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BEYOND RELIGION: THE BAD NEWS, OTHER NEWS, AND THE GOOD NEWS

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ABSTRACT

Many studies have documented the decline of religious belief and church attendance in "secular" societies such as Australia. Tom Frame offers a detailed study of unbelief in Australia and identifies some concerns about the possible intolerance of religion in the future. By contrast, Harvey Cox sees a positive opportunity in the emergence of "an age of the Spirit" and diverse forms of Christian expression around the world. These movements enable us to understand the nature of faith beyond the historic forms of institutional religion. Cox's work provides a specific instance of Charles Taylor's third sense of "secularity", understood in terms of what it may be rather than what it is not. The challenge for Christian theology is, then, to explore the meaning of the Good News and the character of Christian community. Beyond "religion" there is a choice between the bad news and the Good News.

To paraphrase Mark Twain's famous line, the rumours of religion's death have been greatly exaggerated. For some decades, it has been suggested that religious belief would soon die out. What is certainly the case is that in much of the Western world church attendance and church affiliation has been in significant decline for at least the last half-century. At the same time, however, there has been massive growth in Christianity in Africa, Latin America and parts of Asia—along with a similar spread in the religion of Islam. Pentecostal Christian groups have also seen extraordinary growth throughout the entire world. In some senses, "religion" is in decline and in other respects it is not.

In this essay, one major study of the decline of religion in Australia will act as a case study for the "end" of religion before considering a number of works which see a resurgence of faith or spirituality in different forms. These considerations clarify what it is that is lost in the decline of religion and thus to a better understanding of the "secularity" evident in Western societies. With these clarifications, it becomes clear that the decline of "religion" presents us with new opportunities to understand and respond to the Christian Gospel.

I. IS RELIGION IN DECLINE?

In recent decades, there have been many statistical studies of church attendance, religious affiliation and beliefs, all indicating the decline of "religion" in Australia. The census data is especially telling, with the number of people registering "No Religion" increasing from 6.7% in 1971 to 16.6% in 1996 and 18.7% in

2006.[1] A recent study by the Olive Tree Media found that 31% of respondents identified themselves as having no religion or spiritual belief.[2]

Tom Frame has written a detailed and wide-ranging study of attitudes to religion in Australia, which provides us with a helpful case study of religion in post-industrial societies.[3] *Losing My Religion* is concerned to trace the decline of "religion" in (white) Australian society and contemplates the future of Christian belief in a minority and possibly hostile situation. As Frame presents it, the situation is mostly bad news.

Frame defines religion as "the performance of certain rituals and customs arising from a specific set of beliefs to which an individual or community conscientiously subscribes with respect to a deity to which the individual and the community is held morally and conscientiously accountable. Religion involves the assumption of an alignment of a person's believing, belonging and behaving."[4] Frame goes on to distinguish religion from spirituality, which in Australia he says is "generally associated with any pursuit that dignifies personal life and encourages aesthetic reflection."[5] What seems crucial in Frame's definition of religion, in contrast to the much more fluid or amorphous concept of spirituality, are three specific elements: the aspect of conscientious *belief*, having some reference to *a deity*, and the understanding that this belief has moral or *life-style consequences*. This last element indicates Frame's interest in "behaving" as a crucial element in religion. What seems missing from his definition, however, is a clear indication of what he means by the term "belonging". By using the terms "individual or community" he allows, perhaps unintentionally, that religion might be an entirely individual, or as people commonly say, "a personal matter"—with no implication of belonging or accountability to any group or community. As a description of how many Australians might view their religious beliefs, this is perhaps an accurate implication; but it runs contrary to Frame's own assertions about the proper meaning and nature of religion as he intends to study it.

Losing my religion advances several major theses. The first of these is that Australians have not been especially interested in religion, but neither have they been strongly opposed. It is not so much unbelief but disinterest that characterizes the majority. Hugh Mackay has observed that Australians are "easygoing about religion" and "suspicious of extremists".[6] Similarly, Philip Hughes found an increasing number "who want to identify themselves as Christian but who do not want to identify with a particular denomination. A significant part of the movement is a rejection of Christian institutions rather than a rejection of Christianity itself."[7] The decline in church attendances and the increase in the "No religion" response in the census, are all part of an historical trend towards "declining interest in religious believing and religious belonging …

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1 At the time of writing, no data from the 2011 census is available.

2 *Australian Communities Report: Research into Key Belief Blockers and Questions About Faith, Christianity and God Held by Australians Today* (Research conducted by McCrindle Research, for Olive Tree Media, Sutherland, NSW: Olive Tree Media, 2011), 5.

3 Tom Frame, *Losing My Religion: Unbelief in Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2009). It should be noted that Frame deals only with the dominant culture of European settlers in Australia, making no reference to the indigenous peoples of the land and their historic cultures.

4 Ibid., 25.

5 Ibid., 27.

6 Ibid., 103. Here Frame cites Hugh Mackay, *Turning Point: Australians choosing their future,* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 1999), 231.

7 Ibid., 93. Here Frame cites Philip Hughes, Ruth Powell, and Sam Sterland, "The Christian faith in rural Australia," *Pointers: Bulletin of the Christian Research Association* 13 (September 2003): 5. A similar pattern has been noted in Britain, in the study by Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain Since 1945: Believing Without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

especially among younger people."[8] From all this, Frame concludes that "there is no alternative but to say that Australians individually and together are losing their commitment to formalised religion and that the kind of people Australians have been and the society they have built will be markedly different in the future".[9] He adds, rather gloomily, that those who claim that society would be better off if all religious belief disappeared may well see that claim empirically tested in the next decades.

In the middle sections of his book, Frame explores the possible causes of this decline in religious belief and commitment. He notes the debates in the modern period about arguments for the existence of God and the challenges to these conceptions of God arising from astronomy and biology. He concludes, "In the short span of two hundred years, God has moved from being a necessary element in the explanation of most physical phenomena to being completely irrelevant to accounts of natural processes."[10]

Frame then turns his attention to the recent emergence of aggressive atheism, most popularly in Richard Dawkins' book, *The God Delusion* and Christopher Hitchens' *God is not Great.* These and a number of other books, including Australian philosopher Tamas Pataki's *Against Religion*, represent a new form of unbelief. Frame describes these works as "less of a philosophical and more of a political program".[11] He notes that Dawkins, for example, simply asserts his faith in genetic science as capable of answering "all the great questions of life".[12] Here we come to what is perhaps the most crucial issue in the current debate about "religion". Is religion in fact about an "explanation", of the kinds offered by science, in biology, physics and astonomy? Trevor Hart argues that there is a category mistake here. Dawkins and those who make similar arguments have failed to understand "how language works" and, by implication, what religion really is. Science, he observes, "is wonderful at telling us about nature; it's not good at telling us what, if anything is behind nature."[13] Similarly, Terry Eagleton has challenged the idea that religion is, in essence, about explaining the universe. For Christian theology God is not a "mega-manufacturer" but is rather the one who sustains the universe in being through love.[14] This means that the dispute between theology and science is "not a matter of how the universe came about, or which approach can provide the best "explanation" for it. It is a disagreement about how far back one has to go, though not in the chronological sense".[15] Wittgenstein's statement that explanation stops somewhere is pertinent here: "Giving grounds … comes to an end." But the end is not simply a conviction that a certain proposition is true. The "end" is our action, our living in a particular way, Wittgenstein suggests.[16] Once again, then, it is not sufficient to consider religious statements in terms of the content of belief. Their significance lies much more in the "behaving" they signify and, perhaps also, the "belonging" associated with them. Surprisingly, this is not the direction

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8 Ibid., 79.
9 Ibid., 104.
10 Ibid., 150.
11 Ibid., 195; Tamas Pataki, *Against Religion* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2007) is discussed from 230–40.
12 Ibid., 207.
13 Ibid., 215. Trevor Hart, "Belief, Too, Can Start With a Bang," *Australian Literary Review*, (2 July 2008): 6.
14 Terry Eagleton, *Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate* (The Terry Lectures; New York & London: Yale University Press, 2009), 7.
15 Eagleton, *Reason, Faith, and Revolution*, 11.
16 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* (ed. G.E.M. Amscombe and G.H. von Wright; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969), propositions 189, 192, 204.

in which Frame proceeds. Rather, he contemplates the situation where religious believers (by which he means church-affiliated Christians) form a minority within Australian society.

II. THE FUTURE OF RELIGION: THE BAD NEWS

Frame argues that the Dawkins-style attacks have contributed to a shift in the public attitudes to religion. In the minds of some, religion is now seen as "a social, political and intellectual adversary to Western popular culture and liberal democracy". As a result, it has become acceptable to ridicule religious ideas and mock religious people.[17] Thus Frame comes to the conclusion that we are approaching "the end of tolerance".

Frame envisages a markedly changed situation for the Christian churches in Australia in the decades to come. In particular, he foresees a growing marginalising of religious belief, with the prospect that many believers will turn towards a defensive or "ghetto" mentality, with at least some groups becoming militant in their opposition to society at large.

> To disregard religious views is to hasten the possibility that those holding them will turn away from the public square. If religious groups feel they are not heard and, worse still, face only ridicule from the public, they are likely to form an enclave. While this will work against the group's survival, it will also diminish civil society and destroy the body politic.[18]

The main problem, he argues, is "the manner that religious beliefs are handled by those who profess them—and by those who don't".[19] It is a question of mutual respect and an appropriate form of tolerance. Here Frame alludes to Charles Taylor's work, *A Secular Age*.[20] In a secular age, believing is one of a series of options or possibilities, whereas in an earlier context such belief went unchallenged. It was embedded in a "background" of many other cultural features and forms of behaviour. Frame's interest, however, is not so much in Taylor's overall argument as to use his definition of different ideas of secularity to support his call for tolerance of religion. In place of the present "combative" milieu, Frame proposes an attitude of constructive and respectful dialogue. We shall return to Taylor's work later in this paper.

With regard to the churches, Frame believes denominational patterns will change. Roman Catholic and Pentecostal groups will continue, while Reformed and Orthodox groups will remain in largely separate contexts. Churches that fail to present a credible alternative to the prevailing culture, in particular "left-leaning, cause-driven, liberal Protestant churches", will disappear. Frame offers no reasons for these judgments, but uses them as a basis to urge that churches "renew their commitment to resisting some aspects of popular culture and heighten the importance of their beliefs and customs."[21] Unfortunately no detail is offered here to help us understand what Tom Frame means. We might have wished that he had made more of the comments he quoted from Kevin Hart: In the face of the decline of religion, religious people need

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17 Frame, *Losing My Religion*, 221.
18 Ibid., 259.
19 Ibid., 261.
20 Ibid., 281, Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007). See especially "Introduction" and Chapter 1, "The Bulwarks of Belief."
21 Ibid., 299.

"to look at how poorly we teach our young, in church and out of it, and how we make Christianity appear weak, dispensable, half in league with death and almost fully in league with boredom."[22] It is surely in the *formation* of Christian faith and communities, and not in the arena of ideas or belief alone, that the battle for hearts and minds, lives and values will be won or lost.

Fortunately, however, the situation may not be entirely as Tom Frame presents it, neither in Australia nor throughout the wider world. It is true that the so-called "mainline" denominations are in steady and even rapid decline, though some recent evidence suggests that this is not uniformly so.[23] There are other areas of rapid growth. It is the "institution" of Christianity that is in decline, perhaps, but in place of that institutional form other dynamic forms of faith and worship are emerging.

III. THE EMERGING AGE OF THE SPIRIT

A number of recent studies have suggested that beyond the decline of the historic, institutional forms of religion, a new and different form of Christian life and experience is emerging. In his recent work *The Future of Faith*, Harvey Cox has argued that we have entered an entirely different era in Christian experience, which he terms "the age of the Spirit".[24] Cox's thesis is that Christian history can be understood in terms of three broad epochs. The first, lasting approximately three centuries, he terms "the age of faith". It is only in recent decades, through such discoveries as the Dead Sea Scrolls, that we have come to see how diverse and fluid was the theology and communal life of this period. This was the time before the formulation of the creeds and before Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. Cox sees in this time a great tolerance for diversity in worship, in leadership structures and in theology. But with the development of the imperial church, from the time of Constantine onwards, came "the age of belief". The nature of Christian faith was codified and the many dynamic forms of communal life and ministry gradually were replaced by a common, episcopal structure. The church now became the institution of salvation. Crucially, as Cox sees it, the age of belief systematically shielded people from much of the mystery of life itself. Theology sought to "explain" the universe. Even more critically, this theology largely ignored the teaching and ethic of Jesus.[25] This situation lasted for many centuries, with the church forming part of the very foundations of society, especially but not only in those places where the church was a "state church". Only in the last century or so has this form of Christianity begun to unravel, though the decline in religious belief has been developing for much longer. A new situation is emerging, as Cox sees it. This period has much more in common with "the age of faith" than with "the age of belief". Cox calls this period "the age of the Spirit". In this new

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22 Ibid., 215; the source-note for this quotation is missing from the book.
23 Diana Butler Bass has published the results of a three-year study of several hundred "mainline" congregations across the USA which are experiencing significant renewal and growth, and documenting the formative practices which are consistently evident across these diverse communities. Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us: How the Neighborhood Church is Transforming the Faith* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006).
24 Cox, *The Future of Faith* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009).
25 Ibid.*,* 46.

situation, "pragmatic and experiential elements of faith as a way of life are displacing the previous emphasis on institutions and beliefs.[26] *Faith*, rather than belief, is again becoming the "defining quality" of Christianity.

The emergence of this new era of faith is especially evident in "the extraordinary growth of Christianity beyond the West", areas which he describes as "far removed from Plato's orbit".[27] Christianity in India, Korea and Africa might even be termed "postdogmatic", he suggests. "The *content* of the faith of non-Western Christians is much like that of the early church, even though the embodied *style* of their religion often resembles that of their non-Christian neighbors." [28]

In an earlier work, Cox undertook an extensive study of the rise of Pentecostalism throughout the entire Christian world, beginning with the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles in 1906.[29] A number of his conclusions from that study are relevant here. First, Cox was interested to ask exactly why this style of worship and spirituality is so attractive to large numbers of people who were otherwise not drawn to the Christian church. From extensive and detailed analysis Cox concludes that the primary appeal of Pentecostalism is experiential and this experience actually moves people beyond their intellectual resistance to belief. He even describes this experiential dimension as "shattering" the cognitive frame. As a result, for Pentcostals, "the experience of God has absolute primacy over dogma and doctrine".[30] Thus a narrative theology is the only appropriate form. People do not explain their faith, they tell a story of how their lives have changed.

Cox's own analysis suggests that Pentecostal experience engages with, and helps us to recognize afresh, three fundamental and defining aspects of religion. He calls these "primal speech", "primal piety" and "primal hope". Pentecostalism is not an aberration, but is "part of the larger and longer history of human religiousness", which essentially includes ecstasy. What religion is about "ultimately defies even the most exalted human language".[31] Religion must use symbols, forms of language other than the indicative and analytical, and sometimes therefore also the ecstatic. Cox believes that this character of religious language is God-given. It is the work of the Spirit.

Perhaps most distinctive in this form of Christian experience is the emphasis on "signs and wonders", which is the Pentecostal expression of what Cox calls "primal piety". Here Cox poses a question crucial to our study: "Why is it that while many denominations are still losing members, despite the religious resurgence, the pentecostals continue to attract so many people?"[32] He sees here "a tidal change" in what religion itself is. There has been a massive dislocation and uprooting in people's lives, through urbanization and the development of megacities. Two specific features of this "dislocation" are named. First, these social shifts have "cut the nerve of traditional religion, which is often tied to specific geographical locations and cultural patterns". But the sheer struggle of life in the urban masses has also "taken most of the glamour

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26 Ibid., 3.
27 Ibid., 222.
28 Ibid., 222.
29 Harvey Cox, *Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Cassell, 1996).
30 Ibid., 71.
31 Ibid., 92.
32 Ibid., 103.

out of the vision of modernity".[33] As a result, Cox sees a widespread search for new forms of community "and an effort to retrieve and transform old symbols and beliefs." It is in this context that he sees a renewed vision of religion as *healing*. "The idea that faith might have something to do with the actual healing of bodily illnesses has reemerged as an important element in Christianity only in the past two or three decades."[34] Ironically, in this time many middle-class Pentecostals have begun to "soft-pedal" the ministry of healing, whilst in other contexts it continues to be a major feature. Interestingly, Cox notes that in the Azusa community, it was the healing of racial divisions that was seen as the most important sign of the Spirit's renewal.

Finally, then, Cox writes of "primal hope". "Pentecostalism has become a global vehicle for the restoration of global hope."[35] Here, there is a vision of an alternative future to "the good life" as defined by materialist culture. Cox discusses the liberation of women within this context, which is a paradoxical feature of Pentecostal life as at official levels women are allotted a subservient place, while in practice they are often very much in the leadership. Music, especially the influence of jazz in Pentecostal worship, is another important element in the maintenance of this subversive hope.[36]

Collectively, then, Cox sees these three elements of "primal" human experience as being addressed in Pentecostalism, and thus they help to define the character of religion in our time and explain the appeal of Pentecostalism. What is emerging is a new form of "religare", binding together these elements in human life. Here again there is a form of speech, through which people may engage with God, and a form of community in which needs and longings are addressed, if not always "cured", and finally these things elicit hope in the face of otherwise bewildering and disempowering forms of life.

It must also be noted that Cox is critical of a number of elements in Pentecostalism, including especially the tendency towards authoritarian structures of leadership and, in some groups, the continued segregation along racial lines and in some also an emphasis on "prosperity". In his later work, Cox asks whether Pentecostal groups are fulfilling the promise he saw earlier: "Are they heralds of the Age of the Spirit?"[37] The picture is varied. In the USA, he notes that white Pentecostals have been influenced by fundamentalism and have retreated into a more "belief-defined" Christianity. "But in the global South, they are more informed by an ethic of following Jesus, and a vision of the Kingdom of God. They have recently become active in social ministries, but the hostility they sometimes show toward other faiths limits their ability to cooperate."[38]

What emerges from Cox's work, then, is an image of religious life that is not primarily defined by pre-existing institutional forms or belief-structures and certainly not in decline. The question that now arises is whether the vitality of this form of religion is uniquely determined by its distinctive theology and style of worship, or does it indicate something of wider significance, as Cox suggests, about the character and future

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33 Ibid., 104.
34 Ibid., 109.
35 Ibid., 119.
36 Ibid., Chapters 7 and 8.
37 Cox, *The Future of Faith,* 202.
38 Ibid., 202.

of religion as such? Does the "age of the Spirit" invite us to reconsider the nature of secularity and the purported death of religion in Western post-industrial societies?

IV. SECULARITY RECONSIDERED

Charles Taylor's comprehensive study *A Secular Age* analyses the nature of religious belief in the modern era.[39] Believing in God is different for people living in 2000, compared to those who lived in 1500, Taylor explains. As already noted, in a secular age believing is one of a series of options or possibilities, whereas in an earlier context belief was embedded in a "background" of cultural forms, so that in a sense believing was not a distinct activity at all. It was a part of their way of life. With the decline or abandonment of many of those other cultural elements, the character of religion has undergone a transformation. For example, Taylor writes of the "dis-enchantment" of the universe in the modern era, or the "disembedding" of religious beliefs, which has been part of this change in the nature of religious belief.[40]

Without going into the immense detail of Taylor's study, our interest is in his characterization of religion today. His argument is well summarized on pages 530-535 and it is here too that we find his positive suggestion of what emerges within a secular age. The major phenomenon of secularization is that "the unchallengeable status that belief enjoyed in earlier centuries has been lost".[41] Taylor sees both loss and gain in this situation. The "fate" of belief, he argues, will now very much depend on "powerful intuitions of individuals, radiating out to others".[42] Religious beliefs will not be provided for us, as part of the society into which we are born. Faith is something we will need to find, to pursue. One danger Taylor sees in this situation is the potential for a retreat into privatism, a retreat from the public arena into an essentially private form of religion. But Taylor does not see this happening, at least not necessarily. He sees a greater freedom for individuals to speak their own minds, on all matters including religion. This freedom is linked to Taylor's positive characterization of the "secular" age. Rather than using a "subtraction" approach, in which a phenomenon is explained through stating what is no longer the case, he describes the current context positively in terms of a "spirituality of quest". Along with many other commentators, Taylor sees many "nagging dissatisfactions with the modern moral order", giving rise to "the search for adequate forms of spiritual life".[43] Understood in this way, secularity is not to be seen as the loss of institutional religion so much as a situation full of promise and possibility. At this time, the promise is seen in what has been called "minimal religion", a spirituality shared within a person's immediate circle, perhaps with family and friends, but not with a church. This spirituality of quest, though it arises outside institutional and confessional structures, "has its own kind of universalism, a sort of spontaneous and unreflective ecumenism, in which the coexistence of plural forms of spirituality and worship is taken for granted".[44] There is much in common

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39Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age,* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007). For what follows, see especially "Introduction" and Chapter 1, "The Bulwarks of Belief."
40 See ibid*.,* in many places, but for example 146–158 and 426–427.
41 Ibid*.,* 530.
42 Ibid*.,* 531.
43 Ibid*.,* 533.
44 Ibid*.,* 534.

here with the situation Cox has described. There is no single paradigm or model for "religion" today. Taylor uses the new word "bricolage" to describe this situation. Individuals and groups engage in something of a "collage", drawing from various traditions and influences, to formulate their own distinctive "religion" or spirituality.[45] Implicit in this concept is the idea that it is continuously in process. It is a journey, not a fixed position. It is a quest, not a set of beliefs or doctrines. It is a form of faith, and as such it defies the predictions of the death of religion, though it coincides with the decline of the traditional forms of belief and religious expression that have given rise to a "secular" age. What Taylor has been able to demonstrate is that secularity is in fact consistent with religion, in this new form.

Graham Ward presents a somewhat less positive view of the current trends. Ward's study, *True Religion,* helpfully identifies a number of elements in the emerging forms of spirituality.[46] By attending to these, we may better distinguish the issues and challenges before us.

Ward sees two major features in the contemporary forms of religion. First, he notes the element of *re-enchantment*. Whereas traditional forms of religion have been "liquidated", emptied of any specific content or meaning by the forces of secularism, Ward notes in contemporary culture a "fashion for angels" and for apocalyptic forces and images. "The resources of faith traditions—historical, symbolic, liturgical, textual, mythic—are being endlessly redeployed". [47] The "symbolic capital" of religion is now being used to give some kind of mystical meaning to places and people. These "religious" expressions, in health clubs, sci-fi fantasy, architectural design, for example, are not actually "religion", Ward explains, but are "simulations of religion… used as an aesthetic diversion from the profound uncertainties, insecurities and indeterminacies of postmodern living." Here, religious elements or symbols are used to create an illusion of transcendence.[48] So Ward sees a quest for "transcendence" or religion, but this "re-enchantment" is expressed only in commercialized and sometimes kitsch forms.

A second feature of the contemporary situation is *confessionalism*. He observes a renewed vigour in a number of religious communities, but this "turn to the sacred" is in fact a form of resistance to the culture of postmodernity and globalism. Since the 1980s, he suggests, there has been "a noticeable turn to "theology", to arguing and acting from an explicit confessional standpoint." Within particular groups, Ward sees a renewed emphasis on what Frame calls "belief", a desire to hold on to what Cox has called "the age of belief".[49] The world today is basically antithetical to the truth-claims of these religious groups, hence the renewed focus upon confessional forms: "we have strong theological commitments increasingly confident about voicing, and voicing aggressively, their moral and spiritual difference."[50] The potential here for "culture wars" and new forms of tribalism is very strong. What Frame envisages as possible, Ward already sees. Interestingly, he does not refer to the resurgence of religion in the Pentecostal forms Cox describes, which are decidedly not "theological" in character.

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45 Interestingly, Cox uses the same term to describe the emerging form of faith, Cox, *Fire From Heaven,* 305.
46 Graham Ward, *True Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003).
47 Ibid., 130, 132.
48 Ibid., 133.
49 Ibid., 134.
50 Ibid., 138.

Ward concludes, also in common with Frame, with a call for faith communities to adopt a more humble position, still confessional but not of the defensive or oppositional character just described. Ward suggests that if different faith communities can nurture relationship with one another, they will not so much lose their distinctiveness or forfeit their truth claims. Rather, as they discuss and contest the issues of faith with those of different traditions, their own genuine faith assertions will be proved.[51]

Before concluding this consideration of the available options within the current situation, it is worth noting the distinctive contribution of Australian scholar David Tacey. Here we will note specifically his work *ReEnchantment: The New Australian Spirituality*, which deals with many of the issues already considered.[52] In contrast to Frame, Tacey's work does not ignore the reality of the land in which we live, nor the fact of Indigenous spirituality as an element in our situation. Rather, he draws upon Aboriginal spirituality to invite a re-visioning of our life, following the "de-spiritualisation" of nature. In common with Cox, Taylor and Ward, Tacey envisages a new paradigm of religious experience, much more of the nature of a "bricolage", less focussed on institutional structures, defined beliefs and traditions and more democratic, more fluid and more "immanental" or holistic in its focus.[53]

Furthermore, Tacey does not see this new spirituality as a crass adoption of the "spiritual capital" of earlier religious traditions, nor is it without theological depth. Rather, it seeks to work with religious traditions, but in a new way. Tacey writes of a multicultural and genuinely ecumenical vision of shared meanings, religious conversations and commonalities amongst religious communities. This is not a retreat into private experience, though there is much room for individual journeys and differences. In place of a resignation into privatism, Tacey sees a generosity of spirit responsive to the "inexhaustible richness and variety of sacred revelation" from "the mysterious One" who is known through the Many.[54]

V. BEYOND RELIGION: THE GOOD NEWS

In this section I will argue that the "bad news" of the decline of religion in its historic, institutional forms may well be a special opportunity for re-discovering the nature of Christian faith and discipleship. This is what is implied in the arguments of Cox, Taylor and Ward, each in different ways.

First we must consider *the optional character of faith*. Taylor's argument contrasts the structure of religious belief in 1500 and in 2000, suggesting that in a secular age "religion" is one of the many options for what we call our "life-style". But there is a great danger in this situation, that religious commitment amounts to little more than a *preference*, having no significance beyond ourselves. This is what people mean when they say that religion is "a personal matter"—it is an individual's choice and is in that sense private. Ward describes this optional character of faith as the "liquidation" of religion, often expressed in crass or shallow forms. In this situation, Religion is just one more commodity in a consumer market.

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51 Ibid., 153.
52 David Tacey, *ReEnchantment: The New Australian Spirituality* (Sydney: HarperCollins, 2000).
53 Ibid., 228.
54 Ibid., 262–263.

