



Common Ground Journal

Perspectives on the Church in the 21st Century

Volume 3 Number 2 – Spring 2006

ISSN: 1547-9129

What Does It Mean to Be Human?

From the Editor	3
Laurie D. Bailey	
What Does It Mean to Be Human	10
Elaine Becker	
Polygyny and the African Church	19
Emmanuel Ogunyemi	
Learning to Be: A Brazilian Case Study in Social Injustice	33
Marcus O. Throup	
How Theology Should Be Done	46
Edmund Chan	



Common Ground Journal
Volume 3 Number 2 – Spring 2006
ISSN: 1547-9129

Executive Director: Linda M. Cannell
Journal Editor: Laurie D. Bailey
Journal & Web Design: Mark E. Simpson

Opinions expressed in the *Common Ground Journal* are solely the responsibility of the authors and are not necessarily those of the editor or members of the CanDoSpirit Network, Inc. The *Common Ground Journal* is e-Published twice annually by EDCOT® for the CanDoSpirit Network, Inc., c/o:

Laurie D. Bailey, Editor
303 Vine Avenue
Park Ridge, IL 60068-4143 USA

© Copyright 2006. Common Ground Journal. All rights reserved.
<http://www.commongroundjournal.org>

e-Printed in the United States of America

Mission Statement

An Online, Open-Access, International Journal

Common Ground Journal (CGJ) is a publication of the CanDoSpirit Network, Inc. and is published twice annually as a resource for Christian congregations seeking to understand and faithfully live out their calling as the people of God in the world. The primary audience for CGJ is thoughtful Christians in congregations who are catalysts for growth within their own churches.

CGJ is devoted to the development of strong, faithful churches whose life and ministry grow out of the church's nature as the people of God. They are organized and led in a manner consistent with their nature and mission. They continually ask, "What does it mean to be a sign of the Kingdom of God in the world today?"

CGJ is a resource for congregational development. We invite scholars and thoughtful Christians in congregations around the world to stimulate inquiry, reflection and action around issues central to the life and ministry of the gathered community of faith. We invite those who serve as leaders in congregations, mission agencies, parachurch organizations, relief and development work, higher education, and non-traditional leadership development to apply their scholarship and expertise in these fields to the context of the local church. We encourage members of congregations to address the broader church with insights grounded in a thoughtful examination of Scripture, and in their own experiences as part of communities of faith in the world.

CGJ is international in scope. We draw on the rich resources of the church around the world to provide a variety of voices and perspectives on issues facing the church. Writers are encouraged to be specific to their own culture and context. In order to contribute to the development of indigenous literature, articles may be submitted in a language other than English.

CGJ is an electronic journal freely available to anyone with access to the worldwide web. The electronic format allows distribution to a wide and diverse audience, and enables the journal to be interactive in nature. Readers may engage in ongoing conversations about the topics and articles we print, and find links to other resources on the web.

Copyright Permissions and Reprints

Copyright in this document is owned by the Common Ground Journal, a publication of the [CanDoSpirit Network](http://www.candospiritnetwork.org). Any person is hereby authorized to view, copy, print, and distribute this document subject to the following conditions:

1. The document may be used only for informational purposes
2. The document may only be used for non-commercial purposes
3. Any copy of this document or portion thereof must include this copyright notice:

© Copyright 2006. Common Ground Journal. All rights reserved.

ISSN: 1547-9129. www.commongroundjournal.org

-
4. Reprints of works first published in the CGJ should include a statement that the article first appeared in the CGJ.
 5. Reprinted works appear in the CGJ by permission of the original copyright holder. These articles are subject to the original copyright and may not be reproduced without permission of the original copyright holder.
 6. Articles first published in the CGJ, excluding reprinted articles, may be reproduced for ministry use in the local church, higher education classroom, etc., provided that copies are distributed at no charge or media fee. All copies must include the author's name, the date of publication, and a notice that the article first appeared in the *Common Ground Journal*. Articles may not be published commercially, edited, or otherwise altered without the permission of the author.
 7. The articles in CGJ may be read online, downloaded for personal use, or linked to from other web interfaces.

The author and/or its respective suppliers make no representations about the accuracy or suitability of the information contained in the documents and related graphics published on this site for any purpose. All such information contained in the documents and related graphics are provided "as is" and are subject to change without notice.

The *Common Ground Journal* name and logo are trademarks of the *Common Ground Journal*. Other services are trademarks of their respective companies.

Submissions to the Journal

The *Common Ground Journal* welcomes articles from scholars and discerning Christians. Each issue will feature invited articles around a theme, as well as articles received through open submissions. Open submission articles are reviewed by members of the Editorial Review Committee who make recommendations to the editor regarding their publication.

General Guidelines

Common Ground Journal seeks to stimulate Christian Churches to thoughtful action around their calling to be the people of God in the world. All articles should be grounded both in theology and the life of the church. Writers are encouraged to write to and about their own cultures and contexts. CGJ invites submissions in the following categories:

- Articles that stimulate thinking and reflection on the nature of the Church
- Articles that link the nature of the Church to its life and work in the world
- Articles that explore the integration of theology and social sciences in relation to life and work of the Church
- Essays on truths gleaned from the interplay of theory and practice, theology and experience in the active life of faith

-
- Articles that present insights from congregations attempting to live out their identity as the people of God in world
 - Articles based on responsible qualitative research designed to inform a local congregation's understanding of its life and ministry
 - Articles that raise questions that the Christian community needs to explore in becoming the people of God in the world
 - Reviews of books, journals, programs, web sites and related resources

Submission Guidelines

Common Ground Journal submission guidelines and protocols are based on the need of meeting web design standards that are compatible across multiple versions of both current and legacy web browsers. Please follow the standards carefully when submitting documents for consideration for online publication in the *Common Ground Journal*. Documents to be considered for publication should be e-mailed to the editor at: editor@commongroundjournal.org.

Article Length

Articles should be approximately 2500 to 3500 words in length. Book reviews and essays should be shorter.

Language and Foreign Languages

Articles should be written in clear narrative prose. Readers can be expected to be familiar with the language of the Bible and theology, but will not necessarily have formal education in these fields. Please avoid academic language and discipline specific terms. Provide clear definitions and examples of important terms not familiar to a general audience. Use explanatory footnotes sparingly; explanations and examples in the text of articles are preferred.

The best articles are clear and focused, developing a single thesis with examples and application. The successful writer translates complex ideas into everyday language without talking down to the readers. All articles should use inclusive language.

Biblical language terms and words in foreign languages should be transliterated into English. If foreign language fonts are used in lieu of transliteration, you must embed the fonts in the document so the text can be reproduced accurately. Instructions for how to embed fonts can usually be found under the *Help* menu of most word processors (keywords: embed font).

Style and Format

In matters of style and format, please follow the *Chicago Manual of Style*. You must include proper documentation for all source material and quotations using footnotes.

A "Bibliography" of works cited should be included at the end of the article. A "Recommended Reading" list or "For Further Study" list may also be included.

Documents to be considered for publication should be submitted according to the following style protocols:

- Times New Roman font 12 point (important: you must embed any other font used in the document)
- Single-line space throughout
- Use only one space after any punctuation
- Indent paragraphs with only one tab—please do not use multiple spaces for any form of indentation
- Indent block quotations using the indent feature in your word processor instead of tabs or extra spaces to indent text
- Do not underline text, as underlining is reserved for documenting hyperlinks—use bold or italic for emphasis
- Do not use auto-hyphenation
- Charts, graphs, images etc. appearing anywhere in the document should be submitted in BMP, GIF, JPG, or WMF format—images should be as clear as possible
- Copyrighted displays, images or previously published works must be accompanied by a letter of permission from the copyright owner to reproduce the displays or images in the online *Common Ground Journal*

The preferred format is Microsoft Word. WordPerfect, Rich Text Format (RTF), or ASCII formatted documents are also acceptable. Articles will be published in converted to Word format and published online in Adobe PDF format.

Author Information

The credibility of an article is enhanced by a brief bio of the writer's credentials and/or professional experience. Writers must therefore include the following information with their articles:

- A narrative biography of three or four sentences identifying your name as you wish it to appear, the institution you work for or the relationship you have with the topic, your position, and other information relevant identifying your qualifications in writing the article
- A color (preferred) or black and white photograph of you (portrait style) in BMP, GIF, JPG, or WMF format
- The URL of your personal home page (if any), and/or the URL of you reorganization, academic institution, or business as appropriate

Copyright Ownership

The copyright of works first published in the *Common Ground Journal* is retained by the author. Authors are free to publish their articles in other journals if they so choose. Authors reprinting their works first published in the CGJ should include a statement that the article first appeared in the CGJ.

Reprinted works appear in the CGJ by permission of the original copyright holder. These articles are subject to the original copyright and may not be reproduced without permission of the original copyright holder.

Articles first published in the CGJ, excluding reprinted articles, may be reproduced for ministry use in the local church, higher education classroom, etc., provided that copies are distributed at no charge or media fee. All copies must include the author's name, the date of publication, and a notice that the article first appeared in the *Common Ground Journal*. Articles may not be published commercially, edited, or otherwise altered without the permission of the author.

The articles in CGJ may be read online, downloaded for personal use, or linked to from other web interfaces.

Reader Response and Contact Information

Readers are encouraged to respond to articles published in the *Common Ground Journal*. This can be done in two ways. Formal responses to articles and themes or editorial matters may be submitted to the editor via e-mail or postal mail (see *Contact Information* below). Responses may be edited for length.

If you wish to initiate or participate in an ongoing discussion related to an article, go to <http://208.185.149.229/WebX/cmngrnd/>, where you can post and read responses of other readers. The following contacts can be used for any questions or recommendations for the *Common Ground Journal*:

Journal Editor: editor@commongroundjournal.org

Webmaster: webmaster@commongroundjournal.org

Mailing Address: Common Ground Journal
c/o Laurie D. Bailey, Editor
303 Vine Avenue
Park Ridge, IL 60068-4143 USA

From the Editor

By Laurie D. Bailey

Bailey, Laurie D. 2006. From the Editor. *Common Ground Journal* v3 n2 (Spring): 8. ISSN: 15479129. URL: www.commongroundjournal.org.

Pick up a newspaper or pull up your favorite news site and you will get a quick lesson in the global issues that confront us: war, poverty, oppression, disease, and disaster. Stand in the local market or in the church narthex and you will get an earful on local issues: immigration, jobs, tribalism, breakdown of family systems, and conflicts over leadership, music, and money. As we in the Christian community search for appropriate responses to these problems, we must bring to the discussion a careful consideration of the nature of our humanity in light of God's word. What does it mean to be created in the image of God? To be a fallen creature? To be redeemed and restored? Our answers to these questions will frame our understanding of, and responses to, the political, social, and economic issues of our day. Within our churches and societies, we choose each day how we will live in relation to others. Are we able to make thoughtful decisions about the way we will live in the world in light of what God says about humanity?

In this issue, three writers offer theological reflections on basic human concerns. Elaine Becker looks at how the nature of our humanity has been addressed historically in the church, and raises questions related to the social implications of this doctrine. Emmanuel Ogunyemi proposes a theological and sociological rationale for dealing with polygyny in the African church. Marcus Throup describes the humanizing effects of an educational project among the poor of Brazil, and calls for grounding educational philosophy in the gospel. Each of these articles adds perspective to the issue of our humanity.

In our *Continuing the Conversation* feature, Edmund Chan contributes to the ongoing discussion on Doing Theology—the theme of our Spring 2004 issue—with his careful examination of the theological task of the people of God.

About the Editor



Laurie D. Bailey is editor of *Common Ground Journal*. She has over 25 years experience in Christian education and congregational development. She is involved in theological education and leadership development internationally through CanDoSpirit Network, Inc.

What Does It Mean to Be Human?

Elaine Becker

Becker, Elaine. 2006. What Does It Mean to Be Human? *Common Ground Journal* v3 n2 (Spring): 10-18. ISSN: 15479129. URL: www.commongroundjournal.org.

Recently I read an article in the Chronicle of Higher Education by David P. Barash (November 25, 2005), related to C. P. Snow and the bridging of science and the humanities. The quote that caught my attention was the following:

Progress in the humanities typically does not threaten science, whereas the more science advances, the more the humanities seem at risk. Yet, paradoxically, scientific achievement only makes humanistic wisdom more important as technology not only threatens the planet, but even—in a world of cloning, stem-cell possibilities, genetic engineering, robotics, cyber-human hybrids, xenotransplants—raises questions about what it is to be human. (B10)

This started a quest for me once again, to define what it means to be human. The natural answer that popped into my mind came from some basic theology class, which dealt with the “Image of God” and what it means to be made in the image of God. Genesis speaks clearly of men and women having been made in the image of the divine (Genesis 1:26, 27).

