to wage war against the saints and to conquer them" and the peoples of the earth are required to take the mark of the beast or suffer even to the point of death. Like Daniel, Revelation is a resistance document, written to encourage the church to endure a time of persecution. But under no circumstances were they to compromise and worship the beast or receive its mark. Surely this passage sets up a great tension with Paul's admonition for submission to the authorities instituted by God.³⁷ In connection with this passage, it is important also to note that while Revelation is a resistance document, the method of resisting is not that of withholding taxes or guerilla warfare. It is that of following the example of the "Lamb that was slain". Christians, through their faithful witness to the truth of Jesus Christ, can expect suffering and martyrdom but through that martyrdom the Lamb's victory will be won. This should give Christians pause before taking up coercive measures to reform or rebel against government.

What these passages (Daniel 3 and 6, Acts 4, Revelation 13) share in common is the idea that loyalty to God is absolute. Loyalty to any earthly authority can be only relative. Therefore, no law to pay taxes can be absolute and if a situation arises in which paying taxes breaks or diminishes one's primary allegiance to God, then that law - like those that prohibited prayer or required bowing to an idol or taking the mark of the Beast, should be refused.

6. Summary of New Testament Teaching on Taxes

Let the following suffice to summarize the NT teaching on this subject.

- i) Palestinian Jews generally resented Roman taxes and taxes imposed by those they believed to be the puppets of Rome.
- ii) Roman rule was a "mixed bag" of both good and bad, development and oppression. Consequently the NT witness on the issue of the payment of

³⁷ Scholars have noted the contrast between Romans 13 and Revelation 13. Resolving this tension is part of what this research seeks to do and then to apply that resolution to the issue of payment of taxes.

taxes is widely diverse. On one hand, Christians are told to submit to earthly authorities and pay taxes because those authorities are instituted by God. On the other hand Christians are to refuse to cooperate with “Anti-Christ” authorities, particularly when those authorities make claims on their citizens are that directly contradictory to the Christian faith.

iii) The NT writers who speak of taxes share the view that in general taxes are obligatory - that is, there is a basic moral obligation for people to pay reasonable taxes, even to a government they view as illegitimate and/or somewhat oppressive.

iv) Christians are citizens first and foremost of the Kingdom of God and their final allegiance is to God. Governments have a responsibility to govern in harmony with the polity of God’s Kingdom.

v) The sacrificial love exemplified by Christ requires the Christian to be concerned with one’s neighbor. The payment of taxes is a means of expressing that concern.

What Biblical Images Help Us Bring Paying Taxes into Focus?

Richard B. Hays in his book, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, contends that on certain moral issues there is sufficient diversity within the various texts of the NT (and even more so if we include the OT) to create a “blurry vision” of what God’s good and perfect will is in certain circumstances. The solution for this, according to Hays, is to remind us of the grand themes of Bible that give it unity and purpose. He calls these themes “focal images” because when we look at the various NT texts through these lenses or images, our moral vision comes into clearer focus. It will become more apparent what we are to do in any given situation if it was not already clear up to that point.³⁸ This is useful because, as we have seen, there is definitely diversity in the Biblical materials with regard to the payment of taxes and the general issue of the obligations of the Christian to the state. Hays offers three focal images. This research finds these three helpful but inadequate. Hence two additional focal images have been added for a total of five. Each of these focal images will be applied to the key issue of the payment of taxes.

1. The Christian Community - the Church of Jesus Christ

Hays states, “The [Christian] community, in its corporate life, is called to embody an alternative order that stands as a sign of God’s redemptive purposes in the world.”³⁹ The Christian church as a corporate body is to demonstrate the gospel to the world. There is probably no better picture of this than in Acts 2 and 4 where the church is meeting together, worshiping, having everything “in common”, and selling property to give to those in need. This

³⁸ Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation - A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1996), 195.

³⁹ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 196.

kind of community cares about its own members and the people around them. This kind of community would not shirk its responsibilities to the larger community around it by evading taxes. In fact, perhaps the closest equivalent of tax evasion in the Bible is in the very next chapter of Acts in the story of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5) and look at the price they paid for that!⁴⁰

On the other side of the coin, this “countercultural community”⁴¹ known as the church should be a force for justice in society and hence should not blindly lend its influence (or its tax money) to ruling authorities that are not doing good to the bodies and souls of their citizens. The German Christians who naively gave their allegiance (and tax money) to Adolf Hitler in the 1930s are a glaring example of that mistake. What if not just a small minority (like Dietrich Bonhoeffer) but the majority Church in Germany had refused to pay taxes to the Nazi Party? How might history be different?

2. The Cross of Jesus Christ

“Jesus’ death on the cross is the paradigm for faithfulness to God in this world.”⁴² The cross is the clearest example of what the Christian life should look like. Hays prefers the symbol and language of the cross, rather than that of “love” because of love’s many meanings in English. What he means is *that sacrificial love of one person for another* - this is what the Christian life should look like. Passages like the Good Samaritan and the Great Commandment (discussed above) depict this kind of love which seeks the welfare of others over that of one’s self. This kind of love and acceptance Jesus extended even to tax collectors like Zacchaeus. Losing a substantial portion of one’s paycheck each month to taxes is a sacrifice. But if the money is being put to good use in developing the society, it is a sacrifice that Christians should make with the same kind of love that led Jesus to die on the cross.

3. The New Creation

In the words of Hays, “The church embodies the power of the resurrection in the midst of a not-yet-redeemed world.”⁴³ We live between the ages - the old age which is passing away and the new age of the Kingdom of God. This should help us to see that as much as possible we are to live according to the rules of the Kingdom. However, the fact that the old order has not completely passed from our midst should remind us that even our best efforts to live a

⁴⁰ Obviously the gifts that these early believers were giving were not taxes (voluntary, not compulsory) and so what Annanias and Sapphira were punished for was not tax evasion. In fact, they were not punished for withholding money but for withholding the truth. But the passage is still relevant because the most common form of tax evasion is lying about one’s income or the value of one’s assets as Annanias and Sapphira had done. Clearly, God wants us to be honest and transparent with others (including the government) about our wealth.

⁴¹ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 196.

⁴² Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 197.

⁴³ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 198.

righteous life in this world will often be morally ambiguous. Sometimes our taxes will go to fund things we don't agree with. Sometimes our communities (and governments) will implement policies that we do not support even though we voted for those authorities. And even when we voice our dissent from those policies with which we disagree, our own response will often be morally ambiguous. For example, if we pay our taxes, an unjust war may be financed with that money. If we don't pay our taxes, we are fined and perhaps go to jail and our family suffers and perhaps even our community suffers. But the point is not that we should be defeated by this situation of "living between the ages". We are to do our best to live righteously in an often corrupt and unrighteous world. But when our best efforts fail to produce a perfect result, we are to seek God's mercy, then move on.

4. The Liberation and Justice of God

Mention has already been made of justice. God is a just God and demands justice from His people. From Genesis to Revelation, but especially in the OT prophets, God's anger rises when injustice is being perpetrated against vulnerable and innocent people. Christians, too, must be concerned when justice is denied, people are oppressed, and human rights are violated. Christians should seek to ensure a just social order. As mentioned, tax money should not be paid uncritically to any government. As will be shown in the second part of this paper, withholding tax money has sometimes been used as a tool to bring justice and change in a society's governing structures.

5. The Holiness of God

Holiness is what makes God, God. Yet somehow God expects humans to be holy - like Him. For humans it means being set apart and devoted to God. It calls forth a moral and spiritual purity. It allows no sloppiness of moral conduct and demands a sincerity of intention. Any Christian who is seeking this kind of holiness cannot intentionally evade taxes that are justly levied and being put to proper use.

Conclusion

It is now time to summarize and draw general conclusions from our study of the Bible in regard to the ethics of paying taxes. In summary, it is clear that the Bible is no stranger to the issue of taxes. Nearly all forms of taxation used today were already in use during the Old and New Testaments. The Bible assumes a *prima facie* moral obligation of every citizen to pay his or her rightful taxes. Unlike in the modern world, the payment of taxes is seen not as an unhappy burden but as an expression of devotion to God and concern for one's fellow human beings. As such, Christians today in most settings in the world have no excuse if they are found guilty of evading taxes.

Regarding tax policy, the witness of Scripture supports the idea that while there may be some taxes that are uniform across society, generally taxes should be proportionate to income or wealth; that is, the wealthiest should pay

the most taxes. The Bible also supports the idea that taxes can be used to care for the most vulnerable and marginalized members of society.