What would it mean to avoid the "liquidation" of our faith through the optional character of religion today? This question alludes to a pathway well articulated in an earlier situation by Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. It is most famously indicated by Bonhoeffer's call for a "religionless Christianity" and the "non-religious interpretation of Christian concepts".[55] These ideas, however, have a significant background in Bonhoeffer's earlier work, but most importantly in Barth's theological critique of religion.[56]

There is a growing literature re-considering the meaning and potential of Bonhoeffer's cryptic proposals about "religionless Christianity". Tom Greggs has argued that Bonhoeffer, although critical of Barth's "positivism of revelation", was not so much wanting to separate himself from Barth's theological project as to urge that Barth's critique of religion needed to go further.[57]

While we cannot pursue the detail of this argument here, the common ground for both theologians is the Christological centre. In this theology, faith is not our own creation, but is primarily a response to something, or someone, else. Christian faith is the response of obedience to the call of Jesus, "Follow me." Similarly, Jewish faith is a response to the infinite mystery of the great "I am", the unspeakable mystery of the creator of the universe. Faith is more than the adoption of a series of beliefs about God. It is a response to God. As a result, all belief statements must be held lightly, since they may signify the character of God, as religious symbols, but they must never take the place of God. The same is true of the church and any other religious community or group. The church is not the object of our faith. We may practice our faith through the life of the church, but the church is neither the object nor even the source of our faith.

Following this perspective, we may attempt a sketch of what this faith "beyond religion" might mean. Here I would propose three inter-related elements. In keeping with Bonhoeffer's earlier work and with the Christological centre of both his and Barth's thought, the first element here is *discipleship*. The character of faith arises from the call of Christ, in what Barth called the "determination" of the human person by the Word of God.[58] Faith does not create itself; it is responsive to God. As such, it may include both belief and unbelief, in the sense that it may recognize the limitation of all attempts to formulate its understanding of God. What we believe about God is always inadequate to the reality so indicated. A faithful response to Jesus Christ means that the disciple is just that, a follower, a learner, one who is not in control or all-knowing. There is an essential humility in this situation. Greggs has suggested that Bonhoeffer's "religionless Christianity" implies the elements of "anti-idolatry" and "anti-fundamentalism", each expressing this humility. Those who are disciples of Jesus will not confuse God with their belief system or the concepts of

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55 The primary reference here is a letter written in April, 1944 and published in the successive editions of the prison correspondence: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison,* Letter to Eberhard Bethge, April 30, 1944. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 8* (English edition, ed. John de Gruchy,; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009). 361–365.

56 See particularly Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 1/2, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), Section 17 "The Revelation of God as the Abolition of Religion."

57 Among the many contributions here are Jeffrey C. Pugh, *Religionless Christianity: Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Troubled Times* (London: T&T Clark, 2008); Ralf K. Wüstenberg, *A Theology of Life: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Religionless Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Peter Selby, "Christianity Come of Age," in *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (ed. John de Gruchy; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 226–245, and Tom Greggs, *Theology Against Religion: Constructive Dialogues with Bonhoeffer and Barth* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), especially Chapters 2, 3, and 4.

58 Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 1/1 "The Doctrine of the Word of God" (2nd edition, trans. G.W. Bromiley; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975). See especially Section 6.3 and 6.4.

God it imagines.[59] Nor will they set God and their faith over-against the world, as if to "save some room for God in the world".[60] Rather, a "non-religious" Christian discipleship involves a whole-hearted trust in God. In a sense, this trust involves more than we can say. It is as much an "abandonment" to the Spirit as it is a "decision" to believe certain ideas or doctrines. Sometimes this trust may not even focus on such ideas or belief statements, as is the case in Pentecostal experiences.

A second feature of faith beyond religion is *community*. The literal meaning of community is "life together", a common life. In Bonhoeffer's thought, for example, this meant the possibility of Christians living in intentional communities, sharing a daily life of prayer, work and a level of mutual ethical accountability.[61] In his later thought, however, Bonhoeffer's concern moved to a much broader interest in how we live in the world as such. It is the world at large which is the context of Christian living, not the "community of faith", the church. This development in Bonhoeffer's focus arises from the radical conviction that there is no longer a "sacred" and a "secular" sphere. This is part of what is meant by the "end" of religion, but that does not mean the end of the "sacred", or the impossibility of living by faith. Rather it means that all of life, in every sphere of activity and concern, is seen in the light of Jesus Christ. This, as several scholars have shown, is for Bonhoeffer (as for Barth) the consequence of his Christology. God has come into the world, in Christ, and consequently it is the whole of life in the one sphere of our living, that is called into response to God. "Living in one sphere", Keith Clements has argued, is a central motif in Bonhoeffer's theology.[62] There is no separate part of life that is "the spiritual" realm or the preserve of "religion". There is neither sacred nor secular, only the context in which we live in response to the revelation of God in Christ. Life in the world becomes a "community of faith", the context for a religionless Christianity.

So what exactly does this mean for existing religious groups and communities? Will they retreat into their own protective communities, as Frame expects, or will there be a new form of engagement with the wider society? Taylor envisages many small, informal expressions of the quest for spirituality. Ward speaks of theological communities whose humble but true religion might offer an alternative to the consumerist world. Cox sees the growth of Pentecostal groups in the global South as offering some ethical and political challenge to the dominant culture of capitalist consumerism. He believes many of these groups have learned skills, through specifically evangelistic activities, which could also assist them in engaging in wider movements for social change, but the suspicion of other groups, Christian and not Christian, has limited that engagement.

The "bricolage" approach to spirituality has been well described as "minimal religion" or "believing without belonging". The call to "live in one realm" will not permit a retreat into private, optional "faith". Rather, faith must take some *social and ethical form.*

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59 Greggs, *Theology Against Religion,* 65.
60 Ibid*.,* 67.
61 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works,* Volume 5 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005).
62 Keith Clements, *The SPCK Introduction to Bonhoeffer* (London: SPCK, 2010), 39–43.

Bonhoeffer's theology calls for the formation of communities of disciples, engaging with the whole of life as the invitation to follow Jesus, to live in the presence of God. At the heart of such communities would be two things: a commitment to prayer and to justice.[63] As Jeff Pugh explains, when religion functions to justify in God's name the existing political order, it rests easily or naively with the suffering of others. But the Gospel of Jesus Christ, grounded in "the suffering God", overturns this religion and calls forth a new and radical form of faith, in solidarity with the powerless.[64]

The question remains, however, exactly what it means for such communities to engage in serious and constructive action in the world today. As Bonhoeffer clearly saw, there are situations where justice demands immediate action to obstruct the systems of violence—"to put a spoke in the wheel".[65] But it must also be said that Christian faith needs a renewed vision of the positive objectives of our life in society. What do we hope to build and to preserve, not just to obstruct and oppose? It is here that we may look to Cox's idea of the "age of the Spirit". The Pentecostal movement, in its first expression at Azusa Street, saw reconciliation across racial divisions as the first and most important sign of the "fire from heaven". It was only later that the gift of tongues began to take this role. What we need, in the power of the Gospel, is a renewed vision of the Spirit's gift of reconciliation: between the nations, between religions, between the generations, and between humans and the earth, and all these as expressions of God's justice and peace, announced in the mission of Jesus as the "reign of God". Beyond religion and beyond the "bad news" of the decline of religious affiliation, there remains the "Good News", the possibility of a life together with God.

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63 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Thoughts on the day of the baptism of Dietrich Wilhelm Rüdiger Bethge," in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works,* Volume 8 (English edition, ed. John de Gruchy,; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 383–90.

64 Pugh, *Religionless Christianity*, 101.

65 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "The Aryan Clauses," in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords: letters, lectures and notes 1928–1936* (ed. Edwin H. Robertson,; London: Collins, 1965 and 1970), 221.

THE PRIMACY OF CHRIST AND ELECTION

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ABSTRACT

Bruce McCormack's on-going project to produce a thoroughly post-metaphysical account of the Divine ontology, in correspondence with Barth's doctrines of the Trinity and election, has spawned a mini industry of counter theses and proposals, only to be met by a myriad of replies and further articulation of ideas; most of which has been constructive and useful. The central issues of the current debate revolve around the nature of the *Logos asarkos* to the *Logos incarnandus*, what it means for Jesus to be the subject of election, and the relationship between election and God's self-constitution. This essay argues that one way forward in the debate might be to apply the doctrine of the Primacy of Christ to the discussion, and then to re-evaluate the status of the *Logos asarkos* and the *Logos incarnandus* in that light, based upon a relational ontology.

I. ELECTION AS ETERNAL GENERATION?

The ecumenical roots of the received doctrine of the Trinity, including its concomitant doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son, are well known and well-rehearsed. As an Evangelical theologian it is my method to work under the authority of Holy Scripture and in line with this Great Tradition. That being said, we are all well aware, no doubt, that the Tradition guides us in an orthodox interpretation of doctrine via something like the *regula fidei*, but it is far from comprehensive. And so, like all traditions, ours is living and active and each generation of disciples and doctors has the opportunity to enrich the Tradition as we stand upon the shoulders of the giants who precede us.

All of which is not to say that theologians of the Church see things the same way, of course. How we interpret the Tradition, here specifically of the Nicene and Constantinopolitan Creeds, and how we in turn enrich that Tradition is open to intense debate. One such flashpoint of debate today is over the much disputed doctrine of election and its relation to the eternal generation of the Son, and in turn to an understanding of the immanent Trinity. That the doctrine of election has something significant to say to ones doctrine of the Trinity and to the eternal generation of the Son is without dispute; what *exactly* it has to offer, however, is a point of much contention.

In this essay I argue that the doctrines of the Primacy of Christ, of a christologically conditioned doctrine of election, and of a relational ontology, offer critical insights into an understanding of the doctrines of the Trinity and election, and it does so by way of a critique of several contemporary formulations of these doctrines offered in the recent literature. The result, I will argue, is both in line with Holy Scripture and orthodoxy.

The doctrine of election has, as Katherine Sonderegger recently pointed out, "served as a means to speak about God—the divine holiness, justice, and glory—and about the unique relation of grace and of the life with him which this grace effects."[1] Several recent theologians have sought to reinterpret what divine election means when it is considered as constituent of the doctrine of God and only then what it might mean for creation. Here we may point to a number of thinkers, including Karl Barth,[2] Colin Gunton,[3] Thomas Torrance,[4] and Robert Jenson,[5] each of whom situate the doctrine of election within the doctrine of God and in doing so, mount a case against a so-called "classical theism" that had, it is argued, imported false Hellenistic thinking into the doctrines of God and election. Each sought in their own way to expunge such false philosophies and their concomitant ontology's from the Christian tradition.

The most recent locus of such discussion is found within contemporary Barthian studies.[6] Amongst Barthian scholarship today a battle rages between so-called "traditionalists" and "revisionists".[7] The former read Barth as consistently maintaining the freedom of the immanent Trinity and read his doctrine of the election of Jesus Christ from that perspective. The latter regard the Trinity as coming to be as a result of the election of Jesus Christ. The "traditionalists" are most ably represented by Princeton Seminary theologian George Hunsinger and Roman Catholic theologian Paul Molnar; the "revisionists" are most ably represented by Bruce McCormack, also of Princeton Theological Seminary. While this debate may seem "in-house" and esoteric, it does have significant and important implications. On the one hand, traditionalists would argue the revisionists threaten the freedom of God to be God independent of his creation, while the revisionists would have us believe the traditionalist view fails to reckon with the Christological implications of the faith and fails to properly discern the nature of God. For our purposes, this debate has to do with how one understands the doctrines of the Trinity, election, and the eternal generation of the Son.

Over a number of monographs and lengthy articles Bruce McCormack argues that a fully Barthian (and orthodox he would add) doctrine of God must dismantle all false philosophical accretions, essentialist ontology being near the top of the list, and replace it with what he terms a post-metaphysical actualistic ontology. The mechanism he has chosen to do the work in this regard is the doctrine of election. According to McCormack, Barth's doctrine of God as Being and Act, as Being and Becoming, was his way of

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1 Katherine Sonderegger, "Election," in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology* (ed., J. Webster, K. Tanner, and I. Torrance; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 106.
2 See especially Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956–75), II/2, 3–506; especially §33, 94–194.
3 For a concise account see Colin E. Gunton, *Theology Through the Theologians* (London: T&T Clark, 1996), 88–104.
4 See Thomas F. Torrance, "Predestination in Christ," *Evangelical Quarterly* 13 (1941): 108–141; "Introduction," in *The School of Faith: The Catechisms of the Reformed Church* (trans. and ed. T.F. Torrance; London: James Clarke and Co, 1959), xi–cxxvi; *Conflict and Agreement in the Church: Vol. 2: The Ministry and the Sacraments of the Gospel* (London: Lutterworth, 1960), 83–88; *Christian Theology and Scientific Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 127–137; and *Scottish Theology from John Knox to John McLeod Campbell* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996). Torrance's work is especially suggestive, as will be seen later in the essay.
5 See Robert W. Jenson's published doctoral thesis *Alpha and Omega: A Study in the Theology of Karl Barth* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1963), and *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 *The Works of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 173–178.
6 For an introduction see Matthias Gockel, *Barth and Schleiermacher on the Doctrine of Election: A Systematic-Theological Comparison* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
7 The language comes from George Hunsinger, "Election and the Trinity: Twenty-Five Theses on the Theology of Karl Barth," *Modern Theology* 24 (2008): 179. Something of a middle-line is offered by Kevin W. Hector, "Immutability, Necessity and Triunity: Towards a Resolution of the Trinity and Election Controversy," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 65 (2012): 64–81; although it is unlikely this will resolve the issue. McCormack, for his part, rejects these labels, believing Hungsinger gets things "completely backwards" (204), in Bruce McCormack, "Election and the Trinity: Theses in Response to George Hunsinger," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 63 (2010): 203–224.

overcoming a highly classical metaphysical doctrine of God by means of a thoroughly post-metaphysical account.[8] On McCormack's reading of Barth, there is no such ontological priority of Trinity over election.[9] This alters the received tradition radically in that God's decision for the covenant of grace is in itself constitutive of God's being from eternity.[10] Accordingly for McCormack, the *Logos asarkos* is from the beginning the *Logos incarnandus* (the Logos "to be incarnate"). As a consequence "there is no Logos in and for himself in distinction from God's act of turning towards the world and humanity in predestination; the Logos is *incarnandus* in and for himself, in eternity. For that move alone would make it clear that it is 'Jesus Christ' who is the Subject of election and not an indeterminate (or 'absolute') *Logos asarkos*."[11]

If one simply takes notice of the move to not make the *Logos asarkos* either "indeterminate," "abstract," or "absolute," then we may be able to say, so far so good; both traditionalists and revisionists could agree with this point at least. It is how one might interpret and subsequently develop such a theology that is in dispute. In an essay critical of Barth's Chalcedonianism, McCormack argues that "To make Jesus Christ the subject of election—if carried out consistently—is to bid farewell to the distinction between the eternal Word and the incarnate Word."[12] McCormack, by means of Barth, is constructing an argument that would make the immanent Trinity "wholly identical in content" with the economic Trinity,[13] in order to achieve at least two things: first, to avoid engaging in any speculation regarding the being of God (i.e. to avoid metaphysics); and second, to avoid the charge that God changes in his essence in the incarnation (i.e. Divine mutability). There are, of course, other implications of this position which McCormack seeks to defend, the most important for our purposes is that if the Logos is not the Subject of election then "How coherent can one's affirmation of the deity of Jesus Christ be if his being as Mediator is only accidentally related to what he is as Logos in and for himself? Is Jesus Christ 'fully God' or not?"[14] In other words, what of the Primacy of Jesus Christ, a doctrine we shall consider below. In short, it is McCormack's argument that there is no *Logos asarkos* which is independent of his being/existence as Redeemer. A more positive way of saying the same thing is that the immanent Trinity is not accidentally related to the economic Trinity.[15]

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8 In his Kantzer Lectures at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in 2011 entitled: "The God Who Graciously Elects: Seven Lectures on the Doctrine of God," McCormack believes Karl Barth's second *Der Römerbrief* is the most consistently post-metaphysical essay in theology ever offered. See lecture 3, "The Great Reversal: From the Economy of God to the Trinity in Modern Theology" (http://www.henrycenter.org/2011/12/19/bruce-mccormack-2011-kantzer-lectures-online/). McCormack also differentiates between anti-metaphysics and post-metaphysics. Post-metaphysics, as McCormack intends it, refers to following the revelation of God as witnessed to in Scripture and only knowing God in his act. It is this which justifies my identification of McCormack's' position as post-metaphysical actualistic ontology.
9 In a controversial essay McCormack argues this understanding is also evident in the work of Eberhard Jüngel. See Bruce McCormack, "God *Is* His Decision: The Jüngel-Gollwitzer 'Debate' Revisited," in Bruce L. McCormack and Kimlyn J. Bender, eds., *Theology as Conversation: The Significance of Dialogue in Historical and Contemporary Theology. A Festschrift for Daniel L. Migliore* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2009), 48–66.
10 Adam Neder's recent study prefers to call this Barth's "covenantal ontology," which distances Barth from the substantialist ontologies of patristic and Reformational theologies. See Adam Neder, *Participation in Christ: An Entryway into Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).
11 Bruce L. McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 186. McCormack is at this point correcting (or extending) the theology of Barth by following Barth's claim that Jesus Christ is the Subject of election.
12 Ibid., 217.
13 The words are McCormack's, ibid., 191. Later we read: "To put the matter as sharply as possible: God *is* in himself, in eternity, the mode of his Self-revelation in time—God as Jesus Christ in eternity and God as Jesus Christ in time—thus guaranteeing that the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity will be identical in content," idem., 218.
14 Ibid., 188.
15 We may add to that that at one stage in his Kantzer Lectures McCormack makes the side-comment that he disagrees with Thomas' stance that any one of the divine persons could have become incarnate. McCormack affirms the necessity of the Son's

Again, both traditionalists and revisionists could agree with this last sentence, however, it is how one might interpret and subsequently develop such a theology that is in dispute.

Distilling the issue to its most specific we may ask about the logical relation of God's gracious election to the triunity of God. It is here that McCormack self-consciously goes beyond Barth to be more Barthian than Barth was himself, when he posits: "these commitments require that we see the triunity of God, logically, as a function of divine election… In other words, the works of God *ad intra* (the Trinitarian processions) find their ground in the *first* of the works of God *ad extra* (vis., election)."[16] McCormack later adds: "Election thus has a certain logical priority even over the triunity of God," and still further, "Thus the 'gap' between the 'eternal Son' and 'Jesus Christ' is overcome, the distinction between them eliminated… So there is no 'eternal Son' if by that is meant a mode of being in God which is not identical with Jesus Christ. Therefore Jesus Christ is the electing God."[17]

While many responses could be made to McCormack's thesis, what interests us here is the identity of the divine Being vis-à-vis the divine processions. A cursory examination of McCormack's radical reinterpretation of Barth's theology would conclude, as Paul Molnar does, that "the order between election and triunity cannot be logically reversed without in fact making creation, reconciliation and redemption necessary to God."[18] In short, Molnar and others believe that what is at stake is the issue of divine freedom.[19] I fully understand the charge made by Molnar here and I agree with it in principle. However, I do think McCormack escapes the charge if his entire, radically revised post-metaphysical actualistic ontology, whereby God takes into himself a history, the history of Jesus Christ, is considered. That is to say, I think McCormack's theology has an internal consistency to it, even if notions of God, triunity, and freedom, to name but a few points, are radically revised. Whether such a move is what Barth actually meant and if it is orthodox or not, are another matter and are being debated elsewhere.[20]

In several essays McCormack addresses a central and pressing question: What does the doctrine of God say regarding human participation in God?[21] An answer to this question reveals the propriety, one

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incarnation alone. See http://www.henrycenter.org/2011/12/19/bruce-mccormack-2011-kantzer-lectures-online/. See Thomas Aquinas, *ST* IIIa, q. 3 a. 5. Aquinas goes on, of course, in q. 8 to say it is "most fitting" for the Son to become incarnate, but that is not enough for McCormack. McCormack, it seems to me, is taking up the same argument offered by Karl Rahner that all attempts such as that of Aquinas, vitiate the link between the immanent and economic Trinity, and "in so doing installed a relationship of arbitrariness between the begetting of the Son and the incarnation of Christ. Thus the integrity and knowability of God's act in salvation history was undermined," Travis Ables, "The Word in Which All Things Are Said – Anselm and Bonaventure," (Southeastern Commission for the Study of Religion, Annual Meeting, March 5, 2011, http://eden.academia.edu/TravisAbles/Papers/454107/The_Word_in_Which_All_Things_Are_Said_-_Anselm_and_Bonaventure), 1. See Karl Rahner, *The Trinity,* trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 10-11. More shall be said about this below.

16 McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern*, 194. McCormack acknowledges in the footnote that follows this citation that "Barth's position is the opposite," and cites from *CD* IV/1, 45.

17 Ibid., 218 and 219.

18 Paul Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2002), 63.

19 Another notable challenge to McCormack on this score is Edwin van Driel, "Karl Barth on the Eternal Existence of Jesus Christ," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 60 (2007): 45–61.

20 As an overview of the debate and how it is being played out by its major interlocutors—Bruce McCormack, Paul Molnar, George Hunsinger, Paul Nimmo, Edwin van Driel, Aaron Smith, and Kevin Hector—one might initially consult Michael T. Dempsey, ed., *Trinity and Election in Contemporary Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

21 McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern*, 235–260; and "Union With Christ in Calvin's Theology: Grounds For A Divinization Theory?" in David W. Hall, ed., *Tributes to John Calvin: A Celebration of His Quincentenary* (Phillipsburg, NJ.: P & R Publishing, 2010), 504–529.

could say, of any doctrine of God, not to mention of ones soteriology. According to McCormack, all doctrines of *theosis* (what he prefers to call "divinization" or "deification") are to be ruled out, be they Protestant or Eastern Orthodox, as they each operate out of a metaphysically oriented ontology, something we have seen McCormack criticize already, instead of operating out of a historically oriented and post-metaphysical account.[22] Consequently McCormack can say, "The 'exaltation' of the human occurs in and through a history—the history of Jesus Christ. It is not the consequence of a metaphysically conceived 'indwelling' of the divine on the part of the human; it is the consequence of a human participation in a concrete history in which both the 'essence' of God and the 'essence' of the human are—in a sense yet to be established—*made real*."[23] Accordingly both the humiliation of God and the exaltation of the human have their ontological ground in the divine election of grace. In the Incarnation we see the *making real* in time of what was already real and true of both God and the human in the divine decision.

On this reading, the human does not participate in the divine nature as such; rather, divinity and humanity share a common history in the election of the Son as Jesus Christ.[24] This comes to a head, or is most acute, perhaps, when, appreciatively citing Barth and Jüngel, McCormack is of the opinion that "the Word" of John 1.1 is not the eternal Logos or Son, but in fact, *Jesus Christ*: "It is the Logos who appears in the text as a placeholder for Jesus, not the other way round. It is Jesus to whom all of the predicates assigned to the Logos belong,"[25] writes McCormack. In Christ the God-man, all humanity is included; in his election every human is determined. One can opt out of this, of course, and live as if it was not true, but that would not negate the actual truth of it. Thus McCormack's post-metaphysical actualistic ontology is applied to soteriology. Such is the broadly defined argument currently being developed by Bruce McCormack; an argument that is as erudite and profound as it is challenging and troubling. Whatever else one might say, McCormack has certainly stimulated the academy to deeper and better thinking on these range of topics, even when one might end up disagreeing with certain parts or even rejecting his proposal outright.

A critical reply to such an account would take many forms and many pages, and that is not my intent here. Rather, I wish to pick up on the central point of McCormack's doctrines of God, Christology, and soteriology—his post-metaphysical actualism—and argue that the traditional language of Chalcedon is largely correct. I say largely correct as a *relational ontology,* briefly outlined below, not the *substance ontology* of classical theism, is closer to what pro-Nicene and pro-Chalcedonian theology is actually referring to, and such a relational ontology is better placed to account for the essence and freedom of the triune God, for the hypostatic union of the Logos incarnate, and for a doctrine of human participation in God, or more technically—*theosis*. As Ivor Davidson has recently argued:

> The appropriate alternative to substantialist construals of participation is neither extrinsicism nor nominalism: it is a properly rich depiction of the action of the Spirit as the one who sets up human

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22 While McCormack opposes metaphysics he does not oppose ontology, as, in his terms, an ontology does not have to presuppose a metaphysics. See the Kantzer Lectures, "The God Who Graciously Elects: Seven Lectures on the Doctrine of God," (http://www.henrycenter.org/2011/12/19/bruce-mccormack-2011-kantzer-lectures-online/).
23 McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern*, 237.
24 "Both true divinity and true humanity are—on the basis of a free, eternal decision—constituted in and through the same history. It is the singularity of this history which constitutes the unity of the 'person' of Christ," ibid., 246.
25 Ibid., 221, n.49.

subjects in the place for which they were made — the sphere of intimate communicative fellowship with God — by uniting them with the Father's incarnate Son and enabling them to come with that Son, as creaturely sons and daughters, to his Father.[26]

Consequently a relational ontology is better able than either substance ontology or post-metaphysical actualistic ontology to do justice to the biblical narrative of the Dominical man turned deified person, for the salvation of the world.

II. TOWARDS A RELATIONAL ONTOLOGY

Turning first to the divine Being I want to say, with Molnar, that a clearer distinction should be made between the immanent and economic Trinity such that the covenant of grace expresses a logically subsequent will of God to direct *ad extra* the eternal love that is expressed in the intra-Trinitarian relations.[27] The divine processions are not willed by God but are 'natural,' if we may use that term. If we take this line of reasoning then, with Edwin van Driel, we can affirm that "Barth's doctrine of election has no ontological consequences for the notions of immanent Trinity, *logos asarkos*, or God-in-and-for-Godself. Instead of 'upstream' of election, the consequences will be 'downstream', in Christology and anthropology."[28]

In terms of divine ontology we must turn not to the doctrine of election as constitutive of the being of God but to what Thomas Torrance has called "onto-relations" if we are to form a truly relational ontology that does not suffer from the inherent problems of McCormack's post-metaphysical actualistic ontology, or the well-rehearsed problems of a philosophically derived substance ontology. While a full rendition of a relational ontology is beyond the scope of the present essay the following is offered as suggestive for what such a relational ontology may entail.

