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ABSTRACT

CONSTRUCTING A THEOLOGY OF RELATIONAL LIFE
THROUGH THE THEMES OF CREATION,
INCARNATION, AND RE-CREATION AS
AN ALTERNATIVE TO CURRENT
CATEGORIES OF RELIGIONS

by

Andrew Tompkins

Advisor: Wagner Kuhn

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: CONSTRUCTING A THEOLOGY OF RELATIONAL LIFE THROUGH
THE THEMES OF CREATION, INCARNATION, AND RE-CREATION
AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO CURRENT CATEGORIES OF RELIGIONS

Name of researcher: Andrew Tompkins

Name and degree of faculty chair: Wagner Kuhn, PhD

Date completed: February 2019

This dissertation argues that current categories of religions are overly reliant on Western Enlightenment-based presuppositions and academic thinking that creates barriers in understanding God's desire for all people to have abundant life. Many theologians and missiologists utilize these inherited categories without first subjecting them to the biblical canon. As a result, the theological and missiological discourse on religions is often grounded in extra-biblical presuppositions rooted primarily in an overly high view of human reason that do not accurately portray a biblical approach to relational life. These presuppositions do not accurately portray a biblical approach to relational life. I, therefore, compared and contrasted categories of religions as they have been developed with the description of relational life found in the biblical passages of Genesis 1-3, John

1:1-18, and Revelation 20-22, which I argue are theologically central to the biblical canon.

The purpose of this dissertation is to deconstruct the categories of religions that have been inherited and used by theologians and missiologists. The categories of religions are meant to be wide ranging and include terms or terminology that scholars have used to describe large groups of people or ideologies such as: Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Islam, Christianity, animism, folk religions, tribal religions, atheism, Marxism, etc. In the space created by deconstructing the categories of religions a constructive theology of relational life rooted in the biblical themes of creation, Incarnation, and re-creation is developed. Relational life is terminology meant to be used in place of the terms culture and religion and signifies relationships between God and humanity and humanity with each other.

This project utilizes an interdisciplinary approach to research. It involved surveying and critically engaging with current literature in a number of fields including historical studies of religion, anthropology, sociology, biblical studies, systematic theology, and missiology. This follows Veli-Matti Kärkäinnen and Kevin J. Vanhoozer's methodological arguments in favor of an interdisciplinary approach to theology.

By deconstructing the categories of religions three major implications for missiology and theology were discovered. The first implication is that in the development of the categories of religions, people were turned into objects and classified based on vague abstract concepts. The second implication is that the categories often were developed with racialized understandings of humanity. The third implication is that the development of the categories often was done in tandem with the development of the

false teleological hope in the progress of human reason, with the categories serving to clarify where certain people fit on the scale of progress. While many philosophy of religion and history of religion scholars have recognized these problems they have struggled to develop meaningful solutions to the problems. This dissertation suggests that a solution for the implications is found in the Bible by contrasting the categories of religions with relational life as portrayed in the biblical canon themes of creation, Incarnation, and re-creation found in Genesis 1-3, John 1:1-18, and Revelation 20-22.

From the study of these biblical passages it is then argued that a biblical understanding of relational life includes at least the following elements: work and rest, food and eating, language, human relationships and marriage, and clothing. These elements are rooted in the universal concepts that humanity is created in the Image of God, that God incarnated as Jesus to save humanity from sin and rebellion, and that God will re-create this Earth and live with humanity. These elements are, at the same time, more particular descriptors of humanity than the categories of religions and thus more reliable for understanding relational life. Therefore, it is better for theologians and missiologists to focus on the localized particularities of humanity in their diverse relational life as found in the biblical passages, rather than rely on categories of religions to develop meaningful theological and missiological concepts and engagements with relational life. It is then recommended that theologians and missiologists intentionally build relationships with people who live relationally in ways that are different from their own. As they do this they should intentionally turn to the Bible as the final arbitrating authority on ways of living, rather than categories of religions, in order to guide them in their relationships as well as their theological and missiological output.

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

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APROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE:

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Professor of World Mission

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Daniel White-Hodge   Date approved

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There a number of people who have played a key role in the formation of this dissertation. While I am unable to acknowledge all the people involved there are certain people who deserve special mention. First of all is my wife Anuradha who has not only encouraged me through the process but also been a key mind triggering many of the questions and thoughts that this dissertation contains. Along with my wife is all my Indian family and friends who have pushed me and forced me to struggle through many presuppositions and ethnocentric tendencies of mine that I have had to rethink and work through with the help and guidance of their patience and firm but loving care. Without these many unnamed individuals this project would not have even crossed my mind as being something worth pursuing.

The professors who make up the Department of World Mission at Andrews University have been a continual source of encouragement and critique always pushing me to do my best. Two of those professors are on my dissertation committee and deserve special mention. Wagner Kuhn was willing to not only chair my committee but also to be a regular sounding board and critical listener on numerous occasions. His guidance in "relational life" has greatly enhanced my own thinking and writing on the issues in this dissertation. Bruce Bauer has been a faithful mentor now for many years and his ability to inspire for mission while at the same time require a high-level of academic rigor has been a major influencer in my life and this project in particular. I also want to thank the other

two professors on my committee. First, Richard Davidson for giving me the time to discuss my biblical queries that I developed in the process of this dissertation, I continue to be amazed at his ability to take a lengthy document and be able to read through it quickly and grasp with clarity the intent and purpose of the document while also giving critical feedback that is helpful. Ante Jeroncic has provided a necessary challenger in much of my philosophical and theological thinking, areas I consider myself weak in, he has also pushed me to read authors I never dreamed of reading and incorporating more carefully several important arguments into my project.

I must also thank my mother, Kellie Tompkins, who put in countless hours editing a very rough draft of this dissertation moving it towards readability. Beyond that the discussions I have had over the last several years with my mother and my father (Joel Tompkins) and brother (Daniel Tompkins) have been crucial in shaping my own thinking and writing. There would be no dissertation without my family's willingness to engage in rigorous discussion of the issues this dissertation attempts to tackle.

All things positive that this dissertation contains are to a large extent attributable to those listed above. The mistakes and weaknesses I take full responsibility for. I praise God for allowing me to have the opportunity to study at Andrews University, engage with a wide variety of insightful professors and fellow doctoral students, and struggle through writing a dissertation. The doctoral journey has been exciting and challenging. It is my prayer that God may be glorified in some small way through this project and that his mission be furthered.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Problem

The term religion is ubiquitous throughout literary genres. It is used in everyday language and scholarly works as though everyone knows what it means and understands what it signifies. It has been parsed into countless sub-categories to serve innumerable purposes. Religion is often broken down into *world religions*—scholars attempts to categorize people and systems into clearly delineated groups based on their *religion*.[1] Religion defies definition with as many ways to define it as there are interpreters.

In the fields of theology and missiology, the term religion is seemingly fundamental to much of the discourse. It would be nearly impossible to pick up a book on a theological theme or mission issue and not find the concept in some form or another. It is hardly imaginable that theological and missiological discourse could even take place without this term. Yet postmodern and postcolonial scholarship, largely stemming from the fields of anthropology, sociology, and history of religions, have problematized this term in significant ways in the last several decades. According to a number of these scholars, the concept of religion is a weighted concept that has a history which requires

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[1] See "Categories of Religions" in the definition of terms on page 13 of this Chapter.

deconstructing in order to understand what role its usage has played in human discourse and power sharing.[2]

Much of this critical scholarship surrounding the concept of religion has not yet been incorporated into theological and missiological discussions at an adequate level. Major questions have arisen that deserve careful reflection concerning theologians and missiologists use of categories of religions.[3] These issues were first clearly articulated for me several years ago at an annual meeting of the American Society of Missiology where H. L. Richard presented a paper on the problems of "world religion" categories. His presentation resonated with me because I had been plagued by similar questions and doubts. The longer I lived in India and the more I interacted with self-identified Hindus, Muslims, and Christians who did not fit formalized textbook definitions of Hinduism, Islam, or Christianity, the more I began to doubt the usefulness of the categories of religions I was used to.[4]

Historically religion as a concept passed through several developments in Europe and North America from the Enlightenment onwards. Even so, the Enlightenment has several precursor events and moments that influenced the term religion. This dissertation

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[2] Richard King, Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'the Mystic East' (New York: Routledge, 1999), 1.

[3] A. Scott Moreau is a rare example of a missiologist who recognizes this shortcoming in *Contextualizing the Faith: A Holistic Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), xiv.

[4] H. L. Richard has since published his thoughts in two separate articles H. L. Richard, "Religious Syncretism as a Syncretistic Concept: The Inadequacy of the "World Religions" Paradigm in Cross-Cultural Encounter," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 31, no. 4 (2014). This was subsequently republished in the book *Understanding Insider Movements* as H. L. Richard, "Religious Syncretism as a Syncretistic Concept: The Inadequacy of the "World Religions" Paradigm in Cross-Cultural Encounter," in *Understanding Insider Movements: Disciples of Jesus within Diverse Religious Communities*, ed. Harley Talman and John Jay Travis (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2015). The other article is H. L. Richard, "New Paradigms for Religion, Multiple Religious Belonging, and Insider Movements," *Missiology* 43, no. 3 (2015). I lived in India off and on from 2006 until 2015. My wife is from India and I still frequently visit India even though I now reside in the United States.

follows some of these events leading to the present in order to clarify several major

implications that theology and missiology need to take stock of and reflect on, as these

developments relate to religion and the categorization of people.

Prior to the Renaissance and Enlightenment in Western Europe the term "culture"

was tied to agriculture and the term "religion" was used most frequently in the context of

Christian ritual and practice.[5] Europeans categorized people into four major groupings:

Christians, Jews, Mohammedans,[6] and pagans or heathen idol worshipers.[7] But it was not

until the mid-nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century that the terms

culture and religion solidified into the embedded usage of the present. Overlapping with

this time period in Europe and North America things pertaining to God were being

replaced by an emphasis on human reason, which eventually led to a secularized public

realm separate from God or so called "religious elements."[8]

As the wave of knowledge and curiosity swelled out of the "Age of Discovery"

and the Enlightenment, it became evident to many scholars in Europe that a new system

of classifying people was needed. Multiple scholarly developments emerged, each one

serving to encapsulate a system that ultimately led to more standardized use of the terms

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[5] Kathryn Tanner has written an insightful chapter on the history of the term *culture* in her book *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1997), chap. 1.

[6] An outdated term for Muslims.

[7] For more on the use of these four classifications see, Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or How Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 58-61.

[8] One of the more comprehensive works tracing these developments is Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007). For the connections this has with the concept of world religions see Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*.

religion in Western Europe and eventually North America.[9]

Religions became objects of scientific study and analysis during the same time period. New departments were created at universities to pursue research in the new disciplines of the history of religion, philology, anthropology, and sociology. These disciplines often attempted to objectify religion, partly by fragmenting the study into sub-disciplines.[10]

The increase in knowledge in Europe concerning peoples and writings from Asia, Africa, and South America had radically changed the way many scholars thought about and wrote about religion and culture. Countless copies of sacred texts from India, China, and other parts of the world were being translated by scholars in Europe, who were then interpreting these texts from their own Western European context and ideological perspectives. This scholarly endeavor came to be known as Orientalism.[11]

The push to categorize "religions" would eventually lead to the current categories, often referred to as "world religions." These came into their present form in the early twentieth century. Religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam continue to make up the primary religions listed in textbooks on world religions. At times other religions are added, depending on the thoughts and purposes of the author. Some textbooks add the additional category of tribal or folk religions to account for the large

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[9] For a sampling of key sources on this see the following works: Friedrich Max Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion* (London: Longmans and Green, 1873); P. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye, *Manual of the Science of Religion* (London: Longmans and Green, 1891); C. P. Tiele, *Outlines of the History of Religion to the Spread of the Universal Religions* (London: Longmans and Green, 1888); Otto Pfleidere, *Religion and Historic Faiths* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1907).

[10] For more on this see Peter Gottschalk, *Religion, Science, and Empire: Classifying Hinduism and Islam in British India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[11] For more on the development and meaning of the term Orientalism see the classic work by Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 25th anniversary ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

portion of the world's population that do not fit into the generally established categories. This reluctance to include these "lesser" religions is rooted in a discourse of racialization dating back to at least the Age of Discovery and has been perpetuated into the present.

As previously stated, these categories were primarily defined from a European and North American scholarly mindset.[12] They were also primarily defined from the interpretation of sacred texts by European and North American scholars, often with limited input from local contexts where the sacred texts originated from.[13] Reviewing current textbooks on world religions reveals that there have been some changes in approaches to categorization but in general there has been no major shifts in categorizing world religions over the past century. Often the definitions of each religion are prefaced with a disclaimer stating that these are highly complex religions that are difficult to define.[14]

In consequence of the rise in anthropological and sociological research the study of religions has been forced to recognize the immense plurality manifested within each "religion." However, this tendency has often led scholars towards various types of relativistic pluralism. This is often seen as part of the ongoing work of human progress or put differently a teleology of progress in which categorization plays a role. Evil is often ignored in the particular studies and descriptions of various people whether anthropological or sociological. Anthropology and sociology are disciplines built on the

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[12] This is not to say that non-Europeans and non-North Americans were not part of the process, but they were often secondary, in the development of classifications.

[13] For more on the translation and interpretations of sacred texts by Western European scholars see Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, chaps. 5, 7.

[14] For an example of this see the discussion on the use of the term Hinduism in Julius Lipner, *Hindus: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2010) chap. 1.

foundation that human reason is the ultimate norming source of knowledge concerning

humans and their ways of living, thus complicating how these disciplines inform the

categories of religions.

Missiologist H. L. Richard brings these issues to the missiological forefront when

he notes that if these critiques coming from scholars of religion are correct then

missiological paradigms and terminologies must be changed.[15] This dissertation argues

that the same holds true for theological paradigms and terminologies concerning

religions. Richard claims that part of the problem is that Western Christianity is unable to

see past its own syncretism rooted in "Enlightenment" thinking and concepts.[16] This is a

serious accusation that deserves further careful reflection.[17] This critique deserves to be

tested with a careful deconstruction of the development of categorizations of people

based on religions. Out of the deconstruction space for an alternative approach to

categorizing people is opened up.

A number of biblical scholars have pointed out that within the Bible there is no

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[15] Richard, "Religious Syncretism," 212.

[16] Richard, "Religious Syncretism," 212-213.

[17] Wilfred Cantwell Smith desired to answer a similar question more than half a century ago. His primary answer was to abandon the term "religion" altogether and replace it with the term "faith" in his book *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1963). Smith's solution to the problem has been heavily critiqued, but many have upheld his premise that the current ways of defining religion are not only inaccurate but potentially harmful. For an example of a critique of Smith that also recognizes some of his important contributions see Robert D. Baird, *Category Formation and the History of Religions* (Paris: Mouton, 1971), 126-154.

clear concept of religion.[18] This lack of conceptual equal to the current term religion does

not in itself negate the term as potentially useful. Terms such as culture and religion are

words that have come to be utilized in attempts to describe life in its complexities. The

issue is not the terms in themselves but the development and use of the terms and their

meanings and intentions. Richard assumes that it has been accepted by missiologists and

theologians that the Bible provides a holistic understanding of transformation that does

not easily conform to the categories of religions coming out of the Western European

Enlightenment. However, Richard does not clearly delineate what he means by holistic

and assumes most readers agree with his view.[19] William A. Dyrness, in his book *Insider*

Jesus, recognizes more adequately that a biblically informed theology needs to be

developed for better engagement with the current issues in religious categorization as it

relates to the movement of God around the world. He has done more in this area than H.

L. Richard but leaves much work to be done.

   Several theologians and missiologists have recognized that the themes of creation,

Incarnation, and re-creation are prominent themes in Scripture that profoundly affect how

theology and missiology are articulated. In the midst of these themes is also the issue of

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   [18] Daniel I. Block notes that "Biblical Hebrew lacks a word for 'religion.'" Daniel I. Block, "Other Religions in Old Testament Theology," in *Biblical Faith and Other Religions: An Evangelical Assessment*, ed. David W. Baker (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2004), 44. Jacques Doukhan, *Genesis*, Seventh-day Adventist International Bible Commentary (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2016), 63. For an introductory work on the concept of religion before the modern era, see Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

   [19] In Richard's article "Religious Syncretism," he has one sentence arguing that the current compartmentalization of religion within a secular world is at odds with the "holism of biblical faith," but leaves this thought undeveloped, "Religious Syncretism," 212. In his subsequent article "New Paradigms for Religion," he has one paragraph with the heading "Biblical perspective" but it contains only two biblical references and assumes the reader agrees with his premise that "The Bible gives an expectation that people everywhere will have some notion of God, but does not provide teaching on religions as such, particularly not modern notions of religion," "New Paradigms for Religion," 299. Again this goes undeveloped.

the Fall and sin. The concept of religion is a term used to describe humanity in its

complex makeup. The themes of creation, Incarnation, and re-creation are so central to

Scripture that any descriptors of humanity and relational life must be tested by these three

themes. Subjecting the categories of religions to the following three themes, in the

narrative of creation in Genesis 1-3, the Prologue of the Incarnation in John 1:1-18, and

the narrative of re-creation in Revelation 20-22, will lead to minimal theological and

missiological understandings and constructions of relational life.[20] Questions concerning

what it means to live relationally with God and other people and how categories of

religions fit into the picture can then be addressed from the perspective of these three

themes as interpreted from the chosen passages.

Over the past 50 years there have been major shifts in the way mission and

theology approach religious and cultural contexts. The term contextualization was coined,

in a document for the Theological Education Fund in 1972, to describe the work of

missiologists who recognized the need to be sensitive to local cultures, and package the

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[20] While not all the following scholars have used the same texts I have, at some level they have recognized the significance of the themes I have presented here. Examples include, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "What is Everyday Theology? How and Why Christians Should Read Culture," in *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Contexts and Interpret Trends*, eds. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Charles A. Anderson, and Michael J. Sleasman (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 41; Timothy C. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2010), 178. Amos Yong utilizes all three of these passages on numerous occasions in his book *The Missiological Spirit: Christian Mission Theology for the Third Millennium Global Context* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014). Dyrness argues in favor of a slightly altered approach when he says, "the model I am proposing is not the traditional one of creation-fall-redemption… but rather creation-disobedience-recreation." Dyrness, *Insider Jesus*, 34. My choice of these texts finds its roots in an article and book chapter written by Richard M. Davidson, "A Cosmic Metanarrative for the Coming Millennium," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 11, nos. 1-2 (2000) and "Back to the Beginning: Genesis 1-3 and the Theological Center of Scripture," in *Christ, Salvation and the Eschaton: Essays in Honor of Hans K. LaRondelle*, eds. by Daniel Heinz, Jiři Moskala, and Peter M. van Bemmelen (Berrien Springs, MI: Old Testament Department Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, 2009).

gospel in language understandable in that local culture.[21] This was a major step forward

for both missiology and theology. This has created space for some theologians to develop

contextual theology, especially those outside the global North. However, it is also true

that within the Western academy there continues to be a bias to name all non-Western

theological work "contextual," while Western theology remains simply "theology." This

gives the false impression that Western theology is somehow universal while all other

theology is localized.[22]

While some theologians and missiologists have attempted to show that

contextualization moves beyond this, William Dyrness, in his book *Insider Jesus*,[23] has

carefully noted that much of the discussion around contextualization is still using an "us"

and "them" approach which contains residual feelings of Western hegemony and

colonialism.[24] Dyrness argues that the time has come to move beyond contextualization

towards a mutual give-and-take, a type of intercultural theology. His argument is placed

within the discussion of many new movements to Christ found around the world among

people who self-identify as something other than Christian.[25]

Combining Dyrness' and Richard's work with the postcolonial critique of the

European and North American scholarly development of categories of religions creates

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[21] For a history of the term contextualization see Dean Gilliland, "Contextualization," in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 225-226.

[22] For a survey of current Evangelical attempts to move away from this approach to theology see Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland, eds., *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practices in an Era of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006).

[23] William A. Dyrness, *Insider Jesus: Theological Reflections on New Christian Movements* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2016).

[24] Dyrness, *Insider Jesus*, 23, 26, 44. H. L. Richard essentially argues the same in, "Religious Syncretism," and "New Paradigms for Religion."

[25] For case studies see Dyrness, *Insider Jesus*, chap. 4.

the space for a new constructive approach to a theology of relational life from a

missiological angle.[26] Currently the categories of religions, as developed in Europe and

North America, often rely on, "essentialist understandings of culture," and religion.[27]

These basic assumptions that religion "functions, or should function" as it is defined by

European and North American scholars, is then utilized as a way of describing the rest of

the world.[28] Because these categories have been questioned with strong critical analysis

by a number of religious studies scholars and missiologists alike it is appropriate to ask,

how useful are these categories?[29] Do these categories set up a false sense of reality that

is not reflected within living groups of people? Do these categories create a sense of

"othering" that leads to the labeling of groups of people without taking the time to learn

and understand how they live? When these questions are combined with Dyrness' radical

assertion that the current abstraction of religion in the West "imposes a serious limitation

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[26] The terminology "relational life" is my own not Richard's or Dyrness'. Dyrness recognizes that the Bible does not contain the categories of culture and religion as they are used in the twenty-first century and feels this is an obstacle in understanding how God works within and reveals Himself in culture, see Dyrness, *Insider Jesus*, 35, 61, 79, 102. Charles Kraft is also cognizant that most people do not compartmentalize their beliefs or religion from the rest of their life. See Charles H. Kraft, *Worldview for Christian Witness* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2008), 129-130.

[27] Craig Ott, "Globalization and Contextualization: Reframing the Task of Contextualization in the Twenty-First Century," *Missiology* 43, no. 1 (2015): 50. Ott defines essentialist in the following way: "This essentialist understanding of culture claims that cultures are well-defined entities, more or less self-contained, bounded social systems, clearly differentiated from one another." Ott, "Globalization and Contextualization," 49. Richard argues in a similar way when he writes, "Missiology all too easily employs the binary language of 'religion' and 'culture' without recognition of the problems involved." Richard, "Religious Syncretism," 213. Others have felt that current definitions of "world religions" relies on essentialist understandings of religion such as Harley Talman, "The Old Testament and Insider Movements," in *Understanding Insider Movements: Disciples of Jesus Within Diverse Religious Communities*, eds. Harley Talman and John Jay Travis (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2015), 190-191.

[28] Dyrness, *Insider Jesus*, 102.

[29] Ott, "Globalization and Contextualization," 43-58.

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on what the mission of God may be today,"[30] there is a clear need for careful and fresh study of these issues.

There have been numerous articles and books written in the past several decades on the theology of religion(s) and theology of culture.[31] Some of them have contributed significantly to scholarship and the issues at stake. Yet, a vast majority of these works are reliant on the categories discussed above and have not yet fully engaged with the issues Dyrness and Richard raise from an adequately biblical perspective. Because the categories are so well entrenched it has become difficult to develop theological and missiological understandings of relational life that do not fit within the given categories. This dissertation is a work of deconstruction of categories of religions followed by a constructive theology rooted in a biblically centered approach to people and their ways of living in relationship towards God and each other.[32] The increasing evidence of new movements to Jesus from so many different parts of the world and from so many different backgrounds gives added urgency to the need for these issues to be carefully reflected upon and discussed. This study moves towards a biblical approach to these issues with implications for theology and missiology.

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[30] Dyrness, *Insider Jesus*, 101.

[31] For some of the more prominent works on culture see H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2001); Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964). For a recent work on theology of religions see Gerald R. McDermott and Harold Netland, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions: An Evangelical Proposal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). For recent surveys from differing perspectives on the theology of religions, see Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2003); and Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002).

[32] My use of the term "constructive" here is meant to contrast the theologically focused portion of the dissertation with the more deconstructive work of Chapters 2 and 3. My intention is not to provide a "grand" system that is comprehensive nor final in its conclusions. Rather I am attempting to do my best to be true to what I find and interpret in certain biblical texts as they relate to specific issues raised in this dissertation. For more on the various ways of understanding "constructive theology" see Jason A. Wyman Jr., *Constructing Constructive Theology: An Introductory Sketch* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2017), xi.

Statement of the Problem

The current categories of religions are overly reliant on Western Enlightenment-based presuppositions and academic thinking that creates barriers in understanding God's desire for all people to have abundant life. Many theologians and missiologists utilize these inherited categories without first subjecting them to the biblical canon. As a result, the theological and missiological discourse on religions is often grounded in extra-biblical presuppositions rooted primarily in human reason that do not accurately portray a biblical approach to relational life.[33]

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this dissertation is to deconstruct the categories of religions that have been inherited and used by theologians and missiologists. In the space created by deconstructing the categories of religions a constructive theology of relational life rooted in the biblical themes of creation, Incarnation, and re-creation is developed. I argue that the current categories of religions are not sufficient either theologically or missiologically. This dissertation provides an alternative constructive theology of relational life, rooted in the Bible, as an alternative to the inherited categories of religions.

Definition of Terms

The following are terms or terminology that is used throughout the dissertation.

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[33] I have purposely chosen to use the terminology "human reason" rather than rationalism for the following reasons. The term rationalism can tend to hide the human element that is so essential to keep in focus. The turn to reason was an endeavor launched and engaged in by actual human beings and thus, while often described abstractly, is not merely an abstract idea.

Categories of Religions: This terminology is meant to be wide ranging and includes terms or terminology that scholars have used to describe large groups of people or ideologies such as: Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Islam, Christianity, animism, folk religions, tribal religions, atheism, Marxism, etc. There are many other terms that could be added to the list. These are terms that have become common in textbooks on religion and are often used by missiologists and theologians in their writing often without clearly defining them.

Relational Life: This terminology will be used in place of the terms culture and religion throughout the dissertation. Part of the argument of this dissertation is that the Bible does not portray life as separated into categories of culture and religion, therefore it is necessary to use terminology that encompasses both of these ideas. The terminology "relational life" is meant to encompass all aspects of life including internal and external realities for human beings and other beings such as God, Satan, and angels/spirits. The term encompasses relationality between God and all other beings. It also includes relationality between humanity with each other.

Scope and Delimitations

Because of the potentially overwhelming breadth that this dissertation topic could cover, the following delimitations guided the process of research. This project was approached with a high view of the biblical canon.[34] This influenced the type of literature chosen for research as well as how the literature was evaluated.

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[34] I adhere to the description of the biblical canon outlined and detailed in John C. Peckham, *Canonical Theology: The Biblical Canon, Sola Scriptura, and Theological Method* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016).

This study includes a deconstruction of the historical and philosophical developments which led to the categories of religions so prevalent in the present, focusing on the late eighteenth century into the early twentieth century. The historical and philosophical deconstruction is not meant to be comprehensive in its deconstruction but is rather meant to problematize the categories of religions in order to create space for constructive work in the latter portion of the dissertation.

Three biblical passages were chosen as the focus for the constructive portion of the dissertation; one from the Old Testament and two from the New Testament. The purpose is to focus on theological and missiological questions and discussions raised in the historical and philosophical portion of the study, not to present a full-blown exegetical study on each passage. The passages—Genesis 1-3, John 1:1-18, and Revelation 20-22—were chosen for two reasons. First, these passages arguably represent the theological center of the Bible and contain key theological and missiological concepts that should guide the discussion on categories of religions from a biblical perspective. Second, they are representative of other passages that are also relevant but that are not touched on in detail in this project due to space constraints.

Methodology

This project is an interdisciplinary approach to research. It involved surveying and critically engaging with current literature in a number of fields including historical studies of religion, anthropology, sociology, biblical studies, systematic theology, and missiology. This follows Veli-Matti Kärkäinnen and Kevin J. Vanhoozer's

methodological arguments in favor of an interdisciplinary approach to theology.[35]

The first part of the study, Chapters 2-3, follows a method whereby categories of religions, as descriptors of human life, are traced and deconstructed with the purpose of creating space for a missiologically informed theological construction of relational life (Chapter 2). This is followed by Chapter 3 which outlines the implications that the deconstruction of the categories of religions reveal for describing relational life. Three particular implications for theologians and missiologists are highlighted and discussed in Chapter 3: the objectification of people, racialized descriptions of life, and faulty teleological hope in the progress of humanity through reason. Primary documents from the late eighteenth century through the present are surveyed along with a wide variety of secondary literature. This is done in order to demonstrate the need for alternative ways of describing relational life.

The middle portion of the study (Chapter's 4-6) moves toward constructing a missiologically informed theology of relational life. Three biblical passages are the focus of Chapters 4-6: Chapter 4 discusses Genesis 1-3, Chapter 5 discusses John 1:1-18, and Chapter 6 discusses Revelation 20-22. A number of missiologists and theologians alike have recognized the motifs of creation, Incarnation, and re-creation as being central to Scripture.[36] The choice of these passages is an adaptation of Richard M. Davidson's approach to finding the center of Scripture by reading the "introduction and conclusion"

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[35] Veli-Matti Kärkäinnen, *Trinity and Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 13; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "'One Rule to Rule Them All?' Theological Method in an Era of World Christianity," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, eds. Craig Ott and Harold H. Netland (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 95; Amos Yong, *The Missiological Spirit*, 2.

[36] Examples include, Vanhoozer, "What is Everyday Theology?," 41.; Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 178. Amos Yong utilizes all three of these passages on numerous occasions in his book *The Missiological Spirit*.

to "discover the major thesis of the book."[37] The goal is to evaluate and critique the categories of religions currently in use by theologians and missiologists, by allowing the chosen biblical passages to speak into the discussion. The Chapters are constructive and missiologically informed theological interpretations of the biblical passages.[38]

Chapter 7 applies the findings from the three passages concerning relational life and presents alternative frameworks for theological and missiological engagement with relational life, constructively interpreted from the Bible, as an alternative to current categories of religions. The final Chapter (Chapter 8) is a list of recommendations and possible directions for further research.

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[37] Davidson, "Cosmic Metanarrative," 103. Davidson has written a revised version of this in "Back to the Beginning." Davidson focuses on Genesis 1-3 and Revelation 20-22. I have added the passage of John 1:1-1 because the Incarnation of Jesus, including his life, death, and resurrection, is crucial in understanding relational life from a biblical perspective. John 1:1-18 contains the same seven elements that Davidson uses to demonstrate why Genesis 1-3 and Revelation 20-22 can be understood as the theological center of Scripture.

[38] I engaged in exegesis for each passage in order to understand them better, but the nature of this dissertation is not exegetical therefore, the body of the text will not contain exegetical analysis.

CHAPTER 2

CATEGORIES OF RELIGIONS AS THEY DEVELOPED
FROM THE AGE OF DISCOVERY THROUGH
THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

This Chapter is broken into several sections, each illuminating issues that

surround the term religion and the categorization of religions. The first section is a brief

overview of the Age of Discovery predating the Enlightenment in Europe in the sixteenth

and seventeenth centuries. During this time new kinds of knowledge forced Western

European intellectuals to rethink some of their categories in relation to the world outside

of Europe. I will then move into an overview of the philosophical background stemming

from the German Idealism strand of the Enlightenment as it relates to the concept of

religion. This will pave the way for an examination of the development of categories of

religions and how these were defined in distinction from the term culture in new

academic disciplines such as philology, the scientific study of religion, anthropology, and

eventually sociology. Each of these disciplines has had major impacts on how the

development of the concept of religion evolved over time. This is especially true of the

concept of "world religions" which will be a major discussion point of this Chapter.

Finally, I will bring the discussion up to the present in order to demonstrate how

intellectual history continues to play a role in the way categories of religions are used in

current theological and missiological scholarship.[1]

This Chapter is meant to create space for a theological and missiological discussion based on the Bible whereby the categories of religions are submitted to Scripture with the intention of creating an alternative approach to how human life is described in relation to God and other humans. It is not meant to comprehensively describe the history of religion as a concept as this is too vast and complex. Rather, it is focused on issues which are most pertinent for theological and missiological discussions.