The Scriptures provide examples of taxes that were used properly for the sake of the development of society and also examples of taxes as symbols of oppression and injustice. It is clear from Scripture that God has given a mandate to governing authorities to exercise their duties and powers (e.g., collection and disbursement of taxes) for the benefit of their citizens. When this is not done and instead the government is oppressing its people, the moral legitimacy of that government to claim the allegiance of its people is called into question. Nevertheless, the *prima facie* moral obligation of the citizenry to pay taxes is not easily jettisoned. The Scriptures seem to support the stand that even ruling authorities whose legitimacy or moral uprightness is questionable should be given the benefit of the doubt when it comes to payment of taxes. This is in keeping with the eschatological motif of the "already but not yet" of the Kingdom of God

However, when a certain threshold is crossed and the oppression of the people is too great (e.g., foreign nations tyrannizing Israel and Rehoboam's response), the Bible also records instances when God's people rebelled to bring change, apparently with the approval and even action of God. And where rebellion was not possible (e.g., under Roman rule), God's people were challenged to remember where their ultimate allegiance lay - with God and his kingdom - and as much as possible to refuse to participate in the structures of oppression. Though not mentioning taxes specifically, it is clear that withholding of taxes could be one strategy of "resisting the beast".

The general objective of this research is to give guidance on when it is a moral obligation for the Christian to pay taxes and when it is not. Based on this study of what the Bible says on this topic, it can be preliminarily concluded that the Christian should assume that taxes should be paid. That assumption remains valid until such time as it is manifestly clear that the governing authorities are exercising their powers in ways that directly challenge the primary allegiance of the Christian to God or when the authorities are so excessively oppressive or unjust that a posture of non-cooperation or resistance, including in regard to the payment of taxes, is the only way to maintain pursue justice and love for others and righteousness before God.

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The Ideal Life, Jesus, and Prosperity Theology

by Andrew G. Wildsmith

Abstract: *The article examines the Bible's description of the ideal life (both Israelite and Canaanite), and then compares it with ideal life in traditional Africa, modern Western ideals, and also with the Prosperity Theology version of the ideal life. It then evaluates these in the light of Jesus' experience of the elements of the ideal and successful life, and with the traditional Christian perceptions of heaven. It concludes with several implications for Africa today.*

Introduction

Let us paint the picture of two Africas. The one shown often by the world media is of a poor rural farmer (or his children) struggling to survive civil war or drought. The other, practically unseen in the West, is the successful urban businessman struggling through traffic in his SUV to reach the peace of his massive house in the exclusive housing estate. A remarkable number of materially successful Africans have come from humble beginnings in the village. The question the farmer asks is, "How can I become as successful as my brother in Nairobi?" One answer that is becoming all too commonly heard is, "Name it and claim it!"

The Prosperity "Gospel" is widely, though unevenly, spread across Africa. It has infiltrated more or less deeply into African society and the African Church.¹ Its influence and presence in the Church ranges from barely perceptible to completely overwhelming. Prosperity Theology extends far beyond its charismatic and Pentecostal roots to affect, to one degree or another, many people in many congregations of most denominations.² It is important to sympathetically assess the degree to which Prosperity thinking has affected an individual or group lest we falsely accuse people or inadvertently dampen legitimate desires for a better life. No one wants to condemn the rural farmer to a life of unending poverty and struggle. But if all the farmers become wealthy businessmen, who will grow the food they eat? In other words, is the ideal answer to poverty found in the Prosperity Gospel?

The Ideals of the Successful Life in The Old Testament

Deuteronomy 28:7-13 illustrates several elements of the ideal and successful life in the Old Testament. "The LORD will grant that the enemies who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you from one direction but flee from you in seven. The LORD will send a blessing

¹ For a similar analysis see Deji Ayegboyin's comments in "BWA Leader Outlines Problem with Prosperity Gospel". <http://www.ethicsdaily.com/bwa-leader-outlines-problem-with-prosperity-gospel-cms-20899-printer>, accessed 2014.01.30 at 10:00 PM.

² For a brief history of the roots of this gospel in Africa see Femi Bitrus Adeleye, *Preachers of a Different Gospel*, Nairobi: Hippo Books, 2011, pp. 29-39.

on your barns and on everything you put your hand to. The LORD your God will bless you in the land he is giving you. The LORD will establish you as his holy people, as he promised you on oath, if you keep the commands of the LORD your God and walk in his ways. Then all the peoples on earth will see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they will fear you. The LORD will grant you abundant prosperity - in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your ground - in the land he swore to your forefathers to give you. The LORD will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands. You will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. The LORD will make you the head, not the tail. If you pay attention to the commands of the LORD your God that I give you this day and carefully follow them, you will always be at the top, never at the bottom."³

To the extent that the nation obeyed the terms of the covenant, they would receive these national, not individual, blessings. But to the extent that Israel violated the terms of the covenant then the covenant curses would come into effect. "Do not turn aside from any of the commands I give you today, to the right or to the left, following other gods and serving them. However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you:" (Deut. 28:14-15). The list of curses (Deut. 28:16-68) is far longer than the list of blessings and ends in slavery and exile from the Promised Land. In other words, they would need another Exodus.

The Elements of the Ideal Life:

1. *Good Health* This is a universal ideal amongst human beings. What good health looks like, how it is maintained, how to regain it once it is lost, and how important it is compared to other things varies across cultures and amongst individuals. Good health is usually linked to long life, as the following example illustrates. David sent a message to Nabal beginning with the conventional greeting, "*Long life to you! Good health to you and your household! And good health to all that is yours!*" (1 Sam. 25:6). Other Biblical passages that reflect good health as an ideal include Jeremiah 33:6-9 and Proverbs 3:8.

2. *Wealth* Relatively few people strive for poverty whereas a great many strive for wealth. In the OT ideal (never achieved), everyone would enjoy some level of personal prosperity. This is described as each man having his own vine, fig tree and cistern of water as in 2 Kings 18:31-32, "This is what the king of Assyria says: Make peace with me and come out to me. Then every one of

³ The book of Proverbs contains many sayings that illustrate the same elements of the ideal life (e.g. 3:1-2, 8, 9-10; 11:24-28; 12:11-12; 21:5-6; 4:20-22; 4:10; 12:28; 10:27; 3:21-26; 19:23; 2:6-8,11; 3:27-33; 17:6; 13:22; 14:26; 20:7). Ecclesiastes shows their limitations because even these good things cannot provide ultimate satisfaction, and trying to elevate them to that status results in vanity or meaninglessness (e.g. Eccles. 2:1-11; 3:12-14; 4:4; 5:8-20; 6:3-6; 7:1-2, 11-12; 9:11-12).

you will eat from his own vine and fig tree and drink water from his own cistern, until I come and take you to a land like your own, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive trees and honey. Choose life and not death!”

Prosperity is also defined as having many children (especially male heirs), many animals, such as sheep, goats and cattle, and abundant harvests of grapes to make wine, grain for bread, figs, honey and olives. The picture is not one of everyone having the wealth of Solomon, but of everyone having plenty of the ordinary necessities of life and being able to enjoy these in safety.

3. Status Status in the OT was both national and individual. The following passage, often misused by the Prosperity preachers, is a national promise for Israel as a whole. It is not a promise that applied to every individual equally. “The LORD will make you the head, not the tail. If you pay attention to the commands of the LORD your God that I give you this day and carefully follow them, you will always be at the top, never at the bottom.” (Deut. 28:13) Many books and passages mention individual status or in other words, honour. For example, “He who pursues righteousness and love finds life, prosperity and honour.” (Prov. 21:21) Giving an OT king the honour and respect he deserved included bowing down to him. “When Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David, he bowed down to pay him honour.” (2 Sam. 9:6) Wealth affected status, but it was not the sole criteria for high social status.

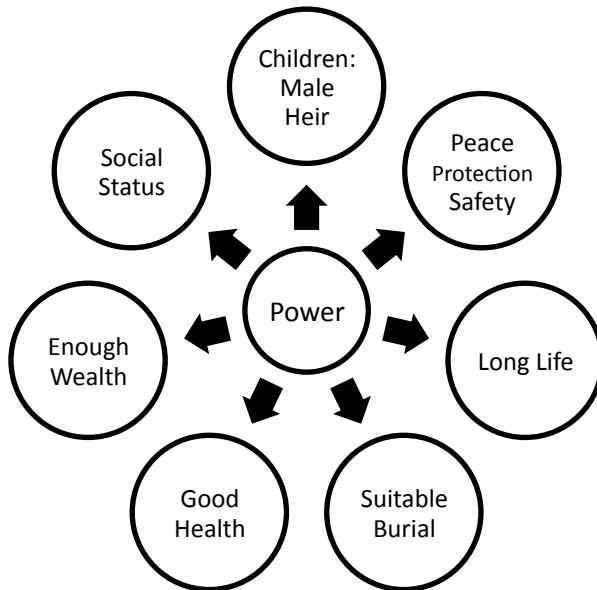
4. Children, Especially Male Heirs Abraham’s greatest concern in Genesis 15 was not the other elements of the ideal life – he already had most of them – it was the lack of a male heir. The first time that faith/belief is credited as righteousness is found in Abraham’s response to God’s promise that he would have many descendants (15:6). Although having many children, especially males, is linked to wealth and status, for an Old Testament man or family to be without a male heir is a greater tragedy than to be without wealth and status. “There was a man all alone; he had neither son nor brother. There was no end to his toil, yet his eyes were not content with his wealth. ‘For whom am I toiling,’ he asked, ‘and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?’ This too is meaningless - a miserable business!” Eccles. 4:8

5. Protection (Peace and Safety) The Israelites, like most nations and tribes, looked for protection from and defeat of their enemies so they could live in peace and safety. Peace is the ideal situation for both nations and individuals, and is directly tied to prosperity. “He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the LORD Almighty has spoken” (Micah 4:3-4).