Building on the doctrines of both the *homoousios tō patri* and *perichorēsis,* Torrance developed what he termed an onto-relational concept of the divine Persons. By onto-relational Torrance implies an understanding of the three divine Persons in the one God in which the ontic relations between them belong to what they essentially are in themselves in their distinctive *hypostaseis*. In short, onto-relations are being-constituting-relations. The differing relations between the Father, Son, and Spirit belong to what they are as Father, Son, and Spirit; so the *homoousial* relations between the three divine Persons belong to what they are in themselves as Persons and in their Communion with one another.[29] In summary, the divine Being and the divine Communion are to be understood wholly in terms of one another.[30]

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26 Ivor J. Davidson, "Salvation's Destiny: Heirs of God," in *God of Salvation: Soteriology in Theological Perspective* (ed. Ivor J. Davison and Murray A. Rae; Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 174.
27 Molnar, *Divine Freedom*, 63.
28 van Driel, "Karl Barth on the Eternal Existence of Jesus Christ," 58–59.
29 Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 102–103. We should note that this is not an argument that the relations are prior to the persons, such as that argued by, amongst others, Paul Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2000); and "Participating in the Trinity," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 33 (2006): 375–391. Fiddes defines "subsistent relations" incorrectly when he argues that "there are no persons 'at each end of a relation,' but the 'persons' are simply the relations," ibid, 281. This would amount to what we might term a personalistic ontology of sorts.
30 This ontology is worked out more fully in Myk Habets, "*Filioque? Nein.* A Proposal for Coherent Coinherence," in Myk Habets and Phillip Tolliday, eds., *Trinitarian Theology After Barth* (Eugene, OR.: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 161–202.

The onto-relations are not modes of existence for Torrance; "They are persons in the fullest sense, constituted by relationality that is homoousial and perichoretic, one with each other in their relational being and mutually inhering in each other," as Del Colle reminds us.[31] As a direct result Torrance affirms the traditional *taxis* of the divine Persons (the eternal processions) with the stipulation that the eternal generation of the Son and the spiration of the Spirit from the Father applies only to the mode of their *enhypostatic* differentiation and not to the causation of their being.[32] If the processions applied directly to the causation of being then the older substance ontology would be in play and the end result can only be tritheism (which includes hard social trinitarianism) or Aristotelian emanationism; or, alternatively, the problematic actualistic ontology of McCormack whereby God wills to be triune by means of the election of Jesus Christ (something which could be seen to move in the opposite direction toward modalism).[33]

Torrance affirms a number of trinitarian axioms that contribute to his onto-relational definition of divine ontology.[34] He first affirms the personal status of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit but also affirms as orthodox the personal status of the one Being of God. Thus in the doctrine of the Holy Trinity the one Being of God does not refer to static essence or abstract *ousia* (a substance ontology) but to the intrinsically personal "I Am" of God.[35] Second, Torrance lays stress on the *monarchy* of God, "or the one ultimate Principle of Godhead, in which all three divine Persons share equally, for the whole indivisible Being of God belongs to each of them as it belongs to all of them."[36] The *monarchy* is thus the Triune Godhead *and* the Person of the Father, but, strictly speaking, it is the *Being* of the Father, the one Triune Godhead, that *monarchy* actually refers to.[37] Third, and consequently, the Spirit proceeds from the Father, but given the previous definition of *monarchy*, "the Holy Spirit proceeds ultimately from the Triune Being of the Godhead."[38] Thus the Spirit proceeds out of the mutual relations within the one Being of the Holy Trinity "in which the Father indwells the Spirit and is Himself indwelt by the Spirit."[39] Finally, it is a natural implication of Torrance's theology to suggest that the Father himself is personed by the begetting of the Son and the spiration of the Spirit and their mutual love in return. There is thus origin and action for all three persons of the Trinity. And in a related point, Torrance recommends an approach to the Trinity that is neither from the three Persons to the one God (Eastern), nor from the one Being of God to the three Persons (Western), but rather, starts with the "*dynamic Triunity* of God as Trinity in Unity and Unity in

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31 Ralph Del Colle, "'Person' and 'Being' in John Zizioulas' Trinitarian Theology: Conversations with Thomas F. Torrance and Thomas Aquinas," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54 (2001): 79.

32 See Del Colle, "Person and Being," 80, who cites, Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 179; and idem., *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement*, 135.

33 This is not to suggest that McCormack is a modalist, he is not.

34 These are worked out in relation to "The Agreed Statement" on the Trinity in dialogue with the Eastern Orthodox Communion, see "The Agreed Statement on the Holy Trinity," in *Theological Dialogue Between Orthodox and Reformed Churches,* vol 2 (ed. T.F. Torrance; Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1993), 219–26.

35 Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement*, 112. It is on this point that "Torrance and Zizioulas are on the same page," writes Ralph Del Colle, "Person and Being," 73.

36 Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement*, 112.

37 Torrance accepts the doctrine of the *monarchy* according to Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzen, and Cyril of Alexandria over that of the other Cappadocians and in so doing he rejects what may be termed standard, Palamite Eastern theology represented so ably by John Zizioulas. For critical engagement see Del Colle, "Person and Being," 70–86.

38 Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement*, 113. At this point Torrance and Zizioulas find themselves diametrically opposed.

39 Ibid., 113.

Trinity."[40] That is, neither the general (*ousia*) nor the personal (*hypostasis*) should be emphasized to the relative neglect of the other. An adequate doctrine of the Trinity must put *ousia* and *hypostasis,* essence and person, on the same level of reality and importance. This is emphasized in the work of Paul Molnar who reminds us that a doctrine of the Trinity must not start with plurality nor with unity, "but with the triune God who is simultaneously one and three."[41] That there is no other God must be made clear in an evangelical theology.

From this triune Being, with its eternal processions, the doctrine of election must then find its logical place. We may say then, the Son *incarnatus* subsists in the eternal Son without ceasing to be *incarnatus* (the Nicene and Chalcedonian logic of the Word becoming human without ceasing to be the eternal Son). There is a unity-in-distinction between the eternal Son, the Son *incarnandus,* and the Son *incarnatus.* On this basis we may conclude with Hunsinger, "The temporal mode of existence is internal to the eternal mode of existence without ceasing to be temporal."[42]

Torrance appreciatively cites the work of Martin Buber who saw through the problem of modern Protestant thought when he attacked it for what he called its "conceptual letting go of God." Torrance imagines a mountain climber trying to climb the face of a rock cliff: if it is utterly smooth, without any cracks in it, it is impossible. Unless he can get his fingers or spikes into the rock, and thus make use of the interstices or intrinsic relations on the rock, he cannot grasp hold of it. Against notions of mysticism and liberalism Torrance argues the fact that God is a triunity means that there are relations of love inherent to God which allows us to know this God as he is in his inherent relations (onto-relations). "There is a kind of meeting of love, a profound reciprocity, within God, and it is when our knowledge of God latches on to that internal relationship deep in God that we can really conceive him and know him in accordance with his intrinsic nature. And that is the ground, as Buber showed, for a conceptual grasp of God."[43]

This onto-relational understanding of person defined as person-in-relationship is also applicable to inter-human relations, but in a created way reflecting the uncreated way in which it applies to the Trinitarian relations in God.[44] Torrance, clearly influenced by Barth, sees in the creation of men and women in the image of God an otherness and togetherness that is to be expressed in an inherent relatedness, which in turn is a creaturely reflection of a transcendent relatedness in the divine Being.[45] Torrance understands that "this is the *personal* or *inter-personal* structure of humanity in which there is imaged the ineffable personal relations of the Holy Trinity."[46] This means that when Torrance speaks of humanity he does not mean an

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40 Ibid., 114, italics in original.
41 Molnar, *Divine Freedom*, 232.
42 George Hunsinger, "Election and the Trinity: Twenty-Five Theses on the Theology of Karl Barth," *Modern Theology* 24 (2008): 184, thesis 8.e. This is what makes sense of Barth's claim that, "In the free act of the election of grace, the Son of the Father is no longer *just* the eternal Logos, but as such, as very God from all eternity, he is also the very God and the very human being he will become in time," Barth, *CD* IV/1, 66, cited in ibid., 184, thesis 6.g.
43 Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*, 150.
44 What Hunsinger says in another connection would also apply to this case: "…it is not the substance but only the grammar of *perichoresis* that is at stake. Whereas the substance is *sui generis*, the grammar can be applied analogously across diverse cases," George Hunsinger, "Election and the Trinity," 183.
45 See Barth, *CD*, III/4, 117.
46 Thomas F. Torrance, "The Soul and Person in Theological Perspective," in *Religion, Reason, and the Self: Essays in Honour of Hywel D. Lewis* (ed. S.R. Sutherland and T.A. Roberts; Cardiff: University of Wales Press), 109–110.

individual[47] but rather a person in ontological relation with other persons (and with God).[48] Jesus Christ is thus the only true human person and the one into whose image all human creatures are to be conformed into. This is what Torrance means by "onto-relations" or being-constituting-relations as applied to human creation.[49]

Given Torrance's doctrine of onto-relations, the *imago Dei* is thus a dynamic and eschatological reflection that, while initiated and developed in time-space within creation, is ultimately only realised in the eschaton of which the church is currently a foretaste.[50] The onto-relations work on two levels, vertically and horizontally. Vertically, one is justified and sanctified through a relationship with the triune God; horizontally, one is formed into communion with other believers in the Body of Christ, the Church. But these two levels are one integrated whole, not two separate spheres. What is clear is that *theosis* or communion with God, is a "personal" activity and persons are defined as humans-in-relationship. The ultimate person is Jesus Christ; hence mature men and women are those who have been perfected by grace as they are united to Christ in the Holy Spirit. The Church thus becomes the locus of *theosis* this side of the Parousia.

Due to sin and the Fall the onto-relations that exist between all personal beings—God-humanity, humanity-God, and humanity-humanity—have been radically "disrupted," resulting in the breakdown of personal relationships on both the horizontal and vertical levels.[51] This disruption affects the "transcendental determinism" of human beings. As fallen humans refuse to listen to the Spirit of God, their transcendental determinism is replaced with a sinful self-determinism. As a result only through the mediation of Christ can the Holy Spirit be poured out on human beings so that they can reflect the *imago Dei* as God intended.[52]

Given this definition of the *imago Dei*, one that is restored through the vicarious humanity of Jesus Christ and mediated to us by the Spirit who unites us with Christ, we can see what Torrance means when he uses the concept of *theosis*. As Colyer helpfully summarises:

> *Theosis* or *theopoiesis* is not the divinizing or deification of the human soul or creaturely being, Torrance contends, but rather is the Spirit of God humanizing and personalizing us by uniting us with Christ's vicarious humanity in a way that both confirms us in our creaturely reality

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47 "That is to say by 'man' the biblical tradition means 'man-and-woman', for it is man and woman who constitute in their union the basic unit of humanity," Thomas F. Torrance, "The Goodness and Dignity of Man in the Christian Tradition," *Modern Theology* 4 (1988): 311.

48 The faulty idea of *person* being equated with *individual* is attributed by Torrance, as it is by most scholars, to Boethius, *De duabus naturis et una persona Christi, adversus Eutychen et Nestorium*, 2.1–5, cf. Torrance, "The Soul and Person in Theological Perspective," 117, n.12. Torrance's view of "person" is partially derived from the work of Richard St Victor as opposed to that of Boethius or Aquinas, both of which are described by Torrance in his *Reality and Scientific Theology*, 174–176. His is thus a relational ontology.

49 Torrance, "The Goodness and Dignity of Man in the Christian Tradition," 311.

50 Torrance, "The Soul and Person in Theological Perspective," 109.

51 Torrance, "The Goodness and Dignity of Man in the Christian Tradition," 313.

52 Ibid., 320–321. An interesting parallel is found in Staniloae's theology of the *Logos*, whereby the human person is created with an inherent orientation toward the ontological pursuit of "ultimate transcendence." This ultimate transcendence is made known supremely in the person of Jesus Christ the *Logos* and it is here that *theosis* takes place. Staniloae goes beyond Torrance, however, when he makes this movement one of nessitity rather than of grace. See Dumitru Staniloae, *Teologia Dogmatica Ortodoxa* (Bucuresti: EIBMBOR, 1978), 2:47.

utterly different from God, and yet also adapts us in our contingent nature for knowledge of God, for communion with God and for fellowship with one another.[53]

By distinguishing between grace and nature, Torrance and the Reformed tradition in general safeguard the distinction between God and creation.[54] This becomes vital when considering a doctrine of *theosis*. Because of the contingent character of the created order there is no innate "point of contact" between God and humanity. This includes the human soul and rationality, which are also created *ex nihilo*. Torrance believes the creation can know God personally, not through any inherent *analogia entis* but rather by a "created correspondence" between the creature and the Creator, located ultimately in Jesus Christ.[55] To further this distinction Torrance adopts Barth's idea of the *analogia relationis,* in contradistinction to classical Western conceptions of an *analogia entis.*[56] Such are the contours of a relational ontology briefly applied to Divine and human nature.

III. SUPRALAPSARIAN CHRISTOLOGY

Moving back from human ontology in general to Jesus Christ specifically, we must now make a decision regarding how we are to understand the *Logos asarkos* and the *Logos incarnandus*. On a traditional reading, adopting the category of substance ontology, the two are only instrumentally related so that creation, incarnation, and salvation seem unnecessary and unrelated to the immutable God. Alternatively, on McCormack's actualistic reading the two are collapsed into one *simpliciter* (without qualification) and are identified with the election of the man Jesus Christ. A third option is, however, open to us, one that has not received explicit attention in the recent literature, and that is to utilize the doctrine of the Primacy of Christ (or what is alternatively called supralapsarian Christology) in this discussion.[57]

According to Christian tradition, Jesus Christ is pre-eminent over all creation as the *Alpha* and the *Omega*, the "beginning and the end" (Rev 1.8, 21.6; 22.13). This belief, when theologically considered, is known as the Primacy of Christ.[58] Discussing the Primacy of Christ within the context of his predestination, John Duns Scotus argues that the occasion for the predestination of Christ was not *supremely* that of sin but

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53 Elmer M. Colyer, *How To Read T.F. Torrance: Understanding his Trinitarian and Scientific Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), 178.

54 Thomas F. Torrance, *Theological Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 65–75; *Theology in Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965.), 64–67; 99–116; "Introduction," *The School of Faith: The Catechisms of the Reformed Church* (trans. and ed. with Introduction by T.F. Torrance; London: James Clarke and Co, 1959), lii-lv; and *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* (London: Lutterworth, 1949), 23–34, argues that this is true of Reformed theology from Calvin to Barth.

55 Torrance, "The Goodness and Dignity of Man in the Christian Tradition," 312; and *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 219–220.

56 See especially Barth, *CD*, II/2, 243. For analyses of Barth's response to the *analogia entis* see: Eberhard Jüngel, "The Possibility of Theological Anthropology on the Basis of Analogy," in *Karl Barth: A Theological Legacy* (trans. Garrett E. Paul; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986); and Allan J. Torrance, "Theological Language, Vestigiality and the Question of Continuity between the Human and Divine Realms," in *Persons in Communion: Trinitarian Description and Human Participation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 120–212.

57 For a comprehensive account of this position see Myk Habets, "On Getting First Things First: Assessing Claims for the Primacy of Christ," *New Blackfriars* 90 (2009): 343–364.

58 The specific issue this doctrine addresses is the question: Was sin the *efficient* or the *primary* cause of the incarnation? 'Primacy' is being used here to indicate the "state of holding the highest place or rank within a given order, and/or the state of being logically or chronologically first," Juniper B. Carol, *Why Jesus Christ: Thomistic, Scotistic and Conciliatory Perspectives* (Manassas, VI.: Trinity Communications, 1986), 5.

rather the glory of God.[59] According to Scotus the glory of God is a much higher good than the redemption from sin. Consequently, to posit the incarnation solely on the basis of human sin and the need for redemption diminishes the incarnation. The *sine qua non* of the doctrine is that the predestination of Christ took place in an instant which was logically prior to the prevision of sin as *absolutum futurum*. That is, the existence of Christ was not contingent on the Fall as foreseen through the *scientia visionis*.[60]

The following texts are most commonly cited in support of a supralapsarian Christology: Prov 8:22-23; Col 1:13-20; Eph 1:3-10; Rom 8:29-30; and 1 Pt 1:20. From Romans 8:29-30 we may conclude that if Jesus Christ is the exemplar or model which God planned to reproduce in humanity, Christ's existence must therefore be, in God's mind, *ordine intentionis*, prior to the existence of all other persons, including Adam, because the *exemplatum* always presupposes the *exemplar*. The specific *exemplatum* in this text is not the eternal Word, but Christ the God-man, the same who died and came back to life and now intercedes at God's right hand (v.34). This is not to argue that Jesus is only or merely an *examplar* or model of salvation. Christ is the Saviour, the unique God-man, the object and subject of election.[61]

A supralapsarian Christology expressly supports the view that the eternal generation of the Son logically precedes the *Logos incarnandus*, but does not materially separate *Logos asarkos* from *Logos incarnandus*. And that is where human salvation is ultimately to be found—in the final *theosis* of human persons as they are united to the glorified Christ, the Dominical man, who is himself the deified man for the salvation of the world. Now a supralapsarian Christology does the explanatory work of the *Logos incarnandus*. Armed with such a theology we can see that the *Logos asarkos* is the *Logos incarnandus*, but to equate such with Jesus Christ *directly* or *simpliciter* would be a mistake. The *Logos asarkos/incarnandus* becomes *ensarkos/incarnatus* and at such a time "becomes" Jesus Christ of Nazareth, without ceasing to be the *Logos asarkos*. And yet, given that Jesus is *homoousios* with the Father and the Spirit, then we must say that the one person of the incarnate Son is identical with the one person of the eternal Son (a relational ontology here understood, not a substance ontology). We may say the eternal Son is Jesus Christ, but we must say this *secundum quid* (in a certain respect), not, *pace* McCormack, in the sense of a strict or absolute identity.[62] It is here that the Chalcedonian logic makes perfect sense:

> as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer... recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence.

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59 See John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio,* Lib. III, d. 7, q. 3 (Wadding edition; Lyons: 1939; reprinted; Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1968–69). For an overview see C.W. Suh, *The Creation-Mediatorship of Jesus Christ: A Study in the Relation of the Incarnation and the Creation* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1982), 13–33.

60 This point is made clear by Carol, *Why Jesus Christ*, 147.

61 On Christ as the subject of election see Myk Habets, "The Doctrine of Election in Evangelical Calvinism: T.F. Torrance as a Case Study," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 73 (2008): 334–54; and on Barth see Edwin Chr. Van Driel, "Karl Barth on the Eternal Existence of Jesus Christ," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 60 (2007): 45–61.

62 In the same way we can say that Jesus Christ is the electing God—but only *secundum quid*. See Hunsinger, "Election and the Trinity," 191.

As a result we do not have a *Logos asarkos* abstracted from the actuality of the *Logos incarnandus*; but conversely, we do not collapse the historical Christ into the *Logos asarkos* as McCormack does.[63] In its own way this fully respects what we read in John 1:14, "Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο," where a real "coming to be" is posited, but not in such a way as to suggest a "ceasing to be" of the Logos or eternal Son. This understanding corresponds to that of Kevin Hector, when he writes: "One can accordingly understand the eternal logos as incarnandus, since he has eternally and wholeheartedly determined to become incarnate, but not as 'nothing but' incarnandus, since the Son could have been otherwise than incarnandus and since, even in identifying wholeheartedly with us, the Son maintains the being he would have had apart from the covenant."[64] On this reading, the real ἐγένετο is the becoming human (the assumption of a human nature), with all that entails for the triune God.

In his own way Karl Barth presents Jesus Christ as the Mediator between Creator and creation, between heaven and earth, between eternity and time.[65] Given Barth's role in the current debate in question his theology is of importance here. While time and eternity are distinct, they are not separated in the person of the incarnate Son.[66] Hunsinger points out that for Barth the fellowship of time and eternity in the person of Jesus Christ has two vectors, one from above-to-below, and one from-below-to above. He then cites Athanasius's famous theotic statement, "God became human in order that humans might become gods" to illustrate how Barth conceives of the simultaneity of these two vectors in Christ.[67] God's becoming human without ceasing to be divine corresponds to the downward vector, while humankind's elevation to God without ceasing to be human corresponds to the upward vector. The emphasis of this upward vector in Barth's theology places him squarely within the elevation-line theology emphatic in doctrines of the Primacy of Christ.

In his trinitarian construction of time and eternity Barth starts with the pretemporal existence of the triune God. In this pretemporal existence God is in perfect fellowship as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. "And in this pure divine time there took place the appointment of the eternal Son for the temporal world, there occurred the readiness of the Son to do the will of the eternal Father, and there ruled the peace of the eternal Spirit – the very thing later revealed at the heart of created time in Jesus Christ." And later on the same page he continues: "To say that everything is predestined, that everything comes from God's free, eternal love

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63 Related to this same theological construal is the fact that the Word is not confined in a human body, the doctrine of the so-called *extra Calvinisticum*. We read a statement of this in John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (ed. John T. McNeill; trans. Ford Lewis Battles; The Library of Christian Classics vols. 20 and 21; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 2.13.4:
They thrust upon us as something absurd the fact that if the Word of God became flesh, then he was confined within the narrow prison of an earthly body. This is mere imprudence! For even if the Word in his immeasurable essence united with the nature of man into one person, we do not imagine that he was confined therein. Here is something marvelous: the Son of God descended from heaven in such a way that, without leaving heaven, he willed to be borne in the virgin's womb, to go about the earth, and to hang upon the cross; yet he continuously filled the world even as he had done from the beginning.
See Myk Habets, "Putting the "Extra" Back into Calvinism," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 62 (2009): 441–456, and Daniel Y.K. Lee, *The Holy Spirit as Bond in Calvin's Thought: Its Functions in Connection with the* extra Calvinisticum (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011).
64 Kevin W. Hector, "Immutability, Necessity and Triunity: Towards a Resolution of the Trinity and Election Controversy," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 65 (2012): 76.
65 Barth, *CD* II/1, 616.
66 In Jesus Christ eternity and time have a "fellowship" (*koinonia*) with one another. Barth, *CD* II/1, 616.
67 George Hunsinger, "Mysterium Trinitatis: Karl Barth's Conception of Eternity," in *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 202.

which penetrates and rules time from eternity is just the same as to say simply that everything is determined in Jesus Christ."[68] This quotation provides a forceful articulation of Barth's commitment to something like the Primacy of Christ. The predestination of Christ is explicitly linked to the will of the triune God in the "pure divine time," which is clearly before any consideration of sin or the fall. This does not, however, establish that for Barth, God constitutes himself triune by means of the election of Jesus Christ. Rather, it supports the reading that the *Logos asarkos* is personally identical to the *Logos incarnandus*—the one elected to be the God-man, and yet the two are logically differentiated.

Barth's theology of covenant and creation is also informative regarding his position on the Primacy of Christ. A Reformed teaching on creation-covenant-Fall is reversed by Barth to covenant-creation-Fall.[69] From within God's "pure divine time" a covenant was established by which God's *ecstatic* being of love decided to create a counterpoint, an *imago Dei* in a creaturely realm.[70] Human beings are created to fulfil the prior covenant of God. In the covenant God aims at uniting himself with the creature and at elevating its being by letting it participate in his own being.[71] Barth is thus committed to an elevation-line theology which sees the incarnation as the way to the consummation of creation. While it is true that sin must be atoned for and that has decisively been done in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, this does not represent the fullness of the Gospel of the Dominical man. While underplaying the significance harmartiology plays within Barth's thought, we may summarise Barth's position in this regard with the following from Suh:

> Before the foundation of the world the reconciliation or the union of God with His creatures was intended. God concluded His covenant with His creatures for this purpose. The first thought in God's counsel from eternity is His union with the creatures and then their elevation which implies their participation in His being. The creation was planned and brought about for the sake of reconciliation. One of the underlying ideas in Barth's theological arguments is that the first creation is imperfect in itself. Therefore, the creation should be elevated to perfection through the grace of God. If seen in this perspective, reconciliation is not said to be made necessary because of sin or the fall, which is an episode or incident. The reconciliation which is connected with sin is included in the scheme of elevation…If sin would not have entered into the world and the covenant would have proceeded to its original goal, then it would have resulted in the elevation of the created being through the union of God with it.[72]

The work of reconciliation in Jesus Christ is the accomplishment of the union between God and humanity which God originally willed and created. This salvation as the fulfilment of being is not, as Suh points out, "inherent to the created being but comes from God to it, because it is the participation in the being of God…It is the free grace of God. God created man to be the participant in His being."[73] Jesus

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68 Barth, *CD* II/1, 622.

69 See the discussion in Suh, *The Creation-Mediatorship of Jesus Christ,* 38.

70 This is developed throughout Barth, *CD* III/1, 94–228.

71 This is developed throughout Barth, *CD* III/1, 42–329.

72 Suh, *The Creation-Mediatorship of Jesus Christ,* 66. Suh bases this largely upon his reading of Barth, *CD* IV/1, 22–66.

73 Ibid*.,* 69.

Christ is the Mediator and the Reconciler, not only in the juridical sense to take away the sin of the world, but in the broader sense of uniting humanity with God, the original intention of the covenant. Seen in this perspective, the Fall and sin represent an episode or incident, according to Barth.[74]

IV. SOTERIOLOGY

Moving from divine ontology and Christology, we now extend the discussion briefly into soteriology. In a recent work Edwin van Driel presents three arguments for a supralapsarian Christology. First, the eschaton is not the restoration of the proton; in the eschaton there is superabundance, a rich intimacy with God that the proton did not know.[75] In van Driel's words: "In Christ we gain more than we lost in Adam."[76] This superabundance involves a transformation of human existence into the form of the resurrected Christ, and an increase in the experience of divine intimacy as humans 'see' God face to face in the face of Jesus Christ. A second argument is an extension of the first and involves Christ's role in the *visio Dei*. If the *visio Dei* is sensory and intellectual, and van Driel rightly thinks it is, then the eschatological goal of humanity in the beatific vision is only possible if God makes himself present in bodily form, that is, through the incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. The final argument mustered by van Driel is one basic to his proposal and concerns divine friendship. Friendship, divine and human, is motivated by love. When in the Old Testament God calls his people his friends (Abraham, Moses, etc) and in the New Testament Jesus addresses his disciples as friends, this defines these relationships as motivated not only by human sin and need for reconciliation, but by a deeper, preordinate sense of love.[77] The death of Jesus is motivated by friendship; the friendship is not motivated by death. If the incarnation only happened as a function of God's reconciling action, there would be no need for a continued bodily existence of Christ after crucifixion and death. The humanity of the incarnate Son is not merely instrumental for atonement for sin.