The Age of Discovery: New People Lead to New Categories

One area which is crucial to understanding a number of shifts in the European social imaginary[2] is the Age of Discovery.[3] This era started with the ships of the Portuguese and Spanish in the late fifteenth century and carried forward into the sixteenth

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[1] I find that Walter D. Mignolo's period differentiation for modernity is very similar to the way I have divided up this chapter. He divides the years 1500-2000 in the following way: "The Iberian and Catholic face, led by Spain and Portugal (1500-1750, approximately); the 'heart of Europe' (Hegel) face, led by England, France, and Germany (1750-1945); and the U.S. American face, led by the United States (1945-2000)." Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 7.

[2] I am using "social imaginary" in a similar way to that of Charles Taylor in *A Secular Age*. One-way Taylor defines the social imaginary is:

The background which makes sense of any given act… It doesn't include everything in our world, but the relevant sense-giving features can't be circumscribed; and because of this we can say that sense-giving draws on our whole world, that is, our sense of our whole predicament in time and space, among others and in history. (Taylor, *A Secular Age*), 174.

[3] For recognition and critique of the gap in Taylor's work concerning the Age of Discovery, see Harold A. Netland, *Christianity and Religious Diversity: Clarifying Christian Commitments in a Globalizing Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 66.

century.[4] European nations such as Britain, Holland, and France followed with their own colonizing efforts. Missionaries from European countries, and eventually North America, then followed the paths paved by merchants, business people, and colonial political structures.

Prior to the Age of Discovery religion and culture were not clearly separated concepts. Nor were they used in the ways that they are today. The term religion, rooted in the Latin *religio*, was in use, but was primarily tied to ritual descriptions and usually within a Christian framework.[5] It took time for religion to be separated out as a category used to describe people other than Christians.[6] When many European colonizers went out and met new people, who were not previously known to exist in South and Central America as well as Africa, they often stated that the people "lacked religion because they were developmentally deficient."[7] Statements like the one above can only make sense if the term religion was used in a different way than it is today.[8] Up until the late eighteenth century it was common to see the world described by Europeans as being divided into

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[4] For a detailed but brief history of the relevant legal concept "the Doctrine of Discovery" see Robert J. Miller, "Christianity, American Indians, and the Doctrine of Discovery," in *Remembering Jamestown: Hard Questions About Christian Mission*, ed. Amos Yong and Barbara Brown Zikmund (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010).

[5] For a short and clear history of the term religion see Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion*. For a more in-depth look see Carlin A. Barton and Daniel Boyarin, *Imagine No Religion: How Modern Abstractions Hide Ancient Realities* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016).

[6] For an in-depth look at why the frequent translation of ancient terms such as *religio* in Latin and *thrēskeia* in Greek as "religion" is inappropriate and misleading see Barton and Boyarin, *Imagine No Religion*.

[7] Willie James Jennings makes these comments in connection to European colonizers descriptions of South Africans. Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 134.

[8] Guy G. Stroumsa, *A New Science: The Discovery of Religion in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 1-2.

four groups of people: Christians, Jews, Mohammedans, and Pagans or idol worshipers.[9]

Often these were not considered completely separate religions, rather Christianity was

categorized as true religion, while Jews and Mohammedans were either heretical or

corrupted religion, and pagans simply followed a false religion.[10] As knowledge in

Europe increased concerning people from different parts of the world these ways of

categorizing people would evolve.

Guy Stroumsa credits three historical events with creating the space for new

conceptions of religion: The European "discovery" of the Americas and Asia, the

Renaissance and its turn to "original" sources and languages, and the wars of religion in

Europe which led to a questioning of the exclusivistic claims of Christianity.[11] The

encounter with people whose different practices and beliefs throughout the Americas,

Asia, and Africa forced Europeans to rethink how they described and categorized the

people of the world. People such as Columbus tended to use classificatory systems that

relied on "two old ideas: the chain of being and the genetic principle. . . . A common

human nature was thus accorded to all human beings, but one that was assumed to exist

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[9] Relations between Jews, Christians, and Muslims have a long and storied history. For an overview of this see David Nirenberg, *Neighboring Faiths: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in the Middle Ages and Today* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

[10] For more on this fourfold categorization see Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 58-61. Peter Harrison, *'Religion' and the Religions in the English Enlightenment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 39.

[11] Stroumsa, *A New Science*, 5-6, 11. Taylor's *A Secular Age* gives much more detail and philosophical background to this process in Europe but fails to deal with the influence of the discoveries of the Americas and Asia in his work which is one of the few significant flaws of his study. Harold Netland has noted this weakness in Taylor's work as well, Netland, *Christianity and Religious Diversity*, 66.

in various stages of maturity and enlightenment."[12] Thus, it was possible to insert the

local people of the Americas, Asia, and Africa into the chart as lesser beings somewhere

below Europeans and actually outside Columbus' known categories altogether.[13] This

must be read within the reality of power structures whereby Europeans were coming to

the other continents as conquerors with technological aids that made it possible for them

to force their way into these new territories and take over the land.[14]

It was during this time that slavery grew into an international trade and eventually

developed into one of the world's primary economic activities. The rise of slavery is

intimately tied to the development of categories of religions. Willie James Jennings

makes it painfully clear that the history of the slave trade is Christian history and

implicates theology in the act of dehumanizing people to the point of creating questions

as to whether Africans were people or beasts.[15] In order for the Portuguese and Spanish,

as well as the later conquering work of other European nations, to legitimize slavery and

still hold to their Christian values they had to work out theological and missiological

relationships with those they were subjugating. This can be seen in significant strands of

white European and North American rationalization of slavery as a type of "*telos*" which

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[12] Talal Asad, Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 20. See also Jonathan Z. Smith, Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), chap. 12.

[13] Stroumsa, *A New Science*, 14. There were also a number of cases where explorers and missionaries attempted to prove that the people they met had Christian roots although this usually required serious distortions of local beliefs and traditions. Jason Ānanda Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 58-70.

[14] Jennings also identifies a tendency of colonizers to view native people through an ethnographic and anthropological lens and then arrange cultures hierarchically. Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 102.

[15] Jennings, The Christian Imagination, 17-18.

is played out in a narrative that sees "African captivity" leading "to African salvation and to black bodies that show the disciplining power of faith."[16]

While slavery would be outlawed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the fallout of this cruel historical reality is still felt in the present, even in the intellectual usage of religion as a concept. Beyond slavery the subjugating act of many Europeans over their colonized peoples aided in the creation of new categories to describe the subjugated. This is not meant to imply that the enslaved and colonized were totally without agency, they did have agency to the point as Kwame Appiah puts it, "colonizers were never as fully in control as our elders allowed them to appear."[17] The reality remains that colonizers attempted to disenfranchise and thus remove agency in many different ways throughout the world during the seventeenth to twentieth centuries.[18] It is

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[16] Jennings points out that Christian theological language surrounds the accounts of the earliest slaves arriving in Portugal as given in firsthand accounts by Zurara the Portuguese king's chronicler. Zurara, who could not observe what was happening without shedding tears, and yet continued to write his chronicle and implicate the Sovereign God as the one who had ordained the trade in slaves. Jennings later writes concerning the Portuguese view of God, "an unchanging God wills to create Christians out of slaves and slaves out of those black bodies that will someday, the Portuguese hope, claim to be Christian." See Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 20, 22.

[17] Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 7. Gottschalk has demonstrated adeptly the challenge scholars have in navigating historical writing in situations that included colonialist hegemony, local agency, and all things in-between. Gottschalk, *Religion, Science, and Empire*, 9.

[18] Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan*, 3. Asad reminds his readers that there is never a time when a person exercises complete autonomous agency, the question rather is "In what degree, and in what way, are they agents or patients?" Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 4. David Chidester has provided a helpful theory he calls "triple mediation" which demonstrates how much of the knowledge that would be utilized in the development of categories of religions traveled from local places such as India or South Africa. He defines "triple mediation" as, "a complex process of intercultural mediation, a triple mediation between indigenous, colonial, and imperial actors that was crucial to the formation of theory in imperial comparative religion." David Chidester, *Empire of Religion: Imperialism and Comparative Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 5.

impossible to disentangle the development of religion from this past.[19]

When you combine the disenfranchisement and subjugation in the name of religion with the philosophical and scientific changes occurring in Europe, as shown in Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*, and others, it demonstrates that the history of religion is neither simple nor without baggage. The Age of Discovery brought Western Europeans into contact with people they knew little or nothing about. The results rooted in this new knowledge and engagement shook European constructions of the world to its core, and forced them to consider a world that was vastly different and more complex than they ever imagined. It opened the minds of Europeans to realize that people in Asia, the Americas, and Africa had lived and functioned with significant political structures, ritual practices, sacred texts, etc., for centuries.[20] What did this mean for Europeans? This was a major question intellectual's asked throughout Europe with varying answers emerging. This was combined with a new spirit of scientific discovery and intellectual skepticism which was turning to human reason as the primary concept to guide the progress of Europe and the world at large.[21]

The combination of discovery of new people and lands with the intellectual changes in Europe paved the way for

> the modern invention of religion. . .a reinvention of the trajectory taken by the Portuguese and the Spanish, who, as we have seen, first drew up the possibilities of

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[19] Jennings is able to combine the details of the slave trade with the topic of this chapter in a very moving way in Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, chap. 4.

[20] Lynn Hunt, Margaret C. Jacob, and Wijnand Mijnhardt, *The Book That Changed Europe: Picart and Bernard's Religious Ceremonies of the World* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2010).

[21] Netland is especially interested in reminding his readers of the philosophical role skepticism has played, Netland, *Christianity and Religious Diversity*, 48-50. German Idealism, which is a major school of thought in this narrative, was rooted in this paradigm see Frederick Beiser, "The Enlightenment and Idealism," in *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, ed. Karl Ameriks (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

(theological) anthropological reflection through description of body differences (for example, skin color, hair texture, manner of dress, and so forth). The need to explain unforeseen, exotic peoples invoked through descriptive practices new ways of creating knowledge. . . . These questions grew out of descriptive procedures that bound assessment of religious consciousness to the assessment of the body.[22]

The Enlightenment and Its Influence on Categories of Religions

While there are many streams that lead to the Enlightenment of the seventeenth century, the stream leading out from Immanuel Kant, G. W. F. Hegel, and Friederich Schleiermacher through German Idealism are especially important for the discussion at hand.[23] These intellectual thinkers have impacted the subsequent development of categories of religions in profound ways that are still felt in the present.[24]

The Enlightenment was a time when human reason was elevated to new heights often as the ultimate norm for mapping out the world of thought and the world in general. For many, reason became the normative concept that all other sources of knowledge would have to pass through; this meant concepts of the metaphysical and ontological types as well as the empirical would now be judged through human reason. For Christian

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[22] Jennings, The Christian Imagination, 134.

[23] One could argue that Johann Gottfried Herder should be listed here. Certainly, his philosophical outlook was very different, and in many ways much less ethnocentric than Kant, Hegel and Schleiermacher, but the reason I have decided to omit him is that he has had decidedly less influence on the development of the categories of religions than these three thinkers. There are plenty of good books which look at Herder's philosophy as it relates to these issues for example see Theodore Vial, *Modern Religion, Modern Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). See also William Y. Adams, *The Philosophical Roots of Anthropology* (Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications, 1998). Timothy Gorringe also refers to him several times in *Furthering Humanity: A Theology of Culture* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004), 80. While Herder certainly was more congenial towards different "cultures" he is a complex character who also had major nationalistic leanings that were used to develop harmful policy after his death. George W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: Collier Macmillan, 1987), 20. See also Léon Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth: A History of Racist and Nationalist Ideas in Europe* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1974), 186-87.

[24] For accessible essay-style histories of the Enlightenment and its fallout see Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972). Terry Eagleton, *Culture and the Death of God* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014). Both of these books attempt to trace the positive and negative influences of the Enlightenment.

intellectuals this meant subjecting the Bible to the same criteria of reason.[25] The age of

biblical criticism began to bud and would blossom to full flower in the eighteenth

century.[26] While a discussion of the change in approaches to the Bible is beyond the

scope of this Chapter, it is relevant because the move away from the Bible as a normative

source for imagining the world had major consequences for the development of religion

as a concept in Europe.[27]

The Bible still continued to influence many intellectuals, even if indirectly, which

can be witnessed through even a cursory reading of Kant, Hegel, or Schleiermacher. But

it is also evident that these thinkers, along with numerous other thought leaders, were not

using the Bible as the normative source for thought development and intellectual-decision

making, instead they were turning to human reason,[28] as the new norm for decision

making. "Through Reason one could hope to define a compact core of unquestionable

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[25] Stroumsa has accurately connected the discovery of new "religions" as being part of the process which undergirded the turn away from the Bible as revelation, towards the Bible as a historical document. The concept of Natural Religion, which was rooted in medieval theology, was combined with a high view of reason and thus played a significant role in undermining the Bible. Stroumsa, *A New Science*, 36-38, chap. 2. For more on reason replacing the Bible see Harrison, *'Religion'*, 31-32. See also Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 197.

[26] Craig G. Bartholomew, Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Framework for Hearing God in Scripture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015). See also Hans G. Kippenberg, Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 65-72. The work of scholars such as Julius Wellhausen and Robertson Smith, which did not take place until the nineteenth century, are often the most remembered in this process but their scholarly inspiration is rooted in the previous decades.

[27] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 271. For more on the connection between biblical criticism and the rise of the science of religion see Lourens van den Bosch, *Friedrich Max Müller: A Life Devoted to Humanities* (Boston: Brill, 2002), 297-99.

[28] This is truer of Kant and Hegel than Schleiermacher who was, by trade a theologian, although he is considerably reliant on non-biblical categories and sources for his theology. For more on Kant and his distancing himself from the church see Michael A. Van Horn, *Within My Heart: The Enlightenment, Epistemic Reversal and the Subjective Justification of Religious Belief* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2017), 51. Kant continued to draw on faith resources for his philosophy but also explicitly attempted to do philosophy without a clear faith commitment by replacing it with human reason as the arbiter of truth. Van Horn, *Within My Heart*, 52, 73.

belief."[29] This included how people were described and categorized, and how life was

cataloged using practices and beliefs.[30]

Along with the turn towards a more exclusive use of human reason was the rise of

distinctions in conceptual terminology in how life was described. Religion and culture

had still not yet been clearly delineated as separate categories in the seventeenth century,

although *Kultur* or *Cultur* became a more frequently used German term during this

period.[31] In its German roots, *Cultur*, described higher society as more educated

compared to the masses. If you were well-educated and lived in a well-mannered way

you were described as "cultured." Those who did not fit within this criterion were

uncultured.[32]

Kant attempted to clarify issues of anthropology (not to be confused with the

current discipline of anthropology); Hegel worked on writing out a philosophy of history,

and Schleiermacher was trying to clarify what religion was. Part of their outlook included

a teleology which comprehended "progress" through the intentional prioritizing of reason

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[29] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 226.

[30] Stroumsa, *A New Science*, chaps. 3-4.

[31] A. L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963).

[32] Tomoko Masuzawa, "Culture," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

as the goal of European dominated society.[33] They tied together changes in empirical discoveries, developments in technology, and the seemingly obvious rise of the European mind to the top of the world's order as an innate part of reality. [34]

For Hegel, "the only Thought which Philosophy brings with it to the contemplation of History, is the simple conception of *Reason*; that Reason is the Sovereign of the World; that the history of the world, presents us with a rational process."[35] He then proceeds to utilize his definition of Reason and Spirit, his term for Universal History, to evaluate people from around the world as he understood them. Africans in particular are denigrated in Hegel's philosophical account of history. Hegel surmises that "the Negro…exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state." For Hegel the "Negros" of Africa are without "Religion." He finishes his diatribe on Africa by stating, "At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the world."[36] This foundation for African religion is frequently carried forward into the present often unknowingly. India does not fare much better in Hegel's

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[33] Vial, *Modern Religion*, 53. For more on teleology and the Enlightenment see Henning Trüper, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, eds., *Historical Teleologies in the Modern World* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015). There were major voices that did not see the potential for "progress" as so clear and obvious and even challenged this teleology, such as Herder, although his alternative was not necessarily a recognition of evil or equality for all people through progress but rather that each generation had the capacity for happiness without progress within themselves. Gorringe, *Furthering Humanity*, 178n2.

[34] I am heavily indebted to the work of Vial in this section, see Vial, *Modern Religion*.

[35] G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (Kitchener, Canada: Batoche Books, 2001), 22. See also Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 23. Charles Taylor confirms this understanding of Hegel and reason in *Hegel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 49. See also Adams, *The Philosophical Roots*, 274-75.

[36] Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 110-17. For a brief look at Hegel's view of Africa and its influence on the discourse of religion see Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 42-43.

estimation, where "Deceit and cunning are the fundamental characteristics of the Hindoo."[37]

Because Kant believed all humans exercised reason he needed to be able to fit them into his framework of reality.[38] Kant felt that "it is reason that decides what is timeless in the historical religion, what is universal in the particular belief, what is common in established teaching, what is unchanging in the ephemeral."[39] While he attempted to reconcile the metaphysical with the empirical through reason, many of those who came after him, and even claimed affinity with him moved away from the transcendent element of his philosophy.[40] For Kant there was a definite hierarchy favoring Europeans.[41] A word search for "Negro" in *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* reveals a number of troubling statements regarding Africans and

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[37] Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 176. The term "Hindoo" at this point in history does not correlate directly to how the term "Hindu" is used in the present. At the time Hegel was writing "Hindoo" basically referred to all people living on the sub-continent of modern day India. For more on the history of the term Hindu see Arvind Sharma, "Hindu, Hindustān, Hinduism and Hindutva," *Numen* 49, no. 1 (2002). It is a troubling reality that much of Hegel's primary source material on different parts of the world was from missionaries, often negative towards native populations. Hegel may have purposely chosen these type of sources because they suited his purposes, Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 177. While no textbooks on religion would include a statement like this today I have had several private conversations with former and current "missionaries" to India and elsewhere who believe that it is impossible to trust Indians of any kind due to their inherent roots in Hinduism. It appears Hegel's paradigms still exist. For more on Hegel's view of Hindus/Indians see King, *Orientalism and Religion*, 124. For an anthology of Hegel's use of India in his writings with commentary see Aakash Singh Rathore and Rimina Mohapatra, *Hegel's India: A Reinterpretation, with Texts* (New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[38] Vial, Modern Religion, 24.

[39] Kippenberg, Discovering Religious History, 11.

[40] "The moral teachings of the Enlightenment bear witness to a hopeless attempt to replace enfeebled religion with some reason for persisting in society when interest is absent." Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 85.

[41] Mignolo, *The Darker Side*, 46.

blacks which betray Kant's belief in the inferiority of black people to white people.[42]

While scholars may be quick to point out the differences between the philosophical works of Kant and Hegel from that of Schleiermacher,[43] these three shared a common denominator whereby "religion remains both subject and object of public discourse when the individual is considered the implacable final authority of religion."[44] Russell McCutcheon argues that "Schleiermacher attempted to persuade his readers (the so-called 'cultured despisers' of religion) that religion did not conflict with their own interest in matters of rationality."[45] Schleiermacher was not much different in how he connected race and religion. While he believed that religious experience, as in an intuitive "feeling" of the transcendent was part of the naturalness of being human, he still

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[42] Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011). See also Vial, *Modern Religion*, 24. Keep in mind that "Kant asserted that this stem-species originated between the thirty-first and thirty-second parallels, and the white brunette current inhabitants of this region are the race that most closely resembles the stem-species, who were white and blond." Vial, *Modern Religion*, 35. Despite Kant's understanding of racial superiority and inferiority he was still opposed to colonialism based on a belief that people should never be treated as means to an end, this then implies that there were some tensions in his thought see Vial, *Modern Religion*, 35. For a detailed analysis of Kant's view of race see Robert Bernasconi, "Kant's Third Thoughts on Race," in *Reading Kant's Geography*, eds. Stuart Elden and Eduardo Mendieta (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2011).

[43] Hegel openly attacked Schleiermacher's definition of religion as a "feeling" but in the end both Hegel and Schleiermacher developed concepts of religion that took the *human* reasoning and/or feeling as the primary normative arbiter in deciding what was or was not religious. Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History*, 17. David J. Bosch makes the valid point that Schleiermacher attempted to "divorce religion from reason [and] locate it in *human feeling and experience*, and thus protect it from any possible attacks by the Enlightenment's tendency toward 'objectifying consciousness.'" David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 20th anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 275. This was, however, still a turn towards human experience as the norming source for theology and not the Bible or God more directly, which was closer to the turn to reason than some may admit. Both men drank heavily from the fountain of Platonic thought which also led to some shared conclusions on religion. Gorringe, *Furthering Humanity*, 49.

[44] Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History*, 17. While it is true that Schleiermacher attempted to pave a way forward after Kant that created space for experience and feeling the religious, he was at the same time heavily influenced by Kant and felt that his theology had to be discussed within the questions that Kant had raised. Van Horn, *Within My Heart*, 80-85.

[45] Russell T. McCutcheon, ed. The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader (New York: Cassell, 1999), 68.

could not fit Australian aborigines in his schema, because they appeared to be "sub-human."[46] He also created a hierarchical scale of "religions" with Christianity being the pinnacle, which was a precursor to some of the more developed evolutionary views of religion that would come a century later.[47]

Around the time of the Enlightenment and moving forward there was another major development in European relations to non-Europeans. Through the efforts of European civil servants working in colonized territories, ancient documents and sacred texts were being "discovered" in places such as India, the Middle East, and China. These documents were often brought back to Europe and translated into English, German, or French for scholars to interpret. In the midst of the rise of human reason and skepticism, intellectuals prized these documents and read them hoping to find the origins and essence of humanity, supposing these texts to be older versions of human thinking than those found in Christian, Jewish, and Islamic writings.[48]

The continual flow of travelogues and missionary ethnographies sent to Europe from around the world impacted European intellectual categories.[49] What is significantly absent from these reports is local voices. Descriptions were, no doubt, reliant on local

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[46] Vial, *Modern Religion*, 206-208.

[47] Steven L. Wiebe, *Christian Theology in a Pluralistic Context: A Methodological and Constructive Inquiry in the Doctrine of Creation* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 56. Schleiermacher's influence on the development of the concept of religion is considered by some scholars to be greater than any other major Enlightenment thinker. Leora Faye Batnitzky, *How Judaism Became a Religion: An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 25.

[48] Urs App, *The Birth of Orientalism* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010). Mignolo sees a direct link between the turn to reason and colonialism, see Mignolo, *The Darker Side*, 9.

[49] Jürgen Osterhammel, *Unfabling the East: The Enlightenment's Encounter with Asia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 10-11.

informants, yet rarely are their words or actions given voice.[50] These descriptions of people were then being inserted into philosophical musings and serious philosophical works in Europe by people such as Kant, Hegel, and Schleiermacher. In other words, the philosophical developments that would shape the subsequent categories of religions were being influenced by the interpreted understandings of people from around the world through the lens of Kant, Hegel, and Schleiermacher in surprisingly similar ways.[51]

Summary

Kant, Hegel, and Schleiermacher matter because they influenced nearly every major subsequent attempt to categorize and define people by European and North American thinkers.[52] Developments of the Enlightenment cannot be relegated to only these thinkers, there is always room for more study and nuancing of arguments. But it appears clear that Kant, Hegel, and Schleiermacher developed philosophical frameworks and outlooks that have played a major role in how human beings and their beliefs and practices have been described and categorized in Europe and North America.[53]

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[50] Osterhamme records two important, but little known, exceptions to this: an interview of the Chinese Emperor Qianlong and the report of Malabar, India sent to Europe by Bartholomaus Ziegenbalg. Osterhammel, *Unfabling the East*, 84-89. Bryan W. Van Norden has engaged in a passionate plea for philosophy as a discipline to recognize its Eurocentric attitudes and approaches to research in Western academic settings. He is especially hard on the philosophic constructions of Kant and Hegel as it relates to their view and understanding of non-European peoples. Bryan W. Van Norden, *Taking Back Philosophy: A Multicultural Manifesto* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 19-29.

[51] For more details concerning the flow of knowledge from Asia to Europe and vice versa see Osterhammel, *Unfabling the East*.

[52] An example of this intellectual pathway can be found in a reference to a leading book on religious classification written by P. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye in 1891 credits Kant, Schleiermacher, and Hegel as the fathers of the philosophy, and subsequently, the science of religion. Saussaye, *Manual of the Science of Religion*, 3-4.

[53] There are many other players in this historical narrative. For a history of some of these players as well as the build-up to the "Age of Reason" as it relates to religion see Stroumsa, *A New Science*.

Combining this with the forces of colonization that occurred during the same period creates a potential problem for the development of religion that has not yet been fully grappled with in theological and missiological circles; the impact of these philosophers, even if it is not explicitly recognized, is considerable in theological and missiological discussions on religion.[54]

Categorizing Religions: Mid- to Late Nineteenth Century

It was during the mid-nineteenth century that the term culture began to be used in a new-fangled fashion, distinct from the concept of religion in a more definite way. It was also during this era that the science of religion in combination with new discoveries in language began to be recognized as a legitimate academic pursuit.[55] The roots of the *world religion* categories so normal today are also found during this time period. Some of the key names are Friederich Max Müller, C. P. Tiele,[56] and E. B. Tylor. These individuals, in varying degrees, were beholden to the philosophical constructions of their predecessors including Kant, Hegel, and Schleiermacher.

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[54] The reliance of theologians on European philosophers as dominant dialogue partners has not been lost on missiologist Craig Ott, "a perusal of the indices of the systematic theologies released by evangelical authors over the past twenty years reveals that most make no reference to non-Western theologians whatsoever. The few exceptions cite only Latin American liberation theologians. On the other hand, reference to Hegel, Heidegger, and even Hitler are common." Craig Ott, "Conclusion," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 311n3. There are exceptions to this which come from liberation theological voices and other non-Anglo-European backgrounds. For example James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 40th anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010).

[55] For more on the interaction between science and religion as it relates to the developments of the category of religion in the context of colonialism see Gottschalk, *Religion, Science, and Empire*, chap. 1. For more on the science of religion as perpetuated by Müller see Bosch, *Friedrich Max Müller*, chap. 4.

[56] Tiele's most well-known and influential book was Tiele, *Outlines of the History of Religion*.

From the mid-nineteenth century through the end of the century theologians and missionaries were also thinking through their use of categories of religions.[57] They often borrowed from the scholarship of Europe and North America, as well as provided scholars in academic settings with fresh ethnographies and documents to be translated.[58] During this century a crisis of Christian faith was playing out in the European academy as higher biblical criticism and Darwin's theory of evolution gained headway.[59] The theory of biological evolution was easily inserted into developments concerning religion and culture that were already organized hierarchically. A majority of missionaries had a low view of the people they were going to live among. "Africa was the 'dark' continent; there, as well as in India, on the islands of the Pacific, and elsewhere, lived only

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[57] William Carey, Joshua Marshman, and William Ward, otherwise known as the "Serampore Trio," were caught up in the enterprise of Orientalism that in many ways was a major distraction from mission-related activities. See "Appendix 1: Missionary Orientalism and the Serampore Myth" in A. Christopher Smith, *The Serampore Mission Enterprise* (Bangalore, India: Centre for Contemporary Christianity, 2006). See also Geoffrey A. Oddie, *Imagined Hinduism: British Protestant Missionary Constructions of Hinduism, 1793-1900* (New Delhi: Sage, 2006).

[58] Edward B. Tylor admits to being reliant on missionaries for much of his material. Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom*, (London: John Murray, 1871), 1:vi. For more on the role of Christian missionaries in the work of ethnography and anthropological theory see also Chidester, *Empire of Religion*. Gottschalk, *Religion, Science, and Empire*, chap. 3. At the same time missionaries were reading and using the works of Tylor to develop their understandings of the people they were meeting creating an intellectual circle rooted in a Eurocentric framework. For examples of missionary ethnographers who helped the growth of the discipline of anthropology see Dmitri van den Bersselaar, "Missionary Ethnographers and the History of Anthropology: The Case of G. T. Gasden," in *The Spiritual in the Secular: Missionaries and Knowledge About Africa*, eds. Patrick Harries and David Maxwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012); David Maxwell, "From Iconoclasm to Preservation: W. F. P. Burton, Missionary Ethnography, and Belgian Colonial Science," in *The Spiritual in the Secular: Missionaries and Knowledge About Africa*, eds. Patrick Harries and David Maxwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012).

[59] Chidester, *Empire of Religion*, 65. Dietrich Jung develops the theory that biblical criticism, as engaged in by Protestant theologians had a direct impact on "philosophical and orientalist discourses on religion." One way he attempts to prove this point is to show how the social circles of European intellectuals during the mid- to late nineteenth century created constant contact between theologians, philologists, and philosophers. Dietrich Jung, *Orientalists, Islamists and the Global Public Sphere: A Genealogy of the Modern Essentialist Image of Islam*, *Comparative Islamic Studies* (Oakville, CT: Equinox, 2011), 99-100.

savages."[60] Not to mention, the long history of marginalization and outright violence towards Native Americans by so-called Christians and even missionaries—a glaring historical reality that has not yet been fully dealt with by mission history or mission thinking.[61]

Skepticism and the turn to human reason had begun to take its toll on theological output causing entrenchment by some and abandonment of faith by others.[62] Geoffrey Oddie reminds readers of another serious challenge for missions in the nineteenth century: "It was definitely of great importance for nineteenth-century missionaries to believe in the superiority of Western civilization."[63] Many of those engaged in the study of philology genuinely hoped that it would benefit missionaries, but often their work also served to undermine the work of missionaries.[64]

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[60] Bosch, Transforming Mission, 296.

[61] Tink Tinker, "The Romance and Tragedy of Christian Mission among American Indians," in *Rembering Jamestown: Hard Questions About Christian Mission*, eds. Amos Yong and Barbara Brown Zikmund (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010).

[62] For the theological battles that were created by new awareness of non-Christians see Kenneth Cracknell, *Justice, Courtesy and Love: Theologians and Missionaries Encountering World Religions, 1846-1914* (London: Epworth, 1995).

[63] Oddie, *Imagined Hinduism*, 23-24. Peter van der Veer, *The Modern Spirit of Asia: The Spiritual and the Secular in China and India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 92. This is demonstrated in the often used phrases "the White man's burden," "manifest destiny," and "civilizing."

[64] Max Müller hoped that his work in philology, which was partly based on ethnographies provided by missionaries, would aid missionaries as they interacted with non-Christians. Friederich Max Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), 1:xxi. Some of those delving into ancient Indian texts were hoping to find "older" texts that validated Christianity, even if this meant altering views of the Bible's inspiration. R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and Asia: From the Pre-Christian Era to the Postcolonial Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 53.

Philology and the Tie of Language to Religion

The distinction between the religion and culture was clarified during the

nineteenth century.[65] Both concepts, however, continued to be used as intellectual tools

for describing humanity in its ancient and current forms. There was an intense interest in

figuring out the origins of human thought, language, physicality, beliefs, and practices

during this period that dominated much of the academic work of scholars in European

universities.[66] This period saw the rise of academic chairs in Sanskrit studies, Chinese

language studies, Islamic history, and other similar types of disciplines.[67] New

translations of sacred texts such as the *Rig Veda*, *Confucius Dialects, The Lotus Sutra*,

The Laws of Manu, along with countless other sacred texts from India and China

occupied scholars for years in Europe. These texts were being mined for insights as to the

origin of thought in ancient civilizations along with attempts to undermine the historical

records that tied Christianity to Jews.[68] There was an attempt to root Christianity in an

Aryan culture that was perceived to be older than Jewish history and thus theoretically

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[65] "Such a science would not have been possible so long as 'religious ceremonies and customs' had remained commingled with the sundry facts, habits, and mores of tribal/national forms of life, as had been the case for many earlier writers." Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 65. See also Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History*, 25-28.

[66] An example can be found through the following statement of Max Müller: "Language still bears the impress of the earliest thoughts of man, obliterated, it may be, buried under new thoughts, yet here and there still recoverable in their sharp original outline." Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop*, 1:ix. Bosch, *Friedrich Max Müller*, 227-33.

[67] For documentation and discussion of the new departments and their chairs in universities see Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 107-09.