6. Long Life in the Promised Land Long life and long life in the Promised Land are linked ideals in both versions of the fifth commandment (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16). These are main themes in Deuteronomy also. “Keep his decrees and commands, which I am giving you today, so that it may go well with you and your children after you and that you may live long in the land the LORD your God gives you for all time” (Dt. 4:40 see also 11:9; 25:15; 30:18; 32:47).

7. A Suitable Burial Burial at home, with proper respect, and after a long life was very important in the Old Testament. King Shallum (Jehoahaz) of Judah would be buried in exile - “He will never return. He will die in the place where they have led him captive; he will not see this land again” (Jer. 22:11b-12). And to be without proper burial was a horrifying punishment. Jeremiah predicts of sinful King Jehoiakim that, “He will have the burial of a donkey - dragged away and thrown outside the gates of Jerusalem” (Jer. 22:19). Proper burial was so important that the Preacher of Ecclesiastes could say, “A man may have a hundred children and live many years; yet no matter how long he lives, if he cannot enjoy his prosperity and does not receive proper burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he” (Eccles. 6:3).

The relationship amongst these elements can be pictured as follows, with “power” at the centre because human beings could not achieve these ideals without the aid of some form of power.



8. Power The ultimate source of the elements of the ideal life was Yahweh, the LORD, the Creator of Heaven and Earth. Success in attaining the ideal life was not primarily dependent on hard work, luck, or natural law. The road to

success was travelled by means of God's spiritual power. Ultimately God gave the ideal life as a result of trusting obedience. True covenant obedience was predicated upon faith and trust in Yahweh, but that faith had to be expressed through obedience to the Law. The only legitimate way to obtain these ordinary elements of the ideal life in OT times was to live a sincere and godly life by obeying the terms of the covenant made at Sinai.

A Counterfeit Route to the Ideal Life through Canaanite Magic

For the ancient Israelite, the alternative path to obtaining these ideals of the successful life was through magical means in the form of Canaanite fertility cults. The worship of Baal and other Canaanite gods was designed to achieve these elements of the ideal life. Israel's failure to completely impose God's "final judgement" on the Canaanites opened up this counterfeit route to the pursuit of the elements of the ideal life. But this route was illegitimate and dangerous, and following it was a sign of disloyalty to Yahweh. The usual result was not that the Israelites completely stopped worshipping Yahweh, it was that they added the worship of the Canaanite gods to that of Yahweh. This resulted in the Israelites treating Yahweh in the same way as they treated the Canaanite gods. Yahweh became only one of the sources of power to obtain the ideal life. But there are no other gods besides Yahweh so placing him at the same level as the Canaanite gods was disloyal.

The Israelites served God faithfully under the strong leadership of Joshua and the elders who entered Canaan with him. But after that generation of leaders died (the ones who had seen God's provision and miracles in the desert), the people turned to the idols worshipped by their Canaanite neighbours (Judges 2:7-10). Eventually God said, "Because this nation has violated the covenant that I laid down for their forefathers and has not listened to me, I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died. I will use them to test Israel and see whether they will keep the way of the LORD and walk in it as their forefathers did" (Judges 2:20-22). Canaanite religion was very immoral. The following description is adapted mainly from Eugene Merrill's research.⁴

The first sin of Israel following Joshua was inter-marriage with the native populace. The Law strongly condemned inter-marriage with pagans. Inter-marriage with Canaanites led to the worship of Baal and Asherim at the "sacred trees or poles" or "groves". This worship involved the most wicked kind of sexual immorality.

Fertility cults were a common feature of religion in the ancient Near East, but in Canaan they were very important. Fertility cults were based on the idea that the gods themselves were originally created when the powers of the

⁴ Eugene H. Merrill, *An Historical Survey of the Old Testament*. Nutley, New Jersey: The Craig Press, 1966, pp. 169-170.

universe had sex. The Canaanites believed that everything living comes into being in the same way. They believed that plants, animals, and men came about only when the gods had sex with one another. They also believed that the gods must be persuaded to have sex with one another so that they would produce plant and animal life. To encourage the gods to have sex, the priests and priestesses of the fertility cult would practice "imitative magic." That is, the priests and priestesses would have sex with each other, and perhaps with the Canaanite worshippers, in an effort to cause the gods to follow their example. This is called "sacred" or "religious" prostitution.⁵ If the gods could be persuaded to have sex there was every prospect for a successful crop. Crop failures and other agricultural disasters happened because the gods were angry for some reason. This Canaanite religious prostitution was carried out either in a temple or in the shelter of green trees or groves that looked green and fertile. One goddess associated with reproduction was known as Asherah, which means "grove". The plural of Asherah is Asherim.

It will be helpful to review a bit about the Canaanite gods. The high god was called El, though we do not know very much about him. He seems to have been most important in early Canaanite theology. Baal, his son, gradually displaced him, though El continued to exist as "father god".⁶ One of Baal's wives was Asherah, a goddess of fertility mentioned above. Baal was the god who was most directly involved with mankind. The name means simply "lord" or "master" and was probably only a title at first. Later on it came to be a proper name. The name "Baal" was also applied to many deities or many manifestations of the same god.⁷ For example, there was a Baal at Peor in Moab (Num. 25:3), a Baal-berith (Jud. 9:4), a Baal-perazim (2 Sam. 5:20) and a Baal-zebul (2 Kgs. 1:3) in addition to many others.

According to some scholars, Baal died and resurrected every year, having achieved victory over Mot, the god of death.⁸ His resurrection was celebrated every fall at the beginning of the new year. This was also when "the former rains" (October to April, the main rainy season) were due to begin. The

⁵ See the link with the Canaanite gods' sexual activity at the high places בְּמֹתָם (*bāmōtām*, "their high places") in the note on Numbers 33:52 in R. B. Allen, "Numbers" *Expositor's Bible Commentary, Revised*, Vol. 2, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012, 434.

⁶ See also Mark J. Boda, "Judges", *EBC, Revised*, Vol. 2, commentary on Judges 2:13 where Baal is mentioned as the son of Dagon. Baal was considered a storm god and could be identified with the storm god Hadad, Michael A. Grisanti, "Deuteronomy", *EBC, Revised*, Vol. 2, note on Deut. 33:26, pp. 811.

⁷ See also Daniel I. Block, *The Gods of the Nations*, 2nd edition, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000, pp. 50-51 for these aspects of Baal.

⁸ See John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, Downers Grove: IVP, 2000, p. 246; and the discussion on Baal, "A Seasonal Myth?" in A.H.W. Curtis, "Canaanite Gods and Religion" in Bill T. Arnold, H.G.M. Williamson, eds., *Dictionary of the Old Testament Historical Books*, Leicester: IVP, 2005, p. 137.

resurrection of Baal announced the end of the dry, hot unproductive summer when Mot was in control. The first rainfall of the year signalled the beginning of the life-giving season of planting. If rain did not come the Canaanites believed that Baal could not escape from the underworld because Mot was strong enough to keep him there. Perhaps Elijah refers to this myth when he taunts the prophets of Baal about Baal's absence at Mount Carmel. These "prophets" probably believed that the drought was caused by Baal's detention in the world of the dead. The rain came when Elijah prayed to Yahweh. This proved that it was Yahweh and not Baal who provided rain and all good things (1 Kings 18). The sexual union of Baal with his sister-wife, Anath or Astarte, was thought to be the cause of the rain and therefore the fertility of the soil. Therefore the New Year's festival was a time of immorality. The priests and priestesses, and perhaps the people as well, had sex with one another in order to encourage Baal to mate with his wives.

This is what was happening when Israel went after other gods and engaged in "prostitution." This was not only spiritual adultery, but also actual, physical adultery. "It was this religious background which explains the monstrous enormity of Israel's transgression in going after other gods and forsaking Yahweh."⁹ This was "the sin of the Amorites" which had reached its full measure. This was the kind of religion that God wanted wiped out by Israel. This was the religion that caused a process we could call "Canaanitization" (the process of the Israelites becoming like the Canaanites). Following Canaanite religion in order to achieve the elements of the ideal life entailed turning from faith in God to trust in magical powers and practices.