Further, to a relational ontology, witnessed to in the incarnation of the eternal Son, the incarnation establishes an interpersonal relationship of mutual love and commitment. The Son becomes incarnate to establish a kingdom of love, in the form of a suitor, pursuing an answer of his beloved.[78] Under this schema the incarnation is a gift given to human persons: by assuming a human nature, the Son makes himself available for interpersonal communion, from one human being to the other. This assumes that in the incarnation the eternal Son takes up a human nature like ours, a nature that allows him to be present to us in human form. Stressing the relational aspect of communion by focussing on pneumatology, Thomas Weinandy has expressed the fact that, "the primary task of the Holy Spirit is to gather the whole cosmic order into union with Christ and to empower all human beings, from Adam and Eve to the last person

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74 Barth, *CD* IV/1, 37.
75 For an elaboration of this theme see Myk Habets, "How 'Creation is Proleptically Conditioned by Redemption'," *Colloquium* 41 (2009): 3–21; and John V. Fesko, *Last things First: Unlocking Genesis 1–3 with the Christ of Eschatology* (Fern: Mentor, 2007).
76 Edwin van Driel, *Incarnation Anyway: Arguments for Supralapsarian Christology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 151. It is more than coincidental that this phrase redounds throughout the work of Thomas Torrance. See Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, 30.
77 van Driel, *Incarnation Anyway*, 160.
78 van Driel, *Incarnation Anyway*, 57.

conceived, to confess Jesus Christ is Lord. Such a Spirit-filled profession of faith is to the Father's glory, for this is the supreme desire of his paternal heart."[79]

In bringing together the themes of election, theology proper, supralapsarian Christology, and theotic soteriology, we may achieve the sort of eschatological biblical theology McCormack and the other participants in the current debate are after, but one that does not rely on false metaphysical *a priori* for its establishment on the one hand, nor on a post-metaphysical actualistic ontology on the other hand.

V. RAHNER'S RULE REDIVIVUS?

In concluding this essay it is worth noting the similarities between McCormack's proposal and the earlier one of Karl Rahner. In his influential essay *The Trinity*, Rahner mounted a case for an alternative understanding of the Trinity in several well-rehearsed moves. He was critical of Aquinas and others who argued that any of the Divine persons could have become incarnate for that, he believed, would tell us nothing about the personal identity of the Son who did take on human flesh, nor would the incarnation reveal God himself. It would, he believed, dislocate the missions from the processions such that God would remain an absolute mystery to us. Rahner, like McCormack, sees the mission of the Son as proper to him (*proprium*).[80] In order to correct this perceived mistake Rahner proceeds through several steps, all-too-quickly narrated here with parallels to McCormack's argument already considered.

First Rahner rejects the Neo-scholasticism dominant in Roman Catholic theology at the time, and presents a doctrine of the Trinity informed by the modern concerns of history, personhood, and subjectivity-relationally. McCormack too seeks to reject metaphysics, presumably including the Aristotelianism of scholasticism, but he chooses to replace it with a post-metaphysical actualism. Second, Rahner moves from Christology to the Trinity in his theological method and ties this in with a salvation-historical approach to the development of doctrines. McCormack too moves from Christology to the Trinity, following Barth closely in this account, and ties this in with a robust Protestant doctrine of *sola scriptura*.

Third, and most importantly, Rahner develops what has come to be known as Rahner's Rule or his *Grundaxiom*: "The 'economic' Trinity is the 'immanent' Trinity and the 'immanent' Trinity is the 'economic' Trinity."[81] The axiom serves at least two purposes in Rahner's argument; first, it attempts to remove the isolation of the doctrine of the Trinity as it makes it dependent upon and informative about the economy. This is the context within which Rahner makes his now famous quip about most Christians being mere "monotheists."[82] Rahner is thus concerned to stress the ontological consistency of the economic missions and the divine processions. Second, it further affirms his thesis that *God* did not become incarnate, rather, the *Logos* did.

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79 Thomas Weinandy, "The Cosmic Christ," *The Cord* 51 (2001): 27. Interestingly, Weinandy is a Franciscan (Capuchin order), a Thomist scholar, an Athanasian expert, and an advocate of a supralapsarian Christology. The element of pneumatology has often been missing in the historic discussions concerning the Primacy of Christ. See Myk Habets, "Spirit Christology: Seeing in Stereo," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 11 (2003): 199–235.

80 See Karl Rahner, *The Trinity,* trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 23.

81 Ibid*.,* 22, italics in original.

82 Ibid., 10.

This impels Rahner to revise the notion of *hypostasis* as it is applied to God, for in that case it "cannot be a universal univocal concept, applying to each of the three persons in the same way."[83] Rahner has other arguments but these are the main ones by which he establishes his axiom. McCormack's assertion that "…God *is* in himself, in eternity, the mode of his Self-revelation in time—God as Jesus Christ in eternity and God as Jesus Christ in time—thus guaranteeing that the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity will be identical in content,"[84] would appear to warrant the conclusion that his is Rahner's Rule affirmed in a novel way. Add to this McCormack's attempt to make the first work of God *ad extra* (election) constitutive of his being *in se* (Trinity) and we see the close parallels between the two projects. Rahner's words could equally have come from McCormack, "what Jesus is and does as man reveals the Logos himself…"[85]

Fourth and finally, we may note that for both Rahner and McCormack the language of "modes" is preferred over that of "person." McCormack specifically prefers Barth's "modes of being" while Rahner, appreciative of Barth's suggestion, finally settles on "distinct manner of subsisting." Both object to the term "person" on grounds that the concept is fraught with metaphysical confusion. The different language should not obscure the fact that for both the notions of "person" and "being" are being radically revised and applied first to Divine persons and then to human persons in such a way that a substance metaphysic is being replaced with one both Rahner and McCormack believe is based more directly upon salvation history (*sola Scriptura*).

By highlighting some of the obvious parallels between Rahner's and McCormack's trinitarianism there is no suggestion that the two theologies are identical or parallel each other at every step—they clearly don't! The intent, rather, is to situate McCormack's proposals into some context and where it does parallel that of Rahner, it is incumbent upon McCormack to answer the standard objections mounted there.[86] What I have attempted in this essay is to mount some further objections but, more than that, to begin to present an alternate account of the divine ontology and the relationship between the immanent and economic Trinity. In summary I have shown that the Dominical man is to be identified directly with the eternal Son and his procession or generation from the Father, but not in such a way that would conflate the *Logos asarkos* with the *Logos ensarkos* in anything other than their personal identification—both are the eternal Son but not *simpliciter*. Likewise, the *Logos incarnandus* is the *Logos incarnatus*, but in a very specific way (*secundum quid*).[87] The triune God covenants to become human in the Son in order to achieve the participation of created human persons in the Divine life in the incarnate Son and by the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Primacy of Christ is but one way in which a christologically conditioned doctrine of election makes sense of both Scripture and the tradition. In the Dominical Man—Jesus Christ—humanity is made to participate in the Divine life and love.

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83 Ibid., 12, n.12.
84 McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern*, 218.
85 Rahner, *The Trinity,* 33.
86 Amongst the many objections the most pertinent in this context would come from Molnar, *Divine Freedom*, especially 126.
87 On this point see Hunsinger, "Election and the Trinity," 182–83, thesis 5.c: "…because the eternal Son is not only eternal but also *incarnandus*, and because the Son *incarnandus* is numerically identical with the Son *incarnatus*, it is not illegitimate to say that in a certain respect (*secundum quid*) it is the Son *incarnatus*, or Jesus Christ, who is the subject of this decision. This statement cannot be made absolutely or without qualification (*simpliciter*)," ibid., 183.

'WHY DO WE SUFFER?': A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON THE 'JESUS HEALS CANCER' SIGN AND RESPONSES TO IT

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ABSTRACT

In 2012, a church in Napier displayed a billboard reading 'Jesus Heals Cancer'. The billboard created a wide variety of public reactions from anger to support. Whilst the billboard is interesting in itself, this article explores the implicit beliefs that were displayed regarding suffering by both Christians and the wider New Zealand public. Embedded within the sign and the responses to it were assumptions about the role suffering should and should not play in people's lives. These assumptions arise in the specific context of Western culture and its belief that suffering is a problem to be overcome. This belief that upholds suffering as an aberration is then contrasted with the biblical narratives of the Joban drama of suffering and the call for faithful suffering in Revelation within the context of eschatological hope. Finally, the article concludes with the rich possibilities for worship in the midst of suffering. Drawing on the language of lament within an eschatological vision of hope, this article explores the role that worship can play in forming a community of hope who can worship well in the midst of suffering and, therefore, suffer well.

Culturally conditioned ideas about the ultimate way of life for humanity sway perceptions of, and responses to, suffering. In the face of suffering we in the Western world easily become consumed with 'why' questions and desperately seek rapid relief.[1] The common question posed in our time seeks to understand how God could allow suffering. An interesting point to consider, however, is why such a question is so frequently asked in today's Western society, in comparison to less developed societies?[2]

An important question that this essay seeks to explore is not 'why do we suffer?' but 'why does it trouble us so much that we suffer?' In 2012, a church in Napier displayed a billboard reading "Jesus Heals Cancer".[3] There were conflicting opinions within the community about whether making such a public statement was ethically right. Yet, another significant question to contemplate is why this text was created within our western New Zealand (NZ) society at all? The billboard's message is a cultural text highlighting surrounding worldviews.[4] This essay explores key aspects of society that relate to the production of, and responses to, this sign. It proposes that NZ culture is afflicted with deep concern for achieving instant comfort and happiness, and that this has affected not only society but the Christian church and our

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1 L. Ann Jervis, *At the Heart of the Gospel: Suffering in the Earliest Christian Message* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 7.
2 Stanley Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), x.
3 3 News, "Church Promises Cancer Cure," *Campbell Live*, February 27, 2012.
4 Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "What is Everyday Theology? How and Why Christians Should Read Culture," in *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts And Interpret Trends* (Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Charles A. Anderson, and Michael J. Sleasman, eds.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 48.

understanding of the gospel. [5] Furthermore, arguments are made, based on biblical and theological perceptions of suffering, that the church must be formed through worship into an alternative community, who anticipate and witness to the true hope of Christ's eternal Kingdom in the midst of our suffering. This essay seeks a renewed perspective on suffering in the light of Christian hope so that the church might be a community who knows how to 'suffer well' in the light of the gospel. It is not intended to undermine the ongoing searing pain that suffering brings to people's lives. ontology to do justice to the biblical narrative of the Dominical man turned deified person, for the salvation of the world.

I. OH HAPPY DAYS—OUR HUMAN-MADE PARADISE

In their study of the informal faith of Christian teenagers in America, Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton coined the term 'Moralistic Therapeutic Deism' (MTD) to describe the kind of faith displayed.[6] Key aspects of MTD are:

> a) a god who looks upon humanity but is largely removed from everyday life
>
> b) each person must be nice to the other
>
> c) happiness and feeling good about self are life's main goals
>
> d) God's involvement in life is expected in crisis
>
> e) when they die good people go to heaven.[7]

Smith and Denton conclude that the "... dominant religion among U.S. teenagers is centrally about feeling good, happy, secure, at peace...attaining subjective well-being, being able to resolve problems, and getting along amiably with other people."[8] In response to the study Kenda Creasy Dean acknowledges that this 'faith' is not confined to youth, but rather has been taught and modelled by generations before them.[9]

MTD is a parasite drawing its life from preferred characteristics of various religions, a prominent one being American Christianity.[10] In many cases Christianity now looks more like MTD's pursuit of the American dream than the historical devotion and practice of what it means to follow Christ.[11] MTD seeks personal comfort and happiness at minimal sacrifice for the individual. These cosseting characteristics of living are not restricted to American society but are common in other developed societies.[12] Thus, this American pseudo-faith also breeds in other developed countries, including NZ. These developed societies

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5 The following does not focus specifically on perceptions of and responses to suffering experienced by those who have cancer, rather, it considers suffering as a broader and more general concept.

6 Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Collin Hansen, "Death by Deism," n.p. [cited 26 June 2012]. Online: http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/aprilweb-only/116-11.0.html.

7 Hansen, "Death by Deism".

8 Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 48.

9 Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 29.

10 Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 166.

11 Dean, *Almost Christian*, 10.

12 Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 55. Bauman makes the link between those living in comfort in developed world and their endless obsessions with security and safety of self in the hope of protecting such a way of life.

boast a culture that births and nurtures confusion and concern toward suffering, as it challenges the happy and cosy 'faith' to which many subscribe.

The passion for healing displayed in the sign "Jesus Heals Cancer" is an expression of MTD. This message joins many advertising campaigns communicating within a largely self-fulfilling culture. Embedded in the consumer-driven messages are beliefs about human identity. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman highlights the power of modern consumption to sell the illusion of one's ability to select, buy, and don the identity of their choosing. Meanwhile, the core of consumerism manipulates the identity type which individuals desire.[13] The learnt worldview of self-fulfilment guides a lot of media, including the billboard in question, to articulate the emotionally charged memo—that each person should adopt and maintain the expectation that they deserve a happy and comfortable life, which illness impedes. Media promotes this 'utopia' and supplies products needed for its achievement. Instant attainment of human-made paradise and 'meaning' is the promise at the end of every fingertip purchasing a product. Tim Costello discusses this religion of 'acquiring' and notes that malls have become the latest temples intended to nurture entering souls with guarantees of happiness.[14] Malls have the 'other worldly' characteristic of the "temple of consumption", and its romantic representation of 'life' creates a seductive space to be enjoyed by anyone seeking the 'better life products' media advertises.[15] In an individualistic world, devoid of meaningful metanarratives, modern consumption essentially defines human meaning.[16]

This consumeristic definition of human meaning guides responses from media's recipients. The utopian messages delivered by the media commonly meet submissive acceptance by recipients, in turn, birthing a culture that eagerly welcomes products that promise self-fulfilled personal 'utopia'. Human-made utopia is a goal of human life post-Enlightenment. Colin Gunton highlights modernity's displacement of the transcendence of God. Since modernity, God's immanence has been overemphasised, as life's meaning was not believed to be found in something beyond, but rather through the certainty of autonomous human reason.[17] From the epistemology of Cartesian thought, truth claims, especially those relegated to the private realm (e.g. belief), have been highly individualised.[18]

On a foundation where 'truth' is searched for within oneself a "displacement of eschatology" is built.[19] Humans are described as 'tourists', living for instant experience, blind to the transcendent vocation once realised when humans were 'pilgrims'.[20] Divine attributes are attributed to self, thus, anxious need to gain control of a happy future on earth is life's focus whilst the possibility of one *true* hope for all people is commonly dismissed. An ironic reality exists, as fullness of life in the instant present can be missed while people participate in a fear-filled hunt for their 'utopia'. Furthermore, people struggle to realise any ultimate future possibilities of life when consumerist ideas and ideals of 'hope', restricted to this independent life

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13 Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 83-84.
14 Tim Costello, *Streets of Hope: Finding God in St Kilda* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1998), 124–125.
15 Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 98–99.
16 David F. Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs: Christ in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 192.
17 Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 28.
18 Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 18-23.
19 Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many*, 90.
20 Derek Tidball, "The Pilgrim and the Tourist: Zygmunt Bauman and Postmodern Identity," in *Explorations in a Christian Theology of Pilgrimage* (ed. Craig G. Bartholomew and Fred Hughes; Aldershot: Ashgate., 2004), 191–192.

alone, dominate the present. This is evident in the society's disgruntled response to the billboard's message, as opposed to the usual passive acceptance of other products. Assurance of 'utopian' outcomes from a 'product', 'Jesus the Healer', that was other than what was *known* to be present truth, was deemed to be inappropriate and deceitful advertising.[21]

II. FEAR

The Western 'faith' of comfort and happiness gives way to an anxious society. In dire attempts to achieve the 'ultimate' for human life *now* and to avoid threats against this goal, fear has become a prevalent mood of society. Anxiety has become the "framework" through which many experiences are understood.[22] It is the subconscious tool regularly called upon in order to justify and dictate action. Furthermore, media takes advantage of society's fear, using it to sell a product. The intent is to draw the consumer by their realisation of need for utmost security. Therefore, fear has become embedded in the understanding of what it is to be a 'developed' human, hunting for their human-made utopian dream.

Bauman highlights that the relentless striving for security and safety is embodied by people living the most comfortable and indulgent lives history has recorded.[23] The promise of happiness by the modern Western world began, for many, the never-ending pursuit from happiness to greater happiness. This pursuit of happiness became so embedded in the expectations of society that a potential breach of promised happiness could be accused to be deprivation or an ethical injustice. Ironically, this injustice has become the forte of the cunning producers of products, ultimate happiness is promised by consumer products yet remains the unattainable goal. As each new iteration of a product becomes the new object of desire, the old products, formerly objects of desire, must be disposed of. People are encouraged to move "from one temporary oasis to another"; the much improved 'new' is designed to point out the blemishes in the once perfect 'old'.[24] This persuasion of comfort within the West is influencing the Church. Costello shares his grief and frustration with Christians who, he observes, have mistaken the never-ending call of achieving worldly comfort and security as being the will of God.[25]

Fear causes distortion of priority. 'Normal' lifestyle choices are often estranged from what should be. Caught up in the 'faith' of happy comfort, perspectives of self and other can become drastically disoriented. Panicked behaviour of those who believe they need to secure comfort is triggered by personal threat. For example, the actual or even potential attack of terrorists is likely to cause chaotic and irrational terror in Westerners.[26] However, these same people can experience peace and safety despite, and as a result of, the immense suffering experienced by other societies stricken by poverty and injustice, which is only

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21 3 News, "Church Promises Cancer Cure."
22 Frank Furedi, "The Only Thing We Have to Fear is the 'Culture of Fear' Itself," n.p. [cited 26 June 2012]. Online: http://www.spiked-online.com/index.php/site/article/3053.
23 Bauman, *Liquid Fear*, 130.
24 Costello, *Streets of Hope*, 146.
25 Ibid., 137.
26 Bruce Barber and David Neville, "Introduction," in *Theodicy and Eschatology* (ed. Bruce Barber and David Neville; Adelaide: ATF Press, 2005), xix.

heightened in the developed world's restless pursuit for happiness.[27] A prominent goal shared by many in a developed society is to protect one's life. Therefore, striving to secure health and happiness despite cost to the other is part of the art of living. Such self-absorbed persistence would have been ruled absurd by the likes of Thomas Aquinas, who deemed life's ultimate priority as "friendship with God". Unlike the higher priorities of Aquinas and the Westminster Catechism of the 17th century—"to glorify God and enjoy him forever"–today's Western living is too often obsessed with hunting down safety and security, passionately protecting their emerging 'paradise'. [28] Such endless devotion, Bauman argues, has been mistaken as the very utopia Westerners seek. Human purpose has been re-defined as the individual's anxious chase after the 'ultimate' life. This hopeless pursuit 'unites' an individualised society. The rarity of community generates the shared denominator of one's fear of the stranger.[29] The 'commonality' of fear due to estrangement forgets the fundamental nature of what it is to be human, a being in relationship. The Western pursuit for happiness exposes them to the hopeless and fearful endeavour of a loss of identity and purpose.

In the culture of fear, people are taught to make decisions favouring security and avoiding threats to comfort. Like the parent consumed by fear for their child, life becomes manipulated by protective prevention strategies rather than hopes and dreams for transformation. Scott Bader-Saye suggests fear motivates the Christian subculture that exists; 'Christian-consumption' will provide the safety or security we seek. [30] Similarly, the church, through fear of its own decline and demise, seeks to attract numbers by providing the "religious commodities...in demand".[31] Fear drives demand and both can be mistaken to be healthy tools for persuading consumers towards Christ, feeding into the need to control life and experience the utopian dream. Expectation of instant achievement of utopian living is prevalent in the billboard. Ours is not a world commonly known to stop and dwell in the midst of suffering, this space is lost amidst the anxious need to overcome.[32] The billboard tactically communicates a familiar fear, it provides the 'product' needed to overcome the threat, and, as a result, desires to attract consumers to its 'product'.[33] Interviews performed concerning the "Jesus Heals Cancer" message present the text's authors expressing their ulterior goal for people to "believe" in Christ; one says: "What have they got to lose from coming to church".[34]

III. ILLUSIVE IMMORTALITY

The use and underlying tone of 'cancer' in the billboard is the doorway to analysing many characteristics and beliefs of Western culture in NZ. Perhaps the most obvious characteristic is the perception of human immortality. The attitudes toward death and suffering by secular and Christian minds in the West demonstrate desired immunity from these evils and expect individuals have a right to a long life and peaceful

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27 Ibid., xix.
28 Scott Bader-Saye, *Following Jesus in a Culture of Fear* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007), 28.
29 Bauman, *Liquid times*, 72.
30 Bader-Saye, *Following Jesus in a Culture of Fear*, 20-21.
31 Michael Jinkins, *The Church Faces Death: Ecclesiology in a Post-Modern Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 13.
32 Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering*, 150.
33 Bader-Saye, *Following Jesus in a Culture of Fear*, 14, 16.
34 3 News, "Meet the Parishioners Who Say Jesus Cured Their Cancer," *Campbell Live* (February 29, 2012).

death.[35] The desire to side-step vulnerability and ultimately death is often based in embarrassment, for inability to determine and control one's fate is considered failure.[36] With the knowledge of inability to dictate the timing of death one's view of death is driven largely by fear. The subject of death is taboo in Western culture; conversations around it are awkward and vague. It is evident the authors of the billboard keep these underlying beliefs in mind. Furthermore, those responding to the sign's message reveal deep anguish at the thought of 'cancer', the devastating shadow that is a frequent and painful reminder of the mortality society has learnt to ignore and avoid.

New Zealand culture (like many Western cultures) is largely influenced by the medical world and the 'we must overcome' attitudes that have developed within this area. Stanley Hauerwas argues that medicine says a lot about who we are - our desires and our fears. It acknowledges a negative cultural view of death and dying, this is evident particularly in light of the possibility of suffering. From the 'tactful' and fuzzy ways of speaking about death to preferences around how to die there is evidence of an avoidance of suffering, which is pursued relentlessly. Thus, medicine is one of a number of areas in society that highlights the human desire to conquer, or at worst to limit, the reality of human fragility.[37] The reaction to the pain-filled threat of human mortality (even in 'the developed world') occupies much energy and resource. The illusion of immortality takes control in the shocking presence of death. Medical identification of death's cause is required in order for the griever to find comfort and to eventually move toward joy once more, only with the hope that future cures may yet be discovered. Very rarely, Bauman suggests, is someone's death attributed to their mortality.[38]

Western society longs to unravel the problem of suffering. They seek a present utopia of comfort and happiness, which suffering destroys. Such issue taken with suffering is linked closely with an understanding of human meaning and purpose. The following section will explore the motif of suffering through the biblical books of Job and Revelation in order to develop a biblical and theological understanding of the significance of suffering to faith.

IV. THE JOBAN DRAMA

The Joban drama begins with fascinating parallelism with Creation. The perfect place of Uz is described as a type of Eden, thus, the world of God's mystery and promise for humanity is seen to be Job's world. Job is an 'Adam' character, identifying his story as a close continuation of the Garden of Genesis.[39] Uz was the Eden of "happy harmony...living in full accord with creations design" as intended and established by the

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35 D. A. Carson, *How Long O Lord?: Reflections on Suffering and Evil* (2nd ed.; Nottingham: IVP, 2006), 25, 103.

36 Alfred G. Killilea, *The Politics of Being Mortal* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1988), 4-7.

37 Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering*, 97-107.

38 Bauman, *Liquid Fear*, 40.

39 Samuel E. Balentine, *Job* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys Pub., 2006), 41-42; Thomas G. Long, *What Shall We Say?: Evil, Suffering, and the Crisis of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 97.

Creator. The world that remained after the fall was a place where goodness still dwelled and memory and hope of the vision for humanity that was known in Eden still existed.[40]

In Uz, suffering was absent from Job's life. However, the belief of retributive justice informed Job's society of how evil could disrupt this peaceful place, thus, Job zealously avoided the 'tree of good and evil'. This belief system could suggest that righteousness was something like an 'insurance policy' people adopted to prevent personal suffering.[41] Is the fallen default for all humanity to seek comfort? Did Job's society, like today, understand themselves to be creators of their own instant utopia? Possible temptation to turn righteousness into self-service is reflected in the satan's questioning. He challenged God saying, "Does Job fear God for nothing?" (1:9). Samuel E. Balentine suggests the question centres on the Godhead, its intention to prompt divine reflection on whether God is inherently sufficient for the worship of humanity.[42] In light of this, Job's journey of suffering emphasises the intrinsic ontology of God, worthy of all worship, from all of His creation, despite circumstances.

The prelude makes exhaustive effort to assure readers of Job's righteousness. Job made regular offerings to God in case his children had sinned. Job is the ultimate man of his time, godly and righteous beyond readers' imaginations. His goodness was accredited to him by God. Yet, despite his righteousness, God allowed Job to suffer immensely. The irrational disturbance, according to humanity, of the good place of Uz began. Suffering was immense. Pain became Job's puzzling norm despite his innocence. His story digressed from Adam's as Job's 'known' order of human life was destroyed. Mark O'Brien argues that Job's suffering intensified because he had no explanation of 'why'.[43] Meanwhile, Job's friends proudly reminded Job of the retributive understanding of suffering. Simply put, Job had sinned and therefore he suffered. Yet, Job's innocence was overlooked in their foolish attempts to defend their 'watertight theology' of the Almighty God, for this the friends were reprimanded by God (42:7-9). Job's imperative warning is that human understanding of suffering is feeble and, therefore, one's approach to it must recognise the ambiguity that surrounds it.[44] No theology is complete. Job's suffering is illogical to the human mind, so how is it to be understood?