[68] This was often done in subtle ways such as the following statement of Max Müller: "What is now called the Christian religion, has existed among the ancients, and was not absent from the beginning of the human race." Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop*, 1:xi. Note that this statement is placed within a point in his writing meant to argue that Christianity is older than Judaism. Michael Rynkiewich points out that this was also an underlying motivation for anthropologists to develop their social evolutionary theories of culture and religion. Michael A. Rynkiewich, *Soul, Self, and Society: A Postmodern Anthropology for Mission in a Postcolonial World* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 136.

closer to the origins of humanity.[69] While many scholars who engaged with this were not directly implicated in anti-Semitism, their work aided anti-Semites and was heavily used during the Third Reich.[70]

The period of colonization in Africa and Asia was also reaching its high-water mark during this century. Europeans were spread around the globe as civil servants for colonial governments and as missionaries. Issues of superiority and inferiority were never far from the surface in the relationships between Europeans and the people they held hegemony over through colonial rule.[71] These presuppositions of superiority were often reinforced by the categorizations of religion being developed by scholars back in Europe during the nineteenth century.[72]

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[69] Ernest Renan is a prominent intellectual name in this trajectory. Jung, *Orientalists*, 102-17. For a summary of the rise of philology see Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, chap. 5. Müller certainly promoted Aryanism as the root of Western culture. Although his goals were not meant to propagate racial superiority often his work was used for that purpose despite his protests. Vial, *Modern Religion*, 106. See also Vinoth Ramachandra, "Globalization, Nationalism, and Religious Resurgence," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, eds. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 220.

[70] For more on the ties of philology and German anti-Semitism see Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 28-33. There certainly was a clear attempt to be anti-Jewish by many philologists of the nineteenth century. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 25.

[71] I am using hegemony in way similar to that defined by Gorringe (who is working off of Stuart Hall) as: "the process by which dominant ideas accumulate the symbolic power to map the world for others, so that they become the horizon of the taken-for-granted, setting the limit to what will appear as rational, reasonable, credible, indeed sayable or thinkable." Gorringe, *Furthering Humanity*, 130. While I focus on the Europeans and North Americans roles of hegemony in this chapter there have and continue to be relationships of hegemony going in all different directions in the world. For an example of discussions of hegemony among East Asia societies see Ji-Young Lee, *China's Hegemony: Four Hundred Years of East Asian Domination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

[72] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 456.

Clarifying the Distinction between Religion and Culture

The term culture entered the nineteenth century in one form and exited in two forms.[73] While the term culture would continue to be used to separate high society from the lower strata well into the twentieth century it would gain a new definition and meaning that coincided with this early use.[74] This can be most clearly traced to the work of the academic, E. B. Tylor.

Tylor reified the term culture as a descriptor of human constructed reality. This was done in light of the new "insights" he gained from social evolutionary theory along with the many ethnographical sources he had read. Combining these two elements, he created a complex description of humanity that spanned two volumes.[75] His definition of culture is as follows: "Culture or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."[76] This definition isolated issues of beliefs, practices, and perceived mentalities which allowed him to hierarchically organize people into a four-part scale. These were arranged in such a way that the lowest on the scale were the so-called "primitive" peoples such as tribal groups found in Africa, Oceania, and Australia; these groups were sometimes referred to as the

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[73] There are a number of good books detailing the history of the concept of culture. The classic text is Kroeber, *Culture*. See also Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, chaps. 1-3. Masuzawa, "Culture."

[74] Niebuhr's classic work *Christ and Culture*, which has been used by numerous theologians and missiologists as a paradigm setter, was meant to engage with the earlier definition of culture.

[75] Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. 1.

[76] Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1:1. Tylor relied heavily on Germans ethnographic research and his definition of culture has been shown to be directly rooted in German Idealism of the Kantian and Hegelian type. Adams, *The Philosophical Roots*, 296-98.

"zero of human society."[77] These "primitive" peoples were viewed as windows into how early humans lived. According to Tylor they had failed to advance in knowledge and civilization and thus represented an inferior and more original form of humanity.[78] The scale culminated in Europeans conveniently at the top of the hierarchy because they were, in Tylor's thinking, the most advanced group of people currently on the earth.[79] Tylor used the term "animism" to describe what he believed was the essence of all humanity, most clearly visible in "primitive" peoples.[80] This term is now found mostly in discussions of religion rather than culture and has had a resurgence in usage after an hiatus.[81]

For Tylor the grounding source of his enquiries is an objectifying rationality.[82] There is no other grounding source that he references, but he is clearly indebted to the

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[77] Adams, The Philosophical Roots, 59.

[78] Tylor often compared "primitive"' people to children or called them child-like, Chidester, *Empire of Religion*, 108.

[79] "He [Tylor] envisioned the human story as one of progress, and saw these advances as occurring in three basic stages: the savage, the barbaric, and the civilized." Timothy Larsen, *The Slain God: Anthropologists and the Christian Faith* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), 5. Kippenberg argues, although without many primary source quotations, that Tylor was not fully satisfied with the "progress" of Europeans and found some "relics" in primitive cultures that he wished had been retained. But this cannot possibly outweigh the evidence that reveals he felt Europeans were superior in general to primitive peoples. Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History*, 59.

[80] Larsen, *The Slain God*, 23. From the beginning "animism" has been a contested term. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 237.

[81] Darryl Wilkinson, "Is There Such a Thing as Animism?," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 85, no. 2 (2017). Rynkiewich, *Soul, Self, and Society*, 138n7. E. E. Evans-Pritchard points out the absurdity lying behind the construction of these terms as invented by the ethnographers and early anthropologists, much of which is still considered fact today. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1965), 11-12.

[82] In many ways Tylor was a purveyor of Enlightenment ideals and was actually more a "philosophe" than scientist. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 156.

work of Hegel and often mentions Hegel as an influencer.[83] His views of evolution were

primarily social in nature.[84] It is important to note as well that Tylor never did any serious

fieldwork; he relied primarily on the reports of others, including missionaries, for

empirical data.[85] He then believed it his duty to collate the data and make sense of it in

light of his philosophical presuppositions rooted in human reason. Many of those

working on anthropology around the time of Tylor held a fascination with "primitive,"

"prehistoric," and "animistic" peoples. It was believed that there was only a short

window of time left to study these "primitives" because they would soon be extinct either

through death or assimilation.[86] Despite the fact that Tylor was writing about *culture*

more than two-thirds of the book, *Primitive Culture*, was on religion, revealing that the

distinction between culture and religion was slow in coming.[87]

While many anthropologists recognize Tylor as the father of modern

anthropology they are quick to distance themselves from his theories. This is primarily

because his theories are rooted in simplistic understandings of non-Europeans that would

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[83] Another major philosophical influencer of Tylor was Auguste Comte, Larsen, *The Slain God*, 21.

[84] Tylor was a major influencer of Darwin, and actually developed his concepts of social evolution before Darwin had given a clear exposition of biological evolution. Angus Nicholls, "Against Darwin: Teleology in German Philosophical Anthropology," in *Historical Teleologies in the Modern World*, eds. Henning Trüper, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 97-101. See also Adams, *The Philosophical Roots*, 51; Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 179.

[85] Adams, *The Philosophical Roots*, 57. Evans-Pritchard has argued that much of this data was highly suspect and unreliable. Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion*, 6.

[86] Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 43. For a recent book that relooks at Tylor and his scholarly output see Paul-François Tremlett, Liam T. Sutherland, and Graham Harvey, eds., *Edward Burnett Tylor, Religion and Culture* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

[87] Kippenberg, Discovering Religious History, 54.

be considered racist and prejudiced in today's world.[88] His understanding of the social evolutionary nature of culture development has also been explicitly rejected by most anthropologists and sociologists. Despite these changes, Tylor's definition of culture remains normative. Very few subsequent anthropologists have offered drastically different definitions of culture and a large portion of the definitions in the anthropological literature are startlingly similar to Tylor's.[89] One reason for this is that the overarching project of anthropology was wrapped up in the teleology of "progress" or "progressivism."[90] The question remains to be answered as to whether Tylor's definition of culture can be disconnected from his presuppositions?[91]

Facets of the Study of Religion

The study of language, so prominent in the nineteenth century, also involved the work of re-creating human language history in order to account for the origins of human thought. The turn to human reason triggered a desire to understand what it meant for humans to be reasonable, which meant searching history for clues on how human thought had developed. There was a determination to locate the origins of human thought in order to know the *essence* of what it meant to be human. It had also become expedient that

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[88] In connection to this it is important to keep in mind that Tylor explicitly stated that one of his goals was to "expose" the superstitions of cultures or religions and destroy them. Jason Ānanda Josephson, *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 99.

[89] Kroeber and Kluckhohn, *Culture*.

[90] Adams, The Philosophical Roots, chap. 2.

[91] Eagleton argues that "we owe our modern notion of culture in large part to nationalism and colonialism, along with the growth of an anthropology in the service of imperial power." Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 26.

people be organized into a religious classificatory system in order to "manage the human diversity encountered globally."[92]

Once the *essence* of humanity was isolated it was hoped that universal and general principles of what it meant to be human could be inferred.[93] The work of universalizing and generalizing was considered one of the primary duties of the scholars of language and eventually the scholars of religion as well.[94] Jonathan Z. Smith writes, "the taxon 'world religions' while seemingly a demographic category" is in fact "a sublimation of an earlier division—'universal' religions in contradistinction to 'ethnic' or 'national' religions. This division itself is ultimately a sublimation of the earliest and most fundamental dichotomous division: 'ours' and 'theirs,' or 'true' and 'false.'"[95] Categories were developed that were meant to help scholars separate the languages and historical religions of the world into distinctly demarcated groups of higher and lower forms.[96] Religions that had sacred texts were assumed to have reason built into their *essence*, and were thus considered more advanced, or higher, than religions that lacked

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[92] Gottschalk, Religion, Science, and Empire, 50.

[93] Even the work of someone like Tiele, which was not far removed from how world religions are articulated today, believed he was doing a universal history of religion not religions, Tiele, *Outlines of the History*, x.

[94] Tylor was explicitly clear in his desire to generalize in his work on culture and religion. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1:10. Moving from the universal to the particular was at the heart of much of Enlightenment thinking and continued into the modern era. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 82.

[95] Smith, Relating Religion, 167.

[96] The terminology higher and lower religions have been in vogue for a long time now. Even Evans-Pritchard, who was generally tough on earlier works of anthropology, utilizes "higher" and "lower" in relation to religion. Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion*.

sacred texts and thus lacked reason.[97] This meant that whole continents such as Africa

and the Americas were left out of religion categorizations, or simply treated in a cursory

way as "primitive" and thus less worthy of sustained scholarly attention.[98]

Colonizers often utilized methods of universalizing for their own purposes.

Jennings points out that colonialists "universalized the earth" in order to "free it from the

strictures of particular ways of life."[99] This aided them in legitimizing taking land and

resources for themselves from local peoples. The universalizing tendencies of colonialists

thus served to empower themselves while disempowering local people.[100] Even the act of

classifying religions is implicated in this as the following quote from Max Müller in

Introduction to the Science of Religion demonstrates. "Let us take the old saying, *Divide*

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[97] Keep in mind that in a post-Kantian European world "The essence of humankind, reason, was considered exempt from historical change; yet, this essence still had to realize itself over the course of history by overcoming culturally established impediments and shedding prejudice, in particular as regarding political organization of humans *qua* social and communicative animals. History thus was conceived as a progressive process of the increasing perfection of humankind, a process over the course of which reason became transparent to itself." Henning Trüper, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Introduction: Teleology and History - Nineteenth-Century Fortunes of an Enlightenment Project," in *Historical Teleologies in the Modern World*, eds. Henning Trüper, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 6. It was based on this type of thinking that Hegel was able to "figure out" who was human and who was less than human, and who had a history and who did not.

[98] Richard King devotes an entire chapter of his book on Orientalism to the prioritizing of sacred texts in European scholarly interpretations of other religions. He notes that they were often texts written in languages such as Sanskrit and Pali which were not spoken languages and were known only by a small educated elite within Asia. King, *Orientalism and Religion*, chap. 3.

[99] Jennings, The Christian Imagination, 146.

[100] As Asad points out the term "local people" can easily just become a substitute for the outdated term "primitive." I use it in another sense, that Asad also delineates, to refer to people who are locatable, with my own addition that they were their first in that location. This tends to be more significant in situations where there is a shift in power from the original inhabitant by coercion or manipulation from a newcomer. Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 8.

et impera and translate it somewhat freely by 'Classify and conquer.'"[101] David Chidester

points out that "imperial theory" played a role in categorization and research. He writes,

"In the empire of religion, as we have noted, imperial theory operated with a distinction,

sometimes explicit, often implicit, between text-based 'world religions' and savage

religions, a distinction duplicating the bifurcated system of colonial governance that

established different laws for racialized citizens and ethnic, tribal, or savage subjects."[102]

In places such as India, according to an influential strand of European scholars,

religion was divided up between Brahmanic and Hindu with the *Vedas* and other texts

serving as the norm for what was considered high and low religion in India.[103] This is

seen in several books that attempted to categorize religion during the nineteenth century.

The key name in this whole exercise is Friederich Max Müller, often referred to as the

father of the scientific study of religion.[104] Müller was born and raised in Germany where

he completed his higher studies before immigrating to England where he taught and

translated sacred Sanskrit texts at Oxford. He was a keen student of Kant's philosophy,

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[101] Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 122-23. Chidester quotes this line from Müller as well and then comments, "More than merely a rhetorical flourish, this motto signaled Max Müller's imperial project, the promotion of a science of religion that generated global knowledge and power." Chidester, *Empire of Religion*, 62.

[102] Chidester, *Empire of Religion*, 46.

[103] Müller was a prolific translator of Sanskrit texts including the *Rig Veda*. Vial notes that for Müller the Vedas and Kant are tied together because for both "there is something infinite, not subject to nature. That is the basis of religion." In other words, Müller, read and translated the *Vedas* through his understanding of Kant's philosophy. Vial, *Modern Religion*, 111. Müller believed that the ancient *Vedas* contained the wisdom of earliest humanity and viewed them as on the same spiritual level as the Bible. Bosch, *Friedrich Max Müller*, 42.

[104] There are two excellent biographies on Müller. Bosch, *Friedrich Max Müller*. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary: The Life of Professor the Rt. Hon. Friedrich Max Müller* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1974).

and even rendered a translation of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.[105] He also was influenced by Hegel's work although attempted to avoid being a full Hegelian.[106] Schleiermacher's influence can also be seen in Müller's interest in the role of language in human history.[107] There is no doubt Müller had a very high view of human reason, although it was tempered by a Romantic twist,[108] and while he remained an active Christian, it was a Christianity that practically rooted its authority in human reason with Scripture playing a minor role.[109]

Müller never traveled outside of Europe but did have acquaintances in India whom he regularly corresponded with.[110] In many ways Müller had a much higher view

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[105] Müller's translation was published in 1881. Müller made it clear that his own scholarly work was being done within the framework that Kant had established, even if he was trying to work beyond it or more accurately build on it. Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 19-20. Bosch, *Friedrich Max Müller*, 239-40. For more on the influence of German Idealism on early philology see King, *Orientalism and Religion*, 128. Josephson also finds a Neoplatonist strand in Müller's work, which in no way would contradict the influence of these other philosophers, and in fact would go hand in hand with them in many ways. Josephson, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 113. Stocking also found other areas that Kant's philosophy impacted Müller's thinking see Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 307.

[106] Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 149. Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop*, 1:ix. Bosch, *Friedrich Max Müller*, 180-81. Hegel's greatest influence on Müller was through his views that a study of human language would lead to a better understanding of how humanity has evolved. Bosch, *Friedrich Max Müller*, 195.

[107] Vial, *Modern Religion*, 101-02. Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History*, 41-42. Wiebe argues that the desire to discover the "essence" of humanity through "religion" in the post-Enlightenment European world is traced to Schleiermacher. Wiebe, *Christian Theology*, 57.

[108] Kippenberg, Discovering Religious History, 37. Bosch, Friedrich Max Müller, 17.

[109] While Müller was not an orthodox Christian he was a firm believer that a more natural form of religion which included Christ (at least as a man) was still the pinnacle of all religions, see Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop*, 1:xx. For Müller humans contained some sort of inner essence that was rooted in language, but deeper than language, deeper than reason to a degree even, yet only accessible through scientific enquiry. This inner core was religion. Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 17; Oddie, *Imagined Hinduism*, 20n8; Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History*, 44; Bosch, *Friedrich Max Müller*, xix. There is also evidence that he incorporated some of his interpretations of the *Veda* into his spiritual outlook. Josephson, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 108.

[110] Prominent names in the study of philosophy, history, and social sciences who did not visit India but attempted to document Indian life and thought and create theories from their interpretations of India include: G. W. F. Hegel, Karl Marx, and Max Weber. Gottschalk, *Empire, Science, and Religion*, 7.

of Indians than the average European did at the time,[111] but this did not mean he was

opposed to colonization. He in fact believed Europeans had a superior civilization

compared to the rest of the world.[112] He believed that his work, as well as that of other

scholars, was a work of separating out "the truly religious elements in the sacred

traditions" to gain "a clearer insight into the *real* faith of the ancient Aryan world

(emphasis added)."[113] It was his expectation that through his interpretation of Indian

sacred texts he had found the true origin and essence of Indian religion which he hoped

would blossom again in India one day.[114] Müller was also a firm believer in the general

progress of ideas in history which was not unlike the teleology of many of his

contemporaries and predecessors.[115]

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[111] Müller presented a set of lectures entitled "India: What Can It Teach Us?" that was meant to create a more positive view of India at a time when Britain was in full colonial swing in India and when most English people had a very low view of Indians. This was subsequently published, see Friederich Max Müller, *India: What Can It Teach Us?* (London: Longmans and Green, 1883). But even within these sympathetic lectures there are clear signs that Müller was expounding on an India of the ancient past that he had invented. "I am thinking chiefly of India, such as it was a thousand, two thousand, it may be three thousand years ago." Müller, *India*. He was not alone in this regard as Sugirtharajah has demonstrated, others even earlier than Müller were doing the same. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and Asia*, 56.

[112] Müller also wrote extensively on Zulu language in Africa. In order to accomplish this, he had to rely on the accounts of missionaries in South Africa. Towards the end of his life, however, Müller recognized that working this way had major problems. He came to know that much of the data he had used to build major theoretical constructs was questionable at best and it caused him to engage in serious reflection on the whole process of knowledge building. Chidester, *Empire of Religion*, 81-82.

[113] Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop*, 1:xii. For more on Müller's development of the Aryan myth see Bosch, *Friedrich Max Müller*, 201-07.

[114] There is no doubt that Müller's translation work, especially of the *Rig Veda*, was valued and utilized by Indians in India. It was, however, often not used in the way Müller had intended. It served as a tool for nationalism and constructing a "Hindu" history that continues to be highly controversial in India. Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 117. Müller expressly desired that his translation of the *Rig Veda* would "give Hindus a better understanding of their past." Bosch, *Friedrich Max Müller*, xvii. In fact it was Müller's work which first gave the *Vedas* an air of canonicity akin to the Bible or the Qur'an, something that had not occurred to most Indians to do at that time. Ramachandra, "Globalization," 219.

[115] Bosch, Friedrich Max Müller, 181.

It is also during this time that the now standard terms, Hinduism and Buddhism, were made popular. These terms were, to a certain extent, invented by European scholars influenced by both missionary and colonial usage.[116] They were terms that came to be used to describe the "belief systems" which were essential for purposes of comparison by Europeans. This comparison was necessary to determine both connections between religions and also to isolate the *essence* of religion.[117] Thus, these terms were used to organize whole masses of people in Asia under headings that were rooted in European interpretations of sacred texts which may or may not have been important to Asians in India, China, and so on. In many ways the development of these terms took place within the intellectual reality whereby "the study of Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism were seen as having significance for colonial rule."[118] This does not mean that Asians had no say in the development of the categories.[119] Although it should be kept in mind that in India for example it was primarily the higher caste elite that aided Europeans in developing the category of Hinduism as an eclipsing descriptor of Indian

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[116] Brian Pennington pushes against, what he labels, the "faddish" idea that Hinduism was invented by the British. If what is meant by invention hinges on a view that there were not Hindus or widely shared views of deities, rituals, or beliefs prior to the British entrance to India then Pennington is correct. But often the term "invention" appears to mean something more along the lines of the British creating essentialized definitions of religion that failed to fully define the actual lived experience and beliefs of Indians primarily by overemphasizing the role of sacred texts and systems of belief in religion. Brian K. Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented? Britons, Indians, and Colonial Construction of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4.

[117] This desire to know the *essence* of religion and thus ultimately the essence of humanity found an early expression in the writings of Lord Herbert of Cherbury, often considered the father of deism. Harrison, *'Religion'*, 66-67.

[118] Van der Veer makes this statement concerning the Dutch and their colonies specifically in mind but it is generally true of other colonizing efforts. Veer, *The Modern Spirit of Asia*, 76.

[119] Josephson, The Invention of Religion in Japan.

religion in general.[120] The problem is that it described an ideal type that did not exist anywhere on the ground.[121]

Hinduism is a classic case of "the invention" of a world religion.[122] During the nineteenth century it was common to find Europeans dividing Indian religion between the allegedly Aryan influenced "Brahmanic religion" of philosophical sophistication, and the lower inferior "Hindu" religion found mostly among those of Dravidian background.[123] Masuzawa summarizes it this way:

> Brahmanism (i.e. Hinduism) was a quintessential case, being *the* religion of India, supposedly, despite the empirical fact that multiple, often contending, and always polymorphous cultic communities had existed in the Indian subcontinent for millennia. In spite of all that might be implied by the overwhelming multiplicity and heterogeneity of the locale, ever since Europeans learned to read Sanskrit, the spiritual genius of the Indian nation has been claimed to reside above all in the Vedas, styled "the sacred books of the Hindus" (emphasis in original).[124]

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[120] King, Orientalism and Religion, 74-119.

[121] Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Christianity in India: From Beginnings to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), chaps. 2-3. This is an example of what Geertz labels, "living detail is drowned in dead stereotype." Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 51.

[122] The debates on whether or not Hinduism was "invented" by British colonizers or that there was already in existence a unified religion in India prior to the arrival of the British is much contested. Peter van der Veer is probably right to see truth in both arguments but van der Veer is also clear this does not mean the British attempts to reify or invent Hinduism are less important even if there was some unity of religious thinking. Veer, *The Modern Spirit of Asia*, 67. For various views on this history see Oddie, *Imagined Hinduism*; Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented?*; S. N. Balagangadhara, *'The Heathen in His Blindness...': Asia, the West, and the Dynamic of Religion* (New York: Brill, 1994). Lipner, *Hindus*. Wendy Doniger, *The Hindus: An Alternative History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009).

[123] It should be noted that Aryan and Dravidian are often differentiated by skin color with Aryan being considered lighter skinned and Dravidian darker skinned, so issues of racial prejudice are lurking behind these categories. Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, 141. An influential strand of Indian intellectuals during the late nineteenth century appropriated Aryan theories to build up Hindu nationalism with a "reconstructed past" that allowed for a universalizing of Hinduism. Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, 49-50. The key names in this movement are Dayananda Sarasvati who founded the Arya Samaj and V. D. Savarkar who is credited with creating the Hindutva movement. The current Indian government is led by the BJP party which traces much of its ideology to this movement. Manisha Basu traces this movement in the literary works of India in *The Rhetoric of Hindu India: Language and Urban Nationalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

[124] Masuzawa, The Invention of World Religions, 133.

While some may argue that Indians themselves use the term Hinduism as a self-description this is not as straightforward as it may at first seem.[125] There are several ongoing debates within India concerning how and who gets to define Hinduism and whether or not it is an accurate descriptor at all.[126] The massive variety of practices, narratives, and beliefs currently found among self-identified Hindus in India along with the tremendous amount of eclecticism in India prior to the arrival of the British cause the category of "Hinduism" to be questioned.[127]

Buddhism, when it was "discovered" by Europeans took Europe's intellectuals by storm.[128] It quickly rose to the rank of a "universal" religion, not based on its geographical extent but rather based on the "textual construction" of Buddhism, basically uninformed by self-identified Buddhists.[129] The reality is that European scholars invented a religion they called Buddhism, which "came to be seen as expressed not 'out there' in the Orient, but in the West through the West's control of Buddhism's own textual

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[125] Gottschalk notes that Rammohun Roy appears to be the first Hindu to have used the term "Hinduism" and this occurred "four decades after its first recorded use by a Briton." Gottschalk, *Religion, Science, and Empire*, 31. This is a reminder that "we would double the disempowerment of those cultures upon which *religion* was foisted as an alien concept if we ignore the strategic and tactical uses to which its members appropriated the term and continue to modify and deploy it today (emphasis in original)." Gottschalk, *Religion, Science, and Empire*, 32.

[126] J. E. Llewellyn, ed. *Defining Hinduism: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

[127] Van der Veer discusses the great oral traditions of India, whereby sacred stories are passed on in countless forms, which are at times written down in history and show overlap but also contain huge variety. It was not until the arrival of the British and the work of Orientalists and philologists that there was active attempts to unify India's varieties of practices, narratives, and beliefs. Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, chap. 5. See also Gottschalk, *Religion, Science, and Empire*, 100-105.

[128] Donald S. Lopez Jr., has provided a helpful anthology of ways in which Europeans understood and portrayed the Buddha from 200 AD-1844 AD. Donald S. Lopez, *Strange Tales of an Oriental Idol: An Anthology of Early European Portrayals of the Buddha* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016). For most of this history Europeans viewed the Buddha as an idol and Buddhists as idol worshippers.

[129] The classic text on this is Philip C. Almond, *The British Discovery of Buddhism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988). The term Buddhism gained currency in the early part of the nineteenth century.

past."[130] Thus "the newly recognized tradition won designation as a world religion, solely on the strength of the original, 'true Buddhism,' sometimes called 'primitive Buddhism' or even 'pure Buddhism'—available only to European scholars who read the ancient texts—and not on account of any of its later corrupt forms, that is, the localized, nationalized, and indigenized Buddhism's actually found in modern Asia."[131] Oftentimes self-identified Buddhists were viewed as inferior to Europeans and, it was argued, that the practices of Buddhists exhibited an inherent laziness.[132]

Islam, while not an "ism" went through a similar process.[133] During the seventeenth century there was a new interest in Islam that tended to be more open-minded and less polemical than was previously the case. This was partly due to the new openness towards different religions that resulted from the fatigue of religious fighting that took place during the Wars of Religion in Europe.[134] Orientalism, which has been heavily attacked by postcolonial critiques, was the overt attempt by certain European scholars to order and categorize people into objective categories for scientific purposes

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[130] Almond, The British Discovery of Buddhism, 13. Masuzawa, The Invention of World Religions, 126.

[131] Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 131. Monier Monier-Williams, the chair of Sanskrit studies at Oxford in the late nineteenth century, went so far as to claim that true Buddhism was understood better by European scholars than by Asians. Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 187. See also Balagangadhara, *The Heathen*, 145.

[132] Almond, The British Discovery of Buddhism, 49-51.

[133] Jung, Orientalists.

[134] Stroumsa, *A New Science*, chap. 6.

primarily in the Middle East.[135] This, whether intentional or not, took away a form of

agency from non-Europeans that remains influential through the inherited categories of

world religions.[136] Jung, who has lived and worked in North Africa for a number of years

asked the following questions: "why [is] Islam so frequently represented in the holistic

terms of an all-encompassing socio-religious system? How is the persistence of this

specific image of Islam to be explained against all empirical evidence? . . . . Why, so the

mind-boggling question, do then so many Muslims and non-Muslims nevertheless retain

this essentialist image of 'true Islam'?"[137] This demonstrates how essentialized

definitions of a religion can become normative both for the "outsider" and "insider"

despite empirical evidence to the contrary.[138]

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[135] The classic source for this critique is Said, *Orientalism*. It has been eclipsed by a number of subsequent works. There are those who defend the idea that not all "Orientalists" were bad nor that they were all engaged in hegemonic endeavors, this is probably true and needs to be taken into account, however, this does not negate the overall power and influence that went one way in the Orientalists endeavors. Vinoth Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict? Christian Integrity in a Multicultural World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 123-124.

[136] Masuzawa devotes a whole chapter to the issue of European scholars understandings of Islam during the modern era, see Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, chap. 6. King reminds his readers that part of the Orientalizing process required creating and essentializing the West as well, see King, *Orientalism and Religion*, 3. It is valid, I argue, that not all religions or definitions of religion are equally equally problematic. Muslims may tend to share certain beliefs and practices more widely than Hindus, yet there is no doubt that Islam has often been poorly essentialized and thus reduced to either a simple set of beliefs or practices or even more problematic to certain extreme fringe movements that claim to be Islamic.

[137] Jung, *Orientalists*, 1. Shahab Ahmed, the renowned Muslim scholar wrote a lengthy volume demonstrating clearly the challenges of attempting to essentialize the huge varieties of ways Muslims self-identify and live out their faith. Ahmed also clarifies that the vast differences do not negate the possibility for shared identities among Muslims who are so different but it certainly complicates how a person would relate to Muslims in the everyday setting. Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).

[138] For a concise history of the challenge's anthropologists have had in describing Islam in its local and global manifestations with a potential alternative approach see Ovamir Anjum, "Islam as a Discursive Tradition: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27, no. 3 (2007). Islam is clearly different in its many manifestations of daily living among Muslims across the globe, this does not negate things that many Muslims share but problematizes the essentialized image Islam is so often described as. Nilüfer Göle, *The Daily Lives of Muslims: Islam and Public Confrontation in Contemporary Europe* (London: Zed, 2015).

In Japan the English term "religion" was used twice in an official communication between American warships and a Japanese magistrate in 1853 when Americans were attempting to enter Japanese territory.

> When Japanese translators encountered the term 'religion,' they had no idea what it meant. They produced multiple versions of the American letters, rendering 'religion' with a range of terms, each of which implied something radically different. No word then existed in the Japanese language equivalent to the English term or covering anything close to the same range of meanings.[139]

It is important to recognize that this was not purely the work of foreigners. Japanese agents also played a major role in creating "religion" for political as well as other expedient reasons. This meant reclassifying the Buddhist, Confucius, and Shinto elements that existed during the late nineteenth century in Japan,[140] demonstrating how "religion" can develop within the context of outside influence with the purpose of classifying people into essentialized categories with obvious political intentions.

Reason and autonomous human experience continued to hold sway as the primary source for grounding theories of religion. This was intellectual European reason while the self-identity constructs of Asians, Africans, and Native Americans were rarely considered in the process of categorization. The categories were rooted in Europeans references to human reason that were rooted in an understanding that European civilization was superior to the rest of the world.[141] German Idealism was especially influential in the

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[139] Josephson, The Invention of Religion in Japan, 1.

[140] Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan*, 2-3. A survey taken in Japan found that a majority of Japanese identify with a number of so-called "religions" at the same time, which means in the mind of many Japanese these are not mutually exclusive categories. Richard, "New Paradigms for Religion," 301.

[141] This act of objectifying is heavily critiqued with a "plea for the importance of the subject in social sciences," by V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), 23.

development of categories of religions, and especially enamored with reason to the point

that, "rationalism, as embraced in German philosophy, involved not so much the exercise

of reason as the worship of reason."[142] Masuzawa insightfully finds a connection between

the work of European scholars of religion under the influence of German Idealism and

Reason:

> Perhaps it was almost as though they could imagine that something like a Kantian
> idea of God—what Kant called the ideal of pure reason, qua postulate of reason, that
> is, as necessary guarantor of the unity of knowledge and therefore of the possibility of
> science—had long ago been posited by Buddhism in its gloriously plain, primitive
> Aryan nakedness.[143]

In other words, these scholars believed they had found "pure Reason" in the

sacred texts of ancient peoples. Even when it became obvious that places such as India

had a very old and complex history, both politically and philosophically, a number of

European scholars attempted to co-opt this history as their own Aryan history thus aiming

to turn Indian history into European history.[144]

This does not mean that all the scholarly work was of no use or needs to be

rejected. Much of the work done in the history of languages is revealing and shows strong

connections between parts of the world that are geographically disconnected. The

continued growth in recognition that the world was full of different types of people led to

a more accurate understanding of the world's inhabitants. Bringing to light ancient texts

can serve the purpose of detailing history in a more careful way that sheds light on earlier

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[142] Adams, The Philosophical Roots, 270.