I went then to a couple of writers. The first was Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines*, to see in what way the doctrine of the image of God has been handled historically. Of course the primary question relates to the state of humanity in relation to God and his grace.

Historically the question of what is inherited at birth, what is the nature of human beings, has been debated. Augustine, in *The City of God*, sets humanity in place in relation to the created universe.

Therefore God supreme and true, with His Word and Holy Spirit (which three are one), one God omnipotent, creator and maker of every soul and of every body; by whose gift all are happy who are happy through verity and not through vanity; who made man a rational animal consisting of soul and body, who when he sinned, neither permitted him to go unpunished nor left him without mercy; who has given to the good and to the evil, being in common with stones, vegetable life in common with trees, sensuous life in common with brutes, intellectual life in common with angels alone; from whom is every mode, every species, every order; from whom are measure, number, weight; from who is everything which has an existence in nature,

of whatever kind it be, and of whatever value; . . . who also to the irrational soul has given memory, sense, appetite, but to the rational soul, in addition to these, has given intelligence and will; who has not left, not to speak of heaven and earth, angels and men, but not even the entrails of the smallest and most contemptible animal, or the feather of a bird, or the little flower of a plant, or the leaf of a tree without a harmony, and as it were a mutual peace among all its parts – that God can never be believed to have left the kingdoms of men, their dominations and servitudes, outside of the laws of His providence. (Augustine Book V sect 11)

Nothing of the created order is outside the realm of God’s control and foreknowledge.

The Greek Fathers recognized that Adam was created in the image of God in the sense that he did not have ethical perfection but possessed a moral perfectibility in his nature. He could and did sin but the guilt of that sin was not passed on to his offspring, only a physical corruption was inherited (Berkhof 1996, 128).

In the Reformation the other side of the issue became predominant stemming from the teaching of such people as Augustine and Anselm. Infants are born bearing the guilt of Adams sin. “As a result of sin man is totally depraved and unable to do any spiritual good” (Berkhof 135). “Calvin stressed the fact that original sin is not merely a privation, but also a total corruption of human nature” (147).

Wesleyan Arminian teaching related to original sin modifies the teaching of Arminius to say, “The guilt of Adam’s sin is indeed imputed to his descendants. But at the same time it holds that this original guilt was cancelled by the justification of all men in Christ” (Berkhof 156). All people have received enough grace to be able to respond to the salvation offered in Christ.

Hegel makes a particularly interesting statement as to the necessity of sin. Prior to the Fall, human beings existed in a state of naiveté not unlike the animals, knowing neither right nor wrong but in the Fall an awareness came into being making them self-conscious.

The original condition of man was one of naïve innocence – a state almost resembling that of the brute – in which he knew nothing of good or evil, and merely existed in unity with nature. That state, however natural for animals, was not natural for man and was therefore not ideal. Man was destined to separate himself from it and to become a self-conscious spirit. (Berkhof 158)

The idea of being made in essence different from God, yet made in his image, being made like the animal kingdom but above the other animals created and placed on

this earth gives rise to all sorts of questions. What does it mean to have authority and yet be under the dominion of God? What does it mean to have free-will and choice and yet at the same time be restricted by the laws of nature? What does it mean to be human and how can humanness be understood?

The paradox is stated clearly in the words of Psalm 8:4-6 which leap from the pages of scripture:

What is man that thou art mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?
You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
You made him ruler over the works of your hands;

In my quest I have gone to another of my theological texts. Millard Erickson (1985), in his theological statement, suggests that the uniqueness of being human lays in the ability of humanity to have a relationship with God the creator.

...Whatever it is that sets man apart from the rest of the creation, he alone is capable of having a conscious personal relationship with the Creator and of responding to him. Man can know God and understand what the Creator desires of him. Man can love, worship and obey his Maker. (471)

Historically a case can be made for the answering of the question, “what does it mean to be human?” Victors in battle were superior to those captured and to be enslaved was someone a lesser form of humanity. In ancient times those warriors and nations captured in battle would be taken prisoners but instead of being slain they would become captives and enslaved to the conquering nation. Slavery has been one of the longest fought realities and only in the mid 1800s did America deal emphatically with the slave industry. Then only in the 1960s some 100 years later did many of the African Americans start to be treated as humans, equal in nature and being to all others. Unfortunately there are still those who would question whether all races of people are equally human.

Anthropology is interested in the question of nature of humanness as a physical anthropological question as well. What are the physical realities and the uniquely psychological processes of humanity as compared to the rest of the created order? In John Wesley’s *Theology* the question of the existence of *homo sapiens* is raised. The earliest evidence of humanity is based on the drawings of people of themselves and of animals around them. Only people have attempted to leave a record of themselves in this way for

future generations. Within the species of *homo sapiens* however, it is clear that there exist distinctions of race.

Thus the present solidarity of *homo sapiens* is apparently acknowledged by most, if not all Anthropologists. That certain racial subdivisions do exist is, of course, common knowledge. However, that their differences are superficial and not essential or fundamental cannot be successfully denied in the light of modern scientific knowledge. (Carter 1983, 196)

The recognition of equality of race and gender are issues that have been battled in the quest for defining humanness despite the clear biblical teaching that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female. The question of definition of humanness has a long history.

Women in America have fought long and hard to be considered equal in nature and being to men. That battle still seems unanswered in some cultures where men are treated as if they are superior. Of course around the world there are varying degrees of suppression and liberation of women. It seems difficult for some people groups to declare them fully human and to see them as equal in the eyes of God, yet women too are made in his image.

Interestingly, Augustine, in *The City of God*, dealt in part with what it means to be human when he recognized that the body was not extra to our humanness but a part of it. "For the body is not an extraneous ornament or aid, but a part of man's very nature" (Augustine, Book 1, sect 13). The issue of course for Augustine related to the proper burial and regard for the dead; but what principle carries over? In what sense can a body be treated or regarded as less than human in order for a body to be created for use of parts for another? Can we ethically create a human body in order to supply transferable parts for another living being without recognizing the human nature within the body itself?

How can the questions of human rights be addressed if the definition of humanness remains unclear? Carter (1983), in *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology*, quotes Peter A. Bertocci:

A human being . . . is not an animal with rationality added. He is not a mere plastic set of needs and wants, which allow him more possibility than animals enjoy. He is not an animal with more choices, made possible by his capacity for self-conscious reflection and symbolization. He is not an unconscious wasteland of non-moral desires insecurely tied down by a superego which automatizes the prudential bargaining of his ego with the surrounding culture. Nor is *homo sapiens* a creature

who is one-third animal, one-third man, and one-third God, full of anxiety about the monstrosities which may be produced from such a union.

We would suggest that man is a creature whose desires even are none of them like those of animals when seen with the context of his whole being. The very fact that man can think, that he feels obligations, that he can will, that he appreciates beauty is stirred by the holy – these facts transform his most physical demands. . . making them different from those of animals. (198)

To be human involves a created uniqueness different from the animal kingdom. It involves the ability for relationship consciously with the creator. It incorporates not only a spiritual identity but the physical being is also involved in this unique character. While the reality of original sin may have altered what it means to be human, George W. Forell is quoted in *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology*:

Yet the destruction of the image of God in people does not turn them into animals. Even the enslaved human being is still human. Even a person who is full of hate is still a person. People cannot escape their humanity. (198)

Practical Outworking of Humanness

The cultures of our world are asking the questions about the human rights of the unborn, of children, of those born in poverty and third world nations. While we talk about a “global village,” still the artificial boundaries of nations impose restrictions on people as to the rights to which they are entitled.

In America there are certain rights that are deemed the rights of all citizens, but is this a legitimate categorical distinction in terms of the world’s humanity? Are these rights “American Rights” or “Human Rights”? Being the citizen of a particular nation imparts certain rights and privileges to a person; but ought the definition of humanness not to be one that must cross borders?

Is there something so uniquely different about humanity that the rights of humanity around the world must become a greater concern than demonstrated by previous generations? If it is true that while human beings are a part of the finite creation they also retain an eternal element that quality continues beyond the limits of time and space. Unlike the animal kingdom, which is finite, human beings are immortal. If these things are true then how can the life of a child in a first world country seem to be of more worth than those dying of AIDS by the thousands?

And while I can be very concerned about what is happening to the global environment and helpless animals that seem to be senselessly slaughtered, how does this compare with the lives of humans that are lost to hunger and disease in every nation around the world? How many people, made in the image of God, are living in poverty?

John Stott (1999) in his book, *Human Rights and Human Wrongs*, deals with the question of humanness and the responsibility of God's human creation to act responsibly before God to one another and to the created natural universe. Stott calls for an "engagement" of all believers in the social concerns of the world quoting from James 1:27: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."

Secular Humanists will work for the advantage of fellow human beings due to the potential they possess in the advancement of the evolution of the world. How much more should Christians care for fellow human beings, not because of their potential, but for who they are by creation—image bearers of God? Stott puts it this way:

For these human but godlike creatures are not just souls (that we should be concerned exclusively for their eternal salvation), not just bodies (that we should care only for their food, clothing, shelter and health), nor just social beings (that we should become entirely preoccupied with their community problems.). . . A human being might be defined from a biblical perspective as a "body-soul-in-a community." (35)

Do I take seriously what Christian community means or does it have a national border around it? In what sense does membership in the Family and Kingdom of God transcend national, racial and gender boundaries? It seems clear to me that the text of scripture indicates that these social structures have no place in the definition of God's kingdom.

John Stott calls for our engagement in social concerns:

"Engagement" means turning our faces toward the world in compassion, getting our hands dirty, sore, and worn in its service, and feeling deep within us the stirring of the love of God which cannot be contained. (30)

Our generation is faced with all kinds of human behavior questions. There is a heightened awareness of ethical issues related to humanness. What does it mean to be human? The quest to know ones' self is ongoing personally and as a culture as well. Part

of knowing oneself comes from knowing our roots or heritage. One's connectedness to the past helps one feel rooted in the here and now.

Historically we have evidence of the extremes to which humanity can go. Humans on the one hand can be loving and caring and on the other hand wield power and destruction in magnitudes almost impossible to imagine. These extremes seem to exist within a people group and within an individual as well. So again the question comes, what does it mean to be human? What does being human demand of me?

All too often the value of a person is measured by things which are utterly insignificant, such as what the person does for a living, where they live, and their annual income. Every culture appears to have a hierarchy of status. In ancient cultures the hunter-warriors were valued above keepers of the land; in today's culture, it seems the white-collar worker is more valued than the factory worker, and the educated is more valued than the illiterate person. The first world people seem more valued over the third world millions. If children born in North America die from whatever cause it seems to have far more magnitude and import than the many that are dying everyday from AIDS in Africa.

So what am I trying to get at in this article? I am on a quest in my own walk with God to answer the question, what does it mean to be human? For then I must deal with the issue of embryo creation for scientific study and research as well as embryo creation for people who long for children when more natural ways do not seem to work.

I must deal with the reality that all too often people are valued related to their race or gender or family lineage. It seems unbelievable to our Western understanding that female children could be easily disposed of in an attempt to have a son. However, within many societies the sense of maleness being of more worth or value still prevails.

I must deal with the Gay and Lesbian community who, while different from me, are no less human. In what sense are they made in the image of God? What rights as humans need they to be afforded?

I must deal with the physically and mentally infirm, who I encounter on a day by day basis. For they are no less human than I am. What rights are they being denied?

I must deal with the labor market of the world and the fact that I, in North America, can often live in luxury due to the poverty in which the greater population of

the world is kept. What does “a fair days wage for a fair days work” mean on a global scale?

I must deal with the question of Euthanasia, for is there a point at which a person ceases to be human? Is there a point at which the physical life can be terminated because the brain function has ceased? Is the humanness in the brain function? In what sense is the body a bearer of the image of God as well?

I must keep coming back to the fact that God has created human beings somewhere between divinity and the animal kingdom and at no point do we change nature either to become God or to become a beast. Then I must be concerned about Human Rights regardless of ones nationality and all the more must I be concerned for the rights of those who do not have the power to stand up for their own rights.

John Stott says,

Thus all human rights are at base the right to be human, and so to enjoy the dignity of having been created in God’s image and of possessing in consequence unique relationships to God himself, to our fellow human beings and to the material world. (Stott 1999, 172)

Stott does not have a glamorous view of Christianity when he speaks of the paradox of our humanity.