Bruce Barber and David Neville suggest our view of sin severely sways our understanding of suffering.[45] The mysterious presence of sin in its essence contradicts the ontological makeup of humanity. This speaks to the irrational invasion of suffering upon the innocent Job. Mostert rightly observes that because of sin's ambiguous nature those attempting to rationalise it lack wisdom. Yet, the person who demonstrates wisdom by acknowledging its mystery is wrongly accused of folly.[46] This we see of Job whose wisdom concerning evil's mysterious presence was mocked by his friends. Job's story opposes the deep-set

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40 Ibid., 71–72. For Balentine this understanding ensures that in the midst of suffering God's purposed home for humanity, which was present in Eden, is not forgotten.
41 David J. Atkinson, *The Message of Job* (Leicester: IVP, 1991), 21.
42 Balentine, *Job*, 74.
43 Mark O'Brien, "Theodicy and Eschatology: Old Testament Considerations," in *Theodicy and Eschatology* (ed. Bruce Barber and David Neville; Adelaide: ATF Press, 2005), 11.
44 Christiaan Mostert, "Theodicy and Eschatology," in *Theodicy and Eschatology* (ed. Bruce Barber and David Neville; Adelaide: ATF Press, 2005), 97.
45 Barber and Neville, *Theodicy and Eschatology*, xiii.
46 Mostert, "Theodicy and Eschatology," 97.

need to rationalise suffering, and humanity's imprudent hope to bring the pieces of the puzzle – 'God' and 'suffering' – together because humanity does not understand the fullness of either one.[47]

How, then, should we approach the one who suffers? The role of 'comforter', alternated between Job's friends, is given bad press (16:1-6). From a safe distance they analysed the reason for suffering and dictated the response required. They aimed to give Job the key to overcome his suffering. Such a quest failed to be of help and, instead, magnified and distorted the problem. Suffering was the enemy to be avoided, instead of being understood as an announcement of the enemy. Interpretation of the friend's perspectives illuminates the instinctive desire to stifle Job's suffering voice.[48] The self-assigned responsibility of the 'comforter' was to direct Job to sidestep his pain and hardship. This mentality and motivation caused Job's friends to fail to care for Job in his raw existence, a fragile mortal dependent on God. The reality and logic of suffering in a world disturbed by evil was ignored, and the lowly creature failed to be acknowledged.

Job 42:6 highlights renewed understanding of human identity for Job. David J. Atkinson claims in this passage Job is not withdrawing his cries of innocence, but rather is expressing renewed vision of God and heightened appreciation for his own humble state.[49] It is through this humble state that Job's awareness of self is refined. Theology gives birth to authentic anthropology. Human identity, along with its fragility and disposition to suffer in a world yet to be restored completely, is understood and welcomed by the Job who sees God more fully as Creator and Sustainer.[50] Uncertainty and anguish are approached through renewed knowledge of God. "Job's questions of theodicy are not answered; they are placed in a broader, more personal, context in which they no longer need to be asked".[51] Job's commitment to metanarrative is also evident in the depths of his suffering when he surprises readers with his stubborn will to hope. "Job dares to hope that God is as committed to the truth about suffering as he is..."[52] His hope, though flickering, acknowledges a greater story that witnesses to his eternal connectedness with the true and perfect God who brings restoration.

Job's story does not feed the fear-driven hunger to understand the problem of suffering. Rather, it deconstructs beliefs about God's nature and his world in light of suffering.[53] Answers remain few and Job is presented as a man willing to have his knowledge of God challenged and matured; despite darkness Job holds fast to God's self-revelation. In his suffering Job's self-constructed understanding of God is destroyed, his own feeble logic can but muster up a god who is monstrous. Job's story demonstrates spiritual transformation in the face of suffering. Job gains a renewed perspective of suffering, and, thus, a renewed response. Ultimately, he finds his comfort in his God who he sees more clearly.[54]

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47 Long, *What Shall We Say?*, 95–96; Terrence W. Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy* (Washington: Wipf & Stock, 2000), 109.
48 Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy*, 110.
49 Atkinson, *The Message of Job*, 157; Balentine, *Job*, 693.
50 Long, *What Shall We Say?*, 109–110.
51 Atkinson, *The Message of Job*, 161.
52 Balentine, *Job*, 225.
53 Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy*, 90.
54 Long, *What Shall We Say?*, 111.

V. THE 'NOW' AND 'NOT YET' OF THE REVELATION

Though humanity is deeply perplexed by the presence of evil and suffering, God is not. Unlike humanity, attempting to unravel this mystery while being governed by the evil they wish to dismantle, God understands these mysteries in light of His eternal purposes.[55] Thus, wise reflections regarding suffering can be accomplished through the lens of eschatology.[56] Mostert's approach toward understanding evil and suffering reflects the greater Christian story of salvation. He argues there is a pull within humanity toward the ultimate 'not-yet' intention of God for all of humanity, and His entire creation. [57]

The book of Revelation illuminates God's powerful eschatological message for His people. However, its crucial points are commonly missed by comfortable Westerners. The Revelation responds to cries of the marginalised desperately seeking truth and hope in their present struggle. It expects the Church is a people constantly in crisis, under persecution and exposed to immense pressure to compromise the gospel. Thus, the meaning of the Revelation is frequently overlooked by those who know little of suffering.[58]

The Revelation John saw proclaims hope and encourages firm commitment to truth in the midst of troubled circumstances. The Revelation realises the eschatological tension of current life, which anticipates the ultimate freedom to come and yet experiences the painful struggles of today.[59] God has conquered and is now Ruler over all, however, evil remains a confident imposter in the lives of individuals and the world.[60] Suffering is only increased for those who seek light and oppose things of darkness. Yet, even in the miserable presence of satanic power, God's rule supersedes. Faith-filled trust that God has already overcome the evil of sin and death enables genuine hope for that which is to come.[61] Marva J. Dawn suggests that future paradise is tasted presently; "fleeting moments of victory" are captured even now.[62] God's tabernacling with us completely in the future (Rev 7) is anticipated as we remember His continued presence throughout the past and know His company in the present. It is in weakness we can ultimately experience God's tabernacling. By living in suffering one understands and participates in their call to depend on God. Through vulnerability and fragility humanity begins to comprehend the sufficiency of God's grace.[63]

Furthermore, suffering is the key to Christ's victory. The door to the ultimate paradise of God's complete dwelling with us, in Christ by His Spirit, has been opened by the suffering Christ yielded himself to. In the Revelation all honour and power is realised in the One who suffered. Of all persons there is but one worthy to open the seals on the scroll of God's judgement and justification—the Lamb who appeared

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55 Peter Hicks, *The Message of Evil and Suffering: Light Into Darkness* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2007), 15.
56 Barber and Neville, *Theodicy and Eschatology*, xiii.
57 Mostert, "Theodicy and Eschatology," 120.
58 David M. Scholer, "Breaking the Code: Interpretive Reflections on Revelation," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 25 (2001): 316–317.
59 Marva J. Dawn, *Joy in Our Weakness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 125.
60 Laurie Guy, *Making Sense of the Book of Revelation* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys Publishing Inc., 2009), 135.
61 Scholer, "Breaking the Code," 308.
62 Dawn, *Joy in Our Weakness*, 124,126.
63 Ibid., 215–216.

slaughtered (Rev 5).[64] The Lion who has conquered (5:5) is the slain Lamb. Though slain, the Lamb embodies God's ultimate power, its seven horns symbolise its divine power. The "victim" (Lamb) simultaneously being "victor" (Lion) upturns the historical Roman and present Western societies' understanding of what it means to triumph. [65] Suffering and vulnerability is given high status within the Kingdom of God. The Revelation illuminates a powerful and Christological theology of weakness.[66]

Suffering within Scripture is unashamedly embraced in the person of Christ for the glory of the Father. Christ's suffering is the experience of the eschatological people of God who are welcomed into the life of Christ, the slaughtered Lamb. In the midst of the present struggle of Christ's Church, God justifies His people. Thus, the Revelation highlights faithful endurance to be fundamental in Christ's call for patient discipleship (Rev. 2:19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12).[67] Faithful discipleship, as a way of living in the mist of suffering, witnesses to Christ in a world of darkness that slams doors in the face of truth's light.

It is through this 'way of living' that worship of God can be truly articulated. Faithful participation in the suffering of Christ witnesses to the victory accomplished by the blood of the Lamb. Revelation 7:13-14 describes a people who are robed in white, purified through washing in the Lamb's blood. These robed people are those who have been slaughtered for their resilient witness to the gospel in 6:9-11. In Christ they bear His future, both His suffering and victory over Satan's reign.[68] In raw lament they continued to witness to the rule of God in the world. United with the Lamb's blood they proclaimed God's victory and participated in the Lamb's conquering of death.

Revelation emphasises the vitality of faithful witness by God's people. The letter to the church in Smyrna highlights the richness in suffering for the sake of non-accommodating discipleship. The church is poor according to worldly standards because of their suffering but God announces their rich victory in their acceptance of eternal life. Though they anticipate deep anguish their hope in the midst of suffering surpasses fear. They are called to realise the final eschatological hope within the present rule of God in a world where evil abounds. The purpose of humanity is realised to be eternal union with Christ and His mission. Thus, through an eschatological lens of humanity there is not so much a desire to figure out suffering, but to fervently picket against evil, which allows suffering to multiply freely.[69]

Costello argues that the eschatological faith of Christianity has a powerful claim against the endless pursuit of benefits in the present life, which is accompanied by the anxious avoidance of death.[70] As Dawn emphasises, the assurance of God's ultimate control, within Revelation, is crucial.[71] Proclamation of the metanarrative of God's engagement with humanity needs to be redeemed in community for the *telos* of all creation to become the new hope-filled focus. Humanity must understand and trust God at the centre of all things, a reminder to cease our obsessive attention on ourselves as if we could provide the ultimate hope

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64 Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 114.
65 Guy, *Making Sense of the Book of Revelation*, 80. Guy points out that horns symbolised power (as seen in Deut 33:17) and 'seven' expressed the fullness of that power.
66 Dawn, *Joy in Our Weakness*, 126-28.
67 Ibid., 308–309.
68 Blount, *Revelation*, 131-33.
69 Mostert, "Theodicy and Eschatology," 120.
70 Costello, *Streets of Hope*, 138.
71 Dawn, *Joy in Our Weakness*, 215.

we crave.[72] The utopia that is longed for is found 'now' and completed in the 'not yet' in Jesus Christ, the slain Lamb. No other 'paradise' will suffice.

This eschatological hope is ample for the restoration of humanity. Genuine knowledge of this hope does not diminish one's anguish, but neither with it is there any dissatisfaction nor is there the desire for illusion, not 'now' or in the 'not yet'. Therefore, it is in the lived experience of sure hope affirmed by God through Jesus Christ that perspective of and response to suffering can be transformed. Human identity and purpose is found within the eschatological hope of God's greater story for all creation. This hope is both found and expressed in Christian worship, and the following section will explore the crucial role of worship in the midst of suffering.

VI. WORSHIP IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING:

Worship enables revelation and formation of human identity.[73] In Western churches worship is commonly considered a worthy humanly initiation to honour the Father. However, as James Torrance argues, only through Christ can we participate in worshiping the Father by the Spirit. Worship is merely response that realises Christ's perfect worship of the Father on behalf of humanity.[74] Worship is also something done in the human, forming them to be centred in Christ through their participation in His death and resurrection. Worship is a Christocentric experience because ontologically Christ, our great High Priest, enables and fulfils all human worship of God. Formative worship witnesses to the "gospel of grace"; God's people reconciled with the Father in the worship of the Son.[75]

Genuine worship is the "*matrix*" of formation for God's people.[76] It is a space for proclamation and shaping of belief of God's self-revealed being and engagement with the world. Through worship a worldview centred in Christ is developed, including perceptions of and responses to suffering. Humans are a species able to ponder death and suffering and their approaches to them.[77] There is, therefore, dire need for worship to form perceptions of suffering by reorienting participants to the truth and hope of God's narrative for His creation. This metanarrative has been lost in Western worship, causing loss of human identity as people fail to see creations' true *telos* and, instead, seek meaning in the human-made consumerist 'gospel'. Yet, the Christian story "is nothing if not a way of thinking about death".[78] It enables people to live as frail mortals and to develop understanding of what it means to 'die well'. John Witvliet mentions three important aspects of acquiring a Christocentric lens of death, which can relate to any kind of suffering. Through developing "honest lament", "resilient hope", and "stubborn solidarity", in the frequent practice of worship, God's people will learn to suffer well.[79]

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72 Ibid., 215.
73 Marva J. Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for the Turn-Of-The-Century Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 4.
74 James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 14-15.
75 Ibid., 15.
76 James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 138.
77 John D. Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding: Windows into Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 291.
78 Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding*, 291.
79 Ibid., 292–295.

Honest lament challenges society's default to ignore or escape the reality and devastation of death. Throughout history the psalmists, prophets, and priests did not busy themselves with cures for suffering, but offered anguish up to God in prayer.[80] Honest lament acknowledges present realities for what they are and gifts space to mourn suffering, allowing one to overcome suffering in some way. Honest lament acknowledges the human self – a mortal and broken person crying out from their pile of ashes for the grace of Christ. [81] Society's denial of the wretched state of humanity is rejected; the desperate need to die to self and live in Christ is realised. This truth is often softened in our worship. As Dawn argues, when God's Word is *truly* read and *genuinely* heard it has that power to "kill us", bringing death to our self-centredness. It highlights human need to embrace the reality of suffering found in union with the slain Lamb. Thus, awareness of our helpless state, as children of Adam, welcomes utter dependence on God, the One who, in Christ, has conquered all evil for all of humanity. Truth strips us and then adorns us with white robes of grace. The time to mourn is deeply connected with the time to laugh.[82]

Lament and praise are holistic experiences. Witvliet claims that a broader range of affective elements of worship need to be adopted for holistic transformation.[83] The worship space, what is seen, heard, touched, spoken, and smelt, contributes to formation. Furthermore, worship introduces body postures that teach participants how to relate to God and to the other.[84] James K. A. Smith suggests the physical practices of worship direct the focus of our love toward Kingdom visions.[85] Singing is one type of full-body engagement in formative worship. The power of communication through song is immense, as it has the ability to engage every aspect of our being and is able to subtly weave its 'truths' into our memory and fasten them onto our hearts. Worship songs affect a large majority of the worshipper's theology, forming how they engage God with their entire being.[86] The persuasive power of song highlights the importance to ensure theological truths about God's ontology (Trinity) and mission are emphasised in the lyrics and tone of the music. True knowledge of God and His will for creation is a necessary foundation upon which to suffer well. [87]

Furthermore, song must engage honest lament of human identity and experience. Powerful language of lament through song, both of word and body, deeply impacts individuals and communities. Reckless crying out of inner anguish reflects the wails of disorientation observed in the Psalms.[88] Songs of

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80 Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 139–140.

81 Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 41-43.

82 Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down*, 206-207.

83 Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding*, 40.

84 John D. Witvliet, "The Cumulative Power of Transformation in Public Worship: Cultivating Gratitude and Expectancy for the Holy Spirit's Work," in *Worship That Changes Lives: Multidisciplinary and Congregational Perspectives on Spiritual Transformation* (ed. Alexis D. Abernethy; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 45–47.

85 Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 131-33.

86 William Dyrness, *A Primer on Christian Worship: Where We've Been, Where We Are, Where We Can Go* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 95.

87 Dawn, *A Royal Waste of Time*, 365. Dawn writes, "Don't tell me what I must do to make my journey better or more enjoyable; remind me instead of how graciously and compassionately God has come to us, how his powerful and merciful reign has broken into our world. The result will be the formation of my journey, but we will wander aimlessly or along the wrong paths if we are not first changed by God's advent and then transformed into his way of life."

88 Walter Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), xii–xiii, 96–97. Brueggemann highlights the powerful transformation of praying the lament Psalms together in church. These Psalms bring structure to the chaos of one's suffering and reorient them toward the community of believers and the metanarrative of Scripture.

this depth find their way into us with their echoing rhymes and rhythms. Vulnerable honest lament must be modelled; the leader of worship leads best in their self-acknowledgement of their wounds.[89] Their language of worship needs to open people to raw lament in the context of God's great metanarrative of hope. Imagine standing united, hand in hand, arms lifted, joined in voice, passionately singing a Psalm of lament, witnessing to the truth of God and His mission in the midst of suffering. Powerful full-body experiences shape our approach to suffering as the Body of Christ.

Through worship Christians reclaim an attitude of hope, knowing that the age to come is already penetrating the present age.[90] Resilient hope acknowledges death for what it is – a tragic doorway within eternal life.[91] Suffering, like death, must be understood in the bigger picture, God's mission. This view contradicts the instant utopian perspective of society. We need to re-understand suffering in the magnificent light of hope, God's promised future for His people, and to live in this rich hope through the Spirit, rather than focusing on lesser or unimportant matters of a life *limited* to 'now'. Through participation in worship we recall God's story, both what has been promised, and the promise yet to come. This profession of hope combats hopeless despair. Jesus' worship at the right hand of the Father, His fulfilment and mediation of our worship, extends into eternity. In this realisation of the everlasting event of worship hope might be discovered in a new light. [92]

Hope-filled worship is found in and gained through those with great hunger for this mysterious hope of the 'not yet'.[93] Such hunger is known by those who truly realise the broken state of this world, who live in overwhelming affliction, utterly discontent with prolonging the present, they yearn for the glorious complete reign of God. There is desperate need for a truly meaningful eschatology to be grasped in the comfortable West. The whitewashed stories of suffering within our churches need to be heard so that the incredible hope of Christ can be more fully understood and desired.[94] The nature of worship should empower congregations to adopt a Christocentric worldview as they learn to "shoulder the cross".[95]

Genuine worship grasps the tension between God's immanence and transcendence. Overemphasis of God's immanence is evident in the West, yet, understanding and awe of His transcendence is less familiar in this largely irreverent society. [96] Participation in rich prayer captures this tension. We acknowledge God's presence with us and depend on His being beyond us, able to bring about His perfect purposes for all creation.[97] Offering raw suffering in prayer to God believes him to be both the true Comforter and the Conqueror of evil. Adoption of rich liturgical prayer is a powerful asset. It uses words that rip through the walls of our hearts and pour in the eternal hope of God that has been proclaimed throughout history.

Dawn suggests a significant cause of the loss of this eschatological narrative of God is the loss of

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89 Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1994), xvi.
90 Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs*, 206.
91 Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding*, 293.
92 Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, 82–83. Torrance reminds that the "life of worship and communion with the Father which Jesus fulfilled in our humanity did not end in death".
93 Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down*, 275.
94 Charles Hewlett and Joanne Hewlett, *Hurting Hope: What Parents Feel When Their Children Suffer* (Carlisle: Piquant Editions, 2011).
95 Dawn, *A Royal Waste of Time*, 341.
96 Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down*, 267.
97 Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 193.

symbols.[98] Webber claims the Eucharist is a key aspect of worship where profound symbolism has been distorted by the rationalism of the Enlightenment.[99] Participation in the Eucharist remembers God's great story of reconciling humanity to himself in the life of Christ from now and for all eternity. In this hope-filled practice we come to the table as we are to feast upon the undeserved eternal grace of Christ. Communion must be articulated well in order for its necessary wealth to be received by a broken and hungry people of God. As leaders of worship who are we welcoming to come to the table? Recognising self and other as desperate for Christ's hope, found at the table, is crucial for the formative worship of participating in the Eucharist.

Stubborn solidarity acknowledges church for what it is, a community called by God to gather as a witness to the Kingdom.[100] It highlights the intended social approach to all of life, including suffering and death. Profound transformation occurs in worship that is focused on God's metanarrative and not on self-preference and desire. This is a massive challenge against the individualist priority of society. The best for self is only found beyond self in the God who redeems and transforms, and in unity with the other. As Philip Yancey argues, it is in the midst of the community standing before God that the fears of suffering can be disarmed.[101] One's presence in the other's suffering defeats the loneliness that intensifies and distorts pain. Yet, church is often the last place honest suffering is found; it is a place full of "happy plastic people" participating in a "stained glass masquerade".[102] Formative worship frames suffering within a maturing faith in the truth and hope of the metanarrative of Scripture. Talking about and living in suffering is normalised in a world longing for restoration. Thus, the Church need no longer fear 'suffering well together'. Individuals must live their anguish in community with others who also suffer. Gathered worship highlights true identity, found in and with the other; individuality is re-imagined in connection with the community of believers anticipating the Kingdom. Worship welcomes people into one another's suffering through symbol, testimony, remembering in prayer/liturgy the saints who have died, and learning from one another's culture. The dynamic relationship between lament and praise is truly experienced in community.[103]

"The Christian community is an alternative society."[104] Through worship we are transformed and live transformed in our communities. Christological perceptions of suffering speak truth and hope to believers and non-believers. Our choices in life are not controlled by fear of suffering but by the eternal mission of God. In worship Christ's disciples witness to God, which results in understanding their place in His metanarrative. Dawn argues God's profound hope and salvation has been watered down to the proclamation of human remedies and materialistic consumer-driven solutions for the present. [105] Wise Christian leaders will realise the importance of worship for the formation of God's suffering people and invest time and energy into doing this well. It is through learning to worship well as the eschatological

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98 Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down*, 271.
99 Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Worship: Proclaiming and Enacting God's Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 147.
100 Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 160–162.
101 Philip Yancey, *When We Hurt: Prayer, Preparation, & Hope for Life's Pain* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 58.
102 Casting Crowns, *Stained Glass Masquerade* (Lifesong; Brentwood: Reunion Records, 2005). In their song, *Stained Glass Masquerade* Casting Crowns, uses this imagery in reference to the nature of church.
103 Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation*, 44-45.
104 Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down*, 215.
105 Dawn, *A Royal Waste of Time*, 360-61.

community of God that we will become people who suffer well. In the midst of our suffering, and the world's, we will be a people who witness to the true hope of Christ, who was and is and is to come.

DESIGNING THE FORGIVENESS MATTERS COURSE:
AN A TO Z GUIDE

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ABSTRACT

To create an effective course is a complex task. Course designers are faced with a plethora of challenges, choices, tasks, and deadlines. They also need to consider screeds of potentially helpful resources and the gaps in their knowledge. Accordingly, many courses are never birthed. This is a tragedy, as effectual courses can lead to positive changes in people's lives and the process of creating new courses can be most invigorating, especially when helpful guidelines are available to follow. In this paper, I discuss how I created and facilitated the Forgiveness Matters course,[1] a theologically and psychologically integrated and validated approach to help churchgoing adults process their parental wounds. This entails engaging with the seven points common to most course design taxonomies, the role that pilot courses perform in the refinement of courses, and the challenges involved in recruiting course participants. The feedback from the participants pertaining to course design and the implications of the study conclude the article.

I. INTRODUCTION

A little over a decade ago while talking with my therapist, I discovered that I had forgiven my father. Much to my surprise, I realised that my feelings of resentment and anger towards him had evaporated, and all that I felt was love concerning him and sadness for the pain and losses that we had experienced. It was not that my father was an awful man. To the contrary, he was a wonderful man on multiple levels who had always loved me. The problem was that he had an undiagnosed obsessive compulsive disorder that had damaged our family in too many ways.

A few years later, I was invited to speak at a number of Christian healing conferences around New Zealand. Other presenters would first elaborate on how parents wittingly and unwittingly wound their children (of all ages) and then I would conclude the conferences by sharing on the concept of forgiveness. Following the organisers' lead, I ended my talks by inviting the attendees "to come forward to confess their sins, receive forgiveness, and/or obtain prayer."[2] In every instance, the vast majority of listeners responded. While people's willingness to step forward was in many respects encouraging, their eagerness also troubled me. I began to doubt if effective forgiveness could be obtained in a few minutes of ministry. I also questioned if all of the churches that hosted the conferences were adequately resourced to assist persons to continue on their forgiveness journeys after our departure.

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1 Philip J. Halstead, "The Forgiveness Matters Course: A Theologically and Psychologically Integrated Approach to help Churchgoing Adults Process their Parental Wounds," *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* 14 (2012): 85–110.
2 Ibid., 87.

I eventually concluded "that the respondents and the churches at which we spoke might have been better served if we had offered a more in-depth, long-term, and proven course in forgiveness."[3] This decision raised a problem: I could not locate any forgiveness courses in the wider New Zealand church, yet alone any that were specifically designed to help adult churchgoers process their parental wounds effectively via forgiveness. Consequently, I determined to fill this gap and create a course in forgiveness. But this resolution gave birth to a further dilemma: It dawned on me that despite my extensive involvement in church ministry and academic institutions I had no comprehension of how to design an effectual course that could facilitate the process of forgiveness in wounded people. I was also not aware of any literature that could assist me in this endeavour. How was I to proceed?

The purpose of this article is to describe how I worked through these challenges in order to create the Forgiveness Matters course.[4] By sharing my experience, I hope to motivate individuals and groups to embark on the meaningful journey of developing their own courses. I also wish to assist them to do this as expediently as possible.

II. COURSE DESIGN

There are seven overlapping concepts that are common to most course design taxonomies. These notions serve as reference points to assist designers in navigating their way through the complex task of creating new courses. They include generating initial ideas; conducting needs assessments; crafting course goals, learning outcomes, and learning objectives; developing course resources; conceptualising course content; developing a positive course environment; and determining how to evaluate the course.[5]

Generating Initial Ideas

Bouma and Ling assert that the research process commences when people's curiosity is stirred.[6] Tolich and Davidson concur, and point researchers to their personal interests to find inspiration for their projects.[7] From this standpoint, it could be argued that I had been (initially inadvertently) generating ideas for the Forgiveness Matters course for at least a decade before I officially started to create it.

Fortuitously, throughout much of this time I had developed a personal data base on the themes of forgiveness and parent/child relationships. This process involved my filing the various ideas that I had on

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3 Ibid., 88.

4 The creation of the Forgiveness Matters course comprised part of my successfully completed PhD studies through the University of Auckland, New Zealand. The data used to validate the success of the course was drawn from the 43 participants who took part in five separate Forgiveness Matters courses.

5 See for example Ian Forsyth, Alan Jolliffe, and David Stevens, *Planning a Course: Practical Strategies for Teachers, Lecturers and Trainers* (2d ed.; London: Kogan Page, 1999); Kathleen Graves, "A Framework of Course Development Processes," in *Teachers as Course Developers* (ed. Kathleen Graves; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 12–38; George J. Posner and Alan N Rudnitsky, *Course Design: A Guide to Curriculum Development for Teachers* (5th ed.; New York: Longman, 1997).

6 Gary D. Bouma, and Rod Ling, *The Research Process* (5th ed.; Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2004), 25.

7 Martin Tolich, and Carl Davidson, "Starting and Restarting the Research," in *Social Science Research in New Zealand: Many Paths to Understanding* (eds. Carl Davidson, and Martin Tolich; Auckland: Pearson Education New Zealand, 2003), 89–101.

these topics into different repositories along with newspaper clippings and articles that I discovered.[8] These ever-evolving files served as memory prompts and guidelines throughout the entire course development process.

Part of this work involved locating literature on how to design courses.[9] What I read was sometimes encouraging and at other times decidedly discouraging. To illustrate: Posner and Rudnitsky rightly argue that course builders need to familiarise themselves with the ways that other practitioners teach the topics that they are investigating.[10] A search of the literature identified 34 extant forgiveness modalities.[11] While none of these models specifically connected the theological facets of forgiveness that I was exploring with the psychological aspects that I deemed critical, many of them provided helpful insights for my course. Conversely, Forsyth, Jolliffe, and Stevens' recommendation that course designers determine from the outset of their construction work what tasks need to be accomplished in order to prepare and finalise their courses was disheartening for me.[12] This was due to the overwhelming number of tasks that ostensibly needed to be undertaken and my uncertainty surrounding the relevance of each task.