[143] Masuzawa, The Invention of World Religions, 188.

[144] Sugirtharajah, *The Bible in Asia*, 55. There appeared to be an ongoing struggle, starting around the time of the Enlightenment, on into the early twentieth century whereby, "Modern thought is pledged to a kind of applied Hegelianism: seeking its Self in its Other. Europe seeks itself in the exotic—in Asia, in the Middle East, among pre-literate peoples, in a mythic America." Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1986), 69.

societies and ways of living that can inform the present. We cannot go back to a time before the Enlightenment nor should this be seen as an ideal to aim for. These positives, however, should not blind researchers to the realities within the hegemonic projects of many Europeans and North Americans during this time.[145]

The fact that religions were often divided up in such a way that tribal groups, which most of Africa was qualified as, were considered "primitive" and thus less worthy of discussion is also highly problematic. While at times scholars inserted discussions on primitive religions, or African religions, this was usually done to demonstrate a certain human *essence* which higher societies no longer carried in clear form or used to explain why these religions were not equal to the high or universal religions.[146] Even Müller, who had an interest in the Zulu language and had access to ethnographic material from missionaries to South Africa, believed that "their language and religion had no history."[147]

There also began a new type of divide in religious categorization between universal and national religions. Early on in this type of categorization Christianity, Judaism, and Buddhism were often categorized as universal, while Islam was on the

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[145] This can be seen in the unequal treaties that Western nation states reached with East Asian states or in the use of categorization and scientific methods to categorize people in order to control them by Western colonizers. While local people continued to exercise certain levels and methods of agency, it is impossible to ignore that European colonizers did hold power in certain forms that was hegemonic. Gottschalk, *Religion, Science, and Empire*, 30-31.

[146] Notice that many discussions on Africa, from the nineteenth century into the present, assume an essentialized definition of Africa as a homogenous cultural and religious place. This is a blatantly false conceptualization, Africa being extremely diverse just as are most continents. Yet this is rarely grasped and understood by religious and social science theorists in their conceptualization of religion on the continent. Appiah, *In My Father's House*.

[147] Vial, *Modern Religion*, 115. For an in-depth study of South Africa and the Zulu as it relates to the development of the concept of religion in the work of colonizers, intermediaries, and local populations see Chidester, *Empire of Religion*.

fence as somewhat universal and somewhat national. The core divider was not based on

geography but on a perceived shared core *essence*. Thus, most religions did not qualify as

universal because they did not contain the core *essence* required to be a universal

religion. This may be rooted in what Masuzawa states as being:

> Some underlying logic silently at work in all variations [of categorizing world religions]. . . . At its simplest and most transparent, this logic implies that the great civilizations of the past and present divide into two: venerable East on the one hand and progressive West on the other… In a word, the East preserves history, the West creates history. In contradistinction from both East and West, the tertiary group of minor religions has been considered lacking in history, or at least lacking in written history.[148]

This was related to the desire to find the essence of humanity within religious language or

categorization. Most religions did not have the necessary qualifiers, such as being

monotheistic or rational.[149]

Summarizing the Nineteenth Century

While the categorization of religions would continue to evolve into the twentieth

century, much of the ground work was accomplished in the nineteenth century. As a

result, typical textbooks on religion, even to the present, are heavily reliant on the

formulas used for categorization developed in the nineteenth century. "Primitive"

religions remain a novelty. Although no longer called "primitive" they are still separated

out as tribal or traditional religions and thus are usually given less space, if any at all, in

textbooks on world religions. This means that Africa and the Native American

"religions" continue to be marginalized and viewed as less than world religions. This was

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[148] Masuzawa, The Invention of World Religions, 4.

[149] For a discussion of the divide between universal and national see Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 110-19.

done with intentionality during the nineteenth century by colonizers.[150] The research and "archiving" of information concerning "savage tribes" by such imperialist nations as Germany, England, Holland, and Japan was meant to aid the empires in their control and exploitation of local populations.[151] Along with this human reason remained the encompassing normative concept that guided the categorizing processes.

Developments in the Twentieth Century

During the twentieth century religion and culture continued to be defined as distinct concepts. Even so, definitions of religion and culture often overlapped, and it was hard to know where one concept ended and the other began. The reality of two World Wars that engulfed Europe and much of Asia and North Africa also changed the positivistic outlook of much of science and philosophy, making way for postmodern critiques. Colonialism, as an overt political force, began to crumble as more and more nations gained independence from European overlords. Subsequently much scholarly work has attempted to deconstruct many of the Enlightenment influenced constructions in thought and science.[152]

It was during the twentieth century that the rise of anthropology, and then sociology, as scientific disciplines took place. For both of these disciplines religion and culture were significant categories. Because this Chapter is focused on religion, the

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[150] Native Americans have suffered from government policy that is rooted in the nineteenth century which stated that one reason Native Americans could be disenfranchised was because they "had no religion" and were thus "uncivilized." Tinker, "The Romance and Tragedy," 22.

[151] Chidester, *Empire of Religion*, 46-47.

[152] This was not necessarily a new tension, but it did take on new proportions and took some of the intellectual power away from science, whereas when the tension existed in the nineteenth century science still held sway in most cases in the study of religion. Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History*, 194.

analysis will be focused on some of the anthropological and sociological uses and understandings of religion as a descriptor of human beings.

<div align="center">Anthropology</div>

Anthropology began to gain in sophistication during this century. While there continued to be influential armchair anthropological works, such as *The Golden Bough* by James George Frazer, anthropology as a whole began to take much more seriously the need for fieldwork.[153] Names such as Franz Boas, Bronislaw Malinowski,[154] Alfred Radcliffe-Brown,[155] Ruth Benedict,[156] Margaret Mead,[157] E. E. Evans-Pritchard,[158] and Claude Lévi-Strauss[159] dominated the anthropological scene. Amazingly, despite all the

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[153] Frazer's work is tied directly to the philosophy of Hegel as Frazer freely admits that his theory on history is very similar to Hegel's and even devotes an appendix to Hegel in the first volume of *The Golden Bough* see James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, vol. 1 (New York: MacMillan, 1935), 423. Larsen observes the following concerning *The Golden Bough*: "His [Frazer's] work is generally, if not universally, dismissed today by anthropologists, but they are nonetheless saddled with the reality that *The Golden Bough* is the most popular and influential book in the history of the discipline in terms of its wider cultural impact." Larsen, *The Slain God*, 40. Frazer basically worked with the same assumptions and categories that E. B. Tylor had developed. Larsen, *The Slain God*, 5. It has been shown that most of Frazer's writing was not based in actual facts from the field but was his own literary imagination, this however, did not stop his work from having profound social implications. Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History*, 89. For an example of Frazer's description of religion influencing biblical studies see Harvie M. Conn, *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds: Theology, Anthropology, and Mission in Trialogue* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 66.

[154] Malinowski is often cited as the first anthropologist to promote fieldwork. Larsen, *The Slain God*, 5-6.

[155] Radcliffe-Brown is often credited with the theory of functional structuralism which has been highly influential in anthropological theory in the twentieth century, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Method in Social Anthropology: Selected Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

[156] Her classic work is Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1934).

[157] Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilisation* (New York: W. Morrow and Company, 1928). This book brought Mead widespread recognition and also created a long controversy over anthropological methods and possibilities.

[158] Evans-Pritchard, Theories of Primitive Religion.

[159] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

changes in methodology the basic definitions of culture remained similar to that of

Tylor.[160]

The basic goals of anthropology through the first half of the twentieth century did

not alter much from the late nineteenth century. While anthropologists wrote in new

ways, it appears that the primary goal was still to try and access the *essence* of humanity

through comparisons.[161] Human reason continued to play the role of normative arbiter in

the research process.[162] Over time and through research certain presuppositions had to be

discarded such as theories about social evolution, race, and certain "universals" that could

not be empirically verified.[163]

Anthropology continued to focus on remote tribes or "backward" peoples as

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[160] In Kroeber and Kluckhohn's influential history of culture they give different titles to various approaches to definitions of culture. Under the title "Descriptive" you find most of the prominent anthropologists of the last century. The "Descriptive" definition is qualified as being "usually influenced by Tylor" but includes anthropologists through the 1960s when the book was published. Kroeber and Kluckhohn, *Culture*, 81-88. Missiologists should note that Paul Hiebert's often quoted definition of culture is very similar to the definition of E. B. Tylor which begs the question of presuppositional starting points. Paul G. Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983), 25.

[161] Malinowski, in his influential ethnography of the Kula in Papua New Guinea, describes ethnography as a work that's ultimate goal is to delve into the "mind" of humanity. Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagos of Melanesian New Quinea* (London: Routledge, 1922), xi. Malinowski's interest in anthropology was triggered by a reading of *The Golden Bough* and James George Frazer wrote the "Preface" for his book. While there is no doubt Malinowski desired, at least outwardly, to maintain a sense of objectivity, James Clifford's analysis of Malinowski's own diaries reveals that Malinowski desperately struggled with issues of ethics and God as they related to his research and his self-identity. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 103-04.

[162] This has continued into the twenty-first century, see Matthew Engelke, *How to Think Like an Anthropologist* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), chap. 8.

[163] Even the hope, that Malinowski had once propagated, that studying one "primitive society would make it possible to understand the 'universal motivations' present in all societies" has had to be tempered. Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, 78.

"Other" and thus as their study objects.[164] They viewed their research societies as laboratories.[165] Anthropologists believed that there was no way around this in order to try and achieve neutral and objective results that would stand up to scientific criteria. But as Adams states, "Other is better than we or worse, different or similar, but is never morally neutral."[166] As research data grew it became apparent that humanity was thoroughly diverse in beliefs and practices. The theory of cultural relativism was born as people from different parts of the world were observed using similar tools, concepts, and ideas in a variety of different ways. The theory—cultural relativism—became an established anthropological fact.[167] This brought a new challenge to a discipline that was built on the foundations of universalizing, generalizing, and *essentializing* human essence.[168]

Further developments in theory ensued. The British school of anthropology moved towards a functionalist approach to culture. Anthropologists who argued in favor of cultural relativism posited that all cultural goods were rooted in some sort of function in relation to wider society, including religion which was subsumed under the category of

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[164] Adams, The Philosophical Roots, 1.

[165] Benedict, *Patterns of Culture*, 17. Balagangadhara sarcastically writes, "If you are a botanist or a zoologist, you need to go to the areas where the specimens are located, so that you may meticulously observe and record. If you are an anthropologist, then the same practice is called 'doing fieldwork.'" Balagangadhara, *The Heathen*, 75.

[166] Adams, The Philosophical Roots, 2.

[167] While Franz Boas laid the groundwork for the concept of cultural relativism, Ruth Benedict can be credited with giving the concept clarity and popularity in North America. Benedict writes, "Social thinking at the present time has no more important task before it than that of taking adequate account of cultural relativity." Benedict, *Patterns of Culture*, 278.

[168] Generalizing and essentializing are two of the most challenging words that anthropologists can hear. Both terms are unavoidable in the discipline and both terms easily lead to objectifying people. Engelke, *How to Think*, 48-49. While universalizing and generalizing are not inherently wrong it is very difficult to develop concepts of human life and society that are universal and general which avoid using the universalizer and generalizers own context as the benchmark for evaluation. One way anthropologists have attempted to avoid this is to be more objective in their research but this then often leads to turning people into scientific objects to study which is also problematic.

culture. This allowed anthropologists to dodge questions of origins and allowed them to interpret the lives of people in such a way that if done properly they could figure out what each cultural object and thought meant functionally within the framework of the culture as a whole.[169] Oftentimes religion was reduced to a cultural element that had a function just like everything else.[170]

American anthropology tended towards relativism, although it also adhered to a type of structural-functionalism similar to Britain, and tended to focus on the gathering of data. Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead popularized anthropology through their works which were attempts to generalize rather than simply gather and interpret bits and pieces of ethnographic information.[171] Although the language was often implicit, Benedict and Mead continued to search for the *essence* or *Geist* of humanity.[172] The issue of origins continued to plague anthropology, which had been so closely tied with evolutionary thought early on.[173] Franz Boas' fieldwork undermined much of the theoretical premises of evolutionary anthropology, yet the field as a whole never has been able to move outside evolutionary influences. Rather than attempt to re-create the origins of humans,

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[169] The avoidance of origins forced anthropologists of this school to take even more seriously the immanentized present with almost no recourse to anything outside the present. While this did away with the difficult questions of origin it left little normative work for the anthropologist to do other than simply describe people, often without a clear purpose. This aided the turn to cultural relativism which was a more accurate view of culture in general but still struggled to argue why it mattered. Conn, *Eternal Word*, 103.

[170] For some, such as Radcliffe-Brown, this meant abandoning the term culture altogether. See Kroeber and Kluckhohn, *Culture*. There was also a movement to abandon the term among anthropologists in the 1980s as well. Engelke, *How to Think*, 49-50.

[171] Adams, The Philosophical Roots, 321.

[172] Adams, The Philosophical Roots, 318-19.

[173] While the relativity of culture is not difficult to establish, the issues of origins lies at the grounding foundation of much anthropological work yet continues to be an area of speculation rather than based on clear empirical data.

much of cultural and social anthropology has focused on describing current human

societies and cultures for comparison purposes, thus avoiding issues of origins. Cultural

anthropology has its roots in this shift, and is the favorite form of anthropology that

missiologists have used. Religion tends to be one cultural element among many that is

socially derived in much of this type of anthropological research.

Anthropology has struggled to rebound from the realization that there is no such

thing as a bounded culture.[174] Rather than describing people as bounded societies, it has

become clear that cultures must be described as fluid.[175] While anthropologists recognize

this, they have often struggled to figure out their role as a result of this breakdown in

theory.[176] Amazingly, often definitions of culture continue to work off of the basic

premises posited in Tylor's definition of the 1870s, despite the drastic changes in

methodology.[177] Anthropologists' attempts to define religion as a sub-set of culture is

caught up in this conundrum, making bounded understandings of religion very difficult to

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[174] Clifford Geertz has done more than any other anthropologist in terms of theory development during the mid- to late-twentieth century. Geertz's work is worth careful reading and is often quoted by social scientists, philosophers, missiologists, and theologians. Yet, even he cannot get around the issue of origins. By far the weakest chapter in his book *The Interpretations of Cultures* is chapter 3 "The Growth of Culture and the Evolution of Mind." This begs the question of Geertz's foundations, in other words what is he grounding his theory in, other than the basic recognition that culture is relative? From my reading I see a strong pull towards deconstruction that is highly useful and creates space for solid reconstruction, although Geertz does not, in my opinion, does not do as well in the reconstruction aspects. See Geertz, *Interpretations of Cultures*.

[175] Rynkiewich, Soul, Self, and Society.

[176] The "scientific" nature of anthropology is such that theories, such as bounded cultures, are hard to lose because so much theoretical work is wrapped up inside that concept. Seeing people groups as laboratories continues to be the norm for many anthropologists because it is the only way objectivity seems possible. For a well-written description, in autobiographical style, of the college experience to fieldwork to academic engagement process for anthropologists see Adam Kuper, *Among the Anthropologists: History and Context in Anthropology* (New Brunswick, NJ: The Athlone Press, 1999), chap. 2.

[177] Despite Clifford Geertz's explicit argument in opposition to Tylorian approaches to defining and explaining culture. Geertz, *Interpretations of Cultures*, 4.

defend.[178] James Clifford has seriously problematized much of ethnographic discourse

and its precarious relationship with hegemony.[179] He has also given clear signals that the

world's diverse ways of living have changed but they continue to be diverse nonetheless.

This creates challenges for any anthropologist or ethnographer looking to make universal

statements or work within an "Hegelian vision," as Clifford puts it.[180] In fact, according

to William Dyrness, anthropologists struggle because they no longer dare "to speak of

what it means to be human" because this has been dismissed "as an Enlightenment

abstraction," yet they find themselves left with a very limited vocabulary for describing

what they do find as a result.[181]

Sociology

The discipline of sociology finds its roots in the late nineteenth and early

twentieth centuries. Emile Durkheim is often considered to be the father of the discipline.

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[178] Geertz argued that anthropologists after World War II have struggled mightily to come up with any new theoretical advances in their understanding of religion. He basically argued that anthropologists were beholden to theories of religion developed by "Durkheim, Weber, Freud, or Malinowski." This was written in the 1970s but it seems that this is still an issue to a certain extent. Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 87. Of course one could argue that Geertz did not do much better, especially in the fact that he continued the tradition of seeing religion as a sub-set of culture. Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 91.

[179] Rynkiewich finds similar issues: "From the beginning, anthropology was a Western discipline, shaped by Western questions and attempting to find answers that made sense in Western categories. Anthropology is still a Western discipline." Rynkiewich, *Soul, Self, and Society*, 169.

[180] Clifford, The Predicament of Culture, 17.

[181] William A. Dyrness, *The Earth Is God's: A Theology of American Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 64. Dyrness reveals a number of cracks in much of the anthropological work that was done in the twentieth century. He asks a similar question to what this project is asking, "Could it be that the tools that their [anthropologists] history has bequeathed to them, however valuable they are in so many ways, are not up to the job that anthropologists are setting out to do?" Dyrness, *The Earth Is God's*, 66. Some anthropological work has the further issue of being implicated in the neo-colonial work of the United States. Engelke, *How to Think*, 13. For a very helpful history of anthropology in the latter half of the twentieth century up until about 2000 see Kuper, *Among the Anthropologists*, chap. 3. Kuper demonstrates that the postmodern turn has created a conundrum of identity in the discipline of anthropology with questions ranging from who gets to do ethnographies? To who should anthropologists be focused on as an audience? And many other questions in between.

Sociologists focused on studying "developed civilizations" of the Western world as they defined it rather than "primitive" tribal groups. Sociology was born in the world of colonialism and it cannot be understood outside this influence. Europe and North America were the focus of sociological studies, and even when other parts of the world were brought into sociological theories, they were brought in by comparing them with European and North American nation-states.[182]

Religion was a primary concept within many early theories of sociology. One of Durkheim's most influential works was an attempt to get at the root of religion, to break it down into its clearest generalization.[183] This required locating religion in its simplest forms.[184] Durkheim came to the conclusion that "whether simple or complex, all known religious beliefs display a common feature: They presuppose a classification of the real or ideal things that men conceive of in two classes that are widely designated by two distinct terms, which the words *profane* and *sacred* translate fairly well."[185] He also believed that religion had higher and lower forms.[186] Religion was a socially constructed reality for Durkheim, but real nonetheless. People had no choice, according to him, as to whether or

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[182] It is revealing that some "postcolonial governments have restricted fieldwork by European anthropologists, and have themselves tended to reject anthropology for sociology—which in the European tradition has been the human science devoted to the study of 'civilized' societies." Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 290.

[183] Durkheim's own journey of faith was complex. He was born into a Jewish family but did not remain closely attached to their Jewish faith in his adult years, instead he basically espoused a kind of agnostic approach towards God. W. S. F. Pickering, *Durkheim's Sociology of Religion: Themes and Theories* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 18-23.

[184] Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 1, 5.

[185] Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms*, 34. For more on the sacred and profane in Durkheim's writing see Pickering, *Durkheim's Sociology*, chaps. 7-8.

[186] Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, 1-2.

not they were religious. Even those who claimed not to be religious lived within spheres

of the sacred and profane, as defined by Durkheim. He relied heavily on previously

developed concepts such as totemism and taboo to develop his thesis.[187] These were

rooted in prior usage by Tylor and Frazer.[188] Durkheim made many universal assertions

about religion that he claimed were true of all religions which has since fallen under

heavy critique, but which makes sense in the history of religious studies that has often

thrived on generalizations about religion.[189]

Max Weber, another influential thinker in sociological theory, and social sciences

in general, in his book *The Sociology of Religion* did not even see the need to define

religion.[190] He assumed people understood what he meant by the term and proceeded to

comment on several major world religions in his attempt to develop a sociology of

religion. He shared with Durkheim the presupposition that religion was a socially

constructed reality. Weber may have been influenced by his Christian upbringing,

although it remains unclear to what extent this impacted him.[191] He certainly wrote his

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[187] Pickering, *Durkheim's Sociology*, 109-14.

[188] For Frazer's use of these terms as well as their connection to magic and religion see Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, chap. 4. For Durkheim's recognition but also disagreement with Frazer see Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms*, 21. Durkheim also tended to work within Kantian categories and some have labeled him a neo-Kantian. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms*, 8. Pickering, *Durkheim's Sociology*, 119. For more on Durkheim's view of reason and the role of objective science in the study of religion see Pickering, *Durkheim's Sociology*, 21, 95-102. Durkheim was also heavily influenced by the work of Robertson Smith, who was not altogether different from Tylor and Frazer, though he certainly had his own peculiar research ideas concerning the origin and roots of humanities religiousness. Pickering, *Durkheim's Sociology*, 62-70.

[189] Pickering, Durkheim's Sociology, 105.

[190] Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, 4th ed. (London: Methuen, 1963), 1.

[191] The verdict is still out on Weber's spiritual life and journey. This is due mainly to the fact that the family has held so tightly to his personal papers and letters. Only recently have a much larger amount of his letters been made available. As a result, Josephson argues that Weber, through his letters, betrays a person who was greatly disturbed and troubled by questions of spirituality and mysticism. This may have influenced his theory of disenchantment although to what extent remains to be fully accounted for. Josephson, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, chap. 10.

sociological theories from a perceived agnosticism that attempted to gather objective

facts in order to make generalized observations. Weber's work cannot be separated from

the time and place he was working in. The progressive potential of Europe infected

Weber and impacted his approach to religion.[192]

Later, sociologists followed in the paths paved by Durkheim and Weber. Peter

Berger may be the most well-known twentieth century sociologist outside of Durkheim

and Weber.[193] He also described religion as a socially constructed reality and theorized

that it would give way to a secularized world. He later admitted that his theories on

secularization did not come true.[194] Weber had explicitly sought to disenchant the world

as an appropriate way forward toward progress, which leads us back to the teleology of

Kant and others who saw progress in terms of pure reason along with scientific growth as

the way towards a peaceful and perfect society. These philosophical presuppositions were

behind Berger's prediction of secularity as well.

Most sociological work struggles with the same issues of grounding that

anthropology has. It is often grounded in a high view of human reason, rooted in

Enlightenment philosophies, while sociologists continue to articulate their findings within

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[192] Mitsutoshi Horii, "Historicizing the Category of 'Religion' in Sociological Theories: Max Weber and Emile Durkheim" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Boston, November 18-21, 2017). There is evidence that he was influenced by his reading of James George Frazer, and that to a certain extent his disenchantment thesis was found in an earlier form in Frazer's writings. Josephson, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, chap. 5.

[193] His most well-known book is Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967).

[194] Berger admitted that his theory on the rise of secularism was flawed and had not come true as expected in Peter L. Berger, "Epistemological Modesty: An Interview," *The Christian Century* 114, no. 30 (1997). For a recent discussion of this see Philip Gorski and Jeffrey Guhin, "The Ongoing Plausibility of Peter Berger: Sociological Thoughts on *the Sacred Canopy* at Fifty," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 85, no. 4 (2017). Berger also grew more explicit in his faith in God, although certainly not an Evangelical he did go so far as to even publish a book on his faith see Peter L. Berger, *Questions of Faith: A Skeptical Affirmation of Christianity* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004).

the language of a European and North American dominated field. This does not mean

that sociology has not contributed important things to the wider field of knowledge. The

work of Durkheim can and has been helpful in creating theoretical possibilities for

research.[195] Weber has contributed significant insights into the history of capitalism as

well as methodological insights. Even the idea of religion being socially constructed

which many sociologists adhere to can be beneficial.

Simultaneously, questions and issues rooted in the European Enlightenment

approaches to knowledge and ontology continue to dominate the field of sociology.

Because of the inherent bias sociological studies have had for so-called Western societies

over and against non-Western societies, it has been difficult for societies outside of the

Western hemisphere to be recognized as legitimate fields for sociological research.

Science, History, and Philosophy of Religion

Much like the social sciences above, the various disciplines of religious studies

went through changes in the twentieth century that impact how religion is understood and

categorized.[196] The study of the history of religion continued to be a major field of study

due to the influence of people such as Mircea Eliade and Gerardus van der Leeuw. Eliade

continued to search for the *essence* of religion which he perceived in rituals and beliefs of

religions, as his published works demonstrate.[197] Van der Leeuw, was also interested in in

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[195] For an example of a very creative and useful application of Durkheim's theory see Smith, *Relating Religion*, chap. 4.

[196] For those interested in getting an overview of different theories of religion stemming from the late nineteenth into the mid-twentieth century consult Daniel L. Pals, *Nine Theories of Religion*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

the *essence* of religion but approached religion from a different phenomenological angle. He desired to describe religious phenomenon from a more explicitly objective point of view.[198] Nevertheless, his methodology is, as he admits, rooted in the philosophical work of Hegel, the philological work of Müller, and the phenomenological work of Schleiermacher, among others.[199]

In more recent decades the very idea of religion has come under increasing attack from postmodern and postcolonial approaches to scholarship. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, in the 1960s, gave the clarion call to abandon the term religion because he believed it created false realities that were not reflected among actual adherents to religions.[200] He preferred the term faith in place of religion; this, however, has not caught on, but his basic critique of the concept has.[201] Others such as, Jonathan Z. Smith,[202] Russell T.

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[197] Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (New York, N: Sheed and Ward, 1958), xi. "His [Eliade's] influence in the study of religions is enormous" so states Vial who demonstrates that Eliade's methodology was heavily tied to the influence of Schleiermacher. Vial, *Modern Religion*, 60. For an overview of Eliade from a critical perspective see Smith, *Relating Religion*, chaps. 2-3. For a critique of Eliade's overall approach to religion see King, *Orientalism and Religion*, 70.

[198] "Phenomenology, therefore, is neither metaphysics, nor the comprehension of empirical reality. It observes *restraint* (the *epoche*), and its understanding of events depends on its employing "brackets." Phenomenology is concerned only with "phenomena", that is with "appearance"; for it, there is nothing whatever "behind" the phenomenon (emphasis in original)." Geradus van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 675. Van der Leeuw was very much interested in figuring out the *essence* of religion. Conn, *Eternal Word*, 107-08.

[199] Leeuw, Religion in Essence, 690-95.

[200] Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*. See also Ellen Bradshaw Aitken and Arvind Sharma, eds., *The Legacy of Wilfred Cantwell Smith* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2017).

[201] Taylor summarizes the issues well, "But what is 'religion'? This famously defies definition, largely because the phenomena we are tempted to call religious are so tremendously varied in human life. When we try to think what there is in common between the lives of archaic societies where 'religion is everywhere', and the clearly demarcated set of beliefs, practices and institutions which exist under this title in our society, we are facing a hard, perhaps insuperable task." Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 15.

[202] Smith, Relating Religion.

McCutcheon,[203] Tomoko Masuzawa,[204] Richard King,[205] and Timothy Fitzgerald,[206] have produced numerous articles and books demonstrating a myriad of problems with the historical development of the concept of religion and its subsequent use in categorization such as in the terminology "world religions." Despite these mounting critiques the concept of world religions continues to be normative for many, with slight changes in its use.[207]

Studies in religion have had to take into account the work of other disciplines at some level. Due to the work of anthropologists, pluralism is a recognized reality in European and North American scholars' approach to religions. There is often an attempt to remain objective and fair to all religions. Phenomenology is frequently considered the best approach, whereby religions are simply described rather than interpreted.[208] This has proven to be difficult to achieve and textbooks on world religions continue to be influenced by certain presuppositions which mitigate against this possibility.[209] The same

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[203] Russell T. McCutcheon, Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[204] Masuzawa, The Invention of World Religions.

[205] King, Orientalism and Religion.

[206] Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[207] Masuzawa argues that since the early twentieth century the list of religions appearing in textbooks about world religions has remained essentially the same. Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 46.

[208] An example of a textbook using the phenomenological approach is *Introducing World Religions: A Christian Engagement* by Charles E. Farhadian. There are a few glaring issues with this text. First, Africa is again forgotten as "traditional religions" are left undiscussed for the most part. It also defines world religions in the following way: "world religions offer standardized scriptures and interpretations, with clearly stated parameters rooted in orthodoxy." Charles E. Farhadian, *Introducing World Religions: A Christian Engagement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 47. I am totally at a loss as to how the vast number of Hindu sects and Buddhist sects can fit into this definition, much less Sufi Islam and Chinese diversity.

seven to ten religions continue to take up the vast majority of descriptive space in

textbooks.[210] Africa continues to remain outside the general pale of discussions on

religions as do Native Americans and other tribal groups, although they sometimes get a

cursory mention.[211] Human objectivity through reason continues, though often unstated,

to serve as the primary normative arbitrating practice in deciding both what religions to

include and how to discuss them in textbooks.[212] The challenge this creates is that human

experience is very difficult to objectively describe comprehensively and thus there are

often reductionisms or simplifications that seep into world religion textbooks which leave

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[209] Some textbooks even attempt to mix all types of methodologies and thus presuppositional approaches within one volume such as Lawrence E. Sullivan, ed. *Religions of the World: An Introduction to Culture and Meaning* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), xxiii. Strangely this book has the normal world religions often listed and then proceeds to argue that "given the long history of Christian influence," Christianity will be divided into discussions of many of its different branches. This was not done for any of the other religions that have different significant branches.

[210] Although, it is also common to find far less than ten. For example, the book *World Religions in Dialogue* discusses the "four non-Christian world religions most relevant to the Western culture of North America and Europe—namely Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam." Readers are not told why these four are more important in North America than say, African tribal groups' religions, Native American religions, New Age movements, etc. Pim Valkenberg, ed. *World Religions in Dialogue: A Comparative Theological Approach* (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2013), 7.

[211] Vial, *Modern Religion*, 224-25. Ninian Smart is a well-respected expert on religion who has written a number of helpful approaches to world religions. His book *Worldviews* isolates six major dimensions that help clarify what a religion is, yet he too continues to work within the above paradigm that relegates Africa to the periphery outside the area of major world religions, despite the fact Africans are engaged in many of the dimensions he isolates. Ninian Smart, *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs*, 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000). Black students at Harvard in the early 1970s criticized the then newly formed Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard Divinity School for continuing to marginalize the entire continent of Africa. Lucia Hulsether, "The Grammar of Racism: Religious Pluralism and the Birth of the Interdisciplines," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 86, no. 1 (2018): 23.

[212] One textbook even explicitly states that "the book must be viewed as greater than the sum of the parts, for it points, as a whole, to two vital areas of human concern which are likely to persist." These are the human condition and how to solve human differences. While I can affirm these statements I am left wondering what this book understands to be the grounding source to pass judgment on various understandings of religion? Is there one particular religion or text that stands above the rest? A person will look in vain to find these questions answered in this text. Arvind Sharma, ed. *The World's Religions: A Contemporary Reader* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), xii, xiv.

out so much of the human experiences that are actually taking place in any given location.

Both beliefs and practices are often covered in world religion textbooks, although beliefs continue to hold sway as more significant. Universalizing has often slipped subtly below the surface in textbooks on religion.[213] For some, such as Huston Smith, who wrote one of the bestselling books on world religions in the twentieth century, universalizing is still the main point, with slight differences from nineteenth century scholarship on religion. Smith avoids the ethnocentric language of the nineteenth century and appears to have a high view of all religions, but then proceeds to describe the *essence* of each religion as he interprets it, which smacks of hegemony in a new toned-down language.[214] Textbooks, despite attempts otherwise, continue to work with essentializing definitions of religions that reduce huge masses of diverse people into groups such as

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[213] One of the better textbooks on religion is Christopher H. Partridge, ed. *Introduction to World Religions*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013). It includes Africa and other normally marginalized religions as equals. It still struggles with how to deal with the "isms" but this is inevitable as long as the "isms" are considered actual entities. The most troubling aspect of this textbook can be seen in a timeline of world religions which adheres to the old theory that indigenous religions are the oldest on earth, although it claims "Vedantism" is just as old, these are theories based on speculation. Partridge, *Introduction to World Religions*, 50-51.