The Ideal Life In Traditional Africa

At this point, we could venture into a discussion of traditional African views of the Supreme God, his relationship with the God of the Bible, and as the ultimate source of the good things of life. African theologians have come to different conclusions about these issues, usually also striving to correct disrespectful attitudes towards Africans, African cultures and African religions on the part of 19th and 20th century missionaries and colonial powers alike.¹⁰

⁹ Merrill, *An Historical Survey of the Old Testament*, p. 170.

¹⁰ See for example, John S. Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa*, Second Edition, Nairobi: Acton, 2012, and *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*, Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1986, who insists on the necessity and usefulness of the African worldview as well as the Bible in African Christianity; Samuel G. Kibicho, *God and Revelation in An African Context*, Nairobi: Acton, 2006, who equates the ATR Supreme Being with the Christian God; Samuel W. Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology*, Nairobi: HippoBooks, 2012, says, "At most, the beliefs and practices of African Traditional Religion convey only a faint and incomplete understanding of who God is." p. 44. James Nkansah-Obrempong, "Theological Heresy" in *Africa Bible Commentary*, Nairobi: WordAlive, 2006, p. 1579, states that one common heresy is, "the elevation of African traditional religion as equivalent to OT faith".

Upon reflection, it seems unwise for an outsider, even one who has lived long in Africa, to tread where insiders have lived and breathed all their lives. But I am convinced that when we come to faith in Christ, God accepts us as we are, with our worldview, our culture, and our relationships (both function and dysfunctional). And God does not leave us where he finds us - he takes us with our worldview, culture, and relationships to where he wants them to be.¹¹ The written guidebook for this journey is the Bible in our own mother tongue, not someone else's language, culture or form of Christianity. That being said, my focus here is on the narrower topic of where many African Christians look for power to help them achieve the ideal life when serious problems arise.

Many of the everyday problems that church members bring to the pastor are about the difficulty they have in achieving the good things of life, the ideal life. For many people in Africa having an ideal life means that they have wealth, good health, male children to inherit their property, a respected position in the community (or "status"), and a long and peaceful life ending in a normal death and a suitable burial.¹² Both Christians and non-Christians often share the desire to achieve these good things – things that closely echo the OT ideals of the good life.

The following African proverbs, mostly from G. Barra, *1000 Kikuyu Proverbs*, and Patrick Ibekwe, *Wit and Wisdom of Africa*, illustrate the importance of these elements of the ideal and successful life.¹³

1. *Health* "Health has no price." - Swahili, (Ibekwe, p. 87). "*Muici ndathiragwo ni mari hindi*. The thief cannot keep fit, because his stools contain undigested food. The proverb means that a thief, who eats his food in a hurry and with the fear of being caught, cannot enjoy good health." (Barra, p. 58, no. 470). This

¹¹ Readers may recognize the kinship with one of Andrew Walls' abiding biblically-based themes here. See Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, Maryknoll/Edinburgh: Orbis Books/T&T Clark, 1996, pp. 7 ff. See also Laurenti Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred: African Spirituality*, Nairobi: Acton, 2014, p. 9.

¹² These ideals are inspired by Marguerite G. Kraft, *Understanding Spiritual Power: A Forgotten Dimension of Cross-Cultural Mission and Ministry*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995, pp. 14-19 where she discusses spiritual power and felt needs in six categories: (1) perpetuity needs, (2) prosperity needs, (3) health needs, (4) security needs, (5) restitution needs, and (6) power needs. The specific elements of this ideal life were developed as a result of my field research in Andrew Wildsmith, *Pastoral Issues In The Anang, Ibibio And Igbo Sections Of The Qua Iboe Church Of Nigeria*, an unpublished PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, December 1998.

¹³ G. Barra, *1,000 Kikuyu Proverbs*, 2nd edition, Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1960. Patrick Ibekwe, *Wit and Wisdom of Africa: Proverbs from Africa and the Caribbean*, Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1998. See also S.S. Farsi, *Swahili Sayings from Zanzibar, vol. 1: Proverbs*, Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1958.

indicates that good health is worth more than illegally obtained wealth. Along with good health goes protection from illness caused by evil spiritual powers.¹⁴

2. *Wealth* "A fool owned many cows: they [i.e. the people] never called him fool." Tswana, (Ibekwe, p. 200). "*Muthinio ni kuona aruga muthinio ni wagi*. He who is troubled by having (property) is better off than he who is troubled by poverty." (Barra, p. 68, no. 560). Wealth is better than poverty, in spite of the troubles that accompany it.

3. *Status* "As one's rank, so they give seat". - Igbo, (Ibekwe, p. 157). "*Kurua, kugurana na kuriha thiri gutiiragwo*. Nobody feels sorry for being circumcised, for having bought his wife and for having paid his debts." (Barra, p. 42, no. 336). Circumcision as a sign of adulthood, marriage and being a lender rather than a borrower are signs of higher social status and honour.

4. *Children and Male Heir* "Children are more than wealth". - Ugandan, (Ibekwe, p. 24). "Children are not a cause for rejoicing in themselves; it is the man who is buried by his children that has had children". - Yoruba, (Ibekwe, p. 24). "*Muthuri utari kahai niwe wiriragira ngururu*. The married man who has no son goes himself to scare away the birds from his harvest." (Barra, p. 70, no. 575). "*Mutumia angikura atari mwana ndangiona mutahiri maai*. The woman that gets old without bearing a child, will have nobody to draw water for her, i.e. will have nobody to help her." (Barra, p. 71, no. 586). These proverbs illustrate one reason why children, especially males, are so valued and loved. To die without a male heir to carry on the family line is a terrible disaster. Sons are a form of personal immortality as well as an important sign of social status.

5. *Protection: Peaceful Relationships* "It is better to build bridges than walls". - Swahili, (Ibekwe, p. 141). "*Mugathi uri gutwika nducokaga muigana*. A broken necklace cannot be made whole again. A broken friendship may be soldered, but will never be sound." (Barra, p. 54, no. 432). Good relationships are very important, not least because they can never be fully restored after being broken. Protection, peace and safety lie in having good relationships with one's family and the community, both of which have spiritual inhabitants as well as physical ones. Obviously this contributes to living a long life.

6. *Long Life* "Cry for life, don't cry for money". - Tshi, (Ibekwe, p. 114). A long life is better than wealth. "*Nyamu nguru ndihatagwo maai*. An old ox is not refused water." (Barra, p. 92, no. 754). Old age is honoured and valued because death is feared and the longer one can put it off shows how successful one is. Part of having a long and peaceful life means protection from physical dangers, such as careless drivers, and good relationships with one's family, neighbours and colleagues at work and with the spiritual world.

¹⁴ The great importance of health and confirmation that it is more than physical can be found in Chima Fredrick Mbieri, "Health and Healing in Igbo Worldview: Significance and Missiological Implications" in *Sedos Bulletin* Vol. 46, No. 1/2- January-February 2014, pp. 24-31, esp. pp. 24-25, 30.

7. *Suitable Burial* "Kunako matanga, kumekufa mtu. Where there is a formal mourning, has died a person." (S.S. Farsi, *Swahili Sayings From Zanzibar*, 1958, p.18, no. 56). If we let "formal mourning" stand for all the various ceremonies surrounding death in various cultures, we see that they certify the social status of the deceased. "A person" refers to a person of notable standing in the community.

From a Christian point of view, these elements of the ideal life in Africa are obviously closely aligned with the Biblical picture of the ideal life previously described. And these elements are good, *except* when people regard them as more important than obedience to God. When any of these good things becomes so important that someone leaves God's will to get them, then it has become an idol to that person. It ceases to be good and becomes a stumbling block that prevents that person from becoming more Christ-like.

8. *Power* As a result of my reading and research, it seems that when something blocks the normal prospect of achieving the elements of the ideal life, then significant numbers of African believers feel a need for spiritual power to aid in the achievement of whatever element of the ideal life is missing. For example, ill health that goes on too long is likely to be suspected of having a spiritual cause or component. If prayer to God, use of modern and traditional medicine, and consulting a Christian prophet-healer (often attached to a charismatic church) don't work then the sick person or his family are faced with the choice of whether or not to step outside the ecclesiastically approved power sources and consult the diviner. If this last step is reluctantly taken, it is taken with a guilty conscience, and without the intention of leaving Christianity as a whole, but the pressing felt need for healing to restore good health is too powerful to ignore for some believers.¹⁵

When stepping outside the usual and approved boundaries in the search for aspects of the ideal life, believers usually step into the world of magic. A magical approach to power seeks to manipulate or channel power to achieve one's desired end. "Magic may be thought of as a self-help program whereby a person employs means to manipulate supernatural agencies to served desired goals."¹⁶ When Christians seek spiritual power from practitioners of traditional African religions, they are engaging in the attempted manipulation of supernatural powers. Whether or not magic "works" is not the point. It is not the reality or unreality of magical practices that is the issue. The issue is loyalty to the true God. When Christians seek help from other powers when they should be seeking help from God, they betray Christ just as Judas did. By rejecting a magical approach, and by rejecting reliance on other powers in

¹⁵ For a similar line of thought see Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, pp. 99, 117. See also Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred?*, pp. 15 ff.