As my initial ideas developed the rationale that underpinned the course slowly came into clearer focus. It can be summed up as follows:

1. Innumerable persons have been wounded by their parents.

2. The potential ramifications of these offences are incalculably destructive.[13]

3. Forgiveness can assist people to process the effects of their parental wounds and to alter positively their relationship with their parents, others, themselves, and God.[14]

4. Despite the likely benefits of forgiveness and the fact that it is a central tenet of the Christian faith the concept remains a mystery to multitudes of churchgoers.

5. To the best of my knowledge there are no extant forgiveness courses that explicitly explore people's relationships with their parents *and* incorporate teaching on transpersonal-, self-, intrapersonal-, and interpersonal- forgiveness that are emphasised throughout my course.

Around this time, I also settled on the central research question that directed the project. It asks, "What constitutes an effective church-based forgiveness course in the New Zealand context for adults who wish

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8 Posner and Rudnitsky, *Course Design,* 22.
9 See for example Forsyth, Jolliffe, and Stevens, *Planning a Course;* Kathleen Graves, "A Framework of Course Development Processes," and Posner and Rudnitsky, *Course Design.*
10 Posner and Rudnitsky, *Course Design,* 5–6.
11 See for example Nathaniel G. Wade, Everett L. Worthington Jr., and Julia E. Meyer, "But Do They Work? A Meta-Analysis of Group Interventions to Promote Forgiveness," in *Handbook of Forgiveness* (ed. Everett L. Worthington Jr.; New York: Routledge, 2005), 423–39; Donald F. Walker and Richard L. Gorsuch, "Dimensions Underlying Sixteen Models of Forgiveness and Reconciliation," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 32 (2004): 12–25.
12 Forsyth, Jolliffe, and Stevens, *Planning a Course,* 6.
13 See for example Robert D. Enright and Richard P Fitzgibbons, *Helping Clients Forgive: An Empirical Guide for Resolving Anger and Restoring Hope* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2000), 71–75; Marie M. Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005), 3; Philip J. Halstead, "Have My Parents Sinned against Me? Exploring the Concept of Sin in the Pastoral Context," *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* 12 (2010): 43–62; idem., "Clearing the Way to Forgiveness: Acknowledging Parental Offences and Theological Misinterpretations," *Colloquium* 43 (2011): 229–52.
14 See for example Enright and Fitzgibbons, *Helping Clients Forgive,* 3; Halstead, "The Forgiveness Matters Course," 94–104; Michael E. McCullough, Steven J. Sandage, and Everett L. Worthington, Jr. *To Forgive Is Human: How to Put Your Past in the Past* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1997), 190.

to explore their relationships with their parents?" On numerous occasions, I returned to this question for clarification when I got bogged down in the process of creating the course.

Unexpectedly, the spontaneous feeling that emerged within me when I first reread the course rationale and central research question together was one of relief. It seems that the clarity of these statements helped me to own at a deeper level that the idea to create a course was in fact valid. It is not that I had realised that I was unduly anxious about the validity of the project prior to this emotional break through. To the contrary, I had assumed that the idea of creating a course was sound. My confidence was based on my personal and ministry experience described above, my passion for the project, the encouragement of my PhD supervisors, the affirmation I received from my wife, and a dream in which I felt God had assured me that there was a divine component to the project. What alleviated my unrecognised anxiety, it appears, was the development of the academic foundations that undergirded the course.

Needs Assessments

A second principle common to most course design taxonomies is the notion of needs assessments.[15] Designers carry out needs assessments by using questionnaires and other methods to gather data on people's existing knowledge, capabilities, and/or circumstances, and to compare this data with wished-for levels of knowledge, capabilities, and/or circumstances. The information derived from these appraisals assists course constructors to develop strategies that can help participants to bridge the gaps between the two levels.[16]

Several techniques were used in the design phase of the Forgiveness Matters course to assess the course members' views of their parents' offences and forgiveness. One entailed my crafting a pre-course questionnaire, which was trialled on a number of colleagues. It included questions such as "How do you define forgiveness?" Interestingly, replies to this question seemed to identify that no two persons define forgiveness the same way. In response to this discovery, I resolved to stress more clearly in the courses the distinction between the separate components of forgiveness (e.g., intrapersonal–and interpersonal–forgiveness) and between forgiveness and a number of related concepts such as reconciliation. This emphasis helped to encourage persons to engage with the aspects of forgiveness that were most relevant to them and to respect other people's choices to do likewise.

The pilot course (described below) also provided me with helpful information concerning how best to assist the course participants to progress their forgiveness work.[17] This feedback identified that some individuals preferred being told what to do throughout the course, as opposed to my pre-course expectation that all persons prefer being able to determine for themselves how to respond to the teaching they received. In considering this feedback, I decided not to alter the course philosophy of self-directed learning, because

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15 See for example Graves, "A Framework of Course Development Processes," 12–13; Johan Uvin, "Designing Workplace ESOL Courses for Chinese Health-Care Workers at a Boston Nursing Home," in *Teachers as Course Developers* (ed. Kathleen Graves; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 39–62.

16 Graves, "A Framework of Course Development Processes," 12–13; Uvin, "Designing Workplace ESOL Courses," 40.

17 Uvin, "Designing Workplace Esol Courses," 45–46.

many adults in my context equate autonomous learning to sound pedagogy, respect, and safety.[18] What I did do, however, was to spend even more time in the individual course sessions walking the participants through various ways that they could apply the teaching. I also expanded upon the advantages[19] and disadvantages[20] of exerting one's will in the forgiveness process. My hope in doing this was that each individual would find a way to continue with their own forgiveness explorations.

A number of erroneous expectations and hopes were identified in this phase of the development of the course.[21] This information helped me to prepare strategies to temper people's unrealistic goals such as their desire to experience complete healing for all of their parental wounds during an eight week course. Similarly, I realised that I would need to refer some participants on to other caregivers for more in-depth therapy post-course.[22] Consequently, I began to develop relationships with a small network of professionals before I needed to refer individuals on to them.

The chief advantage of taking the time to learn where each group member was at on their respective forgiveness journeys was that the process forced me to concede that I could not predict what every person would need or want on the course. As ridiculous as this assumption now sounds, I had largely assumed that my personal experience and education had equipped me to foresee what people needed. As a result of this learning, I included more open-ended questions in the pre-course questionnaire to cue me to possible needs. For instance, one question asked: "What do you hope to get out of the course?" I also resolved not to second-guess the participants throughout the courses; oftentimes, this resolve was difficult to keep!

Course Goals, Learning Outcomes, and Learning Objectives

The efficacy of courses can be greatly enhanced through the development of specific course goals, clear learning outcomes, and explicit learning objectives. Course goals refer to the overarching purposes and/or aims of courses.[23] Insightful questions help to identify key goals. For instance, Fisher asks, "What are the chief purposes of the course?"[24] Surprisingly, questions of this nature are often left unasked, or the answers they generate slip from focus during the busyness of course development. Unsurprisingly, these errors affect the quality of courses. The overarching goal of the Forgiveness Matters course was: "To create an effective church-based forgiveness course for adults who wish to explore their relationships with their parents." Goals were also prepared to summarise the purpose of each course session. When setting goals, Fisher

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18 A. W. Bates and Gary Poole, *Effective Teaching with Technology in Higher Education: Foundation for Success* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 43–44; Gill Nicholls, *Developing Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2002), 14-16; Peter Taylor, *How to Design a Training Course: A Guide to Participatory Curriculum Development* (London: Continuum, 2003), 27.
19 See for example Don Basham, *Deliver Us from Evil* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 1972), 125.
20 See for example David Augsburger, *The New Freedom of Forgiveness* (3rd ed.; Chicago: Moody Press, 2000), 48.
21 Laura Hull, "A Curriculum Framework for Corporate Language Programs," in *Teachers as Course Developers* (ed. Kathleen Graves; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 176–202.
22 Adapted from Uvin, "Designing Workplace ESOL Courses," 46.
23 See for example Forsyth, Jolliffe, and Stevens, *Planning a Course*, 26*;* Graves, "A Framework of Course Development Processes," 16–17; Posner and Rudnitsky, *Course Design*, 8–10.
24 Pat Fisher, "Designing a Seventh-Grade Social Studies Course for ESL Students at an International School," in *Teachers as Course Developers* (ed. Kathleen Graves; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 63–85.

exhorts designers to keep Einstein's dictum in mind: If you can't explain something to a ten-year-old, you don't understand it![25]

Specific goals help designers to structure their courses and to divide the immense undertaking of creating a course into smaller, achievable tasks.[26] Goals also help persons to visualise their courses and sessions as whole entities. In this way, the course goals I formulated helped me to stave off despair, as at times it felt like I was merely going in circles throughout the design phase of the course. They also provided me with a sense of progress, direction, and inspiration.[27]

Learning outcomes refer to statements "of how learners will behave or what they should be able to do after successfully completing a course or learning experience."[28] Thus, learning outcomes relate to ends, not means.[29] They encompass skills and comprehension.[30] They also guide instruction.[31] Taylor encourages designers to structure learning outcomes around the acronym SMART; that is to say, they should be *s*pecific, *m*easurable, *a*ttainable, *r*ealistic, and *t*ime-bound.[32]

Bearing these points in mind, between two and five learning outcomes were developed for each of the eight sessions that comprise the Forgiveness Matters course. For instance, a learning outcome for Session Three stated: "By the end of the session the participants will be able to name at least two factors that might have consciously and/or subconsciously inclined their parents to wound them."

Learning objectives were also fashioned. They express how learning outcomes and course goals can be achieved. Participants typically receive a copy of the learning objectives. Since their primary aim is to provide people with a sense of orientation, learning objectives do not delineate the specific expectations of course learning outcomes. The learning objective relating to Session Three's learning outcome delineated above illustrates these subtle yet participant-friendly distinctions. It read: "The primary purpose of the session is to explore some of the influences that might have shaped our parental experiences. Accordingly, we will identify several factors that might have consciously or subconsciously inclined our parents to wound us."

My reading of the participants' narratives reveals that every group member appreciated being made aware of the learning objectives and course goals. (See below for further discussion.)

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25 Ibid., 66.
26 Graves, "A Framework of Course Development Processes," 16–19.
27 Fisher, "Designing a Seventh-Grade Social Studies Course," 83.
28 Taylor, *How to Design a Training Course,* 94.
29 Forsyth, Jolliffe, and Stevens, *Planning a Course*, 72.
30 Yvonne L. Callaway and Sue A. Stickel, "Introduction to Counseling: A Preliminary Construction of the Professional Reality," in *Teaching Counselors and Therapists: Constructivist and Developmental Course Design* (ed. Karen Eriksen and Garrett McAuliffe; Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 2001), 13–39.
31 Posner and Rudnitsky, *Course Design*, 100–101.
32 Taylor, *How to Design a Training Course,* 95.

Course Resources

All course design taxonomies accentuate the critical importance of designers including quality content in their courses.[33] Plainly, if the subject matter included in the course or the pedagogy that underpins the course is lacking, the value of the course will be compromised.

Many sources were consulted to determine which educational practices and resources might best assist the participants with their forgiveness explorations.[34] Extant forgiveness models provided one point of reference.[35] While they offered little in the way of explicit teaching guidelines, as mentioned earlier, they offered a great deal in the way of course content.

In order to enhance the course resources I also e-mailed 16 friends and asked them, "Can you think of any creative input that might enhance an adult/parent forgiveness course?" Thirteen responded with suggestions such as the song *The Living Years* by Mike and the Mechanics[36] and/or DVDs like *Light in a Dark Place.*[37] Consultative steps of this nature help designers to counter the common tendency of adopting lone-ranger mentalities as they strive to do everything themselves.[38]

To balance (a) the necessity of developing a range of teaching methods and resources to enhance learning[39] with (b) the reality that some individuals prefer predictability over excessive variety,[40] it was decided to formulate several course rituals. In Uvin's view, rituals enhance learning and offer participants a measure of orientation.[41] Paradoxically, rituals also serve to liberate the creativity of course constructors.[42] One course ritual that I developed was the-round-the-room-game. Each week the game would be announced and a volunteer would share a story, raise a question, or simply say 'pass' to express that she or he had nothing to share at that particular moment. This procedure would then continue in a circular pattern until every individual had either shared or passed. It is noteworthy that within the space of a few weeks the participants from each group had learned to appreciate and anticipate the game. Course designers who seek to uphold the principle of freedom of speech and yet who simultaneously wish to create opportunities for persons to share may find such activities particularly helpful in their groups.

I chose to adopt Graves' matrix teaching approach on numerous occasions throughout the course.[43] This meant that I organised the sessions with specific goals in mind, as well as a number of strategies that I

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33 See for example Forsyth, Jolliffe, and Stevens, *Planning a Course*, 27–28*;* Kathleen Graves, "A Framework of Course Development Processes", 19–20.

34 See for example Forsyth, Jolliffe, and Stevens, *Planning a Course;* Graves, "A Framework of Course Development Processes."

35 See for example Wade, Worthington Jr., and Meyer, "But Do They Work?;" Walker and Gorsuch, "Dimensions Underlying Sixteen Models of Forgiveness and Reconciliation,"

36 Mike Rutherford and B.A. Robertson, "The Living Years*,"* on Mike and the Mechanics, *Living Years* (CD: WEA International, 1988).

37 Pilgrim International, "Light in a Dark Place" (Video: Sydney: African Enterprise Australia, 1997).

38 Bates and Poole, *Effective Teaching with Technology in Higher Education*, 139–140.

39 Callaway and Stickel, "Introduction to Counseling," 17.

40 Ann Beales, "The Special Considerations in Selecting and Sequencing Content in Workplace Courses," in *Teachers' Voices: Exploring Course Design in a Changing Curriculum* (ed. Anne Burns and Susan Hood; Sydney: National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research, 1995), 45–50.

41 Uvin, "Designing Workplace Esol Courses," 48.

42 Hull, "A Curriculum Framework for Corporate Language Programs," 192.

43 Graves, "A Framework of Course Development Processes," 29.

could call on to help people move towards these objectives. My choice of which resources to use at any given moment was based on the dynamics that I encountered at the time.

The following example illustrates a small part of this diversity. Lukin claims that topical events can facilitate learning.[44] Accordingly, I sometimes referred to the feud between New Zealand's David Tua, the onetime contender for the world heavyweight boxing title, and his former coach, Kevin Barry. Tua publicly forgave Barry for an unspecified wrong. Barry responded by saying, "We will never have a personal relationship ever again. For him to be so condescending and say he forgives me. What is he forgiving me for?"[45] This example along with others was prepared to illustrate a learning objective of Session One, which read, "To begin to realise what forgiveness is and is not." It also demonstrates the perils of unsolicited spoken forgiveness!

Conceptualising Course Content

Optimally, course goals, learning outcomes, and learning objectives ought to determine what should and should not be included in courses; reality, however, suggests that many factors influence these decisions.[46] Consider the impact of practical considerations.[47] The choice to restrict the Forgiveness Matters course to eight 1.5 hour sessions offers an illustrative example. It was motivated by my desire to find a suitable timeframe that on the one side would grant people enough time to begin to process their forgiveness issues, yet on the other side would not represent too large a commitment that might prevent persons from signing up to the course. A further reason was that eight week courses fitted nicely into New Zealand's ten week school terms. The chief problem with restricting the course to 12 hours of direct contact time was that it limited the amount of material I could include in the course and the course handouts. This tension spotlights that course designers are regularly forced to make choices and compromises.

Designers also need to resolve how they wish to sequence the content of their courses.[48] I chose to shape the course around the HEART forgiveness schema. The schema equates to my adaptation of Lartey's five-phase pastoral cycle.[49] It also represents a helpful and memorable method for persons to process their parental wounds via forgiveness. The acronym HEART reflects Christ's call to forgive from the heart (Mt. 18:35), which is supposed to identify the importance of both volitional and emotional forgiveness.[50] The five phases are:

- *H*eeding people's parental wounds (Part of Session One and Session Two).

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44 Annabelle Lukin, "Functional Grammar in the Classroom," in *Teachers' Voices: Exploring Course Design in a Changing Curriculum* (ed. Anne Burns and Susan Hood; Sydney: National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research, 1995), 53–65.

45 Chris Mirams, "Barry Comes out Swinging," in *Auckland Sunday Star Times* (February 20, 2005): B4.

46 See for example Forsyth, Jolliffe, and Stevens, *Planning a Course,* 17–28*;* Graves, "A Framework of Course Development Processes," 19–20; Taylor, *How to Design a Training Course,* 103.

47 Graves, "A Framework of Course Development Processes," 26; Hull, "A Curriculum Framework for Corporate Language Programs," 181–182.

48 See for example Forsyth, Jolliffe, and Stevens, *Planning a Course,* 17; Taylor, *How to Design a Training Course,* 103–104.

49 Emmanuel Y. Lartey, "Practical Theology as a Theological Form," in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology* (eds. James Woodward and Stephen Pattison; Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 128–34.

50 Adapted from Everett L. Worthington, Jr., *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Theory and Application* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 25.

- *E*xploring the influences that might have inclined people's parents to wound them (Session Three).
- *A*cknowledging some of the key Christian traditions that inform people's understanding of forgiveness (Sessions Four and Five).
- *R*eviewing people's comprehension of forgiveness in the light of their parents' offences (Sessions Six and Seven).
- *T*argeting future forgiveness goals (Session Eight).[51]

As it turned out, the HEART schema also became the spine of the course's content-rich handouts. The handouts served as the key instructional tool throughout the course and they provided the participants with a fertile resource for future reference and reflection. When individual group sessions seemed to stall, the handouts also offered me a place of refuge, in that I would overtly ask for a volunteer to read a paragraph from them, so that I could covertly regather myself and decide how best to proceed. To the best of my knowledge, my ruse was never discovered. Stated differently, I deem that the time spent developing the HEART schema and the associated handouts was very well spent.

The Learning Environment

Since positive learning environments enhance the effectiveness of courses,[52] numerous steps were taken to ensure that the Forgiveness Matters courses were held in participant-friendly atmospheres that were conducive to learning, the sharing of stories, and safety.

The work of cultivating a positive course ambience started months before each course commenced. Prayer comprised an integral component of this labour. Eighteen supporters committed to pray regularly for the courses. These people were thanked for their collaboration (and thereby reminded of their commitments) at pre-course, mid-course, and post-course junctures.

Similarly, Kiser states that first impressions have a major impact on the credibility of course facilitators and therefore the value of courses.[53] This necessitated that the innumerable interactions that I had with potential applicants were steeped in the qualities that I hoped would be palpable in the course sessions themselves—namely, the notions of respect, acceptance, and love. I trust that I achieved this lofty goal.

Many steps were also taken to create a positive ambience and rapport on the first night of each course. The participants were welcomed, offered supper, and pointed to a prepared meeting room. Organising the room entailed heating it, as well as ensuring that the resources and technology needed for the session were primed for use. It also involved arranging the seats in a circle to exhibit a non-hierarchical

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51 For a fuller description of the course content please refer to Halstead, "The Forgiveness Matters Course," 88–93.
52 Callaway and Stickel, "Introduction to Counseling," 22; Carolyn Oxenford, "Discovering Assessment," in *Teaching Counselors and Therapists: Constructivist and Developmental Course Design* (eds. Karen Eriksen and Garrett McAuliffe; Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 2001), 93–112.
53 A. Glenn Kiser, *Masterful Facilitation: Becoming a Catalyst for Meaningful Change* (New York: Amacom, 1998), 4.

teaching structure and encourage group sharing.[54] Part of this process called for me to position my chair in such a way that I would not look directly into people's faces, or sit between them and the door. If steps of this nature had been overlooked, some of the participants might have felt intimidated or trapped, which clearly would have jeopardised their learning. These practices were repeated for every session.

To enhance further the concept of safety I explained on the first night of each course that there would be no overt praying for persons during the course sessions. In the light of the members' diverse and unknown backgrounds it was considered that this form of prayer might lead to misunderstandings and could compromise the safety of some participants. Interestingly, only one participant challenged this stipulation. The apparent accord of the other group members seems to imply that many churchgoers have been disappointed or wounded via the prayers of others; and in the end, who can doubt that prayer sometimes resembles little more than the projections of the people doing the praying. (See below for further discussion.) Confidentiality was also talked about at the first session of each course.[55] It follows that any personal information that was shared in the group needed to stay in the group.

It was considered that groups of six to ten participants would create the best learning environments. In courses of less than six participants, group members might find the groups to be too threatening to share in. Then again, courses with more than ten people might not provide enough space or a sense of connectedness for individuals to share their stories.[56] In hindsight, I consider that groups of eight to twelve would have been better. Slightly larger numbers help to provide a momentum that stimulates sharing and they also mitigate the likelihood of persons feeling cornered, especially when absenteeism reduces group numbers to less than six.

Clearly, course facilitators also play a major role in establishing positive learning environments.[57] Since the accomplishment of this goal is largely dependent upon the knowledge, values, priorities, and attentiveness of the facilitators, it is critical that they have an adequate and growing awareness of their roles and themselves. The role that I hoped to adopt was that of an informed midwife.[58] "The word informed indicates that facilitators are supposed to be highly conversant with the goals, learning outcomes, learning objectives, and content of their courses."[59] They should also be familiar with concepts such as group theory and people's different learning styles.[60] The term midwife expresses my desire to support the birth and growth of forgiveness within the participants' lives as *they* explore the topic of forgiveness.[61] (The steps that I initiated to enhance my self-awareness are described in the Evaluation section below.)

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54 Callaway and Stickel, "Introduction to Counseling," 22; Julie A. Gorman, *Community That Is Christian: A Handbook on Small Groups* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1993), 129–130.

55 Judy Emmett, "A Constructivist Approach to the Teaching of Career Counseling," in *Teaching Counselors and Therapists: Constructivist and Developmental Course Design* (eds. Karen Eriksen and Garrett McAuliffe: Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 2001), 139–67; Ivan Snook, "The Ethics and Politics of Social Research," in *Social Science Research in New Zealand: Many Paths to Understanding* (eds. Carl Davidson and Martin Tolich; Auckland: Pearson Education New Zealand, 2003), 69–87.

56 Gorman, *Community That Is Christian*, 127–128.

57 Nicholls, *Developing Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 45-46; Taylor, *How to Design a Training Course,* 105.

58 Barbara Fujiwara, "Planning an Advanced Listening Comprehension Elective for Japanese College Students," in *Teachers as Course Developers* (ed. Kathleen Graves; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 151–75.

59 Halstead, "The Forgiveness Matters Course," 93.

60 Garrett McAuliffe, "Introduction: Guidelines for Constructivist Teaching," in *Teaching Counselors and Therapists: Constructivist and Developmental Course Design* (eds. Karen Eriksen and Garrett McAuliffe; Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 2001), 1–12.

61 Fujiwara, "Planning an Advanced Listening Comprehension Elective for Japanese College Students," 164–166.

By establishing parameters like these, it was hoped that every participant, every story shared, every church background, and every culture represented in the groups would be honoured. It was also hoped that these steps would help to diminish the resistance that persons frequently bring to groups.

Evaluation

Course evaluation is the seventh feature common to most course design taxonomies.[62] The principal reason for evaluating courses is to assess and improve their effectiveness. Given the importance of this task, it is critical for researchers to resolve *what* needs to be assessed and *how* they plan to accomplish the appraisals.[63] Courses can be evaluated in many ways. The context of each course will help to determine the best methods of evaluation. In my case, since forgiveness generally takes time and as change needs to be sustained if it is to be labelled genuine, it was decided that a key indicator of the success or failure of the course would be a psychometric comparison between (a) people's pre-course views of their parents, themselves, and God, and (b) the views that they held two months after the completion of the course. Consequently, the *Enright Forgiveness Inventory* was used to measure the participants' forgiveness of their parents.[64] The State Self-Forgiveness Scales were utilised to measure people's forgiveness of themselves.[65] And The A God Scale was employed to examine if and to what degree people's participation in the Forgiveness Matters course might modify their cognitive perceptions, affective experiences, and activities in relationship with God.[66]

On another level, the course was always meant to be more about people with their unique stories and circumstances than nameless resources that prove or disprove certain learning goals and outcomes. For this reason, it was also decided to obtain the participants' narratives before, during, and after the course.

The performance of facilitators should also be evaluated.[67] Given that the presence of external moderators or technology in the groups might have impeded some people's forgiveness work, it was decided that the evaluation of my performance would be restricted to three alternative strategies. The first entailed designing a series of junctures throughout the course where the participants were invited to comment on their perceptions of the course, the course content, and my role as the course facilitator.[68] The second involved my attending regular supervision meetings with a licensed supervisor, who kept an emotional overview of the course groups and of the fit that existed between the groups and me.[69] Supervision also

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62 See for example Forsyth, Jolliffe, and Stevens, *Planning a Course,* 4–5*;* Graves, "A Framework of Course Development Processes," 30-31; Posner and Rudnitsky, *Course Design,* 186.

63 Adapted from Mercedes Fisher, *Designing Courses and Teaching on the Web: A "How To" Guide to Proven, Innovative Strategies* (Lanham, MD: ScarecrowEducation, 2003), 127.

64 Robert D. Enright, Julio Rique, and Catherine T. Coyle, *The Enright Forgiveness Inventory (EFI) User's Manual* (Madison, WI: The International Forgiveness Institute, 2000).

65 Michael J. A. Wohl, Lise DeShea, and Rebekah Lynn Wahkinney, "Looking Within: Measuring State Self-Forgiveness and Its Relationship to Psychological Well-Being," *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science* 40 (2008): 1–10.

66 Philip J. Halstead (with Michael Hautus), "Defending the God Beyond: The Development of the a God-Scale—A New Instrument for the Assessment of People's Perceptions, Experiences, and Activities in Relationship to God—and Its Initial Use in a Forgiveness Study," *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* (forthcoming).

67 Karen Eriksen and Garrett McAuliffe, "Constructing the Helping Interview," in *Teaching Counselors and Therapists: Constructivist and Developmental Course Design* (eds. Karen Eriksen and Garrett McAuliffe; Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 2001), 41–70.

68 Eriksen and McAuliffe, "Constructing the Helping Interview," 55–56; Graves, "A Framework of Course Development Processes," 32.

69 Philip L. Culbertson, *Caring for God's People: Counseling and Christian Wholeness* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 293-295.

enabled me to establish a routine to reflect, deal with conflict, and explore complex relationships.[70] My reflection on my own performance as the facilitator equated to the third strategy of evaluating my role.