We human beings have both a unique dignity as creatures made in God’s image and a unique depravity as sinners under his judgment We can behave like God in whose image we were made, only to descend to the level of the beasts. We are able to think, choose, create, love, and worship, but also to refuse to think to choose evil, to destroy, to hate and to worship ourselves. We build churches and drop bombs. We develop intensive care units for the critically ill and use the same technology to torture political enemies who presume to disagree with us. This is man a strange, bewildering paradox, dust of the earth and breath of God, shame and glory. (Stott 1999, 54)

I write this article to invite your conversation on this topic. Are there others there who are dealing with these issues? In what way can I be involved in the Kingdom of God beyond the narrowness of a denomination and nationality? In what way must I live as a member of the Kingdom here and now?

May I ask you to consider a book by Marva J. Dawn – *Unfettered Hope: A Call to Faithful Living in an Affluent Society*. This book challenges the consumer mentality of

our culture. Is it possible that human beings are being treated as they are in part by our press for more and bigger in all areas of life?

References

- Augustine. 1948. *The City of God*. Trans. and ed. Marcus Dods. New York: Hafner Publishing Company.
- Barash, David P. 2005. C.P. Snow: Bridging the Two-Cultures Divide. *Chronicle of Higher Education* 52, no. 14 (November 25): B 10.
- Berkhof, Louis. 1996. *The History of Christian Doctrines*. 14th printing, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.
- Carter, Charles W. ed., R. D. Thompson, C. R. Wilson assoc. ed. 1983. *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press.
- Dawn, Marva J. 2003. *Unfettered Hope: A Call to Faithful Living in an Affluent Society*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Erickson, Millard J. 1985. *Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.
- Stott, John. 1999. *Human Rights and Human Wrongs: Major Issues for a New Century*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

About the Author



Elaine Becker is a graduate of Trinity International University with a Ph.D. in Educational Ministries. She is currently Director of Degree Completion at Tyndale University College in Toronto, Canada. She has served as a Salvation Army officer for 34 years in a variety of appointments in church as well as social service ministries and educational and administrative appointments.

Polygyny and the African Church

By Emmanuel Ogunyemi

Ogunyemi, Emmanuel. 2006. Polygyny and the African Church. *Common Ground Journal* v3 n2 (Spring): 19-32. ISSN: 15479129. URL: www.commongroundjournal.org.

Introduction

One of the major theological challenges facing the African church today is in the area of marriage. There is a pluralism of expression both in theology and liturgy when it comes to the issue of what marriage is, especially in this age of liberation. Some of the questions that were not asked fifty years ago are now being asked by African Christians and non-Christians alike. In the light of the current theological developments in the western world, the African church is confronted with these questions: What is marriage? When is marriage consummated? Who is the head of the home? Is indissolubility an expression of the sacramentality of marriage? Is monogamy an expression of the sacramentality of marriage? These are only a few of the controversial questions that the church in Africa has been wrestling with for some time now.

For over a century, the early missionaries had encountered polygyny and treated it as a major evil in the Africa church. Some African authors on this subject have noted that this approach of the early missionaries (unwittingly) led many potential converts to reject Christianity (Karibwije 1984; Owusu 2000). As Eliade pointed out in his writing, the early missionaries' approach is still haunting the African church even today (Eliade 1987, 229). The 'bone of contention' here is the theological premise used by the early missionaries in dealing with this issue. Since we are created in the image of God and are all fallen human beings, our attitude to those who have come to receive this same saving grace (including the missionaries) should be characterized by humility and love. Our theological understanding of all humans as image bearer (*imago Dei*) will determine how we treat all humans. Is it scripturally correct to put polygyny and divorce on the same level? Does the Bible give any express command on how polygyny should be resolved? What are the sociological, psychological as well as spiritual implications of the current approach that most of the African church has taken on the women and the children?

In this paper, the author does not presume to have answers to all the questions raised above. However, on the issue of polygyny, several questions beg for more

theological reflection on the part of the African church: Should the church baptize a pre-converted polygynist who believes in Jesus Christ? Should the church continue to take the inherited negative stance on polygyny? Should a polygynist be allowed to take Holy Communion? These are pressing questions that confront the African church leadership. This paper seeks to respond to some of them, using biblical principles as well as a missiological paradigm for critical analysis. Areas of focus in this study include polygyny and the Bible, causes of polygyny in Africa, effects of polygyny in the church, early missionary approaches to polygyny, and finally, a suggested biblical approach to the problem of polygyny in the African church.

What is Polygyny (or Polygamy)?

Polygamy has been defined as a form of marriage which involves the union of a man or woman with multiple marriage partners (Eliade 1987, 220). In most cases, polygamy is taken to mean “polygyny.” Therefore, there is need to clarify the difference between the two words.

Polygamy is a broad word, which combines polygyny and polyandry. Polygyny is a union between a man and two or more women; polyandry is a union between a woman and two or more men (Parrinder 1958, 1). There are many countries where polygyny is legally allowed and recognized as a form of marriage (Cairncross 1974, 74). The Baganda of Uganda, the Luo of Kenya, the Ndembu of Zambia, the Tiv and Yorubas of Nigeria and the Swazi of Swaziland are a few examples of people who practice polygyny in Africa (Eliade 1987, 220-222).

However, it must be noted that both polygyny and polyandry are being practiced in other parts of the world. Polygyny, otherwise called plural marriage, is a worldwide phenomenon (Embry 1974, 3). According to Hillman, “Plural marriage or polygamy is found throughout the world in a variety of forms that are culturally determined.” In the Western world, it is practiced as consecutive polygamy, “one spouse after another in a sequence involving divorce and remarriage” (Hillman 1975, 10). Polygyny is also practiced in some parts of Europe, Asia and America. A good example of polygynous communities in America were the Munster and the Utah, these communities were led by a charismatic leader who wanted to change form of marriage (Cairncross 1974, 215). For the sake of this paper, we shall limit this discourse to the African context.

Causes of Polygamy in Africa

There are several reasons why men marry more than one woman in Africa. Some of the reasons for plural marriages are listed below. As Parrinder (1958), Embry (1987) and Trobisch (1971) noted, these reasons may not be all relevant to the Western World.

Occupational assistance. A majority of traditional African men are farmers, so they tend to see it as more advantageous to marry many women who could help work in their cocoa plantations or assist with other farming occupations as it is done in West Africa.

Leadership prestige. In the African context (e.g., Yoruba land in Nigeria), the man who has many wives is accorded greater respect in the community. He is worthy of leading the community especially when he is “perfectly” controlling his wives and children by feeding them and caring for them.

Economic reason. A polygynist gains a lot from the wives who fetch more money and from the children when they get married. He has more in-laws who from time to time bring money and gifts to their father-in-law. By this, he is more financially secure.

Desire to have male children. This is one of the major reasons for practicing polygyny in African countries. In Africa, the male child is very important because of the security it provides the father’s property, both during his lifetime and after his death. So if the first wife does not give birth to a male child, it raises a problem in the home: the man wants to marry another woman for the sake of having a male child. This leads to multiplication of wives.

Wife inheritance. This is common among the Yorubas of western Nigeria. The younger brother is expected to take care of his elder brother’s wife when the elder brother dies. The eldest son of the family is also expected to marry the youngest wife of the father at the death of his father. This is a major cause of polygyny among the Yorubas of Nigeria. This so-called levirate marriage was common even among the Jews in the Old Testament time. It was also popular in other world cultures. It helps to guarantee the security of the widow and the children (Parrinder 1958, 9-11).

Sexual reason. Some polygynists acquire more women because of lack of sexual satisfaction with only one woman. This is true especially when using the traditional method of birth control. The nursing mother is expected to nurse the baby for at least

three years, and that means the husband will have to abstain sexually for this long period. In order to satisfy the sexual pleasure and need of the man, he acquires more wives. The wives keep multiplying as this process continues. Abstinence from sex between husband and wife has been the traditional way of birth control (TAG 1994, 23).

Age of menopause of women. Many women who reach the age of menopause allow their husbands to go ahead to marry a second or third woman. This is both to satisfy the sexual desire of the man and for procreation especially if the woman is barren.

Barrenness. When a woman is unable to give birth to children, the man is traditionally expected to marry another woman. Barrenness has been traditionally perceived as a curse.

Future parental needs. The man marries many wives, not because of the inability of the first wife to give birth to children, but because the father wants to have as many children as possible so that when he is old there will be many sources of help from the children. Because there is no retirement plan such as the Social Security system in America, it is natural for parents to depend on their children for survival in their old age. This could be one of the economic reasons for polygyny.

It must be mentioned that some of these reasons might sound genuine culturally but they cannot be used as excuses to contravene the original plan of God for marriage, which is monogamy. By all standards, almost all reasons are not valid or relevant to the situation of African countries today amidst famine, disease, poverty, HIV/AIDS, etc. Next, we need to examine what the Bible says about polygyny; are there cases of polygyny in the Bible?

Polygyny in the Bible

First, there are cases of polygyny in the Bible. Almost all the authors consulted in this study agree that these cases follow as a manifestation of the fallen nature of humanity rather than the ideal plan of God for marriage (see Dwight 1836; Parrinder 1958; Plumber 1958; Trobisch 1971; Cairncross 1974; Karibwije 1984; Embry 1987 and TAG 1994). The Old Testament presents a number of cases of polygynous marriages, notably the cases of Abraham, Jacob, David and Solomon (Hastings 1973, 74).

Second, polygyny was not God's initial and perfect plan for marriage. God meant marriage to be a union between one man and one woman (Gen. 2:24). There was nothing

as foreign to the institution of marriage as practices like polygamy, homosexuality, lesbianism, etc. These came as a result of human depravity. Human beings turned God's intention upside down. These are the evidences of human degeneracy resulting from immorality and abandonment of God's order (see Gen. 19:4-5; Lev. 18:22; Rom. 1:26-27).

The first man to practice polygyny in the Bible was Lamech (Gen. 4:19, 23). From the first polygynous family, it became apparent that God tolerated the practice in the period of the Old Testament. Great patriarchs like Abraham and Jacob, and great kings like David and Solomon promoted this practice in the Bible without any serious condemnation. Hillman writes, "Although God permitted polygamy in former times, a careful reading of the Old Testament reveals a gradual evolution away from this ancient Jewish custom toward monogamy" (1975, 140). The history of God's people (Israel) in the post-exilic period shows a movement toward monogamy. Some scholars agree that there is no single text of the Bible in which polygyny is expressly forbidden and monogamy universally decreed (Hastings 1973; Hillman 1975). But it must be noted that God only tolerated the practice not as the "ideal" but as a result of the sinfulness of man. The fact that there is no single passage of the Bible as a direct prohibition against polygamy does not mean God sanctions the practice. There are an impressive number of texts that show a positive inclination towards monogamy (Gen. 18-25; Deut. 17:16-17).

Third, God often uses the imagery of monogamy in describing the covenant relationship between Yahweh and his people (cf. Isa. 50:1, 54:6-7, 62:4-5; Jer. 2:2; Ezek. 16). Thus, by accumulating enough of the right sort of texts and by relating them to each other, it becomes clear that God does not sanction polygamy as the ideal marriage; rather he demonstrates his toleration of it as implied in most texts in the Bible on marriage.

In the New Testament, there seems to be complete silence on the subject of polygyny. This does not mean that Jesus or Paul was against marriage. Even though Jesus did not marry, he has high regard for the institution of marriage as depicted in his first recorded miracle at Cana in Galilee (John 2:1-10) and his teaching against divorce (Matt 19:1-12). Only in two passages did Jesus Christ speak indirectly about the two forms of polygamy: Polyandry and polygyny (Matt. 5:27-32; Mark 10:2-12). None of these passages focus on polygyny, rather the main argument of Jesus is the truth of the

indissolubility of marriage. Jesus categorically condemned marriage following divorce (Owusu 2000, 67). As Hasting opines, “It is equally possible that his condemnation of divorce should be held to include the breaking of a second, polygamous union” (Hastings 1973, 7).

The Apostle Paul did not speak directly to the subject. He, however, makes statements that imply the rejection of polygyny in some of his teachings and directives to the churches (See Rom. 7:2-3). But in 1 Corinthians 7:17-24, Paul’s argument could be used to support the admittance of a pre-convert [or “former”] polygynist into the church. In Ephesians 5:22-23, Paul’s discussion did not deal with the issue of polygyny but with marital relationship in the home. As a matter of fact, Jesus Christ, when confronting the Pharisees, refers to the original intention of God as clearly stated in Genesis 2:18-25. Yet, there is no clear proof that either Jesus or the apostles categorized polygyny as sinful, as he clearly does in the case of homosexuality or divorce.