¹⁶ Philip M. Steyne, *Gods of Power*, Columbia, SC: Impact International Foundation, 1990, p. 108.

favour of trusting God to deliver whatever quantity of the elements of the ideal life he wills, African Christians can live faithfully for Christ in this fallen world.

A Counterfeit Route to the Ideal Life: A Western Secular Worldview

If the traditional African perceptions of the ideal life have striking similarities to Old Testament ideas of the ideal life, the modern Western worldview has some striking differences. As mentioned above, all human beings treasure good health. In Western societies, health care consumes vast amounts of money that includes research for developing new drugs and medical technologies, etc. The focus on “good” health in lifestyle, diets, exercise programs and in many other areas seems to totally consume some people. The same excessive attitude drives the need to accumulate wealth and the products, especially luxury products, that wealth can buy. As a popular advertising slogan says, “There are some things that money can’t buy. For everything else, there’s Mastercard.” It is no accident that Prosperity Theology arose in the USA. Status and wealth are clearly linked in the West. And status is linked with individual fame, or infamy. Professional sports figures, entertainment celebrities, and politicians are a few of the classes of people to whom status is ascribed whether they are famous or infamous. Individualism has such a chokehold on modern Western thinking that significant numbers of people regard children and male heirs as a comparatively low priority. Many of the Westerners with this attitude avoid having children at all so that both partners can maximize their earnings.

Protection, peace and safety in the West are a high priority and have both individual and corporate aspects. Individuals are expected to protect themselves with insurance coverage, through crime avoidance and prevention efforts, but also to rely on the police and the military to handle the active resistance to criminals. There are wide variations of this individual/corporate balance in different cultures. For example, in the US, many citizens regard it as their duty to protect themselves and deter criminal activity against them by owning and using firearms. As in many cultures, both long life and a suitable burial are cherished, the former being closely connected with good health.

Christians, both inside and outside Africa, may unconsciously and unintentionally mix magical thinking with the exercise of true faith. For example, some, perhaps many, otherwise mature Western evangelical Christians unconsciously expect God to love them more and make their lives more comfortable when they are regularly engaged in personal devotions. They don’t perceive of this as magical thinking, but it is. Personal devotions are good and ought to be performed sincerely and regularly, but God’s love for us is not based on them and our performance of personal devotions is not directly related to the degree of comfort we experience in life. African believers too may fall into magical ways of thinking when approaching God. Keeping one’s Bible under the pillow or on the bedside table at night as protection against the dangers of the night is one example.

A Counterfeit Route to the Ideal Life through Prosperity Theology

“These are days when the gospel has come to be viewed as a short cut to the good things of life - a good car or a bigger house.”¹⁷ The American import known as Prosperity Theology or the Health and Wealth Gospel is no stranger to us. Various secular condemnations and theological evaluations based on Scripture have been published in numerous newspaper articles, journals and books. My purpose is not to go over ground already covered. Nor is my purpose to hinder anyone from achieving a higher standard of living. I will limit my discussion to an attempt to describe this very popular phenomenon in terms of its view of the ideal life before evaluating that view according to Jesus’ experience of the ideal life.

Although we need to keep in mind that any description of Prosperity Theology and its relationship to the ideals of the successful life must be only a slice out of one part of the wide spectrum of beliefs and practices associated with this movement, I intend to describe ideas from fully fledged prosperity gospel thinking. Many Christians who accept only parts of the health and wealth gospel and reject others are not represented here. I refer only to those committed to all of its major beliefs and practices.

For such “true believers”, only good health is acceptable. Illness and suffering are signs of sin or a lack of faith. Only ever-increasing extreme wealth is acceptable - anything less is at best a sign of a long way to go, or at worst, evidence of sin or lack of faith. Poverty is not only undesirable, but also a curse and a sin. Serious proponents of prosperity thinking seek ever-increasing social status. This is reflected in the titles used for the religious specialists who preach this different gospel. Any ecclesiastical and academic titles less than Bishop, Prophet, etc and PhD are mere stepping stones to the higher prizes. Although this title fever is not limited to prosperity theology practitioners (and is indeed a serious problem for many Christian leaders around the globe), it is rare, if not impossible, to find a true prosperity preacher in Africa who is immune to the condition.

While my impression of African prosperity thinking in regard to the desire for children, especially sons, is that this remains an important element in the ideal life, I think it can easily be accompanied by an increase in individualism as well. The family remains an important institution for prosperity gospel proponents, but it seems individualism in the form of an increased focus on the self and its welfare is also on the rise. This may be an inevitable result of the commitment to what has been called “the gospel of greed”. Similarly, it seems that peaceful relationships with people in the phenomenal world and with the inhabitants of the spiritual world continue to be valued, yet valued not only for community harmony, but also as a means to individual success.

¹⁷ Adeleye, *Preachers of a Different Gospel*, pp. 6-7.

Prosperity theology assumes people should have a long life, but takes this idea beyond reason sometimes. Adeleye has heard of a song based on this gospel that asserts, "I shall not die".¹⁸ When death is not denied, it is essentially ignored.¹⁹ And since death is either denied or ignored, when they die practitioners of prosperity theology must be buried according to whatever community customs are strongest amongst the relatives concerned. The prosperity gospel has no place for death, just as it has no place for suffering.

Prosperity theology in its fully-fledged form operates as a type of superficially Christianized magic. When Christians hope to enjoy the ideal life on this earth, they may try to achieve it by magical means, rather than by God's means. Magic is the use of power through incantations, rites and charms in order to control human actions or natural events. The magician believes that if he performs the magic properly then the desired result will automatically be attained. Magical prayers try to force God into a positive response. If we try to be very obedient to God's ways, to pray and fast regularly, and to preach the Gospel in order to persuade God to give us the ideal life, then we are trying to manipulate God into doing what we want. That is a magical approach to prayer. Prayer is supposed to be an effort to conform our desires to God's desires. Magic is an effort to conform God's desires to our desires. The God who experienced Jesus' righteousness is not going to be impressed with our attempts to appear righteous for selfish reasons.²⁰

Many people do not even consider that they might be selfish when they pray for the ideal life. Many do not realise the difference between a magical, manipulative approach to prayer and true supplication. True supplication prays from the depths of the heart ("*Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me*"), but is willing to be conformed to the will of God in order to build God's Kingdom ("*yet not my will, but yours be done*"). People need to understand true spiritual power. A person may be a true Christian, yet have a magical idea of spiritual power. A person may be a true Christian, and act like one most of the time, but when one element of the ideal life, such as getting a male heir, becomes a very strong desire, he may return to traditional ways of solving the problem. Sometimes these traditional ways may break the rules of the church or they may violate his conscience. He finds himself believing he has to act in a way that is not Christian in order to achieve the ideal life.

¹⁸ Adeleye, *Preachers of a Different Gospel*, p. 3.

¹⁹ See Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 172-177.

²⁰ For additional examples of magical thinking among Christians see John S. Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background*, London: Oxford University Press, 1971, pp. 113, 120-123; and David Tuesday Adamo, "African Cultural Hermeneutics" in R. S. Sugirthajah, ed. *Vernacular Hermeneutics*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999.

Jesus and the Ideal Life

Many African Christians share all or part of the traditional African views of power and the elements of the ideal life. Most people in Africa would find it difficult to be poor, to be sick, to be without the respect and position (status) they think they deserve. For most Christian men in Africa it would be hard to be without a wife and male heir, and to have all their church superiors so angry with them that they are trying to kill them. It would be tragic to die a bad death at a young age and to be buried far from home in a borrowed grave without any funeral. Yet Jesus was poor, was not generally recognised as the Messiah and the Son of God, was not married and so had no male heir. He died a bad death, the death of a criminal, at a young age at the hands of his own people, and was buried far from home in a borrowed grave without any funeral.

The Bible does not tell us about Jesus being sick, but it does say that, "we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin" (Heb. 4:15). Jesus shares our humanity, was made like us in every way, and "because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted" (Heb. 2:14,17,18). Jesus did not live the ideal life as described in the Bible or Africa. It is not that he lacked power or faith to achieve the good elements of the ideal life. Jesus' love for the Father and for us, his neighbours, enabled him to put the will of God, the Kingdom of God, and the salvation of the world before his own normally legitimate human needs as expressed in the elements of the ideal and successful life.

What could be better than the Prosperity Gospel's version of the ideal and successful life? Hebrews 12:2 reminds us: "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Just as the Prosperity Gospel denies or ignores death, so too it undervalues the reason for Jesus' life, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension to heaven and promised return to establish the new heavens and the new earth, a new garden of Eden that can never be lost. The Prosperity Gospel is a different gospel because it under-emphasizes the reason for Jesus' first coming, it misunderstands the true nature of faith, it has a mistaken view of the true nature of this fallen world, and it ignores our destiny as believers. Its version of the ideal life falls far short of Biblical reality.