Eventually, there came a point when I needed to move on from my endless attempts to improve what was up until this point a theoretical model and trial the course. Interestingly, I was tempted to omit this step in the course design process, as I thought that the course was in good shape, and because I was running out of time and energy. As will be seen, it is fortunate that I overcame this temptation, followed the advice of the experts, and piloted the course.

III. THE PILOT STUDY

Piloting courses can greatly enhance their efficacy.[71] Several reasons account for this. Pilot studies force designers to step out from behind their computers and gain a firsthand, working knowledge of their courses. They provide a platform for facilitators to trial the different components of their studies. The learning gained from these experiences and the participants' feedback can assist coordinators to identify issues within their courses that need to be omitted, added, or improved.[72] And the confidence that facilitators obtain from these steps will engender hope in individuals who participate in subsequent courses.

Consequently, I invited six friends who I thought could identify with the theme of the study to take part in a course. Five readily signed up. The course was run over eight consecutive Wednesday evenings in our home.

Overall, I was pleased with how the pilot course unfolded. The sessions seemed to flow together well. The participants appeared to enjoy the course and embrace the process of forgiveness. Every individual reported positive and/or miraculous occurrences in their lives as a result of taking part in the course. And the results from the psychometric analyses were encouraging, though given that they were drawn from only five participants it was not possible to draw any conclusions of note in regards to the efficacy of the course.

Unsurprisingly, I also learned a number of lessons via running the pilot course. Examples include:

1. I concluded that it was probably a mistake to pilot the course in our own home. Not only did I find it difficult to prepare myself adequately for the sessions amidst the bustle of family life, but the course disturbed our household far more than I had anticipated. It was therefore decided to run future courses in neutral, safer, and more professional environments.

2. In the third session, a participant challenged me concerning my focus on historical parental offences as opposed to present-day ones. This perspective motivated me to adjust the balance slightly between these two foci in the remaining sessions. It also prompted me to explain in future courses that the early course sessions focus more on formative child-parent experiences and the latter ones on contemporary issues.

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70 Callaway and Stickel, "Introduction to Counseling," 14.
71 See for example Forsyth, Jolliffe, and Stevens, *Planning a Course,* 28; Franco and Maria Estela, "Designing a Writing Component for Teen Courses at a Brazilian Language Institute," in *Teachers as Course Developers* (ed. Kathleen Graves; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 119–50.
72 Forsyth, Jolliffe, and Stevens, *Planning a Course,* 28; Uvin, "Designing Workplace Esol Courses," 45.

3. I had prepared and begun to dispense bi-weekly questions to the participants in order to conduct overt formative evaluations of their knowledge of parental offences and forgiveness issues throughout the course. However, since the participants clearly had enough to work through without the additional burden of this task, the procedure was abandoned mid-course.

4. I realised that the extent of the participants' biblical, theological, and psychological knowledge was on occasions not as advanced as I had anticipated. Subsequently, I added a number of bridging explanations to the course handouts.

5. Similarly, the process of working through the handouts in a live setting helped me to identify numerous points that needed to be modified. The majority of these were minor. The largest entailed replacing an entire section on relational sin from Session Four's handout with Volf's masterful description of the topic.[73] The first depiction failed to resonate with the participants and in hindsight appeared to miss the essence of the theme.

6. Two people commented at the end of the course that it may have been better if I had adhered more closely to the handouts during the sessions; however, the others mentioned that they had greatly appreciated the malleability of the sessions. Weighing both perspectives, I decided that there was no easy way to rectify this dilemma. I would simply have to trust my own discretion concerning how to balance people's different learning styles in upcoming courses. I also determined to state explicitly that one of the purposes of the handouts was to provide people with the opportunity to revise the content of each session and take it a step further. Reflective learners would clearly benefit from this.

IV. RECRUITMENT PROCEDURES

Having created, piloted, and refined the course further, I then needed to recruit people to take part in the courses that would be used to assess the efficacy of the Forgiveness Matters course. I had anticipated that this would be a straightforward and easy procedure. The theme of the course was important. To my knowledge there were no forgiveness courses operating in the New Zealand church. The pilot study had gone well and the course was being offered for free. Surely, I thought, churchgoers would queue up to join the courses and church leaders would leap at the opportunity to host them. I was so confident of quickly locating the people needed to generate sufficient statistical power to investigate the effectiveness of the course that I expected to use control groups to manage additional participants and to test the course's efficacy.[74]

My plan to find the group members was to place an advertisement in the leadership newsletters of two of New Zealand's largest denominations. Since I had been granted permission to do this and as the

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73 Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 74–75.
74 Wade, Worthington Jr., and Meyer, "But Do They Work?," 423–439.

combined readership of the newsletters was over 1000 church leaders, I thought I would be shortly inundated with calls.

How wrong I was. The plan utterly failed. Two persons responded and neither of them was interested in hosting or taking part in a course. Similarly, a friend offered to advertise the course in her church's bulletin, but no one contacted me from this congregation of over 200 people.

I can only surmise why the advertisements failed to attract interest. One conceivable explanation is that I had written them poorly. Another is that church leaders are too busy to read the newsletters from their denominational offices. Or, perhaps the leaders' silence confirms Symington's contention that some church leaders are psychologically blind towards their own inner realities and their parishioners' lives;[75] consequently, they failed to extend the opportunity to their flocks to take part in a course in forgiveness. A participant from the pilot study offered another explanation: She insisted that people will not take part in a course where they do not know the facilitator and added: "So you need to get out there and sell your great product in person." I followed her advice and contacted eight pastors over the next months. I explained to them the nature of the course and asked them whether I could personally advertise the course to their congregations and run a course in their churches should enough interest be generated. The four pastors whom I knew agreed in principle. The four who did not know me did not say no, but since they did not get back to me or return my calls, nothing further eventuated.

The next phase of the recruitment procedure was protracted and complex. Two of the four pastors who had tentatively approved my request asked me to meet with their leadership teams in order to gain their approval to advertise the course. Both of these meetings went well. I then had to negotiate a suitable timeframe and platform to promote the course with the different churches. These negotiations led to me giving 11 separate public addresses (e.g., at church services, meetings in houses, and at a church camp) to advertise the course.

To *sell* the free course I shaped the 11 talks around Forman's selling-cycle.[76] As a matter of fact, I felt somewhat fraudulent adopting a selling-cycle to enlist persons for the course, but by this time my desperation to locate participants had risen to the point that I was able to overcome my internal and perhaps unwarranted resistance. Thus, I proceeded to:

1. *Establish a need*: This entailed speaking about the inevitability of parental offences and raising the critical question that all people ought to ask themselves; namely, "Have I processed my parents' offences adequately?"

2. *Create Want*: To engender a desire within the listeners to participate in the course and to reiterate the question directly above, I listed several problems that often stem from parental offences that forgiveness may help to improve. One example is where parents seem to reside in their children's heads. Another is when persons realise that they unwillingly behave in an incongruent manner when they are in their parents' presence.

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75 Neville Symington, *The Blind Man Sees: Freud's Awakening and Other Essays* (London: Karnac, 2004), 2–18.
76 David Forman, *The Selling Model Based on the Buyer's Cycle of Motivation* (Auckland: David Forman Excellence in Business Performance, 2000).

3. *Present method*: I then explained how the forgiveness course will address these issues and summarised the practical details of the course such as its length.

4. *Resistance barrier*: Next, I tried to pre-empt and disarm people's resistance barriers to the course. For instance, I encouraged people to approach me to discuss their particular situations and see whether taking part in this course might be of benefit to them.

5. *Close for action*: To persuade persons to turn their interest into action I invited them to sign an *Expression of Interest Form* (see below) and/or talk with me after my presentation.

I estimate that at least 1100 people heard these talks. Perhaps 70 of these spoke with me after the services and 50 filled in an *Expression of Interest Form*. The purpose of these forms was to provide these persons with additional course details and me with their contact-details and preferred timeslots for the course.

Next, I chose a night and starting date for the course in accordance with the people's favoured timeframes and the availability of the church premises. All interested persons were sent a notification of these times and copies of the study's Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms.[77] This information enabled them to make an informed decision as to whether they wished to commit to a course. Twenty-eight participants were recruited in this way.

All of these tasks took time. The briefest period between the initial conversation with the pastor and the first night of a course was 13 weeks; the longest was 30 weeks; and the average was 19 weeks. I found this waiting extremely frustrating.

During this time, I also adopted a snowball approach to recruit course participants.[78] This technique entails researchers using their own social networks to find people who might wish to participate in a course. Fifteen participants were enlisted via this approach. Moreover, one participant from an earlier course told her pastor about the course, who in turn contacted me and asked if I would be willing to host a course at their church. I readily agreed.

Of the many lessons that were learned through the arduous and time-consuming process of recruiting participants, two stand out: I simply underestimated the length of time it would take to organise each course and I had not accounted for the reality that some pastors would neither commit to the course nor say no to the course. If I had been awake to these eventualities, I would have approached many more pastors from the outset instead of trying to anticipate how I could accommodate all of the courses that might come together. In this way, I might have saved myself much consternation and been able to lead more people through the courses.

Still, 43 participants eventually took part in the five courses that were used to assess the effectiveness of the Forgiveness Matters course. For these individuals, I am extremely grateful.

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77 The Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms comprised part of the application I submitted to the University of Auckland's Human Participants Ethics Committee to run the courses. Ethics approval was successfully obtained.
78 Bouma and Ling, *The Research Process*, 117–118.

V. EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS AND IMPLICATIONS

I set out to create an effective course that would assist adult churchgoers to process their parental wounds via forgiveness. The study's findings suggest that the Forgiveness Matters course assisted over 90% of the participants to explore their relationships with their parents; enhance their comprehension and application of forgiveness; and improve their relationships with their parents, themselves, and/or God. Statistical significance was reached on every scale employed in the study and many miraculous stories emerged from the participants' narratives.[79] Five overlapping concepts relating to course design emerged from the narrative inquiry—specifically, the importance of the course structure; the positive learning environment; the role of prayer; the responsibilities of course facilitators; and the importance of storytelling.

The Course Structure

The results of the narrative inquiry reveal that every participant appreciated being made aware of the learning objectives, the course goals, and course guidelines from the outset of the course. Betty,[80] for instance, reasoned that because the facilitator "clearly knew where he was leading us, I could relax." And Talia stated that she "had no confidentiality concerns whatsoever, because they were clearly spelt out in the beginning." In other words, the learning objectives and course guidelines acted as scaffolding that supported the participants' forgiveness explorations. And the course goals provided people with a sense of direction and a path to forgiveness.[81]

Comments like these suggest that the small amount of time that it takes facilitators to clarify learning objectives and goals at the beginning of the courses may well save all parties much time and heartache in the latter course sessions. These steps also serve to create an atmosphere of safety and acceptance.

Most of the participants also appreciated that each session followed the same main structure. Jemma expounded: "I liked the predictability of the sessions – beginning with music (though some of it was certainly not my style), prayer, sharing, a video clip, and" the facilitator's "gentle way of dealing with people." This consistency also helped people to relax, question, take risks, learn, and forgive.

The participants were asked to comment on the length of the sessions in their post-course round-one forms. Seventy percent favoured the 90 minute time frame while the remainder thought that two hours would have been better, because the additional time would have allowed more time for discussion. Jemma reported that "most times" she "was shocked that the hour and a half had gone by so quickly"; many others echoed her sentiments. No one considered that the sessions were too long.

When responding to the question of the length of the sessions, half of participants added that they were delighted to encounter a church-based course that actually started and finished on time. Mercy

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79 For further details see Halstead, "The Forgiveness Matters Course," 85–110.
80 Pseudonyms have been employed for all the participants in this article. Part of the Ethics approval involved obtaining the participants consent for their stories to be written up in articles. Quotation marks are utilized whenever people's exact words are cited.
81 Graves, "A Framework of Course Development Processes," 12.

emphasised "I really, really appreciated the facilitator's care in keeping to time without any sense of pressure being conveyed." The fact that so many people stressed this point indicates that concise sessions and accurate time keeping comprise important yet much overlooked components of effective courses, because they engender certainty, security, and trust.

To develop a relevant course that encompasses theology, psychology, and practice also requires the bringing together of numerous other factors. The primary way I achieved this was to create a set of content-rich course handouts, which were shaped around the HEART forgiveness schema. This offered the group members opportunities to reflect on and integrate the material at home.

Most group members appreciated the freedom and encouragement to engage with the course material in whatever ways felt congruent to them.[82] Betty liked "having choices." Ivan appreciated "the non-threatening way in which the material was presented." Clark connected "the space that was always available to ask questions" to the positive course environment. And Tim reported that "it was great to be always presented with options, because it meant that" he "was never cornered." Statements like these imply that many adults equate autonomous learning to sound pedagogy, respect, safety, and effective courses in forgiveness.

Similarly, the group members reported that they benefited from the variety of teaching materials that were utilised in the course to accommodate their different learning styles and advance their forgiveness.[83] Consider their views on the course videos: Zach "didn't enjoy" them "at all", though he "loved the discussions centred on them." Mia stated that the videos "were helpful to reflect on as were the other people's interpretations of them"; most of the participants echoed this view. And Lia expressed that the video *Light in a Dark Place*[84] was "life-changing, because it put" her "story in perspective."

Observations like these accentuate that there is not only one way to teach adults. Some adults are classical self-directed learners.[85] Others learn best in communal settings.[86] Some thrive on deep-learning strategies and still others benefit more through alternative teaching methods.[87] Moreover, Taylor encourages course facilitators to access the wealth of experience that adults typically bring to meetings by creating opportunities for these learners to share their thoughts and interact with each other.[88] What matters most, then, is that participants are encouraged to engage with the course content in whatever way serves their learning and processing best. To contextualise this theory, course designers will need to think carefully about how they encourage the participants in their courses to engage with the course material.

Similarly, most participants appreciated being informed about the many different ways that scholars viewed forgiveness. When Samantha learned of some of these distinctions, she exclaimed: "You cannot

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82 Bates and Poole, *Effective Teaching with Technology in Higher Education*, 38; Nicholls, *Developing Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 38–39.
83 McAuliffe, "Introduction: Guidelines for Constructivist Teaching," 202.
84 Pilgrim International, "Light in a Dark Place."
85 Taylor, *How to Design a Training Course,* 35.
86 Brita L. Gill-Austern, "Pedagogy under the Influence of Feminism and Womanism," in *Feminist and Womanist Pastoral Theology* (eds. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore and Brita L. Gill-Austern; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 149–68.
87 Bates and Poole, *Effective Teaching with Technology in Higher Education*, 39–41.
88 Taylor, *How to Design a Training Course,* 27.

believe how liberating it is to hear someone say that forgiveness and reconciliation are distinct concepts!"[89] And Fran reflected that "it was immensely helpful to learn of interpretations of forgiveness that are different from" her "pastor's ideas", as they helped to "release" her from a number of "religious expectations such as the demand for instant forgiveness and the need to confront others."[90]

Comments like these appear to challenge the notion that the average churchgoer cannot cope with and/or should not be exposed to conflicting points of view. The participants' diverse backgrounds and positive psychometric shifts over the course support this contention. Additionally, the comments reiterate how the words and edicts of church leaders can have long-lasting detrimental effects on congregants. For this reason, leaders should encourage their listeners to prove their teaching; and the leaders and listeners should always strive to further their education in order to reduce the propagation of narrow and non-effective teaching.

The Positive Learning Environment

The results of the narrative enquiry also accentuated that creating a positive and safe course setting is critical to the running of a successful course. To begin with, positive environments encourage transparency, story-telling, questions, respect, love, growth, and forgiveness; whereas, negative atmospheres can all too easily stifle these forgiveness promoting characteristics.

Further, the participants' willingness to explore the notion of forgiveness and personalise the input was partially dependent upon their feeling safe. Their backgrounds help to explain this essential need. To be a victim of parental offences is to have experienced wounding at the core of one's being.[91] To have known deep shame as a result of parental offences is in all probability to encounter difficulties in trusting others. To express interest in taking part in a forgiveness course is for many churchgoers akin to admitting defeat. And to enrol in a course that invites open sharing with unidentified others and an unknown facilitator is to risk. It is therefore necessary to feel safe in order to move beyond one's natural defences and protective behavioural patterns.

Prayer

Prayer was another factor that helped to create a safe course atmosphere. In one sense, this was surprising, because the only overt prayers that were prayed during the meetings were the ones used to open and close the sessions. In another sense, it was not surprising, given the number of people praying for the course, the priority that prayer is afforded throughout Christendom, and the reality that there are numerous expressions

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89 Enright and Fitzgibbons, *Helping Clients Forgive,* 41–43.
90 Augsburger, *The New Freedom of Forgiveness*, 48.
91 Elan Golomb, *Trapped in the Mirror* (New York: William Morrow, 1992), 35-44; Halstead, "Clearing the Way to Forgiveness," 230–241.

of prayer such as becoming open before God in regards to forgiveness issues.[92] For example, Celina articulated: "I felt an amazing presence of God in the group last week, which stayed with me for a long time after the meeting. How many people did you say were praying for us?" Other persons used expressions like prayerful, peaceful, and God-filled to describe the ambience that they encountered on the course.

Payne argues that it is the presence of God that enables individuals to forgive.[93] The prayers of the course supporters and the participants presumably helped some of the group members to experience God's presence on the course and as a consequence to forgive their parents, others, and themselves.

Rose testified that God via prayer helped her to feel safe and find forgiveness on the course. Rose was sitting in church with a chronic stomach ache on the day that I was scheduled to advertise the course. During the service in a time of open prayer, a church member spoke out: "There is someone here who has a terrible stomach ache. I believe that God wants that person to know that although you have come a long way it is now time for you to forsake the burden that you've been carrying for years". I was then invited to talk. As Rose listened to me describe the course, she later reported that God told her to enrol in the course, because she would "learn how to forsake" her "burden on the course."

Rose arrived at the first meeting with a mixture of expectation and trepidation. Fortunately, she quickly "felt at home" and worked hard to forgive her parents intrapersonally. By mid-course she joyfully reported: "This thing that has defined me for ages, this physical burden, this crippling burden, has completely gone. I am amazed. I feel great. I cannot believe it. I don't actually know what happened, but I know it's gone." Rose also mentioned at the end of the course that she was "shocked to realise that" she had "begun to think about helping other people who have been hurt in the same way as" her. Up until that point, she had not been able to entertain the idea, because her decade-old wounds were too raw.

An addendum to Rose's story is that I received a note from her several months after the final quantitative analyses of the study had been completed. She wrote, "the big thing for me is that I don't need to talk about it (i.e., her parents' offences) as I once did … I don't feel isolated anymore. I don't trust my parents, but I am no longer tied to them. Praise God."

In the light of Rose's opening and closing words, one could say that the Forgiveness Matters phase of her forgiveness journey was framed in prayer.

The stipulation that there would be no explicit praying for individuals during the course sessions also helped to create a safe course environment. Mercy appreciated the directive, because she did not want to be "the focus of attention" and she did "not want other people to touch" her. (Some individuals' theology and/or customs of prayer necessitate that they place their hands on the persons that they pray for in order to invoke the Holy Spirit's presence.) And Tim valued the stipulation, because he was "tired of people's attempts at magic" and "their bandaid approaches to healing" where they "try to resolve a history of abuse with a one-off prayer." Interestingly, Tim's appraisal resonated with every participant in his group. Their accord implies that many churchgoers have been disappointed or wounded via the prayers of others.

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92 See for example Leanne Payne, *Restoring the Christian Soul: Overcoming Barriers to Completion in Christ through Healing Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1991), 84.
93 Payne, *Restoring the Christian Soul,* 84.

This suggestion is not meant to belittle the value of prayer, or the fact that prayer and forgiveness are on occasions closely linked (e.g., Mt. 6:9-15; Mk. 11:25); however, it is meant to highlight that some forms of prayer in some contexts are not helpful.

McMinn expands upon this point, and argues that it can be dangerous for counsellors to pray for their clients on a regular in-session basis.[94] His rationale is compelling. For instance, he reasons that some caregivers pray as a defence mechanism to hide their own lack of insight and self-understanding. He also suggests that prayer can be used to placate the expectations of clients instead of trying to understand the origins of their expectations. And some individuals tend to abdicate any sense of self-responsibility for their healing when their counsellors pray, because, after all, it is the counsellor's job to pray!

Accordingly, McMinn asserts that *the* question that people such as caregivers and course facilitators need to ask themselves is: "*Which* forms of prayer should be used with *which* clients and under *which* circumstances?"[95]

Talia was the only participant who openly questioned the decision not to pray explicitly for individuals during the meetings. In my view, her story reveals some of the reasoning behind her question. Many years earlier, Talia was deeply betrayed by her mother and despite Talia's repeated attempts at reconciliation the two women have remained estranged. The pain of this separation has been particularly difficult for Talia to bear, as her mid-course statement "if I start to cry I may never stop" appears to reflect. Thus, Talia longed for a miracle that would remove her pain and reconnect her with her mother; and she had hoped that the prayers of the group members, as opposed to her own forgiveness efforts, would instigate these changes. A comment she made in her post-course round-one forms seems to verify this: "I didn't read one word from the course handouts and I didn't think about forgiveness at all between the sessions."

Given Talia's situation and patent distress during the meetings, my clinical supervisor and I concluded that I had a responsibility to encourage her to seek professional care. As it turned out, Talia approached me on this very topic at the end of the course. I trust that she pursued the leads that I offered her and managed to find appropriate support.

Since it is impossible for people to resolve all of their parental issues via an eight week intervention and as it can be extremely difficult for some persons to acknowledge their need of professional assistance, I view Talia's decision and the few others like it as an affirmation of the course's efficacy. The significance of the decisions is that they denote that the participants have moved on in their forgiveness journeys and have become aware of their need to work on their issues in a more in-depth setting.

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94 Mark R. McMinn, *Psychology, Theology, and Spirituality in Christian Counseling* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1996), 81.
95 McMinn, *Psychology, Theology, and Spirituality in Christian Counseling,* 81.

The Responsibilities of Course Facilitators

Course facilitators contribute directly to the safety and efficacy of course.[96] While this claim is beyond dispute, it needs to be remembered that every participant who completed the post-course forms knew that I would read them; hence, their comments may be affected by response bias.

Virtually every participant emphasised that the sharing of my own forgiveness story had a positive influence on the course environment and their own forgiveness journeys. For example, Martha reasoned: "Your forgiveness journey gives people hope to carry on with their own journeys." And Rose declared that "hearing" the facilitator's "story and observing his openness about his own journey into forgiveness was for me a critical aspect of being able to tell my story. There is a great deal of difference between somebody standing up in a pulpit and telling me that I have to forgive and someone who can understand just how difficult it is."

The implications of these statements are far-reaching. On one level, they appear to indicate that persons who have not processed their own forgiveness issues should not lead forgiveness courses. On a broader level, they seem to suggest that church teachers should specialise in the fields that they have firsthand experience in. For instance, perhaps the caregiver who can offer the most effective help to an individual who is struggling with depression is not the person who has never experienced depression, but rather a person who has been through depression and gained significant insights into the topic.

A number of participants also mentioned that my knowledge of forgiveness contributed to the positive course atmosphere and aided them in their forgiveness journeys. Petra said that "what I appreciated most of all was" the facilitator's "insight and understanding in the whole area of forgiveness" and Warren nominated that "hearing" the facilitator's "responses to other people's questions" was "one of the most enjoyable aspects of the course." Observations like these underline Graves' belief that course facilitators should always strive to increase their knowledge on their given topics.[97]

Several group members declared that they felt safe on the course due to the way that I related with the participants and managed the emotional environment of the groups. Harriet put it this way: "I liked" the facilitator's "gentle, caring way of handling us all. He was careful to make us all feel valued when we made comments."

My clinical supervisor's insights greatly assisted me to fulfil these roles. That is to say, she helped me "to analyze the "fit" between" my "personality, memories, fears, hopes, gifts, and inhibitions" and my "conduct of ministry, including all interactions with others and the reactions to those interactions."[98] To illustrate: At one point, I realised that I was feeling considerable ill-will towards a non-churchgoing participant. My clinical supervisor enabled me to realise that part of my tension was due to the fact that I had shifted my focus from being a course facilitator to that of a missionary, who wanted to convert the

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96 Nicholls, *Developing Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 45–46; Taylor, *How to Design a Training Course,* 105.

97 Kathleen Graves, "Teachers as Course Developers," in *Teachers as Course Developers* (ed. Kathleen Graves; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1–11.

98 Culbertson, *Caring for God's People,* 291.

participant in order to validate the course. By becoming aware of this shift, I was better able to refocus on my primary role as a course facilitator and thereby support the participant as opposed to tussle with the course member from a psychological point of view.

Storytelling

What seemed to result from the safe course environment was a liberty amongst 90% of the participants to share their stories openly during the sessions. Interestingly, several individuals reported that they chose to talk, because they felt free not to talk, which relates to the course ethos of freedom.

Talking about one's parental struggles in appropriate settings can be extremely helpful. Eric was "humbled" that other persons were willing to pay attention to his story and said "one would usually pay huge money to have someone listen to all of that. Thank you so much for listening." Dowrick reasons that the act of listening to people's words and the meanings behind their words shows the speakers that their inner worlds matter.[99] This seems to have been Eric's experience, because unlike his father "who always pushed" him "away", the group's interest conveyed to Eric that he mattered.

Deborah was met by silence when she finished talking about her parents' offences. Savage contends that silence is a skill and in my view the group's response of quietness was entirely appropriate.[100] Deborah shared her story in the context of Session Three's exploration of the factors that might have inclined parents to wound their children. If persons had responded to her narrative by using the destructive words *yes* you have been wounded, *but* look at your parents' terrible circumstances,[101] they may have weakened Deborah's ownership of her wounds and terminated the possibility of her healing.

Eventually, I verbalised to Deborah that I felt sadness for her parents, yet also horror for what they had done to her. Deborah responded: "Yes, those two factors coexist and then added thank you for understanding." Culbertson notes that before the church can respond to people's needs effectively, it must first hear and understand their stories.[102] Perhaps Deborah was able to continue with her forgiveness explorations, because she felt heard and understood by the group. Her post-course round-two comment appears to reiterate this: "I can now name and "see" the present situation with my parents more clearly and am less emotionally attached to them, which is healthy."