The African Church’s Position on Polygyny

The African church has an enormous role to play when it comes to the issue of polygyny and the biblical response to it. There are different approaches to this issue among the diverse denominations in Africa today. Many churches see polygamy as nearly the worst sin that can be committed. Hence, a pre-convert polygynist cannot take Holy Communion unless he puts away the other wives and remains with the first one. This is what some churches do as a principle and there are enormous psychological effects of this “restitution” on the woman, the children, and the society at large. These positions have been influenced largely by the principles laid down by the early missionaries (Karibwije 1984). Whatever the church’s pastoral judgment is on polygyny, there is need to examine the scriptural basis for such position!

Looking at the history of how this powerful debate has hit the church, it is unfortunate that early missionaries repudiated it so strongly; for example, polygynists were not baptized in the Anglican Church. In some cases, only the wives, who were regarded as the “involuntary victims of the custom,” were baptized. This has in fact proved to be the line which the Anglican Communion has officially taken ever since. The Anglican Church, for more than one hundred years, has vehemently opposed the baptism of polygynists. Some Pentecostal churches such as The Gospel Faith Mission

International, The Deeper Life Bible Church, and The Redeemed Christian Church of God have also followed the footsteps of the mainline churches in Nigeria. In most cases “polygamy was taken as one of the gross evils of heathen society which, like habitual murder or slavery, must at all cost be ended” (Hastings 1973, 15).

Owusu argues that it is unscriptural for anyone to categorize polygynists as equally sinful with homosexuals, adulterers, divorcees (Owusu 2000, 70). He further argues that there are several convincing evidences in the Old and New Testaments against divorce and homosexual practices. In contrast, there is not enough evidence to group polygyny as identical to homosexuality. Dwight (1836) concurs that the Bible seems to have condoned the practice, especially in the Jewish culture. Over the years, writers have taken different theological positions over this issue. A closer look at some of these positions shows that there are four basic positions any Christian church could take on this issue of polygynous marriages in Africa:

1. It is a sin, comparable with adultery.
2. It is an inferior form of marriage, not sinful where it is the custom, but always unacceptable for Christians.
3. It is a form of marriage less satisfactory than monogamy and one which cannot do justice to the full spirit of Christian marriage, but in certain circumstances, individual Christians can still put up with it, as they put up with slavery, dictatorial government, and much else.
4. Polygamy is one form of marriage, monogamy another. Each has its advantages and disadvantages; they are appropriate to different types of society. It is not the task of the church to make any absolute judgment between them (Hastings 1973, 73).

When the early missionaries came, they were very antagonistic to polygamy--as if it was one of the worst sins (position (1) above) (Trobish 1971, 19-20). They did not baptize polygamists, and declined to accept them as full members. It is the position of this author that this approach is not scriptural even though the majority of denominations in Africa follow this strong approach against the baptism of polygynists. Deeper Life Bible Church of Nigeria is an example (Isaacson 1990, 214).

In contrast, the position argued here is that pre-converted polygynists who have repented of their sin and accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior should be welcome as bona-fide members of the body of Jesus Christ. They are entitled to all that any church member is entitled to, such as baptism, and Holy Communion.

Nevertheless, there are a few denominations that have already broken their ties with the early missionaries on the way polygyny should be handled in Africa. For example, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania argued that:

The Church is right in discouraging polygamy among its members. But they are wrong in making monogamy into one of the conditions for baptism and Church membership...my plea with the Church and mission therefore, is that the pre-converted polygamists should be baptized together with their wives and children without being forced to divorce their wives. They should also be accepted into full membership. (Hastings 1973, 24)

It is the opinion of this author that every Bible-believing church on the continent of Africa should take the above stand. The reasons for this position will be explored further in the following sections of this paper.

Objections to the Traditional View of Polygyny

As it has been mentioned earlier in this paper, polygyny, though not the ideal form of marriage, was not tagged sinful by either God in the Old Testament or by Jesus in the New Testament. Polygyny is not like divorce, homosexuality, and lesbianism, which are categorically and explicitly condemned by the Bible.

Polygyny should not be considered as a form of adultery. Jesus' teaching on adultery in the Gospels is clear (Matt. 5:31-32; 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18). Specifically in the context of Mark 10: 2-12, he was not addressing the issue of polygyny; rather, he was referring to the Genesis account on the original plan of God for marriage, which discourages divorce and adultery. "What is reprehensible in the sight of Jesus is the attitude or the intention of a husband who would divorce his wife and marry another" (Hillman 1975, 161). This is quite different from a man who has legally married two or three wives before his conversion and remained committed to the marriage vow.

Salvation is the free gift of God given to any kind of sinner. It is God who forgives. What right do we have to bar someone who has genuinely repented of their sin and has been forgiven from being baptized? Are we then saying a genuinely converted polygynist will not go to heaven (if he dies without sending away his second wife)?

If God could work through the culture of his chosen people, Israel, without rejecting them, why can't Christianity do the same for those who were already polygynists before accepting Christ? Polygyny was not classified as a sin in the Jewish

culture. It was not punishable. God punished them only when they disobeyed his law, which did not proscribe or forbid polygyny (Bethelezi 1969).

Today, we have many priests and pastors who were born into polygynous families. Most of them are doing quite well in the ministry. Yet if children born into a polygamous family are not qualified to be baptized, then by the same logic, these pastors born by polygamists are not qualified to become pastors. They are not worthy of becoming an “holy vessel” that God can use!

Who actually is sinful, the monogamous churchgoer who has a mistress or virtually lives with his secretary and can receive Holy Communion, or the person who is faithfully married to his two or three wives? (But he is barred from receiving communion and his converted children cannot be baptized.) Karibwije (1984) asserts that the legalistic position of the African church had led to high rate of marital unfaithfulness and hypocrisy where men would project one wife in public but have many secret wives or concubines outside the home. This is the real situation in most African churches today. This is quite lamentable!

The passage which we often refer to in the gospel on this issue (Matt. 19:6, 8-9) specifically addressed divorce and the indissolubility of marriage--not polygyny. The only passage that seems to restrict a polygynist on certain tasks in the church is 1 Timothy 3:1-7. In this passage, Paul outlines the qualifications of church officers which include monogamy. However, several Bible scholars and some early church fathers (e.g. Tertullian) believe that a closer look at the text from the Greek translation shows that the phrase translated “husband of one wife” does not mean being married to one woman at a time; rather, it means being married to one man or woman for life (see St Augustine 1958; Schaff et al. 1956; Plumber 1958; Orchard 1953; and Gealy 1980). To many people including the church leaders who pass severe judgments on polygynists, a strict application of this passage could lead to almost an un-attainable standard! This passage therefore cannot be used to restrict a polygynist from taking a leadership position in the church. Even if we bluntly refuse this analysis, that does not disqualify them from being accepted as full members who can take part in any other activities of the church. It is ironic that most churches accept the tithes and offerings of the polygynists yet their salvation is being doubted. Is this not a double standard?

The idea of sending the other wives away has and will always bring confusion to the society, the woman, and the children of the polygynous family. In the first place, it will be difficult for the children to accept the “*Christ who has mandated the church*” to send their mother out of their legal father’s home. This will likely harden their hearts to the Gospel and God’s love.

The wives that are sent out face the temptation of becoming prostitutes who need to fend for themselves to meet their social, psychological and physiological needs. This has increased the population of single parents and prostitutes in African society today. The children may become wanderers and possibly street kids as they are not cared for adequately by their parents who have been separated because they want to please the church. The author has witnessed a case of a boy in Nigeria who planned to murder his father for divorcing his mother in order to meet the church’s standard for taking the Holy Communion.

There is no doubt that in most cases, the wives that have been put away will become adulterers, if they re-marry. In many cases, they don’t get permanent husbands; they rather engage in adultery. This seems to echo what Jesus said about adultery (Matt. 19:6, 8-9).

Polygyny Reconsidered

There are a few comments, which can be made both from biblical and sociological perspectives concerning the causes of polygyny.

From the biblical point of view, polygyny could be resolved if Africans would change their perception of eternity. Eternity can only be assured by believing in Jesus Christ. Children should not be seen as means of being remembered after death. Eternity goes beyond the few years we spend in this world.

Since the unemployment rate is rising in Africa today, the unemployed should be employed to work on the farm instead of marrying more wives and bearing more children for farm work. There are so many alternatives to the use of family labor in farming today. It is even more cost-effective to employ casual laborers than to acquire more wives for the purpose of producing more children for farm work.

In this age of inflation, having too many wives and children does not suggest increased wealth; rather, it is a breeding ground for poverty. Furthermore, accumulating

many wives for the sake of having a male child or children is unwise. There are many male children who are not well cared for today. A majority of them are the street kids in our large African cities. Female children are God's blessings too, and we need to appreciate them.

Barrenness as a problem can be solved through prayer (Hannah and Sarah prayed and God answered) and through medical advice. Children are God's additional blessings in marriage. Children can be adopted from the numerous orphanage homes all over the continent. Additionally, there is no prestige in the accumulation of wives and mass reproduction of children in our contemporary Africa where poverty is eating up the people. The popular cry today is birth control because people are not able to get their three meals per day.

The idea of breeding children for the purpose of getting more dowries during a wedding is not practicable today. It is not only outdated; it is unrealistic. Many girls do not marry in the traditional way. Many of them conceive prematurely before they complete secondary school education because they have been enticed with money.

In summary, polygyny is no longer relevant physically, economically, socially and spiritually to the present African context. The points raised above have serious implications for the church's educational task. There is need for re-conscientization of the people through transformative biblical and holistic education. Therefore the church has got an ample chance to teach her members about the negative impact polygyny has had on our society today.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Having evaluated briefly polygyny from a biblical perspective, as well as the negative way churches respond to the problem and its effects, it is pertinent to make some concluding comments and recommendations for the African church.

The main thesis of this paper is that though polygyny is not the ideal form of marriage as God intended (just like any other results of human depravity which we have to put up with), the Christian church should learn to tolerate converted polygynists bearing in mind the need to bridge the gap between biblical revelation and human context. They (husband, wives and children) should be baptized and allowed into the

church as full-fledged members. In the light of this position, the church could do the following:

1. Teach the members that God's original intention was one man with one wife (monogamy). But in the time of ignorance, God overlooked those who acquired many wives for one reason or the other. Converted members must not go into adultery, which, if it happens, will not be tolerated by the church. Post-conversion wife inheritance that results in polygyny should be condemned and disallowed by the church.
2. While pre-converted polygynists are not allowed to take a higher leadership position by most churches based on the controversial passage of 1 Timothy 3:1-3, caution needs to be taken not to stretch this into a universal rule. If we assume the injunction in the passage is against such a move, it should be restricted only to higher leadership positions such as the office of Bishop or General Overseer. They should, however, not be barred from taking part in any other church ministries as members of the universal body of Christ.
3. The children and wives must not be hindered from taking part in any of the church ministries. After all, many pastors/priests today come from pagan families whose parents may not have repented from their pagan beliefs. Forbidding the wives from taking active roles in the church is not an act of love; it is a rejection of the fact they are fellow image bearer like other people.
4. According to Hastings, "To end (or dissolve) a polygamous marriage in the name of Christ, who said nothing explicitly to condemn it at the expense of effecting a divorce which Christ explicitly forbade, is to pay too high a price to achieve a theoretical conformity with one part of the Christian marriage pattern" (Hastings 1973,77). Undoubtedly, polygamy is not comparable with adultery. Again: It is not adultery.
5. The polygynists should be taught the truth about God's original intention for marriage and then the church should help them find fulfillment in their marriage. They should not be socially ostracized in the church community.

In conclusion, the African church should take precaution in handling this issue. If the Bible is our paradigm, we need to examine our stand scripturally and consider the effects on the precious souls for whom Jesus died. We need to consider the effects of our decision on the society where the believers are the light and salt, and on the cultural setting of the people. In an effort at finding solution to an existing problem, care should be taken so that more complex problems are not created in the process.

If a middle-aged woman and four children are sent out, whose wife and children shall they be? How will the children perceive Christ's love, the church, and even their "cruel father"? These are questions we must answer first before taking such a drastic step.