[214] The following are a few quotes that help demonstrate what I mean, "Every religion mixes universal principles with local particularities… for this book, principles are more important than contexts." Smith continues "I have tried to let the best in each faith shine through by presenting it in the way I have found its most impressive adherents envisioning it." Huston Smith, *The World's Religions* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 6. This begs the questions, who gets to choose the "principles?" Who gets to decide what is best in each faith? Smith is also guilty of sidelining "primal religions" (his terminology). Notice what he says about these "primal religions:"

We shall call their religious pattern primal because it came first… This mode of religiosity continues in Africa, Australia, Southeast Asia, the Pacific Islands, Siberia, and among the Indians of North and South America. Its numbers are diminishing, but we devote this final substantive chapter to them, partly to pay them tribute but also for the contrasting light they can throw on the historical religions that have engaged us (Smith, *The World's Religions*, 365).

This is Tylor being mirrored by a current author who wrote the most popular book for undergraduate courses in world religions across North America in the second half of the twentieth century.

Hinduism or Buddhism.[215] Masuzawa sees this as the "untenable assumption that all religions are everywhere the same in essence, divergent and particular only in their ethnic, national or racial expressions." She goes on to say, "Of course, this is an assumption alarmingly prevalent among the world religions books now available on the market. And it cannot be denied that this well-meaning yet uncritical assumption is what brings a large number of people into our classrooms year after year."[216]

Contemporary use of the term religion, in a "colloquial" sense often is done with an intent to generalize. But this will not work because religion covers too many concepts to be able to accurately generalize anything about it. As Martin comments, "Anyone who begins a sentence with the phrase 'all religions…' is certainly saying something false."[217] And Adams asserts, "Our minds seem to be programmed in such a way that it is virtually impossible to make any generalizing statement about the condition of humanity without at least implying, 'This is as it should be' or 'This is not as it should be.'"[218] In other words, the work of sociologists, anthropologists, and religious studies experts is nearly always a form of normative generalizing. Thus, a stage has been reached when the average educated European or North American assumes that obviously something called

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[215] Even the best attempts of Christian perspectives fall into this unavoidable trap. Winfried Corduan has made a valiant attempt to describe world religions and is more fair than some but still struggles to make it clear how he can group them the way he does and why it matters. Winfried Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2012). Davaney has noticed this and argues theologians need to do a better job of taking this into account, Sheila Greeve Davaney, "Theology and the Turn to Cultural Analysis," in *Converging on Culture: Theologians in Dialogue with Cultural Analysis and Criticism*, ed. Delwin Brown, Sheila Greeve Davaney, and Kathryn Tanner (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 9.

[216] Masuzawa, The Invention of World Religions, 9.

[217] Craig Martin, A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion (Bristol, CT: Equinox, 2012).

[218] Adams, The Philosophical Roots, viii.

"Hinduism" is a real thing and that this does not need to be proved even though they probably have little to support what they intuitively take for granted.[219]

Much of the terminology developed by Europeans and North Americans has even been re-appropriated by self-identified Hindus and Buddhists. Careful readings of many Indian uses of Hinduism reveal that this appropriation suffers from many of the same issues that the original category developments did. They tend to gloss over history, as is the case with definitions of Hinduism found among Hindutva advocates, who lump huge groups of people into a category that cannot possibly describe the nuanced realities of people's actual lives.[220] It continues to be true that "Western scholars of the Subcontinent [India] rely too heavily on *Hindu* and *Muslim* as descriptive adjectives and analytic categories. Many defer too quickly to *Hinduism* and *Islam* as self-apparent terms for exclusive arenas of religious activity."[221]

Reductionistic totalizing and essentializing remain issues connected to the categories of religions that have come under scathing attack from many scholars. It must be noted, however, that many of these same scholars do not have better alternative

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[219] Balagangadhara, *The Heathen*, 67.

[220] This highlights the constant definitional challenge of who gets to define what? Do Hindus get to define Hinduism or outsiders? What if Hindus cannot agree on a set definition? There are countless books written by self-identified Hindus that define their way of thinking and living as Hinduism, hardly any of these are in full agreement as to what the term should mean. For an example see Swami Prakashanand Saraswati, *The True History and the Religion of India: A Concise Encyclopedia of Authentic Hinduism* (Austin, TX: Jagadguru Kripalu Parishat, 2003). This book is very popular among Hindu intellectuals in professional occupations as wells as in academic fields. Yet the definitions and approach to religion here are vastly different than the average textbook definitions of Hinduism. So which way is right? Which way is the most helpful for theologians and missiologists? See also Ramachandra, "Globalization," 219. For a good study on a group of Shiva devotees who self-identify as Hindu but also self-identify as devotees of Shiva fully cognizant that this is different than what other Hindus believe and practice see Elaine M. Fisher, *Hindu Pluralism: Religion and the Public Sphere in Early Modern South India* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017). Notice the conversation she records with a Tamil man who claimed that to be Hindu you must be born in India but that anyone could be a devotee of Shiva. Fisher, *Hindu Pluralism*, 2-3.

[221] Peter Gottschalk, Beyond Hindu and Muslim: Multiple Identity in Narratives from Village India (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3.

approaches to describing people, their beliefs, and their practices. This is partly due to the nature of the times. In an immanentized social imaginary it becomes difficult to do constructive work that does not fall back onto the same philosophical approaches that brought us the problematic categories in the first place.[222] Reason and human experience are unable to serve as the only grounding sources for describing people, yet most scholars do not have any other framework left to work with in the academy.[223] It is appropriate to ask ourselves the question raised by Masuzawa, "how can we ensure that the science of religion henceforth will not be in collusion with such malign forces of absolutism in the name of pluralism, with its hidden supremacist pretensions and exclusivism?"[224]

Conclusion

What does all this mean for theology and missiology? Whether theologians or missiologists realize it or not, they are heavily reliant on these inherited categories of religions in their discourse. And whether they realize it or not, these borrowed categories come with historical baggage. Not all the baggage is bad, but there are enough doubts to warrant a careful reflection on theological and missiological uses of the categories of

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[222] I am purposefully invoking Charles Taylor's framework of the immanentized social imaginary here. Taylor states that many find themselves living in this immanentized world in the West whereby, "the highest goals of human beings seem, even in the sphere of religion, to aim at purely human goods. When, on top of this, there begins to be serious progress towards these goals, the idea can gain currency that these ends are within the scope of unaided human powers." Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 261. Along with this there was the turn in religious studies towards terms such as "transcendent," "infinite," and "sacred" in place of God which basically created an odd gap in religious lingo making the very discussion of religion very difficult to have in concrete terms. Josephson, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 121.

[223] An example of a scholar who does a fair job of analyzing religions from a framework outside of the philosophical presuppositions of most other textbooks on world religions is Stephen R. Prothero, *God Is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions That Run the World--and Why Their Differences Matter* (New York: HarperOne, 2010). Yet this book also struggles with grounding its theory. Prothero recognizes that religions are different and that those in Africa, such as Yoruba, are just as legitimate as any others, yet he still faces the insurmountable task of description on a grand scale.

[224] Masuzawa, The Invention of World Religions, 325.

religions. The next Chapter will lay out three major implications that the above study

reveals for theological and missiological discourse and practice.

CHAPTER 3

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEOLOGY AND MISSIOLOGY

Introduction

The concept of religion permeates the fields of theology and missiology and it is

difficult to imagine these fields without it. In connection to this I follow Jennings who

states, "Theologians must strongly reject the current pedagogical schemas that separate

missionary texts from theological text."[1] This Chapter isolates three major implications

that are meant to serve as a sampling that reveal why it is necessary to rethink the use of

categories of religions by theologians and missiologists.[2] And although this Chapter will

not directly advance the abandonment of religion as a term it is meant to foster serious

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[1] Jennings goes on to write in strong language, which I agree with, "The current practice of teaching systematic theology, and then teaching missions or intercultural studies or both as separate realities only slightly related may in some instances be pedagogically defensible, but ultimately it is *immoral* in the current situation. The immorality here lies in the loss of historical consciousness: the world of theology and the theological world of Christianity changed with the moment of discovery of the new worlds. The global situation that is thrust on theology from 1444, when Prince Henry surveyed his first cargo of slaves, forward has rarely made its way into how theologians, historical or systematic, have told the story of theology as it entered the modern world and changed in the Enlightenment" (emphasis added). Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 115-16. Tennent says something similar though far less eloquently "it is important that theology become more missiological and missiology become more theological." Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 192.

[2] I am not the first to argue that this needs to be done, although to my knowledge this is one of the more thorough attempts at doing so, from a theological perspective that has a high view of Scripture at least. See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "'One Rule to Rule Them All?'" 101.

reflection on the way religion and the categorization of people intersect.[3] This research

also follows the work of Stanley H. Skreslet's evaluation of Christians' understanding of

mission and other religions, especially his sections on the late nineteenth and early

twentieth century. Skreslet's work is primarily descriptive but it reveals that for the most

part the trends of Christian thinking follow the basic trends of religious studies and social

science studies of religion. It is rarely the other way around whereby Christians develop

new theoretical frameworks for thinking about people that are not simply following the

theoretical frameworks of the wider academic world encompassing them. Theologians

and missiologists often nuance their understandings to fit the language of faith but

beyond this they are rarely original in their approach and thinking about categories of

religions.[4]

The first implication involves the process of categorizing people into "objective"

classifications for research grounded in objectifying rationalism, which has tended to turn

people into objects and thus dehumanize them.[5] The second implication involves the

distinct connection between the development of categories of religions with categories of

race. This development is problematized in several ways that include issues wrapped up

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[3] Vinoth Ramachrandra has argued for the abandonment of the categories of religions, which is worth reflecting on, however I am more interested in working around the terms, rather than fight the battle over their legitimacy. Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict?*, 41.

[4] Stanley H. Skreslet, Comprehending Mission: The Questions, Methods, Themes, Problems, and Prospects of Missiology (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012), 108-23.

[5] In fairness the work of using categories to dehumanize goes many different directions. Japanese documents which portrayed some of the earliest Europeans to enter Japan tended to demonize them and refer to these newcomers as something less than human. Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan*, chap. 2. However, this does not negate what happened through the Enlightenment projection of categories on a wide swath of the world, as uncomfortable as it may sound, Japan never controlled, either physically or intellectually, as much territory as European countries. Not all uses of categorization from an objectifying rationalism result in this and certainly many who have engaged in objectifying rationalism are not intending for this to happen. But the previous chapter was meant to demonstrate that it has happened often enough to warrant careful reflection and the creation of alternative possibilities.

in slavery, social evolutionary hierarchies which have been used to establish and prop up

systems of power, and the creation of marginalized "others." Finally, the third

implication is one of teleology. Much of the development of religion has taken place

within the teleological lens of progress rooted in Kant but altered in various ways

throughout the last few centuries.[6] This teleology has proven to be bankrupt, and yet for

many there appears no distinct alternatives other than nihilistic turns, or something akin

to the will to power of Nietzsche within an immanentized world.[7] Part of this is rooted in

the reality of evil and its nearly total absence from the discussions in the development of

the concept of religion. If religion as a concept is caught up in this failed teleology, then

major questions arise as to how useful the categories of religions are for accurately

describing human life. Both theology and missiology deal with God and humanity in

intimate ways; therefore, any language that is used to describe people in relation to God,

or other people, is paramount for the disciplines of theology and missiology to reflect on

carefully.[8]

The purpose of this Chapter is to draw together the implications rooted in the

previous Chapter and thus similar to the project of Jennings who argues that in order to

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[6] For more on Kant's teleology and its subsequent impact see Trüper, Chakrabarty, and Subrahmanyam, "Introduction," 7-10.

[7] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 374.

[8] According to Amos Yong, "whatever religion is, the study of religion is, effectively, the study of what it means to be human." Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 15. I agree with this and with Yong's further explanation that you cannot actually study religion in isolation of culture, psychology, etc. However, I believe that Yong then comes very close to falling back into the poorly essentialized religion trap when he states, "My interests are predominantly theological, even if I approach the subject [theology of religions] fully aware that no discussion of religious experience can be *only* theological but must also be anthropological, historical, social, and cultural." Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 17. Yong admits that his definition of religion is very much like Paul Tillich's which becomes a kind of all-encompassing term to describe the essence of humanity. See Tillich, *Theology of Culture*.

delve into the depths of theological meaning you have to articulate "the profound"

deformities of the issue that is raised. This then creates the space for more open

discussion and for the construction of an alternative.[9]

Objectifying Reason and Religions

Through the influence of the Enlightenment, human reason became the grounding

conviction for the developments of the concept of religion. Without denying the

importance or necessity of human reason playing a role in how life is defined there is a

trend to rely heavily on objectifying rationalism that is detrimental. Due to the

immanentized framework of the academy and much of society in general it has become

nearly impossible to overcome this need for this objectifying rationalism to serve as the

normative arbiter in describing and explaining humanity.[10]

Objectifying People in Order to Study and Control Them

This has led to the need to objectify groups of people into "religions" in order to

study and compare people as objects.[11] This includes studying their systems of belief or

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[9] Jennings, The Christian Imagination, 10.

[10] King recognizes this issue very clearly and gives plenty of evidence to support his claims that this was born out of the Enlightenment and scientific revolution. However, King struggles to create an alternative approach that is not equally reliant on human reason. King, *Orientalism and Religion*, 47.

[11] Gottschalk, Religion, Science, and Empire, 5.

thinking to peer into the *essence* of what human beings are.[12] At first glance this may appear to be a noble cause. But when based in objectifying rationality, which privileges European and North American society, it creates an "otherness" among the people of the world.[13] As Masuzawa states, "The modern discourse on religion. . . was clearly a discourse of *othering*" (emphasis added).[14] And as Vial puts it, "What we take for granted as constituting the category of religion, and the appropriate methodologies built to investigate it, are wrapped up in the European and American projects of expanding and controlling other parts of the globe, and by the concomitant need to reimagine European identity."[15]

This is not to say that everyone is the same, nor is it to say that everyone would get along if the categories of religions were abandoned.[16] Certainly "othering" is not new to the human experience on this earth. Even so, there is no excuse for maintaining an

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[12] Taylor makes the relevant comment that, "Objectifying pictures of social reality are just as prominent a feature of Western modernity as the constitution of large-scale collective agencies." Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 182.

[13] J. H. Bavinck was no doubt a brilliant thinker, theologian, and missiologist. But when I read his works on religious consciousness I am constantly struck by the emphasis put on human cognition, ideas, and beliefs without any reference to the everyday activities of life. As a result, Bavinck is able to make claims about the "Asian" mind as a whole as though they all think and believe in one way. While there is importance in understanding the philosophical backgrounds and thinking of people, and Bavinck has done a noble job of trying to do this, there is something unnerving about reducing humans to their thoughts. J. H. Bavinck, *The J. H. Bavinck Reader*, eds., John Bolt, James D. Bratt, and P. J. Visser (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), chaps. 3-6.

[14] Masuzawa, The Invention of World Religions, 20.

[15] Vial, Modern Religion, 193.

[16] Differences cannot always be easily categorized in definite ways. Take India for example, where "perceiving the importance of religion in Indian society, many scholars erroneously conclude that this society can be described solely in terms of religious identity." Gottschalk, *Beyond Hindu and Muslim*, 4. The rest of this book by Gottschalk gives evidence of numerous groups in India whose *primary* identity markers are not Hindu or Muslim even though they self-identify with one of these. Their boundaries are porous and they get along well, often not seeing differences of religion in a way that many outsiders might project on them.

approach to describing people that reinforces stereotypes and harmful othering.[17]

Objectifying rationality alone has not been able to isolate human essences as was hoped, but it has been able to utilize universal language to turn people into scientific objects.[18] Or as Vanhoozer wryly puts it, "Western pride in the universality of reason—instrumental, theoretical, calculative rationality—may actually be a symptom of cultural insanity. The madness of Western rationality and methodology then, consists in its lack of imagination, its being too generic and too narrowly universal."[19] This act of objectification should not be a surprise considering the close ties to colonization that the category development has had.[20] Colonialization could only work if people were objectified and kept from speaking for themselves, but always spoken on behalf of by

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[17] K. R. Sundararajan relates a story from his life that can serve as a reminder that stereotypes are developed in many different ways. Sundararajan admits he is an electronic gadget lover, which surprised his coworker who had come to believe that all Hindus believed and practiced detachment from the material possessions of this world based on his reading of sacred texts and descriptions of Hinduism. While this appears silly, it actually demonstrates the types of false essentializing that goes on around the world whereby the developed categories blind people to everyday actualities. K. R. Sundararajan, "Study of Religion as Study of Religious Persons," in *The Legacy of Wilfred Cantwell Smith*, eds. Ellen Bradshaw Aitken and Arvind Sharma (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2017), 210-11.

[18] Josephson notes that the "most influential philosophers (Kant, Heidegger, Rorty), sociologists (Durkheim, Weber, Bourdieu, Habermas), and anthropologists (Geertz, Lévi-Strauss, Murdock)…have largely taken religion for granted as a cultural universal." Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan*, 2. Wrogemann also points out that Malinowski made explicit what many anthropologists before and after him have assumed to be true, namely that good fieldwork can lead to a position where the researcher knows those he is researching better than they know themselves. Henning Wrogemann, *Intercultural Hermeneutics: Intercultural Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2016), 119. While it is true that someone coming from outside a person's life can recognize elements of their life or ways of living that they were unaware of it is suspect when Malinowski claims research guarantees this outcome.

[19] Vanhoozer, "'One Rule to Rule them All,'" 88.

[20] Gottschalk, Religion, Science, and Empire.

their European colonizers.[21] There was a tension between "universalizing" and "othering" and both were done through the same categorizing project. However, "othering" only works when the "other" is compared to a "norm," in this case the categories of religions have often been used to figure out who is "in" and who is "out."[22] This is typical of empire making.[23]

While anthropology and sociology have attempted to overcome some of these barriers they have done so in a limited way.[24] As David Bosch puts it, "Even human beings [are] no longer regarded as whole entities but could be looked at and studied from a variety of perspectives: as thinking beings (philosophy), as social beings (sociology), as religious beings (religious studies). . . as cultural beings (cultural anthropology)."[25] The disciplines within religious studies have also struggled to remain relevant in the face of substantial postcolonial critiques. This is not to say these disciplines cannot add to the

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[21] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 91-93. Jennings captures this well when he writes, "Acosta establishes a transparency that will be fundamental to the colonialist gaze. This transparency will be an ability to always see through the natives—their words, their logics, their practices, their beliefs—and discern the underlying logic, in this case a religious logic, that attends their actions. Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 99. Masuzawa writes that such inventions as the concept of Hinduism occurred "in the context of colonialism, or under the forceful impact of the European epistemic field." Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 282.

[22] "The term othering was coined to describe how people classify the world according to a binary code, i.e., when people consciously or unconsciously dissociate themselves from others by simultaneously stylizing both themselves and others." Wrogemann, *Intercultural Hermeneutics*, 349.

[23] Bryan Stone, *Evangelism after Pluralism: The Ethics of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 30-31.

[24] Robert Priest has made a valiant attempt to defend anthropology among a skeptical Evangelical milieu. Robert J. Priest, "The Value of Anthropology for Missiological Engagements with Context: The Case of Witch Accusations," *Missiology* 43, no. 1 (2015). See also Robert J. Priest, "'Experience-near Theologizing' in Diverse Human Contexts," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, eds. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006). Priest still struggles to differentiate between dealing with people as people and people as objects. His case study still comes across as an instance of a Western missionary objectively observing people and then being able to correctly convert them once they have done this observation. I do not think Priest is purposely attempting to objectify people but the way the narrative is conveyed allows for the possibility.

[25] Bosch, Transforming Mission, 270.

knowledge of humanity in positive ways, but a re-looking at presuppositions that then

lead to a major rethink concerning the idea of the "other" remain as a priority in

deconstructing the knowledge of humanity that is being developed.[26] What happens is

that the theoretical constructs of "scientists" and scholars begin to create or form

perceived realities in those who are reading, listening to, or watching anything that uses

these categories to describe people.[27] The fact remains that,

> Modern societies are impersonal in an important sense; that is, they are based on stranger sociability, and involve the creation of collective agency among equals; they privilege categorical identities, in which people are linked through shared properties (being Americans, Frenchmen, Muslims, Catholics), rather than through a network of personal relations.[28]

Taylor's statement should raise alarms for theologians and missiologists.[29]

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[26] An example of a better way to describe and portray people in light of their beliefs and practices is exemplified in the book Todd Lewis, ed. *Buddhists: Understanding Buddhism through the Lives of Practitioners* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2014). This edited volume attempts to allow practitioners' voices to come through in a way that is helpful to those who want a more grassroots level of understanding on how some Buddhists integrate their faith and daily life.

[27] Wrogemann, *Intercultural Hermeneutics*, 81. McDermott and Netland attempt to argue that "Acknowledging that 'religion' and 'the religions' are to some extent modern constructs does not necessarily mean that they are distortions that ought to be abandoned." McDermott and Netland, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, 226. This statement is only true if they really are not "distortions" but I have demonstrated that they are and thus probably should be either abandoned or used very cautiously in theological endeavors.

[28] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 368.

[29] One theological voice who has previously raised this concern is Dyrness in *The Earth Is God's*, 62-66.

Implications for Theologians and Missiologists

Theologians and missiologists have some serious work to do in this regard.[30] The

categories of religions continue to serve as major points of contention in discussions of

theology of religions.[31] Some of the work that has been done in this area fails to even

define what is meant by religion and takes for granted that world religions are actual

realities to be discussed. Other instances reinforce the idea that the core of humanity is

religious, which often becomes an abstract conceptual approach that differs little from the

work of philologists in the nineteenth century.[32] Historically missiologists and

theologians have been guilty of imbibing in the temptation to view people as objects to be

reshaped into an ethnocentric replica of a person's self.[33] This is probably rooted in what

Vanhoozer critiques as being captive to "Greek think" which uses categories to "absorb"

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[30] Harvie Conn argued this in 1984 but few theologians and missiologists have taken up his line of research. He recognized that "the questions first addressed by Max Müller, E. B. Tylor, and others came from the application of Enlightenment methodology and concepts of the autonomy of human reason to the growing eighteenth-century interest in the world of religions." Conn, *Eternal Word*, 21.

[31] Some theologians have at least paid lip service to the issues that I have tried to clarify in the previous chapter of this dissertation. McDermott and Netland recognize that the history of the development of categories of religions does require careful reflection and potentially a different approach to theology of religions. McDermott and Netland, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, 221. They also recognize that part of the issues lie in the Enlightenment to modern tendency to separate religious and non-religious spheres of life, which does not reflect the Bible or the history of Christian tradition. McDermott and Netland, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, 223. In the end they defend the categories of religions, even though they admit they really do not describe lived realities very well. This, in my estimation, is unfortunate because it leads the discussion away from actual people and back into the abstract "religions" that do not reflect actual lived realities. McDermott and Netland, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, 225.

[32] Examples of this include Michael W. Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today: Scripture, History, and Issues* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2014), 352-53. There is much good in Goheen's writing but at times he slips into the overly abstract when discussing religion as the core of humanity, making mission application a real challenge. From this core he then attempts to identify how each "empirical religion" is related to the core of being religious innately. This leads him to utilize essentialized definitions of religions that are overly abstract and bounded.

[33] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 301. Michael Billig points out that the simple act of adding "ism" to a term that describes humanity may actually be a form of turning human beings into objects. For more on this see the chapter entitled "Turning People into things" in Michael Billig, *Learn to Write Badly: How to Succeed in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), chap. 5.

people.[34] This reduction often turns religions into uniform objects of either radicals that are only found to be either creators of the horrifying, such as terrorists, or the uninhibited good, such as yoga.[35]

Often theology of religion discussions swirl around soteriological issues[36] that fall outside the purview of categories of religions completely. Others discuss religions almost as if they are beings rather than theoretical concepts. This is exemplified when theologians write statements such as "Hinduism teaches…," "Islam believes in…,"

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[34] Vanhoozer is indebted to Emmanuel Lévinas for this idea. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 269. See also Vanhoozer, "'One Rule to Rule Them All?,'" 90. Lesslie Newbigin was aware of these pitfalls and attempted to alter the conversation as such to focus on "ultimate commitments" rather than individual religions. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 161.

[35] For a discussion of "Islamophobia" and its appeal beyond the average person but also into the educated elites of the West through the media see Göle, *The Daily Lives of Muslims*, 32-48. I realize that we all use reductions in order to describe the world, the universe, and even God at some level, but there is value in attempting to avoid harmful or clearly misleading reductions. Vanhoozer, "What Is Everyday Theology?," 37. This is somewhat like Elizabeth Spelman's illustration of many different pebbles, if a person describes their "essence" it would be in their common "pebblehood" but this would not be sufficient to describe their many differences in size, shape, and color. All too often, she argues, the same is done with categories used to describe humans. In attempting to define the essence the actual people are forgotten. Carroll Guen Hart, "Taking the Risk of Essence: A Deweyan Theory in Some Feminist Conversations," in *Knowing Other-Wise: Philosophy at the Threshold of Spirituality*, ed. James H. Olthuis (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 70-71.

[36] There is a vast amount of literature that could be consulted on this. Typically, the discussion has circled around the concepts of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism with a myriad of options falling somewhere in between. At the root of most of these discussions are issues of soteriology rather than questions dealing with actual adherents of other religions and their beliefs, practices, and experiences. A quick glance through the chapter titles of the book *Introducing Theologies of Religion*, an introductory text on theology of religion by Paul F. Knitter, reveals the use of the term "salvation" repeatedly. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religion*. See also Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions*.

"Buddhism adheres to…," etc.[37] What often happens is that "religions, have slipped into the place of ungodly people" and are often compared to Christianity as though the Christian faith was the "righteousness of God."[38] The objectification achieved through categorization of religions has often been utilized to decipher who is "in" and who is "out."[39] This often can lead to arguments over which religions are the most reasonable or rational, which in turn becomes arguments over beliefs or systems rather than interactions with actual people.[40] Pluralists are no better when they attempt to argue in favor of the universality of all religions, which is merely another form of hegemony that fails to take

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[37] These ways of writing depersonalize concepts and can lead discussions away from actual living people towards overly abstract concepts that are not easily recognized in any person. There may be a place for this type of abstract categorizing. Nevertheless, for theological and missiological discourse the loss of the human element carries the potential to create the deception that through these abstract concepts the researcher actually knows who people "really are." Examples of this type of language are so prevalent in theological, missiological, and secular literature that I will give only a few samples. Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths*. Or Patrick Cate, "The Uniqueness of Christ and Missions," in *The Centrality of Christ in Contemporary Missions*, eds. Mike Barnett and Michael Pocock (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2005), 45. Cate claims that religions have created some "helpful things" but I would ask was its religions or people who did the creating? Nehrbass recognizes the shortcoming of language like that used by Corduan, because it fails to take seriously the "this-worldly" aspects of religions at the expense of overstating the "transcendent" aspects. Kenneth Nehrbass, *God's Image and Global Cultures: Integrating Faith and Culture in the Twenty-First Century* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016), 155. For more examples of this style of writing see Farhadian, *Introducing World Religions*. Partridge, *Introduction to World Religions*.

[38] Andrew F. Walls, The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 66.

[39] Terminology such as "religious other" may appear harmless but it actually aids in creating false ontological differences. When theologians or missiologists use this type of terminology they are reinforcing the ontologically false separations that the categories work off of. For an example of this type of theology, utilizing inherited categories of religions, see Daniel Strange, *Their Rock Is Not Like Our Rock: A Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014). For an example of a Christian philosopher and missiologist using this terminology see Netland, *Christianity and Religious Diversity*, x. J. Z. Smith may be correct that the taxon of world religions can be abandoned without feeling bad. Smith, *Relating Religion*, 167.

[40] An example of this format and approach is Dean C. Halverson, ed. *The Compact Guide to World Religions* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 1996).

seriously local realities and differences.[41] As Bryan Stone notes, "Both positions [exclusivists and pluralists] accept 'religion' as an overarching genus of which individual religions are species; they compare religions through generalizations about what they hold in common, casting those commonalities largely in soteriological terms."[42]

Historically mission thought has often been wrapped up in questions of rational religion versus non-rational, often pitting Christianity against Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, etc.[43] This approach relied heavily on a high view of human reason that stemmed from the Enlightenment.[44] Many of the more current debates in missiology dealing with issues concerning other religions are also reliant on an understanding of religions that are

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[41] For an argument that "shared" traits between religions, often demonstrated in highly generalized language is often a cover for a coloniastic type of pluralism see Kathryn Tanner, "Respect for Other Religions: A Christian Antidote to Colonialist Discourse," *Modern Theology* 9, no.1 (1993). Here is how Masuzawa describes the issue of the explosion of interest in world religions: "the discourse of world religions, whose rhizomatic growth in the nineteenth century I trace, when it finally erupted in the early twentieth century, facilitated the conversion of the Eurohegemonic claim from one context to another." Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 29. In a recent article Lucia Hulsether demonstrates how Harvard University utilized language of plurality to stymy student uprisings pertaining to issues of race and religion. Hulsether, "The Grammar of Racism." See also Stone, *Evangelism after Pluralism*, 12.

[42] Stone, Evangelism after Pluralism, 110.

[43] "Modern theology as a whole, conservative and liberal, is a long series of debates over which set of concepts—which 'ism'—best names and thinks God." Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 269. This is simply following the knowledge base which assumes these "religions" are actual things. Balagangadhara, *The Heathen*, 4.

[44] Oddie, *Imagined Hinduism*, 28. What should be kept in mind is that some of the most influential thinkers of the Enlightenment provided a framework of approaching thinking that was highly abstract in its turn to reason and thus difficult to utilize in understanding actual people. This explains comments like the following: "Hegel had a 'system' yet as Kierkegaard never tired of complaining, it was unrelated to the concrete realities of life." Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 307.

essentialized and depersonalized.[45] Thus it is supposedly possible to talk about whether

or not someone is a Christian, Hindu, or Muslim by reading textbooks that tell readers

what these people are.[46] By objectifying the religions the textbooks on world religions are

not able to tell us much about people who actually claim to be Hindu, Muslim, or

Christian, because of their essentialized and objectified claims.[47] The discussion is held

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[45] For example, see Doug Coleman, A Theological Analysis of the Insider Movement Paradigm from Four Perspectives: Theology of Religions, Revelation, Soteriology and Ecclesiology (Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University, 2011). There is at least one textbook that has tried to move in a somewhat new direction. Terry C. Muck, Harold A. Netland, and Gerald R. McDermott, eds., Handbook of Religion: A Christian Engagement with Traditions, Teachings, and Practices (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014). What it presents in its introduction chapters is promising but, in the end, it returns to the usual "religions" and the usual ways of describing them, partly because they do not have space for elaboration. They also claim that the best argument for their choice of "world religions" is rooted in the idea that these "religions" came from the so-called Axial Age. The Axial Age is a postulation heavily reliant on evolutionary theory and highly debatable at best, far from a biblical explanation to say the least. Muck, Netland, and McDermott, Handbook of Religion, 44. It is true that "essentializing" in itself does not necessarily have to lead to these conclusions, it often depends on the purpose of those doing the essentializing. Yet trends reveal in missiological and theological discourse that the essentializing of religions often fits the description found above, deeming theologians and missiologists essentializations as problematic. For more on this see Ott, "Globalization and Contextualization."

[46] As Russell McCutcheon points out,

One of the problems with the way in which the study of religion is taught in both the undergraduate and graduate setting is that instructors often present their data as self-evident; they fail to identify for their students the complex and contested theoretical, definitional, and methodological issues that have shaped the field over the past 100 years (McCutcheon, *The Insider/Outsider*, vii).