The Ideal Life in Heaven (New Heavens and New Earth, Rev. 21:1)²¹

Whatever the details of one's eschatology, when all the events of the end times are completed there will be a new heavens and a new earth, like a restored Eden, the garden of God. And God's people from every tribe and

²¹ See also Isaiah 65:17; 66:22; 2 Peter 3:13.

nation and language will have resurrection bodies, spiritual bodies that have put on immortality. It is only then that we will enjoy perfect, unending health. But even more, we will see God face to face, something that is impossible in these imperfect, fallen bodies bound for decay. Only then will we be immortal and sin-free, and only then capable of seeing the fully glorified God. Wealth too will be transposed into what it was always meant to be. Gold will be so common that it is used to pave heaven's streets. Believers will come of age and inherit their full social status as sons and daughters of God.

There will be no concerns about singleness, marriage and a male heir for we will enjoy closeness beyond anything experienced in our current families or marriages. These good things foreshadow the ultimate experience of what it means to be part of God's true family as brothers and sisters in Christ. The perfect peaceful relationships amongst humans, angels and the Trinity that we long for in this imperfect, fallen world will be fulfilled in a way we cannot now comprehend. We will be *Home* in a way that surpasses any warm and secure feelings we might have now when we return from a time away. The new heavens and the new earth, the restored Garden of Eden where we can walk and talk with God is our real home. There we will experience eternal life that we can only express now in negative terms - no pain, no death, no sorrow.

When we compare Jesus' life and teaching with that envisioned by the health and wealth gospel, we see the latter's poverty and unnecessarily limited perspective. When we compare the promises of the prosperity preachers with the vision of the new heavens and the new earth, we see how unreal, truncated and skewed the prosperity vision is.

It is this new heavens and new earth that God is working towards and that he has invited human beings to enter. God is not satisfied with the partial gospel of the prosperity preachers. God is not limited to making his people comfortable in a fallen creation - which is the best the prosperity gospel can do. God's will is not simply that we avoid being poor and that we avoid suffering as individuals. God's will is that poverty, suffering and sin be banished, just as evil beings are banished to the lake of fire. We do not seek the Kingdom of God and his righteousness (Mt. 6:33) in order to receive overflowing material wealth. We seek it because when the Kingdom of God is fully established on earth as it is in heaven, our lives will not be simply comfortable in the midst of others' suffering in a fallen world. Instead we will live perfectly righteous lives in the presence of our Creator without any trace of sin, suffering and poverty existing anywhere. At that point God's will in fact be done on earth as it already is done in heaven.

The Implications for Africa

African traditional worldviews, exactly like all other worldviews, are in need of transformation. As Mugambi said, "All cultures need the Gospel and are

judged by it."²² Not everything in African cultures is headed in the wrong direction, just as not everything in other cultures is headed in the wrong direction. But, like all societies, African societies need transformation to become all God wants them to be. The elements of the ideal life we have been discussing are similar in both ancient Hebrew culture and in traditional African culture. But one of the deviant forms of Western culture, Prosperity Theology, has a very twisted approach to the elements of the ideal and successful life.

African Christianity would benefit by maintaining its more Biblically sound and holistic approach to its view of the ideal life rather than adopting the flawed one found in Prosperity Theology. In particular a Biblical tension must be sustained between this life (the main concern of OT Israel, ATR and modern prosperity preachers), and eternity (the ultimate goal of God as expressed in the whole story of redemption from Genesis to Revelation). This tension is essential to the Church's mission. John Mbiti links the purpose and mission of the church to eschatology. "This purpose of mission is the purpose of the church's own being and existence. This purpose is linked to the eschatological fulfilment of God's ultimate purpose in creation and salvation."²³ But this necessary tension between the present and the future can easily be lost as Mbiti noted long ago. Speaking of an imbalance in the perception of the relationship of this world to the next Mbiti asserts, "The Christian Gospel is intensely eschatological, and if the interpretation or presentation of Eschatology is distorted, so would the Gospel itself also become distorted".²⁴ More recently, Nigerian scholar Matthew Michael adds,

In fact, one can readily say that the Christian message becomes meaningless without a right emphasis on its eschatological vision or description of the persons and events of the next world. The message of the Christian faith ends in the book of Revelation with a graphic description of the world of the future whereby all the wrongs of the present world are made right and the dawning of a new world order without death, sickness, poverty, and all the other ills that have continually battered the pride of human attainments and advancement. Consequently, the message of the Christian Bible closes with a message of hope.²⁵

The new heavens and the new earth are not a consolation prize offered to compensate believers for simply enduring life in this fallen world. The restored Eden is not an afterthought but our destiny as forgiven human beings, according to God's eternal plan. At best, Prosperity Theology halts our journey

²² Jesse N.K. Mugambi, *Christianity and African Culture*, Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2002, p. 2.

²³ Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*, p. 191.

²⁴ Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background*, p. 61. Mbiti's sentiment can be applauded, but the direction his discussion takes is contentious. See Richard J. Gehman, *Doing African Christian Theology*, Nairobi: Evangel, 1987, pp. 54-60.

²⁵ Matthew Michael, *Christian Theology and African Traditions*, Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2013, p. 209.

towards perfection by stubbornly trying to sell its pale version of the ideal life - a version that is doomed to perish when we leave this world. At its worst the Health and Wealth “gospel” is a counterfeit gospel that “is therefore nothing less than seduction into a delusion”.²⁶ Like Canaanite Religion and modern Western secularism, Prosperity Theology is far too small and impoverished to survive an encounter with the truth of the Scriptural vision of the new heavens and the new earth.

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²⁶ Adeleye, *Preachers of a Different Gospel*, p. 101.

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Francis Anekwe Oborji

**Concepts of Mission:
The Evolution of Contemporary Missiology**

Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006

ISBN-10: 1570756635 ISBN-13: 978-1570756634 240 pgs. Paperback
Amazon US \$24.08

Reviewed by Zachs-Toro Gaiya

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In reviewing this piece of work, one needs to know the dominant influence of the author in the emergence of modern Roman Catholic missiology. The author, Francis Anekwe Oborji, is a Nigerian Roman Catholic priest, serving as professor of missiology at the Pontifical Urban University in Rome. He served as Executive Secretary of International Association of Catholic Missiologists (IACM), of which he is one of the founding officers. He is also the author of *Towards a Christian Theology of African Religion*, AMECEA Gaba Publications, Eldoret, Kenya, 2005, as well as other articles and books.

In this work, *Concepts of Mission*, Oborji seeks to describe pertinent issues in mission in the past, present and future. Consequently, the book is divided into three parts - the first part is on the basic issues; the second part deals with issues in mission in historical perspective; and the third part describes new perspectives in mission. These three parts are divided into ten chapters with the last chapter summing up the arguments presented in the entire book. The author has one fundamental question in mind, "What is the subject matter of missiology today and how are these related to the practice or paradigms of mission?" Oborji notes that the subject matter of mission lies in the aspects of proclamation, evangelization, and contextual theologies. He describes the need to see these concepts of mission as unifying forces that define the discipline of missiology.

Oborji faithfully represents his constituency with an erudite presentation of the magisterium documents. He provides a thought-provoking African challenge that needs increasing awareness. As an ecumenical thinker, he interacts fairly with mainstream protestant missiologists and their work. The unity of the entire work is maintained despite the origin of the material as lecture notes for the teaching of missiology.

Looking at the different parts more closely, Oborji's work in part one has two chapters where the author discusses the growth and development of missiology, and the contributions made especially during the Vatican II period. During the Vatican II theological deliberations, Oborji admits that there was

largely a hazy cloud hovering the meaning and understanding of mission and evangelization. In an attempt to address this problem, Vatican II (re)formulated mission's understanding around three concerns: *missio ad gentes*, pastoral activity and re-evangelization or new evangelization. Until the reconceptualization of mission by the Vatican II, mission and Christian unity was largely unaddressed systematically by the Roman Catholic Church. However, in this forum, there is the recognition that repentance is needed and there should also be the realization that unity is anchored on "the common faith in Jesus Christ, his Gospel message . . . (p.16) and the Bible (as) the common sacred book for all Christians" (p.17). On the other hand, this council also adds, "that tradition and Scripture are bound closely . . . and both flow from the same wellspring" and make up a "single deposit of the Word of God." The emphasis on traditions here naturally causes a peculiar divide between Catholics and Protestants despite the ecumenical disposition of the council.