Since the African culture is closer to the Bible's culture (ancient Near Eastern Jewish culture) than Western culture, we should watch the invasion of Western culture in the name of Christianity. Already there are so many street kids who are homeless because of other social vices that continue to befall the African society. Sending the wives away is another breeding ground for more street kids and an increase in the number of single parents. If our God (the God of the Holy Bible) is a God of grace, polygyny should be handled with grace and not law.

Reference List

- Augustine. 1958. *On Christian doctrine*. Translated by D.W. Robertson, Jr. New York: Liberal Arts Press.
- Bethelezi, Mana. 1969. "Polygamy in the light of the New Testament." *Africa Theological Journal* 2:12-34.
- Cairncross, John. 1974. *After polygamy was made a sin: The social history of Christian polygamy*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Currens, Harvey. 1950. *Polygamy in the church in native Africa*. Chicago: Lutheran Theological Seminary.
- Dwight, S.E. 1836. *The Hebrew wife or the law of marriage*. New York: Leavitt, Lord and Company.
- Embry, Jessie L. 1987. *Mormon polygamous families*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.
- Eliade, Stanley. 1997. *Divorce and remarriage in the Church*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan.
- Gealy, Fred. 1980. Introduction and exegesis of the first second epistles to Timothy and the Epistle to Titus. In *The interpreter's Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.
- Hastings, Adrian. 1973. *Christian marriage in Africa*. London: SPCK
- Hillman, Eugene. 1975. *Polygamy reconsidered: African plural marriage and the Christian Church*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books.
- Hitches, Robert J. 1987. *Multiple marriage: A study of polygamy in the light of the Bible*. Maryland: Doulas Publishers.
- Isaacson, Alan. 1990. *Deeper Life: The extraordinary growth of the Deeper Life Bible Church*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

- Karibwije, James E. 1984. Polygamy and the church in Nigeria: A study of various Christian positions. M. A. thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.
- Kore, Danfulani. 1995. *Culture and the Christian home*. Jos: ACTS.
- Owusu, Sam. 2000. Marriage and polygamy: A biblical and theological analysis against the background of the Akan Christian Church of Ghana. Ph.D. diss., Trinity International University.
- Orchard, Bernard, ed. 1953. *A Catholic commentary on the Holy Scriptures*. London: Thomas Nelson and Sons.
- Parrinder, E.G. 1958. *The Bible and polygamy*. London: S.P.C.K.
- Plummer, Alfred 1958. The Pastoral Epistles. *The Expositor's Bible*. New York: A.C. Armstrong and Son.
- Schaff, P. et al. 1956. *A selected library of Nicene and post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian church*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- T.A.G. 1994. *A biblical approach to marriage and family in Africa*. Nairobi: African Inland Press.
- Trobisch, Walter. 1971. *My wife made me a polygamist*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.
- Wech, Douglas E. 1977. *Biblical perspective on polygamy*. London: University Microfilms.

About the Author



Emmanuel Ogunyemi, an ordained clergy, is currently pursuing a Ph.D. degree at Trinity International University in Deerfield. He has served as Dean and Academic Vice President at West Africa Theological Seminary, the largest non denominational theological seminary in Nigeria, and as Senior Pastor/District Overseer for over Fifteen years now. He is currently working on mobilizing the Nigerian church on the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa.

Learning to Be: A Brazilian Case Study in Social Injustice

By Marcus O. Throup

Throup, Marcus O. 2006. Learning to Be: A Brazilian Case Study in Social Injustice. *Common Ground Journal* v3 n2 (Spring): 33-45. ISSN: 15479129. URL: www.commongroundjournal.org.

Introduction

The Living Waters Mission, Olinda, Brazil, came into existence in October 1993 when Simea Meldrum, a young Anglican minister, felt God calling her to the city's rubbish dump. Simea took a team to the dump and ministered God's Word to 50 families who were living as scavengers upon it. Amazingly, Simea was approached by a drunkard who gave her a metal ring saying, "This ring is a sign of the covenant between you, God, and this place." Simea was moved to tears as God's words to Moses came to mind: "Take off your sandals for the ground on which you are standing is holy." There in the filth of the dump, Simea removed her sandals and prayed to Almighty God.

Since then, the Lord has worked many miracles and today the Living Waters Church has over 200 members. Through Simea and the church's courageous campaigning, human rights have been secured for those who governing authorities had previously left for dead. I was privileged to work at the Living Waters Church for almost 2 years, and the following is a reflection on some of the pioneering work in education which Living Waters mission workers set up.

An Educational Initiative in the Fourth World

In February 2002 a representative from the Living Waters Mission attended the World Social Forum (Porto Alegre, South Brazil) and received a report from the French NGO "ATD", entitled *Quart Monde* (Fourth World). The report explains that traditional ways of discussing the socio-economic structure of the world are now dated; that today, if we are to talk about the "third world" at all, we must also mention the "fourth world". The "fourth world" are the poorest of the poor, those excluded even from the so called "third world", persons whom the French NGO say are often difficult to locate because

they hide themselves away, ashamed of their existence and afraid of the society from which they feel completely excluded.

The report showed that not only is the population of the fourth world difficult to locate on account of its timidity, but that it is also difficult to reach logistically. We can think of this geographically, whereby a main road leads to a “B” road, the “B” road to a small lane, the lane to a track, the track to a lesser track and so on, until what remains is the slightest of paths leading to a place which by vehicle will be largely if not completely inaccessible. The leaders of the fourth world community will be quickly identified, for they are those who suspiciously question the visitor or newcomer. There are many however, who remain silent and turn away from the gaze of the stranger, embarrassed; in their homes, one might find the person who never comes out of a back room in the shack.

After studying the report, Mission educator Allan Dick and his wife Delfina were struck by its relevance to the situation of those living just behind the dump of Olinda on Cuz Cuz mound. This community, literally hidden away by the voluminous mountain of refuse, are in fact an archetypal fourth world community, albeit in an urban setting. Unless one were informed, it would be hard to imagine that a community exists on the mound behind the dump. There is a mud track leading up to it, though only with great difficulty can the community be accessed by vehicle.

The community that lives on the mound comprises mostly of rural immigrants who arrived from the famine and draught stricken interior of the Pernambuco state, hoping for a better life. The residents are almost exclusively *catadores* (that is scavengers who hunt for recyclable materials to sell on to large firms), and some are so poor that food wastes found on the dump are the only means of feeding starving and malnourished children. Their “housing” consists largely of wooden and even cardboard shacks, sometimes with plastic sheeting as a makeshift roof. Members of the community live under the constant threat of mudslides, which have destroyed homes and claimed lives. Needless to say, the area has no policing and is extremely dangerous, especially at night. Many of the children are at risk, not only of hunger, malnutrition and disease, but also of domestic violence, and in the past we heard of several attempts of child rape by adult members of the community.

There was another potential danger that Allan mentioned, but of which the community was possibly unaware – the chance that one day governmental authorities

might send in bulldozers to destroy the “village”. As the community’s numerous shacks sprang up on unused government land without prior building permission, it seemed theoretically possible for the authorities to bulldoze the settlement, and in the past there were rumours that such action might take place.¹

The mound community is then, according to the terms we have discussed above, a genuine 4th World community, hidden away in a geographically inaccessible place, purposefully distant from the eyes of those in mainstream society. When I visited it for the first time, I managed, with immense difficulty, to make it in the car--in my eyes a typically small, humble European vehicle. To my amazement, (given that we were in the middle of a huge city with traffic laden roads), a crowd of young children flocked around my car, touching it and gazing upon it in wonder as if it were a spacecraft from another planet! That analogy is perhaps appropriate, for, as I perceived that some of these children had never left the “village” and consequently had never set eyes upon a car, I realised, tragically, that I had entered a different world altogether.

It was this same multitude of fascinated little ones who really captured the heart of Mennonite volunteer Allan Dick. In every way imaginable these were needy children, the majority entirely unschooled. Allan began to contemplate a possibility which for most would be unimaginable, never mind feasible: the establishment of a school in the settlement to run concurrently with mainstream education.

Through a workshop visit to a crèche (day care centre) in nearby town Janga, Allan inspired some of the crèche’s staff to provide some after school classes for children with learning difficulties. Thus came into being “Project Child”, a project which received 40 of the “worst” pupils from a local school. Within 4 months the Janga project had 40 readers and writers, and continues in the same vein. If such a project were possible in Janga, thought Allan, there was no reason why it shouldn’t be attempted on the mound. In any case, as Allan puts it in his manual for basic education *You Can Teach*, “Almost all children want to learn because it is natural for them. Children are not naturally “lazy”: if you give them something interesting to do, they will do it.”²

¹ Today, with the progressive and more sympathetic new administration this is no longer a possibility. Thankfully there are plans to provide better housing for this community.

² Allan Dick, *You Can Teach*. (Unpublished manual). As far as I know the excellent manual is as yet unpublished.

This proved to be true on the mound. Allan managed to secure a partnership with a secular educational authority (FUNESO), who had adopted a government run teaching programme called Restoring the Pleasure of Learning,³ whereby student teachers train with needy children. In 2002, a Latin Link short term mission team put up the main school building adjoined to the home of a *catador* who is also a member of the Living Waters church and currently the leader of the Recyclers Co-operative Association of Olinda (ARO).

With the aid of the student teachers and young volunteers from the Living Waters church, the school functioned extremely effectively, and many children acquired basic numeric and literacy skills in a friendly environment, where the pleasure of learning was actively rediscovered. Allan's key approach was to move from a "curriculum-centered education" to a "child-centered education." As his teaching manual explains:

A basic distinction can be made between centring education on the curriculum (the programme) or the child. Those promoting the first approach point out that a child needs to acquire some basic abilities such as reading and writing, in order to function as a productive member of society, and that the acquisition of these abilities needs to be measured. Every child should demonstrate that he or she has acquired the abilities seen as appropriate for his or her age, in order to go on to the next level of learning. Hence we have grade systems, and, often, written examinations and other tools.

On the other hand, those who are for a child-centred approach would say that each child is unique and has unique needs. Each child has areas of strength and areas of weakness and will not learn at the same rate in all subjects. The programme should therefore be designed to allow each child to advance at his or her own pace in each subject. A child may well be in second grade in math, for example, but in fourth grade in writing... The teacher must adapt his or her approach and evaluation to the individual child.⁴

This concern to meet the child where he or she is and to help him or her to move forward is emblematic of the larger concern and work of the Mission itself where

³ The fact that FUNESO is a secular organisation does not in any way compromise the work of the Living Waters Mission on the mound. For one thing, Allan intended the school to provide basic numeric and literacy skills learning, rather than religious education, the latter already being offered on a weekly basis by YWAM volunteers, working in conjunction with one of our mission workers. Moreover, the Living Waters Mission boldly forms partnerships with secular organisations which have the expertise and resources to strengthen and support a particular initiative. Frequently, partners from secular society have been struck by the love and care with which the Living Waters Mission treats the community in Jardim Brasil V, so that the mission has testified to Christ through these partnerships.

⁴ Dick, *You Can Teach*.

community transformation is understood to result from the transformation of individual lives. Real transformation occurs only where there is real love, and it has been the priority of mission workers to show the very real love of Jesus to those living in brokenness.

The partnership between the Mission and the mound community in this endeavor did more than benefit the children. In an unprecedented way the work of Allan and others opened the way for a greater integration of the community in church life and vice versa. One occasion which stands out to my mind is the Good Friday service held in the recycling area of the ARO in 2003 when to the delight of those present, Allan's pupils participated in a theatrical re-enactment of Christ's passion, costumes and all! Before the founding of the community school this would have been unthinkable.

All this goes to show how the Living Waters' Mission has been blessed with volunteers able to recognize opportunities and bold enough to latch on to them. The work of Simea, volunteers Rose, Aaron and Keturah Gouldthorpe and especially Allan Dick, has brought more than learning to the community – it has brought real joy and true hope.

Theological Reflections: Learning to Be

In many respects, the achievements of Allan Dick and other mission workers speak for themselves, however, since we ourselves have found it useful to reflect theologically upon the Mission's work in education, it seems appropriate to share these reflections in the wider setting, though I am aware that the following are rather sketchy observations, more likely to raise issues and questions than to resolve them.