Every person who completed the post-course forms expressed that they enjoyed and benefited from listening to the other participants' stories and struggles. Uwe appreciated "learning that other children were traumatised or neglected in similar and sometimes worse ways than" he was. This awareness enabled him to realise that he was "not alone in" his "struggle for wholeness." Mid-course, Kevin expressed that he was "finding the course increasingly difficult in a good way, because" he had "never stopped to consider

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99 Stephanie Dowrick, *The Intimacy & Solitude Self-Therapy Book* (Birkenhead, Auckland: Reed Books, 1993), 196–197.
100 John Savage, *Listening and Caring Skills in Ministry: A Guide for Pastors, Counselors, and Small Groups* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 98.
101 Johnella Bird, *The Heart's Narrative: Therapy and Navigating Life's Contradictions* (Green Bay, Auckland: Edge Press, 2000), 150–151.
102 Philip L. Culbertson, "'The Things We Do!' Nurturing the Authority of Men in Ministry",in *The Spirituality of Men: Sixteen Christians Write About Their Faith* (ed. Philip L. Culbertson; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 221–43.

the issues that everyone" kept "on revealing." And Martha said that it was "inspirational to hear how people were being helped by the course and to learn of the changes that were occurring in their lives." Statements like these illustrate how stories can connect people, convey instruction in a non-threatening manner, inspire, help the storytellers and listeners to get in touch with their own issues,[103] and accelerate people's forgiveness. They also speak of the efficacy of the Forgiveness Matters course.

VI. SUMMARY

To design and deliver a new course is a very creative and challenging task. It entails a great deal of effort. It involves working through the seven points that are common to most course design taxonomies, piloting the course, and finding suitable persons to take part in the course. Accordingly, course designers need to be highly motivated to accomplish these tasks successfully. As alluded to above, part of my motivation stemmed from the lessons I had learned and the healing benefits I had experienced during my own forgiveness journey. My ministry experience, my wife's endless support, my supervisors' encouragement, and God inspired me as well. Other designers will need to find their own sources of motivation.

In the reading of this article, I hope that many others will be encouraged to craft their own courses and share their learning. If this were to occur, multitudes of hurting people could be assisted and fellow course designers would learn from one another.

Just as many stories have unexpected twists at their conclusion, so too has this one. In the writing of this article I have noted the emergence of a desire to create another course focusing on an entirely new theme. Who but God knows where this journey may lead me over the next decade?

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103 McCullough, Sandage, and Worthington, Jr., *To Forgive Is Human*, 147–150; Mary D. Pellauer with S.B. Thistlethwaite, "Conversation on Grace and Healing: Perspectives from the Movement to End Violence against Women," in *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside* (eds. Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel; San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 169–185.

Reviews

ANDREW J. GOODLIFF. *"TO SUCH AS THESE:" THE CHILD IN BAPTIST THOUGHT*. CENTRE FOR BAPTIST HISTORY AND HERITAGE STUDIES. VOL. 4. OXFORD: REGENT'S PARK COLLEGE, 2012. (XII + 91PP.) [ISBN: 978-1-907600-03-6].

MYK HABETS

CAREY BAPTIST COLLEGE

What started out as an MTh thesis at Regent's Park College, Oxford, has been expanded into a concise and lucid account of the theology of the child in Baptist thought. This helpful little work draws upon historical, theological, and liturgical resources from the Baptist heritage, predominantly from the UK, and seeks to resource future discussion over how to think of children in Baptist ecclesial contexts, how to minister to and with them in a range of settings, and further, how to simply think about children in the midst of the other competing issues a modern pastor or eldership has to steward. Rather than critique, the stated aim of the book is to "begin to articulate a theological understanding of infant blessing and to *positively* affirm something of the status of children, rather than merely opposing the practice of infant baptism" (p. 1). Clearly, the Baptist position on believer's baptism is the immediate context within which the significance and place of children is raised, and infant blessing or presentation is the setting which structures the work. With this focus the book critically engages with how Baptists read Scripture, asks who the child is, outlines a theology of the child, of sin and salvation, and canvasses issues of the child's relationship with the Church. The final argument is that a Baptist theology of the child must be rooted in a service of infant presentation.

Observing the centrality of Mark 10:13–16 in most theological literature on children, Goodliff spends chapter two arguing for three things: first, the kingdom of God belongs to children; second, the child is a model of discipleship; and third, the blessing from Jesus is an adoptive embrace in which children become heirs of the kingdom which is theirs unless they exclude themselves. While lacking detailed exegetical support, Goodliff examines eight Baptist service books, in addition to a representative sample of works on a theology of the child to make his points, which are not without critique. Goodliff stops short of concluding children are automatically saved but does want to present a more positive and constructive theology of the child than those normally adopted; one which is initiated by the presenting of the child as an infant and a dedication of the parents and the community to their godly upbringing.

Seeking to construct an ontology of the child, Goodliff notices how many treatments of the topic see children in an instrumentalist way, as objects on the way to becoming something important or proper. To counter such views Goodliff focusses on three areas; the child as gift, the *imago Dei*, and the child as active agent. Goodliff begins to construct a paedo—ontology, suggesting children are a gift of God's grace and are thus not the parent's possession. Turning to Barth's notion of relations as the constitutive category for

understanding the *imago Dei* (but ignoring his Christology at this point), Goodliff suggests children are image bearers of God and are fully personal, despite their lack of maturation.

Turning next to theological concerns, Goodliff addresses the issue of sin and salvation in regards to children. By once again examining the eight Baptist service books, four general positions on such issues are evident. First, the age of accountability argument is put forward: children are innocent until an age of moral accountability (perhaps 12 or 13 years old). Second, children are both "in Adam" and "in Christ" and as such children may be reckoned to stand within the saving work of Christ unless they willingly opt out at some point. Third, what in my terms is called the sentimental view, that is, an appeal is made to mystery, grace, and the love of God. Finally, a particularly conservative view suggests children are born with original guilt and are thus sinners in need of saving faith. Eschewing each of these views in their current forms, Goodliff rightly turns to a doctrine of election to address the issue of sin and salvation in relation to the child. Here Goodliff does adopt Barth's christologically conditioned doctrine of election in a sophisticated version of option two mentioned above. According to Goodliff's construal, children are not born Christians, but they are born under the election of Christ and thus can, if rightly nurtured, grow into the faith by means of the Holy Spirit. As such, "The child who grows up in the worshipping community of the church is opened to, and shares in, the faith of that congregation and the work of the Holy Spirit" (p. 35).

The discussion so far (a mere 36 pages!) naturally leads into chapter five entitled "Ecclesiological Conundrums," where Goodliff acknowledges "the largest challenge for Baptists regarding a theology of children is the child's relationship to the church" (p. 37). If a child is not baptised, is it a member of the church? How young or old must one be to receive baptism? Can children participate in Holy Communion before being baptised? These questions dominate this chapter. While fast paced, Goodliff makes a series of observations and then settles on certain practices which, he argues, are essential in Baptist churches if children are to be seen as genuine members of the community; respected and discipled into a mature faith. While largely absent from most Baptist churches, Goodliff advocates introducing a catechumenate as a means of preparation for baptism. He has no problems with baptising children at an early age, upon profession of faith, given this accompanies catechesis. Such catechesis begins through the rite of infant presentation and continues through Communion, which should be open, according to Goodliff's arguments.

Chapter six details five key elements central to a service of infant presentation: welcome, thanksgiving, naming, promises, and blessing. As a means of grace, Goodliff sees such activity as sacramental, even if not *a* sacrament, given the fact that God is acting through the church to welcome and impart himself through the Spirit. The remaining chapter extends the discussion by looking at all—age worship services (family services), before concluding with a series of three appendices which provide texts for inclusion in an infant presentation, a liturgy of infant presentation from a recent Baptist service book, and a note on catechesis.

A theology of children has been a discipline largely conspicuous by its absence from scholarly focus. Recent years have seen a number of significant works on this topic come to light as Trinitarian, relational, and communal theologies work their way into all areas of churchly and missional life. The brevity of

Goodliff's book belies the importance of the topic. Goodliff's study certainly does not exhaust the issues, resources, or possibilities the topic has to offer, but it is a welcome place to begin.

TONY COSTA, *WORSHIP AND THE RISEN JESUS IN THE PAULINE LETTERS*. STUDIES IN BIBLICAL LITERATURE 157. NEW YORK: PETER LANG, 2013. (XV + 501PP.) [ISBN 978-1-4331-2290-3; ebook 978-1-4539-1154-9].

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Any reader of Paul knows how central matters pertaining to worship are in Pauline letters, and so it was surprising to note that Costa's book on this topic is breaking new ground. The heart of his book though is not simply "worship" but an engagement with the historical debate around how the risen Jesus was worshipped in the Pauline communities. The challenges and rigor required within this field of historical Jesus research is met with Costa's tome which boasts an equal quantity of endnotes to main text.

After a review of the work of Cullmann, Moule, Delling, Martin, F. Hahn, and Aune around the topic of worship, Costa engages with three contemporary scholars, Hutrado, Neyrey, and Bauckham. Their work in the field of the earliest Christian worship and the way this writer explores further evidence for worship of the risen Jesus from the Pauline letters is what makes this book a valuable addition to the ongoing research field.

One of Costa's critiques of earlier scholarship on worship is the lack of a definition with criteria that can be used for assessment, and so he provides a fully worked definition before he turns to analyse any text. He rightly identifies that this goes beyond certain Greek words into personal relationship and action and so considering expressions and acts which describe worship opens up further breadth (and I would add satisfaction) to his study. There is attention paid to the object of worship and notes that this context must be religious and so it goes beyond the Graeco—Roman honour culture where rank and status determine ones level of submission. Worship is only rendered to a deity and for a Christian it is to God to whom nothing can be added as he is complete. Similarly, Costa addresses the subject of worship, the worshipper who stands in total dependence upon God in a relationship such as a servant—master or child—parent. One is inferior and the other superior and it is total submission which makes it stand apart from other relationships where submission is partial and relative.

There is a full description of Pauline vocabulary of worship in a delightfully solid exegetical chapter where the range of words for what may be translated "worship" in English are explored. All occurrences and necessary cognates of *latreuō, sebazomai, proskuneō, douleuō* and *thrēskeia* as these pertain to a religious context are worked through systematically. My only question regarding his methodology in this section is his use at times of Thayer's lexicon which seems somewhat out—dated today, and for me, detracts from an otherwise well—resourced and argued chapter. There is further exegetical attention given to the

word *eidōlolatria* where a worship context is found. Clearly the problems of sacrificing to an idol intersect with daily life for Christians as food sacrificed was then consumed; with early Christian worship occurring around the meal table, idol worship is something Paul, as so Costa, needed to address.

An investigation into invocations and prayer is where Costa's monograph adds most fully to the ongoing historical Jesus conversation and becomes most interesting. He notes that there are times Paul appeals to not only God but to the risen Jesus with the context of Christian worship. He considers the invocations of Rom 10:9–14 and 1 Cor 1:2 where Jesus is specifically addressed but goes on to note Jesus as the referent of prayer in 1 Cor 16:22 and 2 Cor 10:8–10. This for Costa, and many others, attests to an early Christian acknowledgement of Jesus as the divine Lord. There is a full discussion of the significance of *maranatha* ("Come, O Lord," "Our Lord come," or "Our Lord has come") in 1 Cor 16:22, and its Aramaic background in original Judean soil. Under Costa's definition of worship where the context must be religious, and there be an addressee of divine order and a supplicant who is in total submission to the deity, he views their plea as worshippers Jesus as God. Further for Costa, Paul's appellation to the *Lord* with regard to his affliction in 2 Cor 10:8–10 is to Jesus and not God the Father as is his more standard phraseology (Rom 1: 3–4; 10:9; 1 Cor 8:6; 12:3; 2 Cor 4:5; Phil 2:11). It is the *power of Christ* (a Pauline *hapex legomenon*), which Paul appeals to in prayer three times as the risen Jesus has the ability to remove the thorn in the flesh; it is the divine will of Jesus which he accepts when the thorn is not removed. Thus it is the power of Christ which rests on, or resides in Paul, and gives him reason to delight. In a Second Temple Jewish world where to pray to anyone but the one God is foreign, the earliest Christians seemed able to embrace Jesus as the Lord for he had risen from the grave, and thus, was to be worshipped. Costa also addresses wish prayers addressed to both God and the risen Jesus, hymns, spiritual songs, baptism and the Eucharist which were an integral part of the Christian community. He concludes with Wright that: "Baptism and eucharist thus both draw the eye upward to the most striking feature of life of the early [Christian] community; *the worship of Jesus*" (p. 230).[1]

Finally, he addresses the *Zielangabe,* the ultimate purpose and goal of worship in Paul through an analysis of the *Carmen Christi* (Phil 2:6–11). The hymn begins and penultimately ends with Jesus while the final climax is God. God is not however the trump—card, rather as worship is rendered to the exalted Jesus, it is by extension given to God the Father. God is not replaced or rivaled, rather worship of Jesus, "*complements* the worship of God and facilitates it. The eschatological *grande finale* for Paul is the ultimate and universal glorification of God which God has purposed to be achieved through worship of the exalted Christ" (p. 249). This is a book well worth reading and reflecting on. I appreciate his close reading of the text and the voracity of his scholarship which leaves the reader well—satisfied.

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[1] N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992), 448.

RODNEY WALLACE KENNEDY & DEREK C. HATCH (EDS.). *GATHERING TOGETHER: BAPTISTS AT WORK IN WORSHIP.* EUGENE: PICKWICK, 2013. (VII + 194 PP.) [ISBN: 978-1-61097-758-6].

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Liturgical theory and practice has not typically been the *forte* of Baptists, or more generally the Free Church tradition. However, there is a growing number of publications seeking to reverse this trend, of which *Gathering Together* is a welcome addition (see also Christopher J. Ellis, *Gathering: A Theology and Spirituality of Worship in Free Church Tradition*; Alexis D. Abernethy (ed.), *Worship That Changes Lives: Multidisciplinary and Congregational Perspectives on Spiritual Transformation*; James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*). From the editors to the contributors, this is a marriage between practical thinkers and thinking practitioners. The American context from which this comes will not hinder Baptists (and others) around the globe from being assisted toward the stated goal to "consider how we might worship God more fully and become the people of God more faithfully" (p. xii). The appendices will be particularly useful, which 'borrow' into one collection various worship resources (orders of service, prayers, creeds, special service orders) from local Baptist congregations and wider church history, organised and themed according to the Christian Year.

In the opening chapter, Kyle Childress gives an autobiographical account of patiently leading the church he pastors from a warm-yet-too-casual posture to a warm-and-intentional ethos characterised by responsive readings, hand—holding benedictions, more frequent Communion and even permitting Childress himself to wear a robe and stole. For those simply wishing to read and recapitulate his journey, the narrative form of this chapter will not yield the desired points of application—nor should it. Indeed, his wise pastoral advice for *how* to implement change is just as important as *what* those changes are.

Michael D. Sciretti, Jr. provides a thorough reintroduction to the Christian Year. He recounts how the ÅJewish festivals of *Sukkoth, Pesach* and *Shavuot* were transposed into Christian key in Advent—Christmas—Epiphany, Lent—Easter, and Pentecost, which he frames as three seasons of 'light,' 'life' and 'love' respectively. For him, the Christian Year serves as a tool for the formation of a 'High Priesthood' (under Christ the High Priest) which is called into "three primary arenas: time, nature, and people (p. 31)."

In light of modern individualism and narcissism, Amy Butler sets forth a discussion of "tangible opportunities for connection" (p. 40) such as: connecting voices (corporate singing), connecting bodies (hugs, handshakes), committed belonging (public recommitment), collaborative experiences (learning a new song), participative rituals (passing the peace), and shared expressions of conviction (reciting a prayer). The various example stories of what we 'might' do would have been strengthened if accompanied by warnings of the *costs* of not doing so. For example, yes, listening to one another singing undoubtedly binds us together, but what assumptions or practices around corporate singing actually hinder us from even *hearing*, let alone appreciating one another's voices?

Sharlande Sledge, herself an avid writer of prayer (*Prayers and Litanies for the Christian Seasons* [Smyth & Helwys, 1999]), effectively frames pastoral prayers as a representative collection of the aspirations and anxieties of the people, which follows the collective 'our,' 'us' and 'we' pattern seen both in the Lord's Prayer and various liturgical prayers. Before offering a selection of prayers written by her and others at her church, she commends *preparation* that is slow and reflective, *language* that is orderly, imaginative and poetic, and in a *form* that is rhythmic and at times responsive. The only weaknesses would be that readers could have been taken further into related literature, and like the previous chapter the points would have been enriched by some exploration of the assumptions and habits that prevent, oppose or dilute this recommended practice.

In the chapter perhaps most challenging to modern Baptist practice and ecclesiology, Phillip E. Thompson (co-editor of *Baptist Sacramentalism* and *Baptist Sacramentalism 2* [Paternoster, 2003 and 2009]) composes his *apologia* for the use of creeds in worship. Looking at Baptist history, he finds both approval of and dependence on the creeds (i.e. Nicene, Athanasian or Apostles') especially among the early Baptists, who did not see them as replacing or being more binding than Scripture. He also deconstructs a tendency in later Baptist ecclesiology to see the church as "logically and theologically subsequent to the free individual" (p. 74) and their right to "unfettered private judgment" (p. 70). The Early Baptists understood human freedom within the ultimate divine freedom of God, and were able to appreciate creeds as faithful summaries of the biblical vision of gospel faith and life. His closing proposal for baptism as the most natural place to recover use of the creeds might not suit contexts where baptismal services are highly attended by unbelieving family and friends.

Rodney W. Kennedy brings a passionate plea for preaching to be tied to the worship of the Church, both through the week and in the corporate gathering on Sunday. He calls for more public reading of Scripture on Sunday and more wrestling over it with others through the week. He commends higher intentionality in crafting sermons to persuade the congregation rather than tickle their ears with preacher—centric stories and suggestions. For Kennedy, preaching is a third—equal sacrament along with Baptism and the Eucharist. Aside from a handful of passing provocations, this chapter fits very well the tenor and trajectory of the overall book.

Scott W. Bullard (Judson College) leads us through a reconsideration of Baptist understanding and practice of the Eucharist. Allegiance to Scripture over tradition does not necessarily support viewing it as 'mere symbol', let alone celebrating it as infrequently as Baptists tend to. Significantly, he argues cogently that debates over what happens to the blessed bread and cup have overshadowed the theologically rich and pastorally crucial reality of the 'transubstantiation' of *the community that partakes in them*. Indeed, in an individualistic and consumer culture, "the body of Christ spends much of its time being "dismembered' throughout most weeks" (p. 105), thus making regular corporate 're—membering' through celebration of the Eucharist all the more urgent. My only complaint for this excellent chapter would be that such compelling arguments could have warranted a stronger recommendation than "*perhaps* more frequent practice" (p. 109, emphasis mine).

In another compelling chapter, Elizabeth Newman (Baptist Theological Seminary) affirms that baptism of believers by immersion "most fully displays the gospel witness" (p. 110), and yet she challenges what she sees as an "impoverished theology of baptism" (p. 111) among modern Baptists. Like the Eucharist, Baptism is neither a 'mere symbol' nor itself saving, but rather a 'grace—filled sign'. Individual baptisms each unite us with the baptism of Jesus, the central point of God's redemptive entry into the world. As documented in the language, art and practice throughout church (and Baptist) history, the water is no more 'magic' and yet no less a vehicle for salvation than the water in the flood, the Red Sea or from the wilderness rock. For Newman, this vision of baptism as "an ordinance with sacramental significance" (p. 120), leads us to the proposal (unfortunately both awkward and difficult) that infant baptism can be seen as "genuine, albeit not as fully scripturally performed as believer's baptism" (p. 123).

C. Randall Bradley is a professor in Church Music (Baylor University) and author of *From Memory to Imagination: Reforming the Church's Music* (Eerdmans, 2012) making him well qualified to illustrate in his chapter the inherent potency of music and to call for more considered liturgical integration of music. He unfortunately overstates the former and under—delivers on the latter. An introductory quote from a popular Christian novel sets up a questionable silence—speech—song hierarchy, which many contemplatives among others would strongly critique. The praise of music continues: "Nothing is more effective in welcoming the stranger than music" (p. 132)? Really!? What of sharing possessions or a meal? Or what kind of 'fact' is it that "music *may* be the church's best hope for Christian unity" (p. 134, emphasis mine)? Such statements obscure Bradley's insightful and needed observations; for example, that incongruent combinations of text and tune will equate to the text's meaning being overridden (p. 130), or that the misuse of music by politicians and advertisers can be recapitulated in "manipulative and coercive ways" in the church (pp. 131–2).

This volume finds a rousing missional finish in the chapter by Cameron Jorgenson (Campbell University Divinity School). A concise discussion of the *Missio Dei*, followed by an excellent comparison of themes in Hebrews and Revelation sets up his proposal that in mission as well as worship, we participate in and with realities that transcend us (p. 140). Further, both worship and mission are not only ways of participating in God's works, but also ways of co—sharing in God's own tri—personal self—loving nature. Reflecting on Jesus' prayer in John 17, Jorgenson concludes, "God's intent for salvation is that the world would be drawn into God's own inner life of love" (p. 142). Worship is "the proper end and goal of mission, and worship has an inescapably missional character" (p. 142). A fitting final trajectory indeed for a book that will be an important part of the wider Baptist and Free Church rediscovery of the importance of taking worship seriously.

C. H. SPURGEON'S FORGOTTEN PRAYER MEETING ADDRESSES: FORGOTTEN PRAYER MEETING ADDRESSES AND OTHER FORGOTTEN METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE SERMONS. EDITED BY TERENCE P. CROSBY. LEOMINSTER: DAY ONE PUBLICATIONS, 2011. (291 PP.) [ISBN: 978-1846252389]

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Over one hundred and twenty years after his death, Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892) continues to stand out as arguably the most famous name in Baptist history. Many volumes have been published recording his sermons and other writings, and the "Prince of Preachers" rightly remains the source of a great deal of study by Baptist historians. Many of his sermons have been translated into numerous languages and distributed around the globe. Taking all of these factors into account, it is highly surprising that there are still some of his sermons and other addresses which have remained in total obscurity and have not been collated together for publication.

Dr Terry Crosby and Day One Publications have done a great service to theologians, believers, and Baptist historians worldwide with the production of this collection. Crosby knows Spurgeon's works well and has compiled and edited many collections of the preacher's work, including the six volume *365 Days with C.H. Spurgeon* series. This new collection aims to bring to wider attention a number of rare sermons which would probably have appeared in the *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit,* had it not ceased publication abruptly in 1917, as well as short prayer meeting address from the Tabernacle's prayer meetings. The sermons and addresses included in this book link well with the 1901 publication *Only a Prayer Meeting* and the sermons compiled by Eric Hayden in *Spurgeon's Sermons Preached on Unusual Occasions.*

The first section of the book contains twenty—one addresses delivered at the Metropolitan Tabernacle's prayer meetings. Crosby writes that his desire is for "God's people [to] be encouraged to regard individual prayer and the church prayer meeting a priority in the Christian life" (p. 5). It can certainly be the case that a church's prayer meeting is one of its worst attended services and prayer can slip down the priority list of busy Christians. However, during Spurgeon's pastorate, the Metropolitan Tabernacle's prayer meetings were well attended and were a significant part of the church's weekly programme.

From the prayer meeting addresses in this book, it is clear that Spurgeon placed as high priority on prayer in a Christian's life. In Chapter 2 an address entitled "His Heart's Desire," he writes, "Oh, happy they who can thus put their prayers into the very heart of Christ" (p. 22). It is very appropriate that first prayer address examines "Three models of prayer" looking at Jacob and Elijah before noting that *the* model of prayer is Jesus Christ Himself.

Chapter Seven's address entitled "The Operations of the Spirit" on the Holy Spirit and His work is a real highlight. The work of the most mysterious and least discussed member of the Trinity is clearly outlined and articulated.

The prayer meeting addresses are short and direct as prayer meeting addresses should be. They are there to focus the Christian's mind ahead of a period of prayer with ones brothers and sisters in Christ. In

the addresses in this compilation it is clear that Spurgeon used his addresses to focus the mind on a specific issue or doctrine, and they further demonstrate that he was just as adept at writing short addresses as he was at longer sermons. They are high quality and to the point.

The second part of book is a miscellany of rare, some previously unpublished, sermons or, in some cases, sermon notes. These were preached on many different occasions ranging from an address to senior Sunday School scholars in 1867 to an address to the Butchers' Festival at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in 1878. Not all were preached at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, for example, one was preached at an unnamed chapel in Brighton, whilst another was preached at the John Street Chapel, Bedford Row, London. The address to the Butchers' Festival is both charming and amusing but is very much of its period and some of the language used by Spurgeon would probably be considering patronising if used now.

Included is a sermon from 1866 which was delivered to the Baptist Union. Entitled "Holy Fire" it was preached over twenty years before the Downgrade Controversy which led to Spurgeon's and the Metropolitan Tabernacle's withdrawal from the Union. Interestingly Spurgeon speaks of his grave concerns surrounding "doubt" and the questioning of scripture, "To be a doubter is thought, nowadays, as a token of being a great thinker. I believe it is a token of being a great simpleton. . . . Doubting is getting to be so dreadfully impudent that we shall have to give it a good thrashing" (p. 119). With the audience who would have been in attendance on this occasion, this suggests he was troubled by changing theological trends within the Union well before the Downgrade controversy broke out in full.

Spurgeon's theology shines through in this collection. The sermon in Chapter 24 is a staunch defence of traditional biblical inerrancy. Spurgeon speaks out clearly against what he saw as the rising tide of liberalism, biblical criticism, and fresh interpretations of key Christian doctrines. Similarly, his adherence to evangelical Calvinism is very evident in Chapters 27 "The sum and substance of all theology," and 28 "The great invitation," as he distances himself from both Hyper Calvinism and Arminianism. Chapter 8 examines how prayer fits into Calvinist theology and reasons for answered and unanswered prayer.

Historic sermons are an excellent source of material for historians, however one of the negatives associated with them is that there may be occasions where instances or people are referred to who were famous in there day, but are totally unknown in the twenty—first century. There are a couple of instances of this in this compilation and it can lead to illustrations losing their meaning. To overcome this, perhaps footnotes could have been employed to explain these instances/persons.

As would be expected from a publication such as this, there is a lack of flow as the sermons contained in the volume are drawn from various dates and are not a series in themselves. However, this need not be a negative and it results in great variety; there is one short address delivered to recent converts and another delivered on the eve of the 1868 UK General Election where it is clear to someone who knows British political history, which party Spurgeon wants to succeed!

This collection is a valuable resource for Baptist historians. The prayer meeting addresses and sermons fill in some of the gaps in the Spurgeon canon. They will also be a source of encouragement to believers who are seeking encouragement in their Christian lives from one of the greatest preachers. The short nature of the prayer meeting addresses makes them excellent reading material for a few spare minutes

in a busy day. Dr Crosby should be highly commended for collating the material and producing this interesting and useful publication.