In part two, Oborji presents in five chapters various mission models and their historical development. In particular, he reflects on such models as conversion, church planting, adaptation and inculturation, interreligious dialogue and *Missio Dei*. According to Oborji, the historical developments in these mission models are primarily influenced by popes, theologians and missiologists from the three 'branches' of Christianity (i.e., Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants). He recognizes the immense contributions of individuals such as Voetius, Warneck, McGavran, Kraemer, Nida, Freytag, Vicedom, Hoekendijk, Stamoolis, Yannoulatos, and Ruett. Here, Oborji was far from making any claim to be describing the history of mission. Instead it is a summary of some major historical developments that shaped Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant views on mission, thus the materials here generally provide good reading for all Christians. In addition, Oborji tries to make the various concepts simple and understandable for his readers, yet without being simplistic in his treatment of the issues described. Concluding this section, Oborji warned against a "one-sided" mandate of the Church in her missionary activities. In her proclamation of the gospel, there should be an emphasis on justice because it is aimed at the restoration of the "dignity of the human being". When justice is not pursued, the church is working "against the (very) nature of mission itself" (p.149), and consequently working against herself.

In part three, Oborji turns his attention to handling new perspectives in mission. He discusses new perspectives in mission in the space of three chapters, including ecumenical dialogue and contextual theologies, particularly from Africa, Asia and Latin America. Acknowledging the differences that exist among the groups, Oborji appeals for a fraternal attitude and collaboration among Christians and especially missiologists, but then added that this "does not mean renouncing one's own or ones church's principles and beliefs" because "true ecumenism . . . must respect doctrinal and theological convictions" (p. 176). For Oborji, four major areas need collaboration amongst Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant denominations. These areas include

concerns for human dignity, peace and reconciliation, art and science, and pastoral care (p. 173).

Oborji's faithfulness to the Roman Catholic magisterium and tradition is obvious, yet he tried to sustain a fair balance by engaging other mission concerns that are largely outside his immediate Roman Catholic purview. He is mainly explicating contextual theologies emerging from the Third or Two-Third's world and from within the Roman Catholic perspective. His perspective is helpful because it brings a non-western interpretation and understanding of the missions' traditions of the church to the non-Catholic Western reader. He describes concerns that caused the development of contextual theologies and illuminates their consistent appeal in non-western regions of the world. By interacting with these various brands of contextual theologies, Oborji reveals their quest to "relate the Christian message to the socio-cultural, political, and economic reality of their region" (p. 181), and "their contributions to the development of the common Christian heritage" (p. 181) thus creating theologies that best fit their unique non-western settings, yet have global applicability. For instance, Oborji describes the dawning of liberation theologies in Latin America; notes Christological formulations and their implications for humanity and structures of power in Asia (India, Korea, and Japan); and explains African theological concerns about Christological and Ecclesiological issues and lately with Pneumatology and hermeneutically related issues. Such Christological formulation especially from Africa is "from below" rather than "from above." As an African missiologist, his contribution in describing these non-western global and missiological trends is invaluable.

In an era of globalization, Oborji's work is significant. Christian missiologists from the Northern Hemisphere should appreciate and engage with the emerging voices from these non-western settings who are confronted with realities and issues that are unique to their cultural and political settings. Since "Third World theologians are now engaged in a fruitful and mutually critical dialogue . . . the emergence of theological reflection . . . (from) the Third World today should not create anxiety" but rather a "sincere dialogue with a view (to) healing and reconciliation" (pp. 204-205). While not sacrificing theological excellence and fidelity to Scripture, "it is necessary to encourage (the) exchange of opinions and information (and personnel) among local churches . . ." (p. 204). This correlates well with the biblical account in Acts 13 whereby the church's gifts and best personnel were jointly channeled for mission works. This would also demonstrate our unity in diversity.

On the other hand, there is a flaw in Oborji's description of contemporary trends shaping missions in the non-western regions. Significantly, Oborji's reflections omitted the significant place played by contemporary Pentecostal missions especially in his discussion of mission in the majority world. In this regard, he ignored or downplayed the reality of the exponential growth of this movement as depicted by works of people like David Barrett and Philip

Jenkins who had shown (via statistics) and missiological reflections that not only does the majority world now contain the largest number of Christians (or Christian movements) on earth, but Pentecostalism has the largest and fastest growing missions and churches on earth. Unfortunately, Oborji did not give much attention to this phenomenon in his work. Also, conspicuously missing is how African migration in the “Diaspora” is revitalizing and reshaping Christianity globally. This new trend is gradually replacing some earlier movements (e.g., the cross-cultural missionary enterprise, McGavran’s homogenous unit principle (HUP), short-term missions, etc.) that have contributed to the growth of Christianity. For example, in Europe a Nigerian leads God’s Embassy and in North America, a Ghanaian leads The Calvary worship center in Burnaby, British Columbia. Both are examples of churches with non-Africans in the majority but led by Africans. Additionally, a discussion on the contributions women in mission is also missing, though they have made significant contributions to Christian missions worldwide. In this same light, Latin American and Asian missiologists are under-represented, where the rapid proliferation of Charismatic Renewal movements within the Roman Catholic faith is found. This growth, in turn, is a revitalization of the Roman Catholic Christianity.

Despite these flaws, Oborji’s work should be used especially when read in conversation with other authors who will make up for the omissions. To this end, I strongly recommend his book to students and faculty members who need an introductory or general guide to missiology presented from a non-western and Roman Catholic perspective.

T. Desmond Alexander

From Eden to the New Jerusalem: Exploring God's Plan for Life on Earth

Inter-Varsity Press, Nottingham, 2008. pb, pp. 208. \$16.57 US\$ on Amazon

ISBN: 978-1-84474-285-1

Reviewed by Andrew G. Wildsmith, Scott Christian University

Dr. T. D. Alexander (PhD, Queen's University, Belfast, Northern Ireland) is Senior Lecturer in Biblical Studies and Director of Postgraduate Studies at The Union Theological College in Belfast. He specializes in the Pentateuch and Biblical Theology, but has written in other areas as well.

Alexander aims to describe the Biblical meta-story from Genesis to Revelation in order to answer the foundational questions: "Why was the earth created?" and "What is the reason for human existence?" His method is to start at the end of the story, with Revelation 20-22, on the assumption that, "a story's conclusion provides a good guide to the themes and ideas dominant throughout" (p.10). He sees very strong links between Genesis 1-3 and Revelation 20-22, and traces the central themes in these chapters throughout the Bible. He has arrived at this approach by observing what the individual Biblical books say, how they relate to one another and how they work together to form the larger picture of God's intentions for us and our world. Whether we describe this as a hermeneutical circle or as a process of analysis and synthesis, it comes from a lifetime of reading and meditating on the individual parts of the Bible while also discerning how, as perceived by the eye of faith, these parts relate to one another or fit together to form the larger meta-story.

For example, he sees the New Jerusalem (Rev. 20:2) and the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:8) as God's dwelling places. There He lives in perfect fellowship with human beings who experience the presence of God. In Genesis 3 mankind's rebellion ruins that perfect relationship so God withdraws His direct presence from earth. Alexander starts with Eden as a sacred garden where Adam and Eve meet face to face with God in perfect peace, and describes how humans sin and are expelled from God's presence. Alexander then proceeds through Scripture highlighting the various ways in which God's presence is revealed in the tabernacle, the temple in Jerusalem, the church, and finally in the New Jerusalem. It is Jesus' intervention that climaxes God's presence in the fallen world and Jesus' atoning death, resurrection and ascension that provides the gateway to the road leading to the New Jerusalem.

Alexander uses the same approach to deal with his other chosen themes: re-establishing the sovereignty of God with humanity as His viceroys; destroying the devil who is the source of the evil that Man chooses in the Garden; accomplishing the redemption of creation through the sacrifice of Jesus the Lamb; reinvigorating the lives of people from every nation as holy people in the New Jerusalem where the tree of life reappears as a major symbol; living securely among the people of God in New Jerusalem a theme which is drawn from Revelation's description of New Jerusalem's foundations, walls and gates that are embossed with names of the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles. This summary of his themes fails to uncover the riches of Alexander's exegesis and connects the themes with the meta-story: the actual delight of the book is in its details.

Let me summarize his method of presentation: Alexander identifies a central theme found in Revelation and Genesis and then follows that theme as it develops through the whole Biblical narrative from beginning to end. The emphasis is on following the theme within its historical development, not on identifying a historical period and then examining how the themes are understood in that period. The historical events of the progress of redemption are the foundation and background for the themes so that the book's subtitle is correctly given as "An Introduction to Biblical Theology" rather than "A History of Redemption".