The wider aim of this reflection is simply to call for the grounding of educational philosophy and initiatives in the gospel, rather than in anything else. That is, against the background of Liberation Theology (still fairly prevalent in Latin America), where Marxist theory can exercise too great a control, meaning that educational theories have sometimes taken on a thoroughly atheistic line. An evangelical theology will seek instead to ground educational philosophy in the Christian gospel itself, i.e. in the belief that humans find their true being and purpose in God, and that it is to him we must look in

order to discover who we are and how we should live, in the firm hope that God who has created all, also recycles lives.⁵

In this connection it has proved useful to compare the educational ethos of the Living Waters Mission with that of the MST (in English, Movement of the Landless Rural Workers, an initiative founded in 1984 by rural workers associated with the Roman Catholic Church. Today the movement is supported not merely by Roman Catholics but by Protestant churches (including Anglican), by humanistic organizations, and by groups and individuals of no religious persuasion. It continues to campaign for a just agrarian reform in the hope that Brazil's immense rural lands will be released from the control of the feudal elite, into the hands of the landless masses.

The MST labours to make both the lands and the masses socially productive, with a view to "help humanize people, to develop human beings with dignity, identity, and a project for the future."⁶

In education matters the MST makes for an excellent conversation partner with the Living Waters Mission, since it too works closely with the dispossessed and those who struggle with economic oppression and social exclusion. Like the Living Waters Mission, the MST has had to confront severe motivation difficulties and the real practical challenges presented by individuals and entire communities suffering from low self-image problems.

In *Movement of the Landless Rural Workers (MST): Pedagogical Lessons*, Roseli Caldart explains that "the MST works all the time at the limit between humanization and dehumanisation; its' struggle is that of life or death for thousands of people, who make their participation in the Movement a tool for re-learning to be human."⁷

Again, expanding on this theme, she affirms that, "when we discuss practices of humanizing the field-workers as a product of education, we are in fact recovering an

⁵ For those acquainted with Liberation Theology the work of the Living Waters Mission will no doubt be reminiscent of it. It must be differentiated from Liberation Theology however, since it is a truly evangelical and charismatic set up, reliant only upon the power of the gospel and not on any political ideology or system.

⁶ Roseli S. Caldart, *The Movement of the Landless Rural Workers(MST): Pedagogical Lesson* (Landless Voices Web site, Project Director & Academic Editor Else P R Vieira), <http://www.landlessvoices.org/vieira/archive-05.phtml?rd=MOVEMENT610&ng=e&sc=3&th=42&se=0>. site created January 2003.

⁷ Caldart, *Movement of Landless Rural Workers*.

essential link to the work in education: to educate is to humanize, to cultivate learning to be a human being.’⁸

The work of the MST has, according to the same author, adopted a three-pronged approach:

First, the recovery of the dignity of thousands of families...second, the building of a collective identity, one which goes beyond each person, family and settlement...in a movement that is related to the re-encounter of humanity with itself. The third dimension is building the educational project of different generations of the Sem Terra family, one that combines schooling with broader concerns of human development and the training of militants.

Much of what Caldart says of the MST’s educational projects could also be said of the efforts of the Living Waters Mission, summed up in Allan’s initiatives. In the rubbish dump environment, the Living Water Mission stands directly on that precarious line between humanization and dehumanization, so that education has in the first place come to represent “learning to be”.

The recovery of dignity at the family level has played an important role in the Mission since the first visits of the Reverend Simea Meldrum over ten years ago, and continues a high priority within the Mission and the church context, though real advances are hard earned.⁹ The building of a collective identity was one of Allan’s principal objectives, and is also an obvious concern of the ARO. Thanks in part to the work of the Living Waters Mission, and, more specifically, through the recent efforts of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) development workers Delfina Dick and Aaron Gouldthorpe, some progress has been made.¹⁰

Although in education matters there is clearly much common ground between the MST and the Living Waters Mission, the parallel has its limitations. Where the educational philosophy of the MST is at its strongest, with the idea of education as humanization, or the cultivation of being, it is in fact likely to part company with the

⁸ Caldart, *Movement of Landless Rural Workers*.

⁹ More recently the “Oikos” (cell group) structure attends to family discipleship and support, while encouraging social interaction and mercy ministries such as the soup and gospel outreach to Olinda’s homeless.

¹⁰ Although I believe that Aaron would want to emphasise that he has experienced tremendous hardships in this task when the leaders of the ARO have been seduced by power and money, and that it is very much an ongoing, up hill struggle.

specifically Christian (and evangelical) thinking which under girds the educational programmes of the Living Waters Mission.

Enlarging on her conclusion that people are educated by learning to be, Caldart states the following:

This returns us to the notion that this is an essential human task of learning to look in the mirror of what we are and want to be, to take on personal and collective identities, to be proud of them, at the same time we are challenged with the movement of our permanent self-construction. To educate is to help build and strengthen identities, to draw faces, to form subjects.¹¹

Here the phrase that is potentially doubly problematic for the Living Waters Mission is “the movement of our permanent self-construction”. This idea as presented by Caldart seems to say too little in that there is no mention of the possibility of God’s action in the building up of human identities. God is either omitted or excluded from the movement of human development, and from projects concerned with the “construction” of personhood.

On the other hand, again, from the specifically evangelical perspective of the Living Waters Mission, the phrase is found to say too much, or rather to want to claim too much, for the idea of “our permanent self-construction”. Although perhaps at one level attractive, it is in fact not only a rather idealistic sounding principle, but also (as it stands) an ambitious humanistic (and therefore godless), sounding one.¹²

Caldart’s talk of “action” and “interaction between people,” moulding “the way to becoming human” in itself is perfectly acceptable to the Living Waters Mission. But where there is no talk whatsoever of God’s action, the Living Waters Mission is forced to conclude that the educational philosophy of the MST as presented above misses the most important dimension of all, and therefore risks moulding “the way to becoming human” in purely humanistic terms, which would be unacceptable for any Christian who by definition is interested in the theological – God aspect.

At this point the Living Waters Mission stands up in faith over against humanistic philosophies of education. For the educators of the Living Waters Mission, “religion” is

¹¹ Caldart, *Movement of Landless Rural Workers*.

¹² E. Jungel has explained that understood biblically, the notion of self-realization, manifest in such an unreserved sense today, is in fact “the quintessence of sin,” in E. Jungel, *Theological Essays II* ed. J. Webster (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 235.

not some optional extra; rather where the issue is humanization or recovery of personhood, Christ must take his rightful place at the very centre of discussions about the restoration of being, and therefore, as the foundation of discussion about education.¹³

Daniel Hardy, writing on the “Missionary Being of the Church” observes that traditionally, Anglicanism has adopted the following approach: “To know how to be human we must take our historical past – the history of Christ as the way God created us to be – and ask of all human institutions what end they serve.”¹⁴

The principle which concerns us and also Daniel Hardy—Christ at the centre of knowing how to be human—is biblical. The apostle Paul, in the Epistle to the Romans explains how by way of his incarnation and saving action Jesus Christ is reckoned before God as a second Adam, restoring through obedience to the will of the Father what through Adam’s disobedience had been lost; none other than “life” itself (Rom. 5:18), the perfection of Creator-creature communion. Thus, the Incarnation and saving action of Christ in history reveals in equal light, both humanity’s frailty and incompleteness, and its’ possible deliverance and restoration (in him).

For the Living Waters’ Mission therefore, in distinction from non-religious or humanistic philosophies, the recovery of personhood is not achieved by acquiring some property, ability, or even identity; rather it happens where and when the divine enters and transforms human life. The realization of personhood on this view therefore, has nothing to do with the Marxist and Liberation Theology notion of “conscientização” where this concept signifies the accruing of knowledge. For if we are to “become human” merely on account of our knowledge, or learning, we shall have to conclude that this will prove impossible, since we know so little and are forever learning.¹⁵ As Jüngel has commented, reflecting on Luther, it is faith in Christ that lifts human persons out of the uncertainty of

¹³ This does not mean that all education will be “Religious Education”. It means rather, that the foundation of all educational work will be Christ, that he and his love inspire us to work in “learning to be,” that he is our reference point in all such work.

¹⁴ Daniel Hardy, *Finding the Church* (London: SCM, 2001), 33.

¹⁵ At the risk of pronouncing something akin to blasphemy in the Brazilian academic environment in which I work, it must be said that Paulo Frère was consequently wide of the mark in his conclusion that as human beings we are “*unfinished*,” implying that through “*conscientização*” we might work towards completion. On the Christian view, ontologically speaking we might infer that we have become “*undone*,” and that as we find ourselves in the process of sanctification we are “*unfinished*.” But, and this is what is crucial, it is only through faith in Christ that we shall be truly, gradually, and ultimately (in the life to come) reconstituted.

their own being as determined merely by their own work, into the clarity of true being with God.¹⁶

When the specifically Christian categories under discussion here are taken on board an authentic “humanization” process and the start of a true restoration of being can take place. For where the whole person is able to recognise his or her status as created in the image of God and redeemed through Christ, there is a sense of self-worth, and a recovery of self-esteem, however gradual. In this case, to re-work Caldart’s language, “the mirror of what we are and want to be” is Christ, for he is the ultimate ground of our being, the “teacher” sent not only to show us how to be human, but in restoring our relationship with God, enabling us to truly *be*.

An Educator and an Educator’s Model: Jesus and the Kingdom of God

In a conversation I had with Allan Dick, he affirmed, “Jesus was an educator”. To my question, “In a community which largely lacks sociological and Christian ethical values how does one go about rebuilding those values?” I confess that I had expected some kind of complicated educational theory for an answer. Allan’s immediate response however, was more simple and profound: “Being an example – being consistent in your example.”

On the same question, Allan further explained, “It’s a teacher thing... you create a micro-society with rules, and systems to enforce those rules, (the primary step) forming and applying rules relating specifically to interpersonal behaviour until these rules become second nature.”

In the second step, classroom rules become values and spill over into other areas of life, until the whole community is reached. Here Allan has as his model Christ himself, who with his disciples created a kind of “micro-society”. Through the process of consistently impressing upon their hearts and minds the “rules” of the Kingdom of God, (the Sermon on the Mount is a clear example of this), these with time became values

¹⁶ Jüngel, *Theological Essays II*, 235.

reaching into every other aspect of life.¹⁷ Through this process it was not merely the disciples who were transformed, but their society, and history itself.

On Allan's view Christ is viewed as a supreme "Teacher", one who through his example allowed others to comprehend how to live, and how to live in relationship with the heavenly Father, Creator and Sustainer of the Universe. Through his being and his example, Christ is the supreme educator in that he (and in the ultimate sense – he alone) is able to help those who are learning to be.

In a wider evangelical setting there is, one senses, much to be gained from what Allan has to say about example. It was Christ after all who taught, "Let your yes be yes, and your no be no." And the New Testament picture of Jesus suggests that consistency and constancy of attitude typify his character. If we are to be true followers of Jesus, and if we are to truly love the poor, then these qualities must also be evident in us and in our mission.

Perhaps, at this level, in the educational sphere and beyond, mission in the lesser-developed world might have one or two pearls of wisdom to impart to those fortunate enough to live in the more developed world. Could our theological seminaries and colleges develop a "theology of constancy"—a kind of "back to basics" ministry—in the place of "flash in the pan" evangelism, which is habitually carried out to appease the conscience of church leaders and members concerned to know that "we're doing our bit for evangelism"?

Such a theology would have as a key idea, "repetition". Reflecting on how his pioneering educational work relates to the New Testament teaching about the Kingdom of God, Allan affirms, "Jesus was an educator, by living and practicing the Kingdom of God he brought it with him. We too are seeking to live and practice it, and to see it come among us."

Practice means repetition, so just as the learner of a musical instrument must repeat certain exercises, so we repeat what we know to be true until it somehow becomes a part of us, evident in us, just as the great musician appears not to be separated from the music he or she plays, but is in some mysterious and wonderful way a part of it, and it a part of him or her.

¹⁷ The essential difference here, explains Allan, is that a rule is something apersonal, whereas a value is something which to some degree, we possess.

This concept of repetition which Allan spoke of, caused the author to recall Daniel Hardy's call for the church to rediscover "spiritual discipline".¹⁸ This is not monastic chanting removed from the sphere of human action and engagement; rather it is the daily putting into practice of our Christian faith, simply and boldly, seeking to be consistent and reaching for constancy in both word and deed, for the sake of the Kingdom. Along these lines the unfashionable and even maligned notion of "Christian duty" might be recuperated and given a new place in theological and missiological discussion.

Moving from the educator to the educator's model, Allan recalls Jesus' likening of the Kingdom of God to a mustard seed, which is at first tiny and insignificant looking, but which grows to great stature and fertility. In this he finds a model for our work of Christian outreach, and by the same token is suspicious of large "synthetic" appearing packages which he feels lack the necessary anchorage of firm and well tried roots.