This is especially true of Seminary theological education on "world religions." I think the following comment by Clifford Geertz is appropriate here even though he was applying it to a slightly different setting. "Nothing has done more, I think, to discredit cultural analysis than the construction of impeccable depictions of formal order in whose actual existence nobody can quite believe." Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 18.

[47] This is exemplified in the attempt of Gerald McDermott and Harold Netland to legitimize their approach to a theology of religions. They try to demonstrate why culture and religion should be separated, and why current categories of religions are legitimate, while at the same time admitting that the categories cannot really tell readers much about actual people. See McDermott and Netland, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, chap. 6. See also the strong critique of their approach in the same volume by Vinoth Ramachandra, Vinoth Ramachandra, "Response 3," in *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions: An Evangelical Proposal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). See also Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict?* Another problem is "who gets to speak for any given religion?" Paul J. Will identifies this problem when discussing the history of European scholarships encounter with Buddhism. It was first Theravada Buddhism that European scholars studied which became the normative way of viewing anything that claimed to be Buddhist, yet is this fair to Buddhists who have a different approach to how they understand their Buddhist life? Paul J. Will, "Swami Vivekananda and Cultural Stereotyping," in *East-West Encounters in Philosophy and Religion*, eds. Ninian Smart and B. Srinivasa Murthy (Long Beach, CA: Long Beach, 1996), 385.

captive by philosophical presuppositions which have a very high view of human reason.[48]

As a result, mission thinkers have been guilty of understanding "the image of God in man

as mankind's rational capacities."[49] This complicates definitions of human beings and

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[48] It is also true that many people around the world do not approach or understand life within these categories. Rather they think about life as being much more integrated. Beliefs, rituals, and daily life are inseparable and often outside forces such as spirits are understood to be intimately tied to what happens in daily life. This is actually closer to the biblical description of life than many in Europe and North America have typically described it. Rynkiewich, *Soul, Self, and Society*, 135. There are some theologians who have recognized this shortcoming and desire to move beyond it, such as, Davaney, "Theology and the Turn to Cultural Analysis."

[49] Conn, *Eternal Word*, 80. On the same page Conn also states, "All three [anthropologists, theologians, and missionaries] ended up isolating the person as a religious being from the person as a whole." And "People became dehumanized objects of study." Conn, *Eternal Word*, 80.

allows arguments over theoretical issues to be disconnected from real people.[50] Theology

and missiology, by nature must deal with people both in their relation to God and each

other, and gain little from these types of theoretical discussions.[51]

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[50] An example of this can be found in *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable* by Timothy Tennent. Tennent sets up his project well by accurately arguing that many discussions of "world religions" are overly generalized and superficial from Christian standpoints. He then proceeds to write out his entire book as a comparison using chosen doctrines from Christianity compared with Hindu, Muslim, and Buddhist doctrines. The problem is that he chooses to use fictional people as his dialogue partners thus once again taking away the agency of an actual adherent to something and speaking on their behalf with Christianity coming out on top. Timothy C. Tennent, *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable: Evangelicalism in Conversation with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002). Gerald McDermott does something similar in Gerald R. McDermott, *Can Evangelicals Learn from World Religions? Jesus, Revelation and Religious Traditions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000). While McDermott's book is not so much a dialogue he continues to refer to other religions as though they were "beings" in a sense by giving the voice not to actual adherents but to the "religions" as he interprets them. In the end, for McDermott, because God is Sovereign there has to be some reason God allowed these non-Christian religions that benefits Christians. His conclusion is that Christians can learn from them in some sense though they are clearly not able to bring forth any sort of special revelation or salvation for their adherents and in fact are in opposition to God at some level as the title of one of his more recent books makes clear. Gerald R. McDermott, *God's Rivals: Why Has God Allowed Different Religions? Insights from the Bible and the Early Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2007). I fully believe that God does have rivals and that these rivals have followers all over the world, among all types of people who self-identify as many things including Christian. What bothers me is equating abstract "religions" with these rivals rather than looking for the manifestation of these rivals in everyday life. King's arguments are relevant here: "The essentialism endemic in such an approach involves the construction of abstract notions of 'religion' that can then be extrapolated from their local, cultural context. In this sense, religions become divorced from their actual historical circumstances and manifestations." King, *Orientalism and Religion*, 69. This is seen over and over in theology of religion discussions, which so often become discussions about abstract religions and not people. Even those who propose an open view to the possibility of other religions are often caught in the trap of talking about abstract religions not people. For example, Clark Pinnock writes the following comments on Acts 17:22-31, "He [Luke] gives the impression that aspects of religion can be brought to fulfillment in Christ." Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 202. The problem with this statement is that it makes it sound like religions should be fulfilled not people, as if religions were beings of some kind. The whole school of fulfillment theology runs the risk of depersonalizing and ultimately dehumanizing their discussions of religion. For a history of fulfillment theology, see Eric J. Sharpe, *Not to Destroy but to Fulfill: The Contribution of J. N. Farquhar to Protestant Missionary Thought in India before 1914* (Uppsala, Sweden: Gleerup, 1965).

[51] As Wilfred Cantwell Smith put it: "For it happens to be a law of this universe in which we live that you cannot understand persons if you treat them as objects." Cited in Willliam A. Graham, "Wilfred Cantwell Smith and 'Orientalism'," in *The Legacy of Wilfred Cantwell Smith*, eds. Ellen Bradshaw Aitken and Arvind Sharma (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2017), 89. While Clifford's *The Predicament of Culture* was not written to overcome the culture and religious divides described here, his arguments concerning the way culture is creatively and constantly diversified even as the world globalizes are helpful in demonstrating how all of life overlaps to such a degree as to put ethnographies in a predicament. See especially his "Introduction" in, *The Predicament of Culture*.

The act of trying to separate culture and religion can create a challenge.[52]

Separating religion and culture from each other creates a false sense that some objects,

practices, and experiences are cultural while others are religious.[53] It is true that not

everything serves the same purpose in life. Durkheim was right to see different meanings

for different actions and thoughts, but this does not mean life can easily be divided up

into religious and cultural elements or categories. Wilfred Cantwell Smith has pinpointed

this issue when he writes, "To treat persons objectively, as if they were objects, is not

merely morally wrong, but is intellectually wrong. It does not lead to accurate or

penetrating understanding."[54] It is imperative that anyone attempting to study a "religion"

be aware of the development of Eurocentric concepts. Talal Asad warns, "while religion

is integral

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[52] This separation is seen in the numerous attempts to write books or articles on a "theology of culture" or a "theology of religion" separate from each other. Paul Tillich, with a book oddly titled *Theology of Culture*, is one of the few who actually combined the two into one theological discourse. The challenge I have with his work is the near total lack of biblical references. His attempt to describe religion existentially is worth reflecting on if for no other reason than he tries to describe life in a more wholistic way, albeit a different way than this project takes. The split is often found in theology of mission books as well. Lesslie Newbigin's book *The Open Secret* contains two separate chapters for culture and religion. If you were to substitute the term "culture" and "religion" for each other in the two chapters they would, for the most part, still be fully intelligible. Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, chaps. 9, 10. See also Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, chaps. 6, 7; Craig Ott, Stephen J. Strauss, and Timothy C. Tennent, *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), chaps. 11, 12. William Dyrness also appears to use the terms almost interchangeably in Dyrness, *The Earth is God's*, 75-76.

[53] This is one of the biggest challenges in missiological literature. The following are examples of missiological writing that demonstrate the issue of trying to differentiate religion and culture. "In other cultures [non-Western] religion is a comprehensive vision that animates, directs and unifies all of human life." Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today*, 332. The relationship between culture and religion is hard to figure out in this sentence. Later Goheen argues that "religion is an all-embracing vision of life." Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today*, 336. So then what is culture?

[54] The rest of this paragraph reads, "Hence the Western university does its work badly if it interprets Asia in purely objective, behaviourist, impersonalist terms, on the one hand, under the pretention of being 'scientific.'" Cited in Graham, *The Legacy of Wilfred Cantwell Smith*.

to modern Western history, there are dangers in employing it as a normalizing concept."[55] This is especially true in the context of the separation of culture and religion.

Eloise Hiebert Meneses admits she has "been frustrated by the uncritical way in which Christian academics adopt views out of the secular academy."[56] What is needed then is a possible alternative to human reason as a grounding norm. There needs to be an intentional shift away from the Enlightened and colonial approach to these issues which many theologians and missiologists have internalized without necessarily realizing it.[57] This is still visible in language of contextualization that refers to receptors of the gospel in objective language, which is simply a drawing on the theoretical frameworks of the social sciences view of the "other."[58] The recent critiques of the concept of religion opens up the space for rooting the discussion in something other than human mediated reason. I will argue, in subsequent Chapters, that the Bible can serve as this normative source and that it will aid in overcoming this objectification that has taken place through the Enlightenment up to the present.[59] This is not the only alternative, any adherent of any

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[55] Asad, Genealogies of Religion, 1.

[56] Eloise Hiebert Meneses, "Faithful Witness: Postcritical Epistemology for Christians," *Direction* 36, no. 2 (2007): 130. I agree with Meneses that this does not imply the opposite extreme, which would be a complete rejection of the secular academy; neither option is useful. At the same time, I believe that Meneses solution, which is a turning to the scientific philosophy of Polanyi much like her father Paul Hiebert and Lesslie Newbigin did, is an insufficient approach. While the problem is recognized, I am baffled to try and understand why the Bible continues to be marginalized as a source of authority on these issues even among self-identified Christians. Timothy Tennent feels the same way, see Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 171.

[57] Jennings, The Christian Imagination, 8.

[58] Conn argued persuasively that mission thinking reflects this through language that refers to receptors of the gospel as passive agents. This changed with the fall of overt colonialism, but has been retained often through the use of power wielded through finances or technology. Conn, *Eternal Word*, 123.

[59] This is in direct contradiction to the work of Hegel who wrote, "It is…a widely current fiction, that there was an original primeval people, taught immediately by God, endowed with perfect insight and wisdom." Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 24.

beliefs and practices could argue that their text or practices serve as the norm. A person

must choose some sort of norming source though, and human reason alone does not

appear to be up to the task, thus the opening for the Bible.

Race and Religion

Racial Categorization of Power and Control

A quote from Vial is appropriate to begin this section:

> Religion and race share a genealogy. The genealogy, the importance of this for
> scholars of religion is that, because of this shared genealogy, race and religion in our
> modern social imaginary shape each other. Religion is a racialized category… A lack
> of awareness of this fact leads to recapitulate—in more contemporary language that is
> on the surface less problematic than the language of our nineteenth- and twentieth-
> century ancestors in the study of religion—some of their biased analyses.[60]

These biases are seen explicitly in the philosophical and theological works of Kant,

Hegel, and Schleiermacher. They are also seen plainly in the works of Tylor. There is no

doubt that even someone such as Friederich Max Müller, who fought for a much more

congenial view of Indians than most in his time, was also caught in the act of

perpetuating race and religion together.[61]

This was not something new, as Willie James Jennings has shown so poignantly.

From the first launching and landing of the Portuguese and Spanish, all the way through

the colonial movement and right up to the present there has often been a direct tie

between theological construction and racial categories that involve religion. Jennings

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[60] Vial, *Modern Religion*, 190-91. "One important part of the background to modern race, then, is the view that species are what they are because of something internal to them, some life force that is immanent rather than transcendent." Vial, *Modern Religion*, 171. This quote makes sense in light of the turn towards the immanent documented by Charles Taylor in *The Secular Age*.

[61] Müller defies a simple description when it comes to the relationship between race and religion. However, there is no doubt that some of his theories on the Aryan race were appropriated by others for "scientific" proof of their racialized ideologies. Bosch, *Friedrich Max Müller*, 203-07.

demonstrates that, based on the words of Zurara the chronicler for King Henry of Portugal, an ontological hierarchy had already been developed as a "scale of existence, with white at one end and black at the other end and all other places in between."[62] This anticipated social Darwinism by a couple of centuries and was couched in Christian rhetoric.

Attempts to distance Christian history from Jewish history is part of this same historical tendency.[63] It is in this historical narrative that the thesis of Jennings on race, and Masuzawa on religious category developments, meet up.[64] Jennings argues, persuasively, that supersessionism is a major theological move in the colonialist spirit during the Age of Discovery, and continues on throughout the colonial era into the present. This form of supersessionism imagines the Anglo-European Christians as "fully within European (white) identity and fully outside the identities of Jews and Muslims."[65]

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[62] Jennings, The Christian Imagination, 23.

[63] The ultimate tragedy of this trajectory, rooted in scholarly studies of language in the nineteenth century and earlier, is the purging of Jews by Nazis during World War II. Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*. See also Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth*, chap. 9.

[64] Tomoko Masuzawa, "What Do the Critics Want? A Brief Reflection on the Difference between a Disciplinary History and a Discourse Analysis," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 20, no. 2 (2008): 147. Van der Veer also recognizes a racist ideology that pervaded European philology especially in the study of "Indo-German" languages and "Semite" languages. Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, 116, 38-39.

[65] Jennings follows the theme of supersessionism and its relation to racial categories and skin color throughout his book, Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*. David Bosch wrote the following concerning missions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,

In the course of time, these ideas were wedded to the Old Testament concept of the chosen people. The result of this was that, at one point or another in recent history, virtually every white nation regarded itself as being chosen for a particular destiny and as having a unique charisma…. It was only to be expected that the nationalistic spirit would, in due time, be absorbed into missionary ideology, and Christians of a specific nation would develop the conviction that they had an exceptional role to play in the advancement of the kingdom of God through the missionary enterprise (Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 306).

See also Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Creation and Humanity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 442-43.

Combining this with the continued marginalization of African and Native Americans, not to mention most Asian tribes and their ways of living (as being secondary to the more important "world religions"), a disturbing trend is revealed.[66]

While it is unnecessary to get caught in either of the ditches of condemning all missionaries as merely colonialists, or claiming all missionaries were opposed to colonialism,[67] there is no way to avoid the reality that mission work from the seventeenth century to the twentieth century was often tied up with hegemonic colonial powers and racialized views of other religions.[68] This has often created nearly impenetrable walls between white Europeans and white North Americans with Africans, Asians, and Native

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[66] This can often be seen in overt attempts to avoid marginalizing "indigenous or local" religions and yet continuing to do so. For example, Miroslav Volf writes,

I have left aside religions that are equally inadequately designated as 'primary,' 'indigenous,' or 'local.' Local religions have their own, mostly unhappy, history with globalization as well as their own contribution to make to its reshaping, especially when it comes to globalization's relation to local natural habitats and the planet as a whole. *But someone else will have to take on that story* (emphasis added; Miroslav Volf, *Flourishing: Why We Need Religion in a Globalized World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 3).

While I do not mean to take anything away from Volf's overall thesis in his book this sentence demonstrates the ongoing marginalization. Even those who recognize the marginalization continue to tell the stories of the "major" world religions, in Volf's case "Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam," Volf, *Flourishing*, 67-71. For another example, probably inadvertently, of favoring so-called "major religions" as opposed to lesser religions such as "indigenous" or "tribal" see Netland, *Christianity and Pluralism*, 26n72, 139. Netland's book has basically nothing to say about Africa.

[67] For a unique approach to this thorny issue see Parna Sengupta, *Pedagogy for Religion: Missionary Education and the Fashioning of Hindus and Muslims in Bengal* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011). See also Wilbert R. Shenk, "The 'Great Century Reconsidered'," in *Anabaptism and Mission*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1984).

[68] Bosch, while noting that there were many missionaries who openly opposed colonialist policies and mistreatments of local people, is equally clear that racism was intrinsically connected to much of the nineteenth and twentieth century mission endeavor. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 317. The rise of Aryan theories is very much implicated in this history and involved the work of philologists in Europe, Orientalist scholars in Asia, and missionaries in Asia, see van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, chap. 6. Light skinned "Aryans" in India were viewed as superior to dark skinned "Dravidians" and tribal peoples or "aboriginals." There is also a "glorification" of the Aryan "Brahmanical" invasions theorized in history as compared to the "horrific" invasions of the Mughal Muslims in India. Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, 142-43.

Americans[69]—deep relational togetherness was often not achieved and continues to remain elusive between racial and religious "others."[70] Vial points out that even in the present the problem is perpetuated, "when we rank parts of the world by how developed or progressive or modern they are, by how compatible their religions are with democracy, and when we notice what color the people are who live there, we find that our categories are not so different from Kant's and Müller's."[71] Add to this the long history of identifying people by their skin color even to the point of the ridiculous which did "not stop countless generations of (white) Europeans from classifying the Chinese and Japanese by the supposed hue of their skin [yellow]. By the same token Native Americans have never been red nor South American and Latinos and Latinas brown before Western racial classification."[72]

Vial makes a valid point when he writes, "We continue to use the categories bequeathed to us, and so, I [Vial] argue, despite our best efforts, continue to racialize

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[69] Let me be clear that even the broad categories of Africa or Asia are misleading. Africa is an extremely diverse continent of people and ways of living that defies categorization on such a grand level. While it is true some African and numerous European and North American intellectuals have attempted to argue there is a unified African culture and religion this is not based in the reality that is Africa as Appiah has aptly demonstrated. Appiah, *In My Father's House*, 80. The same is true for Asia see Namsoon Kang, "Who/What Is Asian? A Postcolonial Theological Reading of Orientalism and Neo-Orientalism," in *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire*, eds. Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner, and Mayra Rivera (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2004), 104-08.

[70] Jennings even demonstrates how a missionary in South Africa, who had good intentions, failed to make deep relational connections due to his inability to grapple with these issues, Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 150. The same holds true with the Native Americans in North America who have had to contend with a Christianity so intertwined with the violent spread of empire that it's nearly impossible to disentangle the two, see Amos Yong and Barbara Brown Zikmund, eds., *Remembering Jamestown: Hard Questions About Christian Mission* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010).

[71] Vial, *Modern Religion*, 19. Gottschalk provides evidence that skin color was an operative tool used in the categorization of Indians by the British during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Gottschalk, *Religion, Science, and Empire*, 247-53. See also Dyrness, *The Earth is God's*, 99.

[72] Mignolo goes on to state that these skin colors were meant to fill in the space between black which equaled slave and white which equaled master. Mignolo, *The Darker Side*, 45.

religion in ways that reinscribe the racism of our forerunners."[73] This means theologians

and missiologists have a substantial responsibility to critique their use of these

"bequeathed" categories. As far as possible theologians and missiologists must avoid

using terms or concepts that lead to acts of power which continue the subjugation either

directly or indirectly of any person or people. As Jennings says, it may be that we are

living "within a diseased social imagination."[74]

Implications for Theologians and Missiologists

If the categories of religions have become overly racialized philosophical

frameworks that cannot be disentangled, thus creating dense barriers that block deep and

meaningful relationship building, then theologians and missiologists must rethink their

use of these categories.[75] It does not necessarily mean the rejection of the terminologies

but it does mean giving clear definitions of terminology that move toward empowerment

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[73] Vial, *Modern Religion*, 2. Appiah makes the point that "Using race in itself as a morally relevant distinction strikes most of us as obviously arbitrary. Without associated moral characteristics, why should race provide a better basis than hair color or height or timbre of voice?" Appiah, *In My Father's House*, 18. Based on Appiah and Vial together it appears that categories of religions, often overlapped with categories of race, have been utilized as tools for moral judgment and continue to have that potential.

[74] Jennings, The Christian Imagination, 6.

[75] Kärkkäinen also recognizes the connection between "religion" and "race" and also advises theologians to be more cognizant of this connection. Kärkkäinen, *Creation and Humanity*, 443. The long-term effects of racial divides in African regions that experienced colonialism, between the white colonizer and black colonized, are still very fresh in the minds of several African theologians. It appears that discussions of religion in the Western academy have yet to fully take this into account. Bénézet Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 37-48. See also Ben-Willie Kwaku Golo, "Taking Africa Out of the African: Eco-Community, the Christian Heritage of Empire, and Neo-Pentecostalism in Africa," in *Wealth, Health, and Hope in African Christian Religion*, ed. Stan Chu Ilo (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018). This is no easy task considering that "an idea of Man, introduced in the European Renaissance, became the model for the Human and for Humanity, and the point of reference for racial classification and global racism." Mignolo, *The Darker Side*, 19. The roots of current racist categories, including those of religion, go way back. R. S. Sugirtharajah has demonstrated that overcoming the historical barriers even for those who have a high view of Scripture is no easy task. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics*.

and away from marginalization.[76] Hindutva,[77] which is another version of racialized uses

of religion in India, is an example of non-Western attempts to utilize the power of

religion and race as a tool to "create" a pure India. While much of this project is focused

on the essentializing that certain Europeans and North Americans have engaged in, the

reality is that this is happening all around the world for a wide variety of harmful

purposes.[78]

Franz Boas, the eminent anthropologist, should be credited with working hard to

disprove the evolutionary theory of race that was so pervasive during his tenure in the

early part of the twentieth century. His work was influential in shifting anthropological

research away from oblique racial overtones indicative of anthropology at the time. Yet

Boas lacked a definite grounding concept outside of human reason like those who had

gone before him.[79] Thus, while applauding his work against racism, it must be asked if he

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[76] For a sample of someone attempting to do something similar to what I am calling for here see Wrogemann, *Intercultural Hermeneutics*, 146-48. In these pages Wrogemann breaks apart a historical reality of the British using methods of categorization in order to retain power. The categorizations they used were racial and religious. He closes his analysis with the following sentence, "Cultural transformations are therefore processes in which identity may be positively 'constructed' in a goal-directed fashion. The aspect of power and exercise of power as well as its justification thus take on a considerable significance." Wrogemann, *Intercultural Hermeneutics*, 148.

[77] Hindutva is an attempt by some in India to establish the hegemony of Hindus, as opposed to other groups, in India.

[78] Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict?*, chap. 2. Ramachandra reminds his readers that much of the current conflicts concerning Hindutva in India are actually rooted in concepts of religion that were primarily the work of the colonizing British in tandem with Indian elites. Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict?*, 56-63. There is a significant difference between the colonizers work of Orientalism and that of Occidentalism, although both are unfortunate, the difference being one of power. "Occidentalism does not have the hegemonic power over the West as Orientalism does over Asia." Kang, "Who/or What is Asian," 104. Essentializing and generalizing, while unavoidable among anthropologists, can also be their greatest weakness because it often leads to objectifying people which then leads to the creation of stereotypes that are harmful. Engelke, *How to Think Like an Anthropologist*, 48-49.

[79] Mignolo points out that "rational classification" usually can be stated as "racial classification" which if true creates a real conundrum for those turning to reason as the primary source for categorizing. Mignolo, *The Darker Side*, 83.

was able to provide a distinct alternative approach that would lead in a more constructive direction?[80]

Missiology has moved towards taking African traditions more seriously, with more recent years seeing a rise in more careful discussions and sensitive interactions taking place. Even so, the mission conference of Edinburgh 1910 ignored African traditional ways of living and this has been the norm and is still an area of marginalization in mission studies in general with Africa often being lumped into one big terminological bundle either as animistic or tribal.[81] Theologians from the West are guilty of even greater marginalization of Africa than missiologists.[82] Rarely are African theologians quoted as primary sources of theology in systematic or biblical studies by North American and European authors. These issues appear to fit within the overall trajectory of race and religion in the wider academy and thus create challenging questions for missiologists and theologians concerning the complicity in issues of racial divisions. In relation to this it is still common to find theologians and missiologists discussing "high" and "low" forms of religion or "folk" and "formal" versions. This language comes with a built-in hierarchical baggage that automatically infers superiority and inferiority and is rooted in a very problematic history tied to race.[83]

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[80] Franz Boas, *The Primitive Mind of Man* (New York: MacMillan, 1922). There is no doubt that the corrective brought forth by Boas was needed, as Adams reveals, much of anthropological work in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were attempts to argue that darker skinned people had not progressed culturally as far as lighter skinned people. Adams, *The Philosophical Roots*, 49-50.

[81] Skreslet, Comprehending Mission, 129.

[82] Ramachandra, "Response 3," 312.

[83] For examples of this see Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999). McDermott and Netland, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, 235.

This does not require minimizing real differences between people and their ways of living.[84] It means taking seriously these differences but not allowing constructed categories such as race and religion to get in the way of building meaningful relationships.[85] I advise a turn away from the categories if they are explicitly or implicitly tied to historically problematic understandings of race.[86] My turn toward the Bible must take this critique seriously as I attempt to evaluate how the Bible handles relationship building in the midst of real and perceived differences.

Human Progress as Teleology

Creating False Hope in Human Reason

As noted in the previous Chapter, the Enlightenment was rooted in a teleology of progress. This was seen through the hope in the power of human reason as a tool powerful enough to lead humanity towards a prosperous and peaceful future. This teleology is found in Kant but expounded on and altered by numerous other Enlightenment thinkers and those influenced by the Enlightenment even into the present.[87] Events, such as two World Wars and all they entailed, put an end to much of

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[84] There is still be room for anthropological studies but it is notoriously difficult to know where anthropology is appropriate and how to undertake anthropological research in meaningful ways, especially from a foundation of biblical faith as opposed to agnostic reason. For a defense of why all people should think at least somewhat anthropologically see Engelke, *How to Think Like an Anthropologist*.

[85] As Vial puts it, "Humans are apparently hardwired to prefer their ingroup, but the markers of what constitutes in or out are historically contingent, and the level and content of the preference are subject to cultural influence." Vial, *Modern Religion*, 5.

[86] The fact that both disciplines of theology and missiology have been dominated by white male scholarship has not helped the situation. Harvie Conn argued this many years ago and has since been joined by a host of other scholars who also recognize the imbalance and are working towards a viable solution. This has played a role, although less tangible, in the development of the categories of both race and religions as well. Conn, *Eternal Word*, 14. A later Chapter in this dissertation will discuss this issue in fuller detail.

the optimism that had pushed the Enlightenment forward in Europe. But there has not

been a clear and sufficient alternative teleology to replace progress.[88]

Much of science, and this includes the science of religion and the social sciences,

has been actively engaged in the goal of furthering the progress of humanity.[89] This can

be read explicitly and implicitly within the writings of the key thinkers who were behind

the development of the concepts of religion from the eighteenth through nineteenth

century.[90] That goal was rooted in a "rehabilitation of human nature" whereby human

nature is seen as primarily good especially European and North American white human

nature.[91] It has since proven to be a faulty teleology rooted in the suspect grounding of

human reason.[92] Vial has argued for an approach to human description without teleology,

but this does not seem to be a tenable option. That road appears to lead to a purely

immanent world cut off from the apocalyptic transcendent. Living in a world that is

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[87] As the Enlightenment, in its myriad forms, led into the late nineteenth and early twentieth century articulations of progress, theology began to imbibe more and more from this fountain until eschatology among all but certain strands of more evangelically minded people was hardly a factor in theologizing. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Hope and Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), 9-11. I disagree with David Bosch's argument that "from the seventeenth century on, however, science has been avowedly non-teleological." Bosch goes on to argue that science is interested in questions of cause and effect only, yet this does not match with the manifested desire for progress as a guiding principle in both the physical and social sciences of the twentieth, and even to a certain extent twenty first centuries. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 271. Bosch later in the same book recognizes that "progress" was a driving force of optimism that came out of the Enlightenment and heavily influenced theology and mission thinking. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 277.

[88] For more on this see Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 183-84. Vial summarizes clearly the connection between modernity and the ideal of progress as its teleology, see Vial, *Modern Religion*, 238. See also Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 289.

[89] McCutcheon, *The Insider/Outsider*, 129. Although to be clear when Darwin burst on the scene it shook the foundations of any sort of teleology to its core, see Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 379.

[90] For more on this see Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 219-28.

[91] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 253.

[92] Unfortunately, as Bosch states it, "The foundational Enlightenment belief in the assured *victory of progress* was perhaps more explicitly recognizable in the Christian missionary enterprise than any other element of the age (emphasis in original)." Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 350.

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immanently enclosed has shut much of European and North American society off from any sort of otherworldly teleology, which even Kant kept in place to a certain extent although in an abstract way.

Harvie Conn referred to this approach as "developmentalism" which had a significant influence on anthropology and sociology. According to Conn, this led to "anthropologists dehumanizing" their subjects by comparing them to the more "progressive" West. Conn contends that Christians theoretically argued against this by turning to the creational understanding of the Image of God, but practically incorporated Progress as a normative narrative which is seen in the language of superiority missionaries used within non-Western environments.[93] A quote from Michael Rynkiewich is worth citing in full here:

> Early anthropologists, both scholars and dilettantes during the nineteenth century, were concerned with the origins of customs and institutions. The underlying motivation for this quest for new foundations was the desire to bolster European cultural pride. The underlying assumption was that, if it could be shown that culture and society developed in stages from simple to complex versions, then it was but a short step to justifying why Europe was at the top of the ladder, as it certainly seemed to be in terms of political and military power. In addition, the church's version of history, one of devolution or a fall from a primal state of purity and innocence, would be undermined in favor of the new faith in progress. The idea of cultural and social evolution provided a narrative that justified colonial domination and economic exploitation.[94]

Marginalization of Evil

Part of this teleology includes a drastic reduction in the role of evil in the world. Thus far in the dissertation I have hardly mentioned the concept of evil not by choice but

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[93] Conn, *Eternal Word*, 78.

[94] Rynkiewich, Soul, Self, and Society, 136.

by necessity. The concept of evil, and especially the idea that evil beings interact with people on this earth, fell on hard times during the Enlightenment in Europe and North America.[95] Taylor states, "This new ethic of rational control supposes disenchantment. . . . The buffered self is the agent who no longer fears demons, spirits, magic forces."[96] Taylor goes on to clarify how the turn from evil took place.

> If God's purposes for us encompass only our own good, and this can be read from the design of our nature, then no further mystery can hide here. If we set aside one of the central mysteries of traditional Christian faith, that of evil, of our estrangement from God, and inability to return to him unaided, but we see all the motivation we need already there, either in our self-interest well understood, or in our feelings of benevolence, then there is no further mystery in the human heart.[97]

Theodicy was certainly still on the radar screen of some who have been discussed above, such as Peter Berger, but they discuss evil in a very different way than it is described in the Bible.[98]

In some ways it seems evil was removed from the framework in characterizing people and replaced by qualitative descriptors. So, people may not be evil but they could be "backwards," "primitive," "less than human," etc.[99] People were

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[95] Harrison traces the shift to a moment in the seventeenth century when God and Satan were removed from the picture and religion was placed in the "natural" world. Harrison, *'Religion'*, 5. In the seventeenth century, nevertheless, there was still a large and influential number of English scholars who had a belief in Satan and fallen beings that interacted with the world in a dynamic way. Harrison, *'Religion'*, 100-01.

[96] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 134-35.

[97] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 223.

[98] Berger has a chapter in *The Sacred Canopy* entitled "The Problem of Theodicy." Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, chap. 3. Taylor notes a preoccupation with questions of theodicy in the current age, but this is not to be confused with discussions of Satan and evil as they were previously understood before the Enlightenment. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 232.

[99] While it was not his intention, Asad demonstrates this point very well, when discussing the role of a teleology of progress combined with evolution in the theory of many anthropologists which use this combination to explain differentiation. Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 22. This often included explicitly racialized language to differentiate between the "white" superiors and the "black" savages. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 185.

distinguished as inferior both in their religious and cultural makeup.[100] For Tylor and others part of the role of ethnography was to isolate the backwardness or non-rational elements or people and "mark them out for destruction" as this would aid in "progress."[101] This is no longer acceptable, but in an immanent framework, the only other apparent option is relativism.[102] Thus, all people are to be tolerated because they are all equal. No religion or culture can be seen as superior lest we fall back into the old ethnocentric traps of the previous centuries. As a result, evil continues to fall outside the purview of religious and social science disciplines.[103] This is strange in light of such devastating events of the twentieth century such as two World Wars, the Holocaust, and other atrocities.[104]

The inability of social scientists and historians of religion to take stock of evil and deal with it should be a major concern for any theologian and missiologist that make

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[100] Adams specifically mentions that Boasian anthropology has often glossed over the "warts" of societies or cultures, in the ethnographies produced. In other words the description of "primitive" people was and is often done in such a way that the people described appear as serene and satisfied in their ways without conflict. Adams, *The Philosophical Roots*, 107.