Two features of his approach were very helpful. First, at the beginning of each chapter he summarizes the main themes of the previous chapters and how they intertwine to form the Biblical meta-story. He then introduces how the new chapter relates to those previous themes. The last chapter is his conclusion which summarizes the main findings of the whole book. Second, Alexander also skillfully applies some the themes he has uncovered to the lives of believers today because he believes that, "Good theology always has pastoral implications." (p. 11)

Alexander also avoids twin disasters: 1) trying to define the relationship between modern science and the opening chapters of Genesis and, 2) trying to adjudicate between rival eschatological systems in Revelation. He simply (and wisely) avoids the first, and acknowledges and briefly describes the second (pp. 117-118). He does note that all the systems agree that Satan is completely defeated at the end, a point that is related to his "destroying the devil" theme. Alexander remains focused on his main aim and refuses to be drawn into important discussions meant for another time. While his approach to Revelation and to the relationship between Israel and the Church reveal a generally amillennial leaning, this is not trumpeted, and his careful tracing of the themes that connect the OT and NT people of God remains helpful to Christians who might take a different approach or who think they are neutral in regard to that aspect of the eschatology debate.

Alexander is a British evangelical and most of what he writes will resonate with all those who trust that the Bible is true and authoritative. *From Eden to the New Jerusalem* is one of a growing number of books that attempt to, in one way or another, illuminate the Bible's grand meta-narrative. These include: Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding our Place in the Biblical Story*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004; Rodger Crooks, *One Lord, One Plan, One People: A Journey Through the Bible From Genesis to Revelation*, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2011; Daniel Fuller, *The Unity of the Bible: Unfolding God's Plan for Humanity*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992; Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible*, Nottingham: IVP, 2003; Vaughan Roberts, *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Story-Line of the Bible*, Downers Grove: IVP, 2003; Willem VanGemeren, *The Progress of Redemption*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Books, 1988. As noted above, the structure of Alexander's book focuses more on the Biblical Theology side of the story, while some of the books just listed focus more on the historical side, VanGemeren's for example.

Whereas *From Eden to the New Jerusalem* is not written for an African audience, Alexander deals with the whole story of salvation from Genesis to Revelation, the story of God's relationship with human beings, and this is of as much interest and importance to Africans as it is to Christians everywhere. Like practically every person brought up in a family, church or culture that has some inkling of Biblical stories, African believers inherit the Bible as a mostly unconnected series of narrative fragments. Christians, including African Christians, training as church leaders need to know how these fragments connect, and need to know all the other parts of the Bible usually left out of Sunday School classes, in order to have a maturing grasp of God's story of the progress of redemption. I have taught such a course in two pastoral training colleges in Africa. In one of those classes a first year diploma student asked a question about Saul that eventually revealed that he was conflating King Saul with the Saul who became the apostle Paul. If students come in with a knowledge of the Bible that is limited to twelve baskets of fragments, they should go out with a synopsis of Biblical history in chronological order and with some awareness of the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God, particularly of the theological progress of our redemption.

For lecturers seeking a textbook for such a course, in Africa and elsewhere, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem* is useful depending on the cultural setting and the previous knowledge of the students. I will use it as the main textbook for an MA level course called Progress of Redemption, though the lectures will organize the Biblical books into historical and chronological eras with certain common Biblical themes highlighted in each era.

Libraries of theological schools and colleges in Africa should have this book in their stacks, and some will benefit from using it as a textbook at the first degree level and above.

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Richard J. Gehman

**From Death to Life:
The Birth of the Africa Inland Church in Kenya, 1895-1945**

C-M Books, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 2013. Paperback, 356 pages.

900 Ksh in Kenya. \$21.50 on Amazon.com

ISBN: 978-1-62890-379-9.

Reviewed by Georgette Short, Lecturer at Scott Christian University

Dr. Richard J. Gehman, a retired AIM missionary from the USA, served the Africa Inland Church (AIC) in Kenya for 36 years. He was a lecturer or principal of Scott Theological College (now Scott Christian University) in Machakos, Kenya for most of that time. He is the author of several other books, including *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective* (East African Educational Publishers) and *Learning to Lead: The Making of a Christian Leader in Africa* (Oasis International Ltd).

When Peter Cameron Scott led his small band of pioneer missionaries from the Africa Inland Mission (AIM) to Kenya in 1895, their first few years of ministry were not promising. Some missionaries resigned while others, including Scott himself, succumbed to deadly tropical diseases or were weakened by famine and drought. Today however, the AIC is the largest Protestant church in Kenya, with local churches in almost every part of the country. It has experienced remarkable growth and development, especially through the sacrificial efforts of its earliest African members.

Richard Gehman's fascinating book *From Death to Life* describes the first 50 years of the AIC in Kenya from its inception in 1895 until 1945. His detailed, scholarly research has unearthed hundreds of pictures, testimonies and stories about how the AIC began which highlight the challenges and advances these first missionaries and Kenyan believers faced.

Gehman sees three phases in the growth of the AIC during this period. Phase 1, from 1895-1901, covers the very early years, when missionary resignations, famine and death so affected the work that it almost failed. The small number of Wakamba who became believers were the reason why the work continued as they shared the gospel that had changed their lives with others in their community. Living in the Mumbuni area, as I do, it is heartening to see what a pivotal role this village played in these early years in Kenya.

In Phase 2, from 1901-1929, evangelists and teachers were trained and the gospel was taken to other tribes within Kenya. Some of the challenges

faced in this period include enculturation issues and the growth of nationalism, but the biggest challenge was that posed by the missionaries' reaction to female circumcision. The missionary stand against this deeply held cultural practice, one still very much disputed today, caused many African believers to leave the church in this time period.

Phase 3, 1929-1945, deals with the development of Bible schools and how AIM was administered. The 1930's and 1940's were demanding times as the Second World War restricted movement of missionaries and drew both Westerners and Kenyans into the conflict. However the church grew and spread during this period and slowly moved toward being truly indigenous.

One strength of this book is its individual accounts of missionaries and Kenyan believers that Gehman discovered in the course of his research. These touching stories highlight what God can do through fallible but committed expatriate and African believers. Gehman shows how the first people the missionaries led to Christ were excited about their new faith and how keen they were to pass it on to others despite the challenges and opposition they faced. These remarkable African Christians are the main reason the gospel spread. Without them the AIC would not be what it is today.

Gehman provides statistics for various AIM stations around Kenya, charting their growth or decline. This, along with descriptions of the work being done by missionaries and nationals, and many wonderful photographs give a more complete picture of how the work of the AIC progressed.

The author's concluding section utilises the metaphor of parenting to describe this early period of the AIC. It is a very apt way to look at the suffering involved in birthing the AIC, the guidance the early believers received from the missionaries, the education they desired, and how the missionaries, like all parents, surrendered control to their adult offspring as they came into maturity.

As Dr. Joseph B. Onyango Okello says on the back cover of the book, from what Gehman records of the birth of the AIC, it is a miracle that it remains up to today. Considering the way the church began and the serious challenges it faced, it truly was remarkable that it not only survived, but thrived. God's hand can be seen in the lives of the early missionaries and their first converts as well as in the way he brought good out of potentially disastrous situations.

This is a wonderfully readable book which captures not only what the first AIM missionaries and the early Kenyan converts did to build the church, but also how their faith in Christ impacted their lives and the lives of those they came into contact with. I am looking forward to reading his next instalment.

The book is useful as a resource for AIC members and the libraries of AIC Bible colleges as well as all those interested in missions and church history.

Books Received

This page lists some of the books AJET received from publishers, but that we have not yet been able to review. Our reading hopes exceeded our reading ability. We hope some of our readers might want to submit their own original, previously unpublished book reviews of one of these titles. Sorry, we can't send you a title to review. If you are still interested, please see the book review guidelines on our website - <http://www.scott.ac.ke>.

Miriam J. Bier and Tim Bulkeley, eds. *Spiritual Complaint: The Theology and Practice of Lament*. Cambridge, UK: James Clarke & Co., 2014.

Jonathan J. Bonk, ed. *Family Accountability in Missions: Korean and Western Case Studies*. New Haven, Connecticut: OMSC Publications, 2013.

Robert F. Cochran, Jr. and David VanDrunen, eds. *Law and the Bible: Justice, Mercy and Legal Institutions*. Nottingham, UK: Apollos/IVP, 2013.

Gregg A. Okesson. *Re-Imaging Modernity: A Contextualized Theological Study of Power and Humanity within Akamba Christianity in Kenya*. American Society of Missiology Monograph Series, Vol. 16. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2012.

Jonty Rhodes. *Raiding the Lost Ark: Recovering the Gospel of the Covenant King*. Nottingham, UK: IVP Press, 2013.

Andrew G. Shead, ed. *Stirred by a Noble Theme: The Book of Psalms in the Life of the Church*. Nottingham, UK: Apollos/IVP, 2013.

Jay Sklar. *Leviticus, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, Vol. 3*. Nottingham, UK: IVP Press, 2013.

Robert Letham. *The Message of the Person of Christ: The Word Made Flesh. The Bible Speaks Today: Bible Themes*. Nottingham, UK: IVP Press, 2013.

Lissa M. Wray Beal. *1 & 2 Kings. Apollos Old Testament Commentary, Vol. 9*. Nottingham, UK: Apollos/IVP, 2013.

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