The mustard seed image is not only a source of great encouragement for our education projects which have all been born of humble origins, but also for the Mission as a whole. There is no doubt in the mind of the mission workers who serve in the Mission, nor in the mind of those Christians who visit it, that God's Kingdom has come into the area in a genuinely humble and simple manner, but has grown up strong and vigorous. Whereas the mustard seed's transformation is natural, it is clear to us that in Olinda it is the supernatural action of God which has broken into a given human (inhumane) situation and transformed it spiritually.

The Living Waters Mission began as the smallest seed of hope, a group of young people bringing food, medicines and Christian love to desperate people. Today, with so many coming to know Jesus' love, that seed is being transformed into a great tree, with branches reaching out over Olinda, Brazil, and steadily throughout the world, as a living and prophetic testimony to the reality of the action of God's Holy Spirit in a dark place.

Allan and Jesus' mustard seed image recalls an original word which the Reverend Simea received from God, the reminder of the Lord's promise to Abraham, that he would be blessed and also a blessing to all nations. We hope that the unmistakable coming of the Kingdom of God in Olinda's dump will prove to be a blessing to other nations, to

¹⁸ Hardy, *Finding the Church*.

those who are tired and discouraged, that they may rest in the shade which this tree provides, assured that God is present and active in the world, even if His presence and activity is more visible in some places than in others.

About the Author



Reverend Marcus O. Throup studied Theology at the University of Oxford at Nottingham. He heads up the Anglican Theological Seminary in Recife, Brazil, and is married to Tamara Dultra.

How Theology Should Be Done

By Edmund Chan

Chan, Edmund. 2006. How Theology Should Be Done. *Common Ground Journal* v3 n2 (Spring): 46-58. ISSN: 15479129. URL: www.commongroundjournal.org.

The Architecture of Theology

Theology is a vast and rigorous discipline. The historicity and complexity of Christian theology as a discipline is captured by J. I. Packer's succinct statement:

For eighteen centuries Christian thinkers have pursued a discipline – variously called first principles (so Origen), wisdom (so Augustine), theology (so Thomas Aquinas), Christian philosophy and doctrine (so Calvin), dogmatics (so Reformational and Catholic teachers since the seventeenth century), and systematic theology (so American protestant teachers since the nineteenth century) – that seeks a full and integrated account of all Christian truth. Books developing this discipline have borne a variety of titles – enchiridion (handbook), ekdosis (exposition), sententiae (opinions), summa (full statements), commentarius (survey), loci communes (topics of shared concerns), institutio (basic instruction), medulla (marrow, as in bones), syntagma (arrangement), and synopsis (overview), among others – and have been put together in many different ways.¹

To simplify such complexity, Alister McGrath pictures an “architecture of theology”, a basic taxonomy that gives a theological synopsis and structure to this demanding discipline. It encompasses a number of related fields, notably that of biblical theology, systematic theology, historical theology, pastoral theology and philosophical theology.²

Defining the Theological Task

The chief task of theology, Millard J. Erickson contends, is the exercise which “strives to give a coherent statement based on the doctrines of the Christian faith...based primarily upon the Scriptures, on the culture and rooted in the issues of life.”³ Important as this task is, we must bear in mind that it is not a restricted one. Everyone has a theology, whether they know it or not, and whether they can articulate it or not. We all

¹ Packer, J. I. *Is Systematic Theology a Mirage? An Introductory Discussion*, p. 17.

² McGrath, Alister E. *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, p. 119-123.

³ Erickson, Millard J. *Christian Theology*, 1986, p.21.

have a particular view of God. In this broad sense, everyone is a theologian with a privileged responsibility of thinking deliberately about God.

Theology belongs to the people. It is therefore not to be confined to the distinguished halls of intellectual institutions, sprouting long incomprehensible theological jargons from dusty large books with incredibly small print. There is obviously a significant place for theological institutions in the life of the church but a wider engagement of theological reflection, outside the hallowed halls of academia, must be encouraged to take place.

At the heart of true theology is the essential and intimate knowledge of the Almighty God. "Theology" therefore is the devout contemplation of God, by the people of God, resulting in a growing understanding of God's essential nature and will, through the revealed Word; so that lives are transformed through the practice and teaching of that which is learnt. Such theology, with a high view of God that is informed by the Scriptures, is not dry but dynamic!

In the light of this grand theological task for the people of God, I want to briefly examine how theology should be done. There are at least six fundamental necessities for doing theology well. This paper briefly examines these six basic building-blocks; namely, (1) the necessity of theological vision, (2) the necessity of theological foundation, (3) the necessity of theological contemplation, (4) the necessity of theological pedagogy, (5) the necessity of theological holism and (6) the necessity of theological humility.

The Necessity of Theological Vision

The church faces a serious theological crisis. The ideological virus of post-modern humanism has been so entrenched in our 'Christian' mindsets that our ability to think deeply about the things of God has been entirely compromised, often without our realizing it. Herein lays the severity of the problem. We are unaware of the compromised extent to which our thinking has been shaped by a secular mindset. We accept as a norm the profound lack of willingness, or ability, to think deeply and consistently about truth. We are lulled into a passive mode of thinking which militates against vital theological reflection. Instead of countering the fallacy of secular philosophy with rich biblical and theological truths, and a deep life congruent with those truths, we live in a generation where a sound theological foundation is ignored; or worse, even snubbed upon.

Unexamined assumptions thus shape the intellectual contours of a lazy generation, tainting the moral and spiritual landscape of the soul. As such, one of the distinct weaknesses of the modern church is that of having zeal without knowledge. We end up with a superficial faith without a deep theological foundation. Indeed, as it has been popularly said, thinking without roots will result in flower but no fruit. In the contemporary revolution of ideas, what engages the Christian mind is no longer “*what’s true*” but rather “*what works*”. Truth has often been sacrificed upon the altar of pragmatism. Of course, pragmatism has its value. But when “*what works*” supersedes “*what’s true*”, we engage life with a severe short-sightedness that will sabotage both a deep soul and a lasting spiritual legacy. For at the root of this critical problem is the emergent crisis of theological *rootlessness* in both our way of thinking and our basic orientation to life.

What the church needs today is theological vision. We must once again return to the cultivation of a right and high view of God. It is the ability to intelligently and meaningfully examine the condition of life and its presuppositions of thought in the light of who God is as revealed in the Scriptures. In Lints’ definition,

To frame a theological vision is simply to attempt to capture in a careful and deliberate manner this ‘way of thinking’ about God, the world, and ourselves. A theological vision seeks to capture the entire counsel of God as revealed in the Scriptures and to communicate it in a conceptuality that is native to the theologian’s own age.⁴

The church needs to think aright about God. This necessity is a critical one. A. W. Tozer, on reflecting on the attributes of God, most rightly concluded:

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us . . . The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion, and man’s spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God.⁵

Life without God is surely a contradiction of terms. Indeed, we need to think aright about God. As the book of Ecclesiastes reminds us, life without God is spiritually barren, philosophically sterile, existentially meaningless and thus ultimately futile. Right theology is certainly positive and life-giving. It affirms humanity’s destiny, addressing at

⁴ Lints, Richard. 1993. *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology*, p. 8-9.

⁵ Tozer, A. W. 1965. *The Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 9.

its most fundamental level the theological agenda of who we are, and how we ought to live, in the light of who God is. The church needs such a theocentricity that is largely missing in our contemporary culture.

The Necessity of Theological Foundation

The very idea of the thinkability of God is both a grand and profound one. How can one possibly conceive God? How can that which is *finitely* finite understand the One who is *infinitely* infinite? The divine God is totally and eternally beyond human comprehension. To comprehend God would be exceedingly more confounding than for a toddler to understand a post-graduate philosophical discussion of Nietzsche's impact upon the critical theories of deconstructionism and post-structuralism. It is like trying to describe three-dimensional realities to someone else if both were to have lived all their lives in a two-dimensional world.

Divine revelation is therefore the key to theology. It is centered upon the very idea of the *self-disclosure* of God. Thus, neither reason nor tradition nor experience is an adequate foundation for thinking aright about God; for unless God reveals himself, our human faculties fail us most miserably. The canonical Scriptures, the agent of divine revelation, are the true and God-appointed foundation for faith and theological reflection. Indeed, the most important world we live in is the unseen world, and the most precious commodity in the unseen world is truth; and this truth is founded upon the Word of God.

Yet, although *sola scriptura* was one of the great resounding battle-cries of the Reformation, some theologians today have misguidedly questioned the high place assigned to revelation.⁶ It is thus fundamental to affirm that revelation is "the primary source of theology, and is also a basic category in theological thinking."⁷ The importance of biblical authority lies in the evangelical premise that "the doctrine of the Bible controls all other doctrines of the Christian faith."⁸ It is most important that we get our theology right and that our theology be informed by the Scriptures, the Word of God.

⁶ Cf. F. Gerald Downing's *Has Christianity a Revelation?*

⁷ Macquarrie, John. *Principles of Christian Theology*, p.6

⁸ Henry, Carl F. H. 1964. *Frontiers in Modern Theology*, p.138.

Submission to the Scriptures is foundational to doing theology well. In reflecting on the epistemological issues which underlie biblical hermeneutics, Pratt reviews both subjectivism, expressed in much liberation and feminist hermeneutics (“bringing the text to our level”), and objectivism, expressed in much of most evangelical hermeneutics (“raising our understanding to the level of the Scriptures itself”); and calls for an *authority-dialogue* model which “keeps the Bible supreme and the reader a servant of the text.”⁹ Because theology is essentially centered upon God’s *self-disclosure*, it is obvious that the basis for doing theology should be the Scriptures.

Even so, important as the Scriptures are to doing theology well, it is not given by God to be an end in itself but for the basic purpose of revealing Jesus Christ (John 5:39; cf. Psa 40:7). One of the most remarkable tenets of Christianity is the fact that we can meaningfully think about God, not just because he has revealed his *truth* to us, but because he has revealed *Himself* to us in Christ. As far as God is concerned, ultimate truth is not merely *Proposition-bound* but *Person-bound*. Christ is the absolute anchor to doing theology well.

Hence, a strong theological foundation, both in the written Word (the Bible) and the living Word (Jesus Christ, the *logos* of God in John’s Prologue) must fundamentally inform and inspire our theologizing.

The Necessity of Theological Contemplation

Our generation of Christians however is largely tutored in theological content, if they are tutored at all, rather than in the art of theological contemplation. The aim of theological contemplation is not merely to help us think more deeply about God, or to think more intelligently about God, or to think more clearly about God. Rather, the aim of theological contemplation is to help us think *more godly* about God. That which informs the mind must also inspire the heart.

We can neither overlook nor dismiss the fact that in our milieu the theological pedagogy continues in much the same old fashion. We are still tutored by the *lectio*, the *quaestio*, and the *disputatio* in dogmatic theology. The doctrine of the historic Christian

⁹ Pratt, Richard J. *He Gave Us Stories*, p. 33.

faith is first set forth, then defended on the basis of Scripture and the tradition of Christian thought, and then we move into theological speculations and inquiries.¹⁰

Theological content aims at imparting information about God, telling us what we should believe about him. Important as theological information might be, it is grossly inadequate to establish a vital spirituality. For at the heart of theology is thinking godly about God. To many, God is regarded as irrelevant except for emergencies only. People approach God as a “quick fix” to their problems. Many in the church have drifted from sound theological moorings, searching frantically for a quick fix to their problems. The contemporary malaise of irreverence towards God stems from the worldview that God is irrelevant to practical living. Theology thus becomes the *Cinderella* of the church, unwooed and unsought. At the heart of such shallowness in theological thinking is the fallacy of the truncated Gospel and the domestication of God in postmodern culture. We must return to strong theological roots for practical Christian discipleship. We have a God who is immensely relevant to every facet of life. Let us engage life theologically.

There are at least three fundamental questions to guide us in such contemplation: (1) what is the essential nature of God and his kingdom? (2) what is the fundamental purpose of God in the light of his essential nature? And (3) what are the unchanging principles by which God deals with humankind, in view of his essential Being and his essential purpose? Such theological contemplation probes the emerging realities of life in view of the sovereignty of God, which must be once again declared over human affairs and destinies.