[101] Stocking, Victorian Anthropology, 194.

[102] Rynkiewich writes that, "this view of progress marks the modernist project, and is still strong in Euro-American psyche today." Rynkiewich, *Soul, Self, and Society*, 138.

[103] Notice what Engelke writes concerning witchcraft, superstition, and other paranormal concepts,

Many anthropologists would be open to such possibilities themselves. They would at least not openly scoff. Nevertheless, most would never commit it to print, and most work hard—not without justification—to suggest the ways in which apparently irrational beliefs, forms of mystical participation, witchcraft, and so on make sense on their own terms (Engelke, *How to Think Like an Anthropologist*, 236).

A robust belief in Satan and other evil beings does not make sense in the "world" of the social scientist.

[104] Part of the silence is due to the fact that some of the early "fathers" of the social sciences adhered to theories of social and cultural development that were implicated in the rhetoric of Nazis. Adams, *The Philosophical Roots*, 280. Adams appears to contradict himself when later he argues that German ethnography was never undertaken with hegemony as a goal or with an ulterior agenda than to learn about culture. Adams, *The Philosophical Roots*, 296.

heavy use of social science data.[105] Thus a fatal flaw is revealed in the development of

the categories which can lead to serious consequences of relativism if a person is not

careful.[106] This inability to deal with evil is rooted in the "scientific" nature of the social

sciences, whereby, social scientists pride themselves in observing cultures and societies

from supposed positions of neutrality. But this means the language of evil has no place in

their descriptive works.[107]

Turning to the Bible should remedy this issue by allowing the text to insert an

understanding of evil in the post-fall world that informs how humanity is understood and

described.[108] Relying on inherited categories of religions from the philosophically

informed European and North American intellectuals background they come from fails to

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[105] Robert J. Priest has written a very good chapter on this issue Robert J. Priest, "Christian Theology, Sin, and Anthropology," in *Anthropology and Theology: God, Icons, and God-Talk*, eds. Walter Randolph Adams and Frank A. Salamone (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000). Charles Kraft and Alan Tippett, both Christian anthropologists, have done far better than most at revitalizing a belief in and understanding of evil, Satan, and demonic influences in mission thinking and practice. While Paul Hiebert developed the concept of the "excluded middle" he did not develop nearly as robust an understanding as either Kraft or Tippett on how to understand and deal with evil.

[106] Evans-Pritchard was clear that he did not take seriously the spirit world that those he observed took seriously, this included their understandings of evil. His view is typical of anthropologists. Larsen, *The Slain God*, 89.

[107] Anthropological descriptions of evil have been a source of debate among anthropologists for some time. It is very difficult to pinpoint how to define evil when you do not have a clear demarcation of what is good or moral. For a very wide-ranging set of essays on this topic see David J. Parkin, ed. *The Anthropology of Evil* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985). For excellent overview of these challenges from the perspective of sociology see Hillel Levine, "On the Debanalization of Evil," in *Sociology and Human Destiny: Essays on Sociology, Religion and Society*, ed. Gregory Baum (New York: Seabury, 1980). For a book that deals more with the psychological side of evil as it relates to society see Terry D. Cooper, *Dimensions of Evil: Contemporary Perspectives* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007).

[108] I am aware of at least one excellent article, written by self-identified Christian social scientists in dialogue with theologians, that moves in this direction. See Eloise Meneses, Lindy Backues, David Bronkema, Eric Flett, and Benjamin L. Hartley, "Engaging the Religiously Committed Other: Anthropologists and Theologians in Dialogue," *Current Anthropology* 55, no. 1 (2014).

take evil into full account in its category developments.[109] This deems the categories to be problematic in that they often lead to an unnecessarily high view of culture and religion or a neutral view that does not reflect reality.

Implications for Theologians and Missiologists

Theologians and missiologists, who have historically had a high view of Scripture, are equipped with an eschatological vision that should aid them in providing a teleology that answers the issues raised above. Yet, rarely have I found a discussion of culture or religion that emphasizes the importance of the New Earth and re-creation. While abstract discussions of the Second Coming are common among Evangelicals, these discussions often do not have any influence on theology of religions discussions nor theology of culture discussions. It is possible that the presuppositions of such fields of study as anthropology, have brought their progressivism roots into missiology.[110] Certainly the history of mission is laden with progressivist language and hope.[111]

The current available categories of religions were forged in a world that saw

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[109] This has had a serious impact on the way "Christians" in Europe and North America have thought about the "unseen" world of God, Satan, and miracles. Andrew F. Walls, *Crossing Cultural Frontiers: Studies in the History of World Christianity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017), 41-44. John Peckham has found that the cosmic conflict so prevalent in Scripture has often been "dismissed or overlooked" due to the rise of Enlightenment thinking in Europe and North America. John C. Peckham, *Theodicy of Love: Cosmic Conflict and the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 55.

[110] Michael Rynkiewich argues this has happened, see Rynkiewich, *Soul, Self, and Society*, 195. William Y. Adams is not a missiologist, but his work on tracing the ideology of "progress" as the "tap root" of anthropological theory is very important and may aid in identifying where this mentality enters missiological discussions through the appropriation of certain anthropological theories and definitions. Adams, *The Philosophical Roots*, chap. 2.

[111] Bosch, Transforming Mission, 298.

human progress through the exercise of human reason as the answer to Earth's woes.[112] This has proven to be unsustainable and implicates the categories as rooted in a false hope, of which the categories were partly formed to discover what a "true" human is and should be like. The categories, indirectly, served as guides towards progress, revealing who was advanced or in high culture or religion, and who was backward or behind. The implication was that such people needed to change in order to survive and thrive in the world of reason.[113] But this approach led to hegemonic use of the categories as sources of power over those who labeled and categorized through reason.[114] There is still a tendency to work within these categories which easily lead in the same directions, though maybe not in as explicitly racist or triumphalistic terms as before.[115] It is quite common to find the categories being used around the world as tools of communal entrenchment that aid insiders in knowing who is an "outsider" and how to keep them out.[116]

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[112] Van der Veer points out that many nineteenth century British thinkers adhered to a kind of social evolution that was guided by an overall teleology of progress reliant on Enlightenment ideals. This was then utilized in colonial policy, for example, in how the Indian education system was set up. It was understood by many leading British theorists that Indians were intellectually equal to "children" and thus needed to be "educated" in the ways of progressive England. Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, 18.

[113] As Adams asserts, "The "Other", meaning in this case earlier peoples, becomes the yardstick by which the progressivists measure their own superiority. No people, so far as I know, has ever propounded a progressivist doctrine without placing itself at the top of the ladder of progress." Adams, *The Philosophical Roots*, 12.

[114] Mitsutoshi Horii, "Critical Reflections on the Category of 'Religion' in Contemporary Sociological Discourse," *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 28, no. 1 (2015): 24. Many things that end in "ism" are meant to prop up systems of power. Vanhoozer, "What Is Everyday Theology?," 54.

[115] Wrogemann finds that often the language used in theology of religion discussions and theology of culture discussions falls into this trap. In these discussions the terms "culture" and "religion" are defined in normative ways that create lenses in which to view the "other" as wholly other. Wrogemann, *Intercultural Hermeneutics*, 270-71.

[116] Asad states, "dominant power has worked best through differentiating and classifying practices." Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 17.

According to Vial, "As with Kant, when we make sense of the world with a teleological story, we cannot but eventually theorize difference as a more or a less."[117] This is a major accusation against teleology that deserves careful reflection. I will go to the Bible to examine whether it can serve as an alternative source for teleology. This requires submitting descriptions of life to the teleology of Scripture rooted in Revelation 20-22. This work remains for Chapter 6.

Conclusion

The changes that the concept of religion has passed through in the previous four centuries is a complex road to navigate. As knowledge increased through the engagement of people from all over the world, categories had to be changed and updated. But this process has been plagued by a history of hegemony, dominance, and colonizing power that problematizes the concepts of religion that were developed during this time. Human reason held sway as a conceptual norm during these centuries, and still holds sway for most scholarly pursuits. In an immanentized world it is hard to see any distinct alternatives to reason's dictatorship over epistemological and ontological issues. This has played a major role in the developments of religion through philosophy, philology, evolutionary science, anthropology, and sociology.

Despite all the knowledge gained through the turn to human reason, significant problems have arisen that often go unnoticed or unaddressed. These include issues of objectification—huge masses of people lumped together into philosophically and scientifically derived categories—devised in Western Europe and North America to be foisted on the rest of the world. Unfortunately, this objectification is often a two-way

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[117] Vial, Modern Religion, 146.

street, whereby the Western world is also essentialized by non-Western forces that stand to gain in demonizing the West.[118] Race and religion also appear to be inseparable siblings, which complicates the categories considering the awful history of slavery and racism. Finally, the past four centuries have functioned within a teleology based on the idea of "progress" as a real human potential, if only human reason were allowed to function in full force. This has proven to be a faulty teleology that has left an immanentized world in a position where hope seems out of reach and thus life's meaning begins to ebb away. Evil, which includes a belief in non-human beings that influence this world negatively, has nearly faded out in the immanentized world created through the turn to human reason. This leads to inadequate accounts of religion, to the naturalization of sin and evil, and to a positive relativism, allowing no room for critique.

The Bible is one alternative source of authority that can serve to help in overcoming these serious implications. As noted in this Chapter and the previous Chapter many scholars recognize that the categories of religions which have been developed are highly problematic. But these scholars, while recognizing the problem, struggle to provide a clear alternative that is able to overcome the challenges posed by their own deconstructive work. These scholars often leave the reader with a vague attempt to argue that the categories should be abandoned and that all people should try to be more understanding of those different than themsleves. A prime example of this is found in Masuzawa's work. She writes in regards to the "invention of world religions,"

> But how do we avoid such a violation—if that is what it was—and how can we ensure that the science of religion henceforth will not to be in collusion with such

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[118] Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict?*, 34-37.

malign forces of absolutism in the name of pluralism with its hidden supremacist pretensions and exclusivism?[119]

Her answer, "It has not been my express purpose in the present study to furnish an answer to this question one way or another."[120] This is a weak alternative that is not rooted in a clear normative source other than her own reasoning which is then a logical circle back that does not provide a better way forward.[121]

Religion is not simply a word—all language and words have the potential to build up or break down. Therefore, it is essential that these categories, with their historic baggage be submitted to the Bible in order to reveal if there is a better alternative to describe human life, both in humanity's relationship with a transcendent God, and in immanent relationships with each other.[122] Harvie Conn pleaded many years ago that

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[119] Masuzawa, The Invention of World Religions, 325.

[120] Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 325. Masuzawa has done scholarship on religion a great service by providing the history of ideas that she has, but it is not at all clear as to what she feels the readers should do with this information other than avoiding "supremacist" attitudes. But how? What alternative frameworks are there for aiding such avoidance? These are left unanswered.

[121] There are several other examples like Masuzawa including Fitzgerald who deconstructs religion and culture in order to "propose that religious studies be rethought and represented as cultural studies, understood as the study of the institutions and the institutionalized values of specific societies, and the relation between those institutionalized values and the legitimation of power." In other words, this appears to be a work of ongoing deconstruction that does not provide a clear reason or path to construction of a better alternative. Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*, 10. McCutcheon also leaves his study in the realm of deconstruction as he writes,

> I have not attempted to demonstrate that the use of research methods based on sui generis religion are theoretically or morally wrong, but have simply demonstrated that such methods and theories are entrenched in unrecognized issues of discursive demarcation, power, and control, and that sociopolitical implications follow their use (*Manufacturing Religion*, 191).

When you read this book it appears to be painting a picture of theoretical and moral wrongs, yet in the end argues this is not the purpose, leaving the reader wondering exactly what the purpose of the deconstruction, which is valid, was for?

[122] Amos Yong has argued for something similar, he terms this as a need for a "hermeneutics of life." I think that Yong is on to something here, although we take different interpretative paths towards our respective solutions, the focus on life rather than religion is very similar to what I am attempting in this project. Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 129, 149-61.

"missions still needs a theology that encompasses all of life."[123] It is to this plea, which I argue has yet to be adequately heeded, that the rest of this dissertation will turn.

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[123] Conn, *Eternal Word*, 120.

CHAPTER 4

CREATION TO FALL AND RELATIONAL

LIFE IN GENESIS 1-3

Introduction

The following three Chapters will construct a missiologically informed theology

of relational life[1] within the space created by the deconstructive work of the previous two

Chapters. The following three Chapters will move into the Bible in order to form an

understanding of relational life that can serve as an alternative to the categories of

religions deconstructed in the previous Chapters.[2]

Fields such as anthropology and sociology, as well as religious studies to a lesser

extent, have attempted to overcome the problems described in the previous two Chapters.

The argument in favor of focusing on particular people and particular settings is one way

of dealing with the problems presented as is the turn towards "dialogue" between people

who differ from each other. This, however, has not created alternative frameworks for

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[1] See "Relational Life" in definition of terms on page 13 of Chapter 1.

[2] Although there are others who have attempted to address this issue framed in a similar way to what I am doing, it has often been approached from either, different angles or different biblical passages, and usually from different presuppositional starting points. For an example see William Edgar, *Created and Creating: A Biblical Theology of Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2017), 51. Several authors have framed their discussions of culture and the Bible within the paradigm set by H. Richard Niebuhr. I see my project as doing something different, but have found his work and more recent critiques of his work, helpful in situating my own approach and arguments. For examples of books that deal with Niebuhr, and then create their own approach to a theology of culture, see John G. Stackhouse, Jr., *Making the Best of It: Following Christ in the Real World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

thinking about life that is equal to that provided in the Bible as I will argue in the next

several Chapters. I am arguing that a biblically based understanding of relational life

provides a superior alternative framework to the current categories of religions in a way

that anthropologists, sociologists, and religious studies scholars who root their theories in

human reason are unable to accomplish.

It is far beyond the scope of this project to provide an entire canonical study on

relational life. Rather this study will attempt to remain true to "canonical principles" as

clarified in *Canonical Theology* by John C. Peckham.[3] It will do so by making

theological and missiological statements rooted in three different passages and

theological *loci* of the Bible. In order to accomplish this, I chose three passages of the

Bible that arguably represent the theological center of the Bible. By adding John 1:1-18 I

adapted Richard M. Davidson's arguments for reading Genesis 1-3, and Revelation 20-

22, as the theological center of Scripture.[4] These three passages will be the focus of the

three subsequent Chapters. Davidson provides seven theological themes that are shared

between Genesis 1-3 and Revelation 20-22, which I believe are also present in John 1:1-

18.[5] Certain of those themes are particularly relevant for this project. This work combines

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[3] Peckham, Canonical Theology.

[4] Tennent uses a similar framework. He writes, "We have demonstrated that a theology of culture must be related to the doctrines of creation and New Creation, which flow out of the Father's initiative. It is also essential that a theology of culture be properly related to a biblical Christology." Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 178.

[5] These are the seven themes: (1) Creation and the Divine design for this planet. (2) The character of the Creator (with implications for theodicy). (3) The rise of the moral conflict concerning the character of God. (4) The Gospel covenant promise centered in the Person of the Messianic Seed. (5) The substitutionary atonement worked out by the Messianic Seed. (6) The eschatological windup of the moral conflict with the end of the serpent and evil. (7) The sanctuary setting of the moral conflict. Davidson, "Back to the Beginning," 19. For other scholars who argue that Gen 1-3 creates the framework whereby the rest of Scripture is meant to be understood see the footnotes on the following pages of Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 1-2.

theology and missiology, and in light of the now accepted concept of the *missio Dei*, I

argue that if these passages represent the theological center of the Bible they also

represent the missiological center.[6] Since they represent both the theological and

missiological center of the Bible these passages will be studied in order to locate whether

or not they reveal descriptors of life between humanity and God, and humanity with each

other.[7] What emerges from these passages will then be compared with the implications

that stem from the current categories of religions found in Chapter 3.

Genesis 1-3

The book of Genesis is the book of beginnings. It documents the beginning "of

the world, of life, of humankind…, of nations, languages, culture."[8] This Chapter will be

focused on Genesis 1-3, as these chapters relate to the concepts of culture and religion.

Definitive ways of defining either religion or culture are hard to isolate, as a result, I will

proceed in this Chapter with a broad definition of religion and culture, based on the

understanding that both are meant to characterize life as it relates to God and humans.

Nehrbass is correct to exposit that God did not create culture, he created humans with the

ability to be creative with the materials on earth and their minds and bodies.[9] Therefore,

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[6] The literature on *missio Dei* is so vast that there is little reason to include any of it here. I use the term in a minimalist sense to convey that all true mission stems from God's loving mission.

[7] Vanhoozer argues that the narrative "movement" of Scripture goes from "creation through fall to salvation." And if we view reality through Scripture in this way we actually have better grasp of reality than if we do not use Scripture. Vanhoozer, "What Is Everyday Theology?," 41.

[8] Doukhan, *Genesis*, 21.

[9] Nehrbass, *God's Image*, 68. I agree with Nehrbass' statement that understanding God creates humans not cultures, which he says, "should be very freeing for us, rather than disturbing or controversial. It should allow us to stop holding so tightly to so many of our culturally patterned behaviors and beliefs as if we were bound to them." Nehrbass, *God's Image*, 68.

this Chapter will use the terminology, *relational life*,[10] to refer to the combination of what has typically been defined separately as religion and culture. The goal is to allow Genesis 1-3 to speak to the issue with the purpose of critiquing the categories of religions.[11] In order to accomplish this task the Chapter is divided into five main sections and a conclusion.

The first section looks broadly at what it means to be made in the Image of God. This is done from a missiological and theological framework rather than an exegetical starting point. The objective is for this vital biblical concept to inform the issue of religion as a descriptor for living relationally.

The second section will then look at five elements of relational life in Genesis 1-2, namely: work and rest, food and eating, language, human relationships and marriage, and clothing. In current anthropological academic parlance these elements would probably be labeled as cultural. Rather than allowing current definitions of religion or culture to dictate the discussion the elements are drawn out of the passage to inform the category development of relational life.[12]

The third section discusses the difficult issue of whether or not religion is present in Genesis 1-2. Based on the discussion on relational life elements, I will then put forth

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[10] I am indebted to Wagner Kuhn for this terminology which he shared with me in private conversation, although the way I use it is my own. The theological turn to relationality, including inter-trinitarian relations, God and human relations, and human-to-human relations, is well-documented and supported, see Kärkkäinen, *Creation and Humanity*, 290-92.

[11] This is similar to the task of Hironori Minamino who wrote an article with this preface statement: "I am attempting to describe how contemporary people can critique their own culture through interpreting the Bible." Hironori Minamino, "Genesis 1 as Critique of Japanese Culture," *Direction* 34, no. 2 (2005): 159.

[12] I recognize that this is idealistic language and that at some level my own presuppositions, including those about religion and culture, are playing a role as I interpret and subsequently write about Genesis 1-3.

the challenge of finding religion in Genesis 1-2. The text will again assert into the issue, and will move toward questioning the reality of the concept of religion in Genesis 1-2.

The fourth section will review the five elements of culture in Genesis 3, during and after the Fall of humankind. The discussion will focus on what types of changes occurred to these relational elements after the fall, as well as whether there was any continuation from pre to post fall.

The fifth section will again look at the concept of religion in Genesis 3. The purpose of this is to check the conclusions drawn in this Chapter's third section to see if the entrance of sin altered or produced new understandings of religion. The Chapter's conclusion will draw a more distinct picture of what Genesis 1-3 says, which impacts current categorization of religion especially as it relates to the issues delineated in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

Imaging God

Terence Fretheim wrote in his book, *God and World in the Old Testament*, the "testimony regarding God, standing at the head of the canon, should inform our understanding of God in the rest of the Scriptures."[13] Fretheim richly describes the intimacy between God and humanity that is found in Genesis 1-2 when the narrator recounts how humanity came into being.[14] In verse 27 female and male together make the Image of God complete not one or the other in subjugation, neither are they situated

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[13] Terence E. Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), 40. Stanley J. Grenz cites Karl Barth as interpreting Genesis 1, as the "prologue to a narrative." Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 202.

[14] Fretheim, *God and World*, 39.

hierarchically based on gender.[15] Together they "image" God. Genesis 2 describes the

creation of the first humans in more detail, but the use of image terminology is found

primarily in Genesis 1.[16]

Scholars have debated for centuries as to what it means to be made in the Image

of God.[17] Some of the debate swirls around the description of God using the plural "Let

us," in verse 26. While conclusive answers as to what the "us" stands for are not agreed

upon, it very well may be a reference to God as Trinity.[18] At the very least it created a

sense of community right from the beginning of humanity's existence. There was no "I"

in the beginning but rather "Us." Humanity was created in the image of "Us," the God of

community. This is an important theological premise that runs throughout Scripture and

enhances the intimacy of community both between humanity and God, and humanity

with humanity.[19] Stanley J. Grenz and Jay T. Smith remind their readers that only God

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[15] Davidson describes it this way, "the sexual distinction between male and female is fundamental to what it means to be human." Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 19. For more on the equality and non-hierarchical nature of Eve and Adam's relationship see Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 22-35.

[16] Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen points out that explicit references to humanity being made in the Image of God after Genesis 1 are few and far between. Kärkkäinen, *Creation and Humanity*, 269.

[17] For an overview of the many theological discussions concerning the Image of God over the centuries see Grenz, *The Social and Relational Self* . See also Richard M. Davidson, "The Nature of the Human Being from the Beginning: Genesis 1-11," in *"What are Human Beings that you Remember Them?"* ed. Clinton Wahlen (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2015), 12-22.

[18] For more on the possibility of Genesis 1:26 referring to the fullness of the Godhead, which would include the various members such as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit see Jiří Moskala, "Toward Trinitarian Thinking in the Hebrew Scriptures," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 21, nos. 1-2 (2010): 256.

[19] Doukhan feels that it is appropriate to see this as a reference to the Trinity. Doukhan, *Genesis*, 62.

has the prerogative to decide what is or is not human, and all that is human is in God's image.[20]

Scholars are unanimous in recognizing this is a pivotal point in Scripture, which gives humanity a level of value that is beyond explanation.[21] Part of God's purpose in creating the world was to create beings in order to have a relationship with them.[22] Humanity was made to "image" the very God who created them; there is a similarity between these entities, God and humanity, that is unchangeable in essence.[23] While the history of the study of religion in the last two centuries often desired to uncover the "essence" of what it meant to be human, the use of Genesis 1 to articulate this essence became less and less relevant.

Humanity will always carry with it this Image of God; even when distorted it cannot be erased entirely. This passage gives humanity as a whole a worth beyond

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[20] Stanley J. Grenz and Jay T. Smith, *Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 43. A look into history shows the importance of keeping the prerogative of God in deciding who is human, as a very high priority. Recent history alone is enough to show what happens when this is not done correctly: The Holocaust, Eugenics, other genocides, etc. Each of these movements or massacres was built on an understanding of humanity in which some were of lesser value and therefore expendable.

[21] The concept of *ubuntu*, illustrates this value very well. *Ubuntu* is the belief that there is no independent life without the creative acts of God. This is then translated into a way of life here on earth in which people are treated with respect because we are all part of this life that God has created. Olaotse Gabasiane, "Relational Care as Ministry to the Marginalized," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 6, no. 2 (2010): 19. There has been some push back on the idea of *Ubuntu* being a pan-African concept as some claim. Rather it is a more localized concept that is worth exploring but should not be understood to represent all Africans view of life. For more on this see Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Lies that Bind: Rethinking Identity* (New York: Liveright, 2018), 203-204.

[22] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Pictures at a Theological Exhibition: Scenes of the Church's Worship, Witness, and Wisdom (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 277.

[23] Fretheim, *God and World*, 17. For Nehrbass the connection is "functionality." In other words we function like God by being creative. Nehrbass, *God's Image*, 62.

measure. All people "share a common humanity because we share a common origin."[24]

Wright says, "When we look at any other person, we do not see the label (Hindu,

Buddhist, Muslim, secular atheist, white, black, etc.) but *the image of God*, loved by God,

valued and evaluated by God."[25] This statement alone, if true—and this is assumed in this

project as true—has major implications for how theologians and missiologists think about

and approach the so-called "other."[26] No matter what labels are used to describe people,

the creation account makes it clear all categories are subordinate to being made in the

Image of God because this takes place prior to the development of any category or label

used to describe humanity.[27]

While a complete definition of what it means to be made in the Image of God is

beyond the scope of this Chapter, or any one scholar, there are certain portions of Genesis

1-2 that can help the reader form an idea as to some of the characteristics of what it

means to be made in God's image. Wright describes four "truths" that being made in the

image of God reveal: (1) "All human beings are addressable by God." (2) All human

beings are accountable to God." (3) "All human beings have dignity and equality." (4)

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[24] Cynthia M. Campbell, *A Multitude of Blessings: A Christian Approach to Religious Diversity* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 36. Campbell hammers home this theme throughout her small book. While the implications she derives from the common origin of Genesis 1 deserve more careful reflection and interpretation, the basic premise is important and deserves to be highlighted especially in the ongoing theological and missiological engagement.

[25] Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2006), 423. Wright has developed strong arguments for using the lens of the Image of God at creation through which to see the world.

[26] Doukhan would likely agree, he writes the following comments on Genesis 1:26, "This scriptural definition of the human being is a rich revelation of biblical anthropology, for not only does it affirm the unity of human nature, it also underscores the miracle of human individuality." Doukhan, *Genesis*, 62.

[27] Wright says that "There is therefore a fundamental God-awareness or God-openness that is common to all humanity, in comparison with which all other labels are secondary, including religious ones." See Wright, *The Mission of God*, 422.

"The biblical gospel fits all."[28] This begins with Gen 1:28-30 which laid out God's

desires for humanity in the beginning.

A number of theologians and missiologists have labeled Genesis 1:28-30 the

cultural mandate.[29] There are several elements within the passage that lend credence to

this interpretation. The cultural mandate, or creation mandate, "describes the divine intent

for human life and culture as it applies to all peoples."[30] I prefer to use the terminology

creation of relational life which is similar to Goheen's definition of the cultural

mandate.[31]

God gave duties to humanity; they were to oversee the created surroundings God

placed them in and to develop "culture and society."[32] This included the plants and

natural environment, the birds and fish, and the animals, with Adam and Eve as their

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[28] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 422-25. Commenting on number two Wright states that the accountability of all humanity to God is a "universal phenomenon independent of culture or religion." Wright, *The Mission of God*, 422-23.

[29] For examples of scholars referring to the cultural mandate in Genesis 1 see Daniel B. Clendenin, *Many Gods, Many Lords: Christianity Encounters World Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 122. One of the clearest and concise explanations of the cultural mandate is Roger S. Greenway, "The Cultural Mandate," in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 251-252. Stackhouse, Jr. calls it the "commission." Stackhouse Jr., *Making the Best of It*, 183. William Edgar makes the fascinating observation that this mandate is closely connected to the mandate of Matthew 28:18-20 to make disciples. In other words, the mandate to make disciples is a mandate to share and create new ways of living, in light of the life of Jesus, throughout the world. Edgar, *Created and Creating*, 161.

[30] Ott, Strauss, and Tennent, *Encountering Theology of Mission*, 150. Andy Crouch describes it as "the Creator's own cultural initiative." Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 108.

[31] It is not clear why Goheen separates the terminology "human life" from the term "culture" as one seems to assume the other. By widening the terminology to "relational life" I am hoping to open up a more holistic potential ingrained in the relational aspects of both human life on earth with each other and human relationships with God.

[32] Goheen, Introducing Christian Mission Today, 104.

creative caretakers.[33] God was particular that the first humans reproduce offspring in their

image, and ultimately in the Image of God.[34] He also created humanity in a world full of

trees and plants that produced seeds and fruits to eat.

Humanity was endowed with the ability to create within the environment God

placed them.[35] They would not only create new life through the reproduction capabilities

God had created them with, but they would also create new ways to grow plants and to

work with the natural world. In a sense, they would be constantly creating new

surroundings as they interacted with the plants, trees, and living creatures around them.[36]

While it is difficult to fully identify what it means to be created in the Image of God, one

thing is apparent from the verses following Genesis 1:26-27, humanity was designed to

be creators, not in the exact same way as God—who created something out of nothing—

but in a similar fashion.[37] God placed humanity within the created surroundings in order

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[33] Greek Orthodoxy has a well-developed theology concerning this particular aspect of the text. This however needs to be understood in light of the "theosis" which Greek Orthodoxy points to in much of its theology. For a good sample of Greek Orthodox theology as developed from Genesis 1-3 see Anastasios Yannoulatos, "Culture and Gospel: Some Observations from the Orthodox Tradition and Experience," *International Review of Mission* 74, no. 294 (1985).

[34] Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 49. Genesis 5:1-3 reiterates this.

[35] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 104.

[36] Campbell argues that the diversity of religions can be understood theologically to be similar to the variety of plants and animals that God created. This is a very speculative argument that goes well beyond what the text says, see Campbell, *A Multitude of Blessings*, 40. W. Eugene March develops a similar argument to Campbell. March infers that the diversity of the natural creation points to diversity in humanity that is meant to be celebrated, see W. Eugene March, *The Wide, Wide Circle of Divine Love: A Biblical Case for Religious Diversity* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 19.

[37] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 22. Clifford Geertz, who was not writing from a faith perspective, gives legitimation to this view when he argues that the search for cultural universals is not a very fruitful way forward. While Geertz may be overstating this point, Scripture does portray humanity as having the ability to create culture in ways beyond numbering, making it difficult to tease out the universals if they exist. See Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 40. The renowned sociologist Peter Berger also argues that humans create culture in a way that would not contradict Genesis 1-2, see Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 5.

for them to creatively image Him.[38] Timothy Tennent's comments that "God is the source and sustainer of both physical and social culture" is not far off the mark.[39] Humans are the creative authors of relational life, and God is the author of creative humans.[40]

This implicitly reveals that God created free beings, which becomes more evident in Genesis 2.[41] God's mandate to humanity to work with the natural world, and with each other, does not contain a lot of details;[42] they were given freedom to proceed, but this was always done "before the face of God."[43]

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[38] Jonathan R. Wilson builds a strong case for seeing the myriad's of cultures as a result of this creative impulse that God gave to humanity when they were created, see Jonathan R. Wilson, *God's Good World: Reclaiming the Doctrine of Creation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 20. Fretheim notes that there have been a number of attempts in history to define what it means to image God, many of which are extremes to be avoided. Fretheim, *God and World*, 14.

[39] Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 171. Earlier in the same book Tennent writes that God is the author of culture which comes across a little differently than the statement used above. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 163. Later he reiterates that God is the "author of culture," using Gen 1:28 in tandem with Acts 17:26 to prove his point. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 176.

[40] Dyrness, *Insider Jesus*, 36. I believe Stackhouse, Jr. is correct to find that within this mandate to create ways of living is the blessing of reason that God has bestowed on humanity which brings together the cognitive and material world as both valid and important as to what it means to image God. Stackhouse, Jr., *Making the Best of It*, 183-84. However, as J. Richard Middleton points out it has been typical for theologians from the early church fathers to the present to equate the Image of God with human rationality or the ability to reason. This is at least partly due to the heavy influence of Platonic thought on theology. J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The* Imago Dei *in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005), 19. I am moving away from this limited interpretation towards a more holistic understanding which does not deny the importance of the human ability to reason, but it also does not limit the meaning of being made in the Image of God to that ability. For more on this and the various theological interpretations of the Image of God see Kärkkäinen, *Creation and Humanity*, chap. 11. For a critique of the oft repeated idea that what it means to be made in the Image of God is primarily the ability to reason see John F. Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 178-88.

[41] For a classic discussion of what it means to be made in the Image of God and to be free see Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1-3* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 33-38.