The Necessity of Theological Pedagogy

Theology must be pedagogical. There is a vital element of teaching the truth, not just of acquiring it. To do so, we must rise above theological ambiguities. Granted that every discipline has its distinctively technical terms, there are ways of communicating the same ideas that would either unfold its meaning or confound it. I have read theological writings that are lucid and compelling (even though technical theological jargon is employed). However, I have also read some that are utterly confounding, not because the ideas are difficult to understand but precisely because the pedagogy of theology is

¹⁰ Vidales, Raul. *Methodical Issues in Liberation Theology*, p.35.

ignored; and the author is in fact a rather poor communicator, untutored in pedagogical principles, who has confused the incoherent profusion of words for the intellectual profundity of ideas. In the twenty-first century, even homiletics has progressed to help preachers move from archaic expressions of words to connect with the contemporary audience. Why would not more theologians pay attention to the *application* and *communication* of truth rather than merely the *acquisition* of it (cf. Ezra 7:10)?

A worthy consideration in contemporary theological pedagogy is the narrative as a fresh conduit of truth. The story, along with the principles gleaned from the plot, becomes the central motif for theological reflection. In discussing narrative as a forum and motif of doing theology, Lints reminds us that the Bible is not “given at one time, nor in the form of a theological dictionary. . . It is a book full of dramatic interest and comes complete with major and minor plots.” (1993:274). Indeed, the Scriptures weave a narrative of God’s unfailing faithfulness and tutor our faith in him.

Consider the narrative as an essential part of theological pedagogy. The way the Jewish culture teaches about God, as opposed to the Western propositional approach, is instructive. Within the conservative Jewish culture, at least two things deserve our immediate attention. First, God was not just taught in theological schools but more significantly, in the homes. Fathers are to be the theological educators in the family! When Christian fathers abdicate this God-given responsibility, we find a generation that is biblically illiterate and theologically impoverished. The church (and theological institutions) ought to complement the home (and equip the fathers!) but the foundation of theological education rests in the home (Deut 4:9-10; cf. 32:7).

The second thing that calls for immediate attention is that within the home, theology was not taught in the Jewish family by way of propositional truth. The father did not say, “Son, let me tell you, God is good. And son, remember, God is great...” No, he tells a story! The father would narrate the accounts of Noah and the ark, Abraham and his exploits of faith, Moses and the mighty deliverance from Egypt etc. Through these great biblical narratives, their concept of God is shaped. And the wise, godly father would speak with such holy awe that it wasn’t merely the narrative plot that gripped the imagination of the child, it was the sense of the father’s reverence for God that is communicated to his children as a profound theological legacy.

Such “narrative” theology must nonetheless be applied to life and not remain merely a good story irrelevant to life. Goldberg highlights that there are three critical issues that any narrative theology must face: (1) the question of Truth – the relationship between story and experience; (2) the question of Meaning – the hermeneutic involved for understanding stories aright; and (3) the question of Rationality – the charge of moral relativism.¹¹ Might I add a fourth: the question of Application; for it is in the application of the narrative that the greatest hermeneutical challenge lies. It is in the application that the elements of truth, meaning and rationality are caused to bear upon the circumstance or condition of life.

The Necessity of Theological Holism

Theological holism is integrating truth with life. Adapting the thought from Cole’s article on holistic spirituality in the Reformed Theological Review,¹² it may be proposed that there are four basic building blocks to holistic theological integration: (1) **Orthodoxy**. There is a need for right doctrines *of truth*; (2) **Orthopraxy**. There is a need for right practice as a responsibility *towards truth*; (3) **Orthokardia** There is a need for right response of the heart *in truth*; and (4) **Orthokoinonia** There is a need for the right community *for truth*.

Obviously, theology is more than just orthodoxy, it also involves right practice (orthopraxis). In the Scriptures, right practice is both the desired outcome as well as the imperative for right doctrine (e.g. Romans 1-11 doctrine, 12-16 practice; or Ephesians 1-3 doctrine, 4-6 practice). Moreover, the aim of orthopraxis is more than just applying the truth; rather it is applying for a redemptive and transformational purpose. As Lamb puts it, orthopraxis

... aims at transforming human history, redeeming it through a knowledge born of subject empowering, life-giving love, which heals the biases needlessly victimizing millions of our brothers and sisters. *Vox victimarum vox Dei*. The cries of the victims are the voice of God. To the extent that those cries are not heard above the din of our political, cultural, economic, social, and ecclesial celebrations or bickerings, we have already begun a descent into hell. (1982:22f.)

¹¹ Goldberg, Michael. 1982. *Theology and Narrative*. Nashville: Abingdon, p. 192.

¹² Cole, Graham A. *At the Heart of a Christian Spirituality*, p. 49-61.

In doing theology, the importance of community must not be overlooked. A right community (orthokoinonia) is needed for a dynamic transformational orthopraxis. For truth, and the application of it, is best done in the context of interpersonal relationships. In any theological discussion of truth, for example, due consideration might be given to earlier reflections, such as the Pennabergian, Barthian and Hegelian worldview pertinent to the rhetoric of truth, and of Niebuhr's postulation of truth and culture. Nonetheless, I would like to contribute to this discussion a most simple observation: Truth is best communicated in the realm of interpersonal relationships.

It comes as no surprise therefore that "some of the most effective learning in systematic theology courses in colleges and seminaries often occurs outside the classroom in informal conversations among students who are attempting to understand Bible doctrines for themselves."¹³ A faith community of collaborative theological learners is formed. In such a community, there is a vital non-formal aspect to theological education. There is thus a need to engage theology not just by way of individual contemplations of truth but more importantly, in a faith community of collaborative theological learning. This is how theology is best done!

The Necessity of Theological Humility

Knowledge puffs up (1 Cor 8:1) but theology that is done well humbles. For at the heart of theological education is not to exchange an empty mind for a full one, but rather to exchange an empty mind for an open yet discerning mind. And a mind that is discerningly open and openly discerning understands and appreciates the richness and depth of theological contemplation, such that it is genuinely humbled by the finiteness of the human mind to grasp and comprehend an infinite God.

The aim of theology, as Wells alluded to, is not to "master" the subject of God by the formulation of theological knowledge but rather to come to both the realization and appreciation of its utter inexhaustibility. For God, unlike the periodical table, cannot be quantified and analyzed.¹⁴ Such true and inexhaustible theology humbles us. A discerning perception of theology is the understanding that it is always an unfinished task. As Barr

¹³ Grudem, Wayne. 1994. *Systematic Theology*, p. 35.

¹⁴ Wells, David. *The Theologian's Craft*, p. 171.

points out, “Cross-cultural theological discussion exposes the limits of every theological view and reminds those engaged in such discussion that theology is never, at least in this life, finished.”¹⁵

Another aspect of the humbling is that we need each other. No man is an island in the construction of informed theological thought and convictions. D.A. Carson, commenting on the integratedness of theological paradigms, compared the systematic theologian with a juggler, keeping many intellectual balls up in the air:

Unlike balls whirling through the air by the juggler’s skill, the various ingredients that constitute systematic theology are not independent. Drop a ball and the other balls are unaffected; drop, say historical theology and not only does the entire discipline of systematic theology change its shape, but the other ingredients are adversely affected. Without historical theology for instance, exegesis is likely to degenerate into arcane, atomistic debates far too tightly tethered to the twentieth century.¹⁶

As such, there is a place for humility to learn from the past as we theologize in the present for the future. The one who misguidedly spurns a theological tradition, rather than taps from it, misses doing theology well. As Cole puts it, “Theological thinking is also historical thinking. The theologian has behind him or her the great stream of Christian thought. To ignore the past would be an immense folly.”¹⁷ This thought is likewise affirmed by Spykman who declared that “tradition is the very lifeblood of theology... No healthy theology ever arises *de novo*. By honoring sound tradition, theological continuity with the past is assured.”¹⁸ The link with our theological roots and the ability to hear one another is a mark of theological humility.

Conclusion

To become a Christian is not to engage in intellectual suicide. On the contrary, it calls for clear thinking that stems from loving God with all that we are, including a love that is sustained and nourished by right thinking. As Wolfhart Pannenberg has aptly commented: “Argumentation and the operation of the Holy Spirit are not in competition

¹⁵ Barr, William R. *Re-forming Theology in the Global Conversation*, p.8.

¹⁶ Carson, D. A. *The Role of Exegesis in Systematic Theology*, p. 39.

¹⁷ Cole, Graham A. *Thinking Theologically*, p.52.

¹⁸ Spykman, Gordon J., *Reformational Theology: Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics*, p.5.

with each other. In trusting in the Holy Spirit Paul in no way spared himself thinking or arguing.”¹⁹ There is no place for anti-intellectualism in Christianity. The greatest need of this generation is the intentional development of biblically grounded, theologically sound and spiritually vital disciples of Christ.

As such, theological leadership is vital to the health of the contemporary church. We must do what we can to strengthen the cord. Our purpose and priorities must be clear. The pulpits of local churches must make a radical shift from exhortation or worse, mere entertainment, to sound exegesis and biblical exposition. The rise of biblical illiteracy must be addressed. Sound theological thinking must be returned to the people of God. And such theology should be done contritely, conscientiously and corporately. We are grateful that we have the God-given faculty to think about God meaningfully because the Almighty has chosen to reveal himself to us and to call us into a living relationship with him. Thus, we must go beyond a mere attempt to do theology as merely an intellectual exercise; but rather to integrate it into the whole of life and faith.

We increasingly realize our inadequacy in such a profound intellectual, spiritual and communal exercise. Yet the wonderful privilege and the critical responsibility of doing theology today invite us to such a glorious undertaking. For theology done well is both the act and foundation for the true worship of God, who alone is the adored and inexhaustible subject of all our finest but finite attempts at theologizing. And in the final analysis, this is how theology should essentially be done. For the true worship of the Almighty God, who has revealed himself through the Scriptures and in Christ, is the distinguishing mark of doing theology well.

Bibliography

Barr, William R. 1997. “Re-forming Theology in the Global Conversation” In *Constructive Christian Theology in the Worldwide Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Carson, D. A. 1994. “The Role of Exegesis in Systematic Theology” In *Doing Theology in Today’s World*, John D. Woodbridge and Thomas Edward McComiskey. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹⁹ Pannenberg, Wolfhart. 1971. *Basic Questions in Theology*, Vol. II, p. 35.

- Cole, Graham. 1989. "Thinking Theologically." *The Reformed Theological Review*. Vol. 48, No. 2
- _____. 1993. "At the Heart of a Christian Spirituality." *The Reformed Theological Review*. Vol. 52, No. 2
- Erickson, Millard J. 1986. *Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.
- Goldberg, Michael. 1982. *Theology and Narrative*. Nashville: Abingdon.
- Grudem, Wayne. 1994. *Systematic Theology*. Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press.
- Henry, Carl F. H. 1964. *Frontiers in Modern Theology*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press.
- Lamb, Matthew L. 1982. *Solidarity with Victims: Toward a Theology of Social Transformation*. New York: Crossroad.
- Lints, Richard. 1993. *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Macquarrie, John. 1966. *Principles of Christian Theology*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- McGrath, Alister E. 1994. *Christian Theology: An Introduction*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers.
- Packer, J. I. 1994. "Is Systematic Theology a Mirage?: An Introductory Discussion." In *Doing Theology in Today's World*, John D. Woodbridge and Thomas Edward McComiskey. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Pannenberg, Wolfhart. 1971. *Basic Questions in Theology, Vol. II*. London: SCM Press.
- Pratt, Richard J. 1990. *He Gave Us Stories: The Bible Student's Guide To Interpreting Old Testament Narratives*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing.
- Spykman, Gordon J., 1992. *Reformational Theology: Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Tozer, A. W. 1965. *The Knowledge of the Holy*. London: James Clarke.
- Vidales, Raul. 1979. "Methodological Issues in Liberation Theology" In *Frontiers of Theology in Latin America*. Rosino Gibellini, ed. Maryknoll: Orbis.
- Wells, David. 1991. "The Theologian's Craft" In *Doing Theology in Today's World*, John D. Woodbridge and Thomas Edward McComiskey. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

About the Author



Rev. Edmund Chan is the Senior Pastor of CEFC (Covenant Evangelical Free Church) in Singapore. He is a seasoned mentor who developed the annual Intentional Disciplemaking Church (IDMC) seminar. He received the MA degree (Missions) from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and is the author of two books: *To Last: Towards a Disciplemaking Church* and *Growing Deep in God: Integrating Theology and Prayer*. He also serves on the advisory councils of several Christian organizations.



Common Ground Journal
CanDoSpirit Network, Inc
5250 Grand Avenue Suite 14-211
Gurnee, IL 60031-1877 USA

www.commongroundjournal.org