[42] Michael Barram, in discussing the implications of Genesis 1-3 on economics, observes that the freedom given to humanity was freedom to serve each other, this is a critique on any human system which claims to create "freedom" but in reality, thrives off of selfish undergirding's, i.e. consumerism. See Michael Barram, "'Occupying' Genesis 1-3: Missionally Located Reflections on Biblical Values and Economic Justice," *Missiology* 42, no. 4 (2014): 390.

[43] Dyrness, *Insider Jesus*, 32. For the history of a relational understanding of what it means to be made in the Image of God see Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 21-23.

Although Genesis 2 expands on the elements of life found in Genesis 1; the essence of humanity is made plain in Chapter 1 in such a way that is manifestly important for all subsequent Scripture. Humanity was made in the Image of God—which includes the mandate of relational life in Genesis 1:28-30 giving humanity the ability to create—placing immeasurable value on them. From Genesis 1 onward, all humanity, is first and foremost made in the Image of God.[44]

Elements of Relational Life in Genesis 2

There are a number of elements that Genesis 2 mentions that are relevant to a discussion of the biblical understanding of relational life.[45] This section of the Chapter will examine the following elements allowing them to emerge from the biblical text: work and rest, food and eating, language, human relationships and marriage, and clothing. They will be viewed in connection with each other. Each element could easily be the subject of its own study. Therefore, the purpose of this particular Chapter is to cover a careful overview of the elements as they relate to the overall thesis of relational life put forth in this project.[46] While this definition may appear too broad and vague, I

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[44] While the rest of this Chapter is concerned with more tangible aspects of this "image" other authors often emphasize the more abstract ways humans are made in the Image of God. For more on this see Davidson, "The Nature of the Human Being from the Beginning," 18.

[45] Davidson presents life in Gen 1-2 this way:

the divine mandate in Gen 1-2 for both male and female to join in the work of procreation, subduing, having dominion, and tending the garden (1:28, 2:15), reveals that the sexes are not one-dimensional; both sexes are equally directed to the world of things and the world of relationships (Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 38n97).

I agree with this description but am broadening the concept of relational life in this Chapter as will be seen below.

[46] See Dyrness definition of culture which is similar to what I am arguing for here, *Insider Jesus*, 36. Dyrness developed this idea in an earlier publication as well, see Dyrness, *The Earth Is God's*, 58.

will argue in this Chapter, through interpreting Genesis 1-3, that a broad and vague,

definition is actually necessary when describing human life. Andy Crouch states that

"God has seeded the world, as it were, with cultural goods."[47] It is to those goods of life

that this study now turns.

Work and Rest

While the concept of work is implicitly present in Genesis 1:26, it becomes

explicit in Genesis 2:5: "no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant

of the field had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there

was no man to work the ground." Part of God's original design was for humans to work

in the earth that He created. If there was any doubt about this Gen 2:15 states it in

unequivocal language, "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden

to work it and take care of it." Work was in tandem with taking care of the earth, not to

exploit the earth but to continue the act of creation that God had initiated and now

expected humans to play a role in.[48]

Eve and Adam's work was a type of gardening or farming.[49] They were to serve

the natural environment, to create a living space in which all creatures would thrive.[50]

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[47] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 108.

[48] For an in-depth and comprehensive study on the theology of work in the book of Genesis see Elizabeth Ellen Ostring, *Be a Blessing: The Theology of Work in the Narrative of Genesis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016).

[49] For more on this see Gary W. Fick, *Food, Farming, and Faith* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008), 118.

[50] The idea that Adam and Eve were to serve the creation comes from the use of the Hebrew verb *'abad* in Gen 2:15. Allen Ross in his commentary on Genesis sees a parallel between the service of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden with that of the Levites in the Tabernacle of Israel, see Allen Ross and John N. Oswalt, *Genesis and Exodus*, Tyndale Cornerstone Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2008), 46-47. Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 209.

This was to be done together, both the male and the female were to compliment the work of the other as helpers to each other (Gen 2:18). While many societies have assigned roles for males and females the narrative of Genesis 2 does not contain enough detail to develop gender roles as it relates to work.[51] This is not to condemn societies that have developed gender roles in relation to work, but it highlights that the Bible's account of creation of work did not include a detailed description of which gender should engage in what tasks.

There was a fair amount of freedom given to humanity to develop their own understandings of what it meant to work in the garden.[52] This was to be done in consultation with God, after all "God was the first gardener."[53] Joseph Coleson comments that there were certain types of work that would have been inappropriate in the Garden of Eden. This would include any type of work that degraded or defaced the Image of God.[54]

Genesis 1-2 repeatedly makes the statement that what God made was "good." Therefore, the fact that God told humanity to work can also be understood as "good." Work before sin was meant to be a joy and to stretch humanity's mental and physical capabilities that God had endowed upon them. This is a critique against any sort of

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[51] Davidson writes, "gender roles are *not* hard-and-fast prescribed stereotypes in the creation narratives… Since the biblical text in Gen 1-2 differentiates between the sexes (male and female) but does not specify certain role relations that belong exclusively to the male and others that are exclusively the domain of the female, it seems inappropriate to go beyond the biblical evidence at this point and seek to clarify if and to what extent there are gender-specific role relations in addition to the obvious biological differences (emphasis added)." Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 39n97.

[52] Nehrbass sees this as "exciting." Nehrbass, *God's Image*, 67.

[53] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 108. Miroslav Volf refers to this work as "cooperation in preservation." Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 98-99.

[54] Joseph Coleson, *Genesis 1-11*, New Beacon Bible Commentary (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2012), 100.

cultural, religious, or societal ideal which paints work in a negative light. There are groups among all people around the world which create an atmosphere in which work is looked on as something to be avoided and disdained or only fit for lower classes or slaves. Often in these situations those who work little and still get remunerated are viewed as successful and are emulated whenever possible. This goes against the original design of God for humanity made in His image—the image of a working God.

The term culture originates from the term agriculture which fits well with Genesis 2. Humans were given creative freedom to develop a world, and this could take many forms.[55] Crouch sees the possibility in this freedom of God voluntarily withdrawing to a certain extent to allow humans to create. At the same time, Crouch specifies that God was never far away, and often walked in the Garden.[56]

God also instituted rest in the beginning, according to Genesis 2:2-3, with God himself resting after six days of creating. This was not a rest from fatigue but rather a way of stepping back from the completed creation and recognizing its goodness. It was also an anticipatory institution for a working humanity.[57] God designed humanity to

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[55] Dyrness talks about the "potential good" in the beginning. His point is not that the creation contained elements of error but rather part of what it meant to have freedom was the ability to create things that had not yet been created. See Dyrness, *The Earth Is God's*, 69. It is also important to state, along with Nehrbass, that the life of Eden is not detailed and thus we cannot argue that it is the only ideal culture. Rather even in a perfect world change would have occurred and new ways of living would have developed. Nehrbass, *God's Image*, 76.

[56] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 110.

[57] Barram describes work as being part of a cycle that includes rest, thus the seventh day is part of the work cycle in a sense. See Barram, "Occupying," 393. Davidson has identified seven different elements of rest as related to the Sabbath that can be found in the Torah, see "Sabbath, Spirituality and Mission: Torah's Seven Dimensions of Sabbath Rest," in *Encountering God in Life and Mission: A Festschrift honoring Jon L. Dybdahl*, ed. Rudi Maier (Berrien Springs, MI: Department of World Mission, Andrews University, 2010), chap. 1.

work, but he also designed them to enjoy the company of each other and of him.[58] This

was meant to be done throughout the week but the seventh day was to be set aside as

unique from the other days.[59] Greenway views this day of rest as a part of the cultural

mandate, a day which was meant for reflection and celebration.[60]

Crouch has isolated two important elements of what this rest signified. First, it

was meant to be a time of celebrating God's good creation—a joy to participate in rather

than a grudging acceptance of. Second, Crouch argues that being creative can be

exhausting work, therefore, in order to "sustain" creativity rest was, and is, needed.[61]

There was a strong relational element to this rest in which God and humanity

were to spend intimate time together.[62] The seventh day would have been the first full

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[58] The relationality of the Sabbath is rooted in the love of God as noted by Ellen G. White. "The Sabbath…is a token of the love of Christ." Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898).

[59] Swoboda finds the "seventh day" part to be very important.

It turns out humans were not made to work nine days and rest only one in a week. We were made to work six days and rest one. The seven-day rhythm is sacred. The seven-day week is not the result of human ingenuity; rather, it is a reflection of God's brilliance A. J. Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath: The Surprising Power of Rest in a Nonstop World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2018), 11).

For more on the relational aspects of the Sabbath see Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath*, chap. 4. The tradition I was brought up in, the Seventh-day Adventist tradition, has highlighted this and is one of the reasons the seventh day Sabbath, like the Jews, is kept aside each week to be a day of rest. Swoboda does not argue for this, he, however, does argue for a regular rest every seven days but he leaves it up to individuals to pick which day they rest on. Biblically this is a difficult position to defend as there is no clear indication in Scripture that a person or people gets to choose their day of rest.

[60] Greenway, "The Cultural Mandate."

[61] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 107.

[62] Sigve K. Tonstad has shown that one of the reasons the relational aspect of the seventh day has often been overlooked is due to the overemphasis of many theologians and biblical scholars on the sovereignty and power of God in creation to the neglect of the relational aspects. See Sigve Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 32-33. Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, Interpretation (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1982), 6.

day after creation—the first full day in which God, Eve, and Adam would spend together learning about each other and celebrating the new world that had just been created.[63] The seventh day of rest implies a level of trust whereby humans understand the world will survive even if the work stops.[64]

Although the seventh day was set aside as a holy day in the Garden, there is no record that certain activities were only meant for this day in a ritual and religious sense prior to sin. The only thing that seems to be required is for the work of the other six days be put aside. Even this is reading backwards into the text somewhat from a Sinai perspective, although it can be deduced from God's resting. More importantly, "the seventh day comes endowed with an imposing portfolio of meanings, embodying notions of purpose, power, and personhood—of relationship, love, and presence."[65]

Work and rest can both be considered elements of relational life.[66] Each one has gone through many developments over time, and it is beyond the scope of this Chapter to survey these developments. The passage in Genesis 2 is a reminder that humanity was created to work and rest as part of what it meant to be alive on the "good" earth before sin and in relationship to God and each other.[67]

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[63] Coleson, *Genesis 1-11*, 77.

[64] Pol Vonck, "Imaging the Unimaginable: Biblical Rootage of Art," *African Ecclesial Review* 27, no. 5 (1985): 262.

[65] Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning*, 27.

[66] For Volf work is an essential element of what it means to be human. Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 127.

[67] Swoboda, Subversive Sabbath, 7.

Food and Eating

People often label food from other parts of the world and outside their own

environment as "cultural" or "ethnic" foods. The same can be said for different styles of

eating, whether it be with forks and knives, chopsticks, or hands. Food, its preparation

and taste, along with the methods used to eat it, vary widely around the world. Many

rituals toward deities or ancestors, not to mention at temples, gurdwaras, churches, and

other sites of worship, give food a prominent role. Food is commonly considered an easy

way to identify different ways of living between humanity. In a broad sense Genesis 2

also contains this element of life.

In Genesis 1:29 God said to Eve and Adam, "I give you every seed-bearing plant

on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be

yours for food." In commenting on this verse Doukhan says, "Food is then the first gift to

humans."[68] Genesis 2:9 mentions that "the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out

of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food." God provided for

the nourishment of humanity through the plants and trees that He had created on the third

day of creation.[69] There is an inexhaustible level of care and intimacy implied in this

"gift" of food from God.[70]

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[68] Doukhan, *Genesis*, 66. Doukhan goes on to say, "This text contains the first biblical occurrence of the verb 'give' (*natan*) associated with God as the giver and humans as receivers. Food is thus declared as the first affirmation of human dependence on God." Doukhan, *Genesis*, 66.

[69] Love and food find their deepest meaning in the Creation story. Sharon Parks attempts to capture this mutuality between love and food when she writes, "We cannot separate the fact 'Because I was loved, I am' from the reality 'Because I was fed, I am.' We are physical beings made in and for relation, and our word *companion* means 'one with whom we share bread (emphasis in original).'" Sharon Parks, "The Meaning of Eating and the Home as Ritual Space," in *Sacred Dimensions of Women's Experience*, ed. Elizabeth Dodson Gray (Wellesley, MA: Roundtable Press, 1988), 186.

[70] "Food…was perhaps the greatest gift of God to humanity." Joel R. Soza, *Food and God: A Theological Approach to Eating, Diet, and Weight Control* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 7.

The diet of Eve and Adam consisted of fruits and seeds or nuts depending on how the text is interpreted and translated. Adam and Eve ate a plant based diet, despite the arguments of some to the contrary. They did not kill animals or any other living creature for food.[71] Genesis 3:22 implies that the act of eating from the tree of life would keep humanity alive forever. Gary W. Fick sees a connection to "biological, social, and spiritual" aspects of life every time a person engages in an act of eating.[72] While this text is not easy to interpret, at the very least it increases the importance of the act of eating.

God had created the earth with an abundance of food options and God said all were available to eat from with the exception of one tree. Often this is viewed as God restricting Eve and Adam. In fact, the passage portrays God as providing an immense variety for them, all of which were good for eating. Only one tree out of many was off limits—a tremendous freedom rather than a restriction.[73]

The tree of knowledge of good and evil is one of the clearest examples in Scripture that God created humanity with free choice. This tree was not meant to tempt humanity but it was meant to allow a choice, even a bad choice, because true love could not be fostered any other way.[74] While this Chapter is not primarily focused on theological understandings of free will, the concept does have major implications for a

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[71] Doukhan, *Genesis*, 66. David Grumett and Rachel Muers argue that Genesis 1-2 are not historical texts but that they are promoting vegetarianism. They believe these texts should lead Christians to think carefully about vegetarianism as a theologically viable option, see David Grumett and Rachel Muers, *Theology on the Menu: Asceticism, Meat and Christian Diet* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 137.

[72] Fick, *Food, Farming, and Faith*, 12. Fick is not commenting on the tree of life here but rather creating a holistic understanding of what it means to eat.

[73] Tonstad develops the positive logic of having the tree of the knowledge of good and evil within the cosmic conflict framework in Sigve K. Tonstad, *God of Sense and Traditions of Non-Sense* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016), 89.

[74] Peckham, *Theodicy of Love*, 43.

theology of relational life.[75] In Patty Kirk's scintillating description of picking berries in order to make jam and jelly she writes, "God combined parts of his creation—lights and dark sky, dirt and breath—to make other things, we also combine things—berries and sugar and lemons and heat—to make other things and pronounce them good."[76] A little further on she writes, "Cooking, for me, is the emulation of the deity's most essential habit: to create. As such, to cook is to worship."[77] If humanity was meant to be creators of relational life within a world of free choice it means that they would have the capability of creating an infinite amount of ways to eat.

It is significant that the only prohibition God gave to humanity involved eating. They were not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17). Eating from that tree would lead to death, the opposite of eating from the tree of life. While diet should never be viewed as a means to salvation, these passages do make a case that eating is a major part of life and involves moral and ethical choosing. Eating is more than a natural inclination of humanity but comprises relational actions that can lead to life or death both physically and spiritually according to Genesis 2. If humanity had avoided eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the intimacy that humanity enjoyed with God before the Fall would have been preserved.

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[75] This research is done with the presupposition of libertarian free will that is based on the idea that, "the free will defense is strongest when the value that is offered as the morally sufficient reason for God's allowance of evil is not moral freedom alone but love, which I take to be a greater good, perhaps even the greatest good in the universe. Indeed, if 'God is love' (1 John 4:8, 16), what value could be greater?" Peckham, *Theodicy of Love*, 11.

[76] Patty Kirk, "Wild Fruit," in *The Spirit of Food: 34 Writers on Feasting and Fasting toward God*, ed. Leslie Leyland Fields (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 5.

[77] Kirk, "Wild Fruit," 5. After reading this I could not help but reflect on several moments in my life when I witnessed cooking as more than merely the preparation of food for sustenance. I have watched roadside hot snack stand cooks in India create their fare with a flair and vigor that could not help but add to the flavor of the food.

Beyond giving Eve and Adam broad instruction that they could freely eat from any tree but one, there was little to guide humans in what to eat and how to eat it.[78] This is important in that diverse developments of what to eat and how to eat would be natural when placed within the context of a world in which humans were made to be creative and free in all aspects of life. Current creativity in types of food preparation and methods of eating could be viewed as proof that humans still contain some elements of what it means to be made in the Image of God. The Garden was a place of abundant food and was also a place God frequented; food and fellowship appear to have gone together right from the beginning.[79]

There were some basic outlined items that could be eaten, beyond that God gives humanity freedom to develop the element of food types, preparation, and methods of eating. While not all types of food are appropriate, much of the diversity found throughout the culinary arts of the world is a sign of the creativity God gave humans in their use of food as a means of relational life.

<div align="center">Language</div>

Any discussion of relational life must take seriously the reality of language and communication, in both verbal and nonverbal forms. It is often stated that it is basically impossible to understand any given group of people without knowing how to communicate in the first language of that people.

In Genesis 2:19-20 there is an explicit reference to language. After creating Adam, God brought the animals and birds in front of Adam so that "he would name

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[78] Edgar, Created and Creating, 142.

[79] Soza, *Food and God*, 6.

them." Adam "gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field." This was the first time a human being was recorded using verbal language to converse.[80] The communication was towards the living creatures but it is also implied that God was part of the interaction. In Verse 19 God "brought them [living creatures] to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name."

This description of God, Adam, and the living creatures contains at least two major implications for language and its connection to relational life development. First, there is a level of trust in the communication between God and Adam through language that reveals how close humanity once was to God.[81] It is through language that humanity communicates both to God and each other, adding to the richness of relationship.[82] Greenway says that "Implied in the command to name the animals is humankind's responsibility to study the universe, unlock its secrets, use judiciously its potential, and

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[80] Linguistic studies have struggled for centuries to account for language acquisition in children. Beyond "innateness" there is of yet no clear consensus on another theory of acquisition that has not been falsified at some level. Noam Chomsky describes various attempts to locate other hypotheses but demonstrates their weaknesses and incoherence's. Thus, the idea that language ability is an innate ability continues to be seen as plausible, although mysterious, even in secular scientific studies of language. Noam Chomsky, *Language and Mind*, 3rd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 73-77. Because my presuppositional starting point is biblical, I come to this conclusion aside from scientific data, but in this case, linguistics continues to support, indirectly, the possibility that God endowed his creatures with the ability to create language within some sort of rules of "universal grammar" as many linguists call it. See also Kärkkäinen, *Creation and Humanity*, 258. Kärkkäinen recognizes the challenges of figuring out the origins of language, and because he leans towards a theistic form of evolution he attempts to discuss the rise of language outside the passage of Genesis from a purely "scientific" and "anthropological" perspective.

[81] Vern Poythress points out that the first record of "divine-human communication" was between God and Adam in Genesis 2:16-17. See Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language : A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009), 37.

[82] As Vanhoozer puts it, "Language is not simply a tool for information processing but a rich medium of communicative action and personal interaction." Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 47.

glorify God for the beauty and variety of creation."[83] Or as Poythress puts it, "Adam's

meanings were not meanings imposed on alien material, but meanings from a mind made

in the Image of God, and therefore a mind in tune with the world."[84]

Choice is again a major element of the passage.[85] God gave Adam freedom to

name the animals without any sort of rules or guidelines as to what names he should

choose. The way the passage is written makes it sound as if God was on the edge of His

seat waiting with anticipation to see what names Adam would give the animals. God

endowed humans with the ability to communicate and gave them the freedom to use

communication as they saw fit. This greatly enhanced the ability of humanity to create

new ways of living because they could converse with God and each other.[86] This also

demonstrates that categories and categorization in itself is not wrong. While much of this

dissertation is meant to undermine certain types of categorization the use of language in

this passage clarifies that humans think and operate through some level of categorization

but this is done in such a way in Genesis 2 that it accurately reflects categorizing in an

appropriate manner. Problems arise when categories are developed that go against the

Image of God and all that entails for human beings as creative people.

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[83] Greenway, "The Cultural Mandate," 251.

[84] Poythress, *In the Beginning*, 37.

[85] Michael Pasquale and Nathan L. K. Bierma, *Every Tribe and Tongue: A Biblical Vision for Language in Society* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 3-4.

[86] Ludwig Wittgenstein demonstrates that words have meaning only when they are used in a recognized way with reference to a shared concept among a given group of people who are participating in the same "language-game." This fits quite well with the biblical origins of language as found in the passage above. Adam begins the process of combining a physical animal in front of him with a word/symbol, most likely a particular sound or sounds joined together. Thus, begins the process of creating a language-game as it were. Wittgenstein's insights are based on existing language; he does not delve much into the origins of language. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1963), 19-20.

Creativity and new ideas are formed within the domain of communication, and this creativity is possible because the gift of language is rooted in the image of the creative God who *spoke* all things into being.[87] Adam is not just a "conservationist" but a creator of relational life through the act of naming. If we were not able to engage with the ideas and concepts of those around us, our ability as humans to create new ideas and new things would be limited or impossible.[88] The relational life element of language is manifested in Genesis 2; it was given to humanity in order to increase their quality of life and keep them in close connection with God and each other.[89] This is most evident in the first phrases recorded as spoken by a human in Genesis 2:23. Adam described Eve in ecstatic excitement, using beautiful poetic language in an attempt to capture the feelings and emotions that were coursing through him when he saw her for the first time.[90]

The genius to develop new forms of communication were in place from the

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[87] Poythress, *In the Beginning*, 29.

[88] The philological work of the nineteenth century often had the stated goal of locating the "essence of humanity." Language is still considered by some, including the intellectual giant Noam Chomsky, to be close to the "human essence" if there is such a thing. While language is innate to most creative experiences humans have, I am arguing in this chapter that it is difficult to isolate one final "human essence" at the expense of other seemingly innate aspect of relational life such as food and eating, relationships, clothing, work and rest, and possibly more elements which together make the "essence," or more appropriately based on Gen 1-2, the "Image of God" found in humanity. This does not, necessarily downplay the insights linguistic studies bring to the wonderfully complex and yet simple and straightforward ability that humans have to use language and create with it. Chomsky, *Language and Mind*, chap. 4.

[89] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 109.

[90] Another way to describe this moment is, "The opening phrase of Adam (*zōʾt happaʿam*) is difficult to translate from Hebrew into equivalent dynamic English. It means something like 'Wow! At last! This is the one!'" Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 51.

beginning.[91] As with several of the other elements already reviewed, language also was not overly delimited by God. Humanity was given freedom and full capacity to communicate even if that meant communicating with a deceptive serpent.

Human Relationships and Marriage

Part of being created in the Image of God includes community and togetherness.[92] Trinitarian theology has moved in the direction of recognizing the importance of community being part of the essence of who God is, and therefore part of what it means to be created in God's image. God made both male and female for each other. They were then told to "be fruitful" and produce offspring which would enlarge the earthly community (Gen 1:28).[93] Adam and Eve, as the first couple, represented the future

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[91] There are some scholars who argue that culture originated at Babel. See for example Theodore Hiebert, "The Tower of Babel and the Origin of the World's Cultures," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126, no. 1 (2007). Hiebert's premise is that the Babel narrative in Genesis 11 is primarily meant to describe the origination of culture and has nothing to do with God punishing the people of Babel. While the issue of language is a prominent theme of Genesis 11, and language is a major part of culture, to say that culture originated at Babel does not give adequate consideration to the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:26 and Genesis 2. Therefore, it seems plain from Genesis 1-10 that cultures already existed prior to Babel. For counter arguments see Pasquale and Bierma, *Every Tribe*, 10-13. Nehrbass states, "God's plan was always that people would fill the earth and create endlessly diverse ways of living, so Babel was not as much a punishment as it was God's way of ensuring that his original plan—the creation mandate—was carried out." Nehrbass, *God's Image*, 91. See also the large study by Kreitzer which opposes the idea that diversity started at Babel and was the result of a punishment. Mark R. Kreitzer, *The Concept of Ethnicity in the Bible: A Theological Analysis* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008), chap. 4. See also Bernhard W. Anderson, *From Creation to New Creation: Old Testament Perspectives* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), 177. Daniel Strange on the other hand goes so far as to argue that Babel explains "the origin of the diversity of false 'religions.'" Strange, *Their Rock*, 127. But the text does not discuss how these people thought about God or whether or not they kept some understanding of God alive much less how they lived. Certainly, a time came, when many peoples or nations chose to follow demonic forces that led them away from the true God but this cannot simply be pinpointed on the Babel narrative. We do not know exactly when or how this occurred.

[92] Grenz and Smith argue that humanity's search for identity is traced to creation. For Grenz and Smith this is a "religious quest." I would argue that they are correct to trace this search for identity to creation, but that it is more than a religious quest. Rather it is a quest for holistic life that is not limited to some sort of religious or spiritual category but is a quest for an abundant life in all its aspects. See Grenz and Smith, *Created for Community*, 40.

[93] Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 22.

human community in microcosm.[94] The way they were created to interact with each other was an example to all those who would come after them. Jennings addresses this relational aspect when he writes that the "doctrine of creation is first a doctrine of place and people, of divine love and divine touch, of human presence and embrace, and of divine and human interaction."[95] The work of creating new ways of relational living was, from the beginning, a communal task.[96]

Toward the end of Genesis 2, there is a statement that is often seen as the mandate for the institution of marriage. This statement in Genesis 2:24 says, "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh." Humanity, in its femaleness and maleness, was meant to come together in a monogamous relationship. This was designed to facilitate the "fruitfulness" but also to complete each other. It is together that males and females represent the Image of God (Gen 1:27). "Together in relationship they are also to be *creative shapers of the new creation* (emphasis added)."[97]

Marriage in its myriad forms is something that is almost universal with female and male coming together as wife and husband. The practice of marriage varies greatly from society to society. This in itself is not against the original plan found in Genesis. There are few details found in Genesis 2 as to what exactly should take place, for

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[94] Coleson, *Genesis 1-11*, 113.

[95] Jennings, The Christian Imagination, 248.

[96] Goheen, Introducing Christian Mission, 105.

[97] Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 41.

example, at a wedding. This is "a succinct theology of marriage."[98] Some have argued that the way the text reads implies a public statement before witnesses, in the beginning the witnesses were the Godhead and the heavenly beings.[99] Beyond this, there is little description. The only other component is that the male should leave his father and mother and join his wife,[100] a practice that is often done in the opposite manner currently around the world.[101] Allen Ross notes, that the Hebrew term *'al ken*, based on its use in the rest of the OT is, "a given event as the basis of a later custom."[102] Contingent on this line of reasoning the marriage that takes place in Genesis 2:24 was the beginning of a divinely instituted practice that was meant for future generations to continue.[103]

Once again choice enters into the equation. Richard Davidson writes: "Just as…freedom was essential in the garden, so it is crucial in all succeeding sexual relationships."[104] How marriage proceeded at this stage was left up to the creative ability of humanity to develop. The basic formula of man and woman coming together was plain, but as far as ceremony and practice there is little to work with in the text. This makes sense in light of the above discussion where God gave humanity freedom to

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[98] Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 21.

[99] Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 45. Davidson is expressive in his description of this moment, "The Creator, as it were, celebrated the first marriage." Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 50.

[100] For more on this injunction see Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 44.

[101] Davidson argues that the injunction to leave one's parents does not mean to abandon them altogether, see Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 298. In many parts of India, it is expected that the female will leave her family and go to live with her husband's family. This practice, however, may need revision by those who desire to allow the Bible to guide their ways of living. Davidson points out that it "is particularly striking in v. 24…that it is the man who is to leave. It was a matter of course in the patriarchal society at the time Genesis 2 was penned that the wife left her mother and father." Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 44.

[102] Ross and Oswalt, *Genesis and Exodus*, 48.

[103] Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 42-43.

[104] Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 43.

creatively discover and create what marriage looked like.[105] This is yet another major part of what it meant to be human in the beginning, which has been carried on in one form or another for millennia.[106]

Clothing

In the beginning there were no clothes as we understand them in the present. But the idea of clothing is important because the human body is the final thing mentioned in Genesis 2:25: "Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame." The two humans did not wear any sort of physical garment—they only wore their skin.[107]

They felt no shame because in the beginning the human body was not something to cover up. Even in their sexuality there was an openness between the married couple, a freedom to be themselves in front of each other and with each other. This is deeper than simple coverings; it is a commentary on the level of trust and love between these two newly created human beings. Clothing today is (1) a necessity for most people, and (2) for some a statement of fashion. Many do not think of the deeper meaning as to why we cover up our bodies. Genesis 2 portrays a level of relational life that in many ways is beyond the imagination of humanity in the post-Fall world.

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[105] Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 43.

[106] While it would be going beyond the passage of Gen 1-2, I believe Davidson is correct to state that, "singleness, although not God's original ideal, does not prevent an individual from experiencing socialization, including healthy relationship/companionship between both sexes." Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 42. See also Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 42n111.

[107] Psalm 104:1-3 seems to point to the possibility that God is "robed in" light and that Adam and Eve may have had a similar type of "garment." This argument is reliant on a view of humanity that finds the concept of the Image of God applies in resemblance at some level between God and human beings, for more see Davidson, "The Nature of the Human Being from the Beginning," 22-23.

Summary

Work and rest, food and eating, language, human relationships and marriage, and clothing are descriptors of life for humans in the beginning.[108] If these five elements were removed from Genesis 1 and 2, humanity would hardly exist.[109] There is a sense of holism when they all come together. Humanity was formed as one unit with each element overlapping the others and without compartmentalization. There is also a sense of freedom whereby God gives capabilities to humans, who are at liberty to develop and create ways of living relationally.[110] This means that even if sin had never entered the

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[108] This is not necessarily a comprehensive list of elements of relational life, rather it is meant to be representative. Strangely, with the exception of language, missiological literature has limited discussions on these elements of life. Although they may often be implied when the term culture is used, which it is often in missiological literature, there is a need to dive into more specifics as they relate to how these elements are understood and applied in the Bible and around the world. Part of the reason for this is that these elements are often considered "surface level" issues and that the real stuff lies somewhere deeper in a person. For example, see Ott, Strauss, and Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 267. This, however, does not fit with the Genesis account, it is these elements together that make up a human not some deeper soul or subconscious.

[109] While Gorringe does not directly reference Genesis 1-2 he does come up with a similar way of describing life. He argues that you can divide life into primary and secondary cultures. Based on his dichotomy the elements of life I have described here would be primary culture; secondary culture being the public transactions of these primary things through the media, public institutions, technology, etc. Gorringe, *Furthering Humanity*, 92-93. I am sympathetic to this view as long as there is a clear recognition that you cannot easily see where one ends and the other begins and recognize that there is a cyclical flow going back and forth. I recognize the issues of trying to locate human universals and the troubled history this kind of research has had. Yet I cannot go along with Geertz and totally deny that God created humanity with certain universal elements of life in place which could then lead to infinite ways of living. This does not mean we cannot, at some minimal level, find universals as this chapter argues. The problem is when we get overly defined universals and then find them in everyone whether they are there or not in the way we define them. This was the problem with the Enlightenment pursuit of finding universals that has carried on through various strands in the social sciences ever since and is at the heart of much of Geertz's critique. Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 43.

[110] Geertz writes the following: "One of the most significant facts about us may finally be that we all begin with the natural equipment to live a thousand kinds of life but end in the end having lived only one." Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 45. Geertz did not intend to defend the biblical creation narrative, but based on what is in Genesis 1-2, it is not surprising that Geertz writes this way after observing diverse groups of people for so many years. Vanhoozer, who has read Geertz, argues that "culture is the realm of these objectified expressions of human freedom." Vanhoozer, "What Is Everyday Theology?," 22. For proof of Geertz's influence on Vanhoozer, see Vanhoozer, "What is Everyday Theology?," 24-25.

world, creation would have looked different now than it did in the beginning.[111] In some instances there are guidelines that come from God concerning some of the elements, but these guidelines are meant to help humanity live to the fullest and are not meant to be prohibitive, even in the case of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.[112]

With the beginning of human life on earth, there was no definite telos other than an eternity of creating new ways of living in relationship with each other and God. In some sense, the mysterious future of creation was itself a telos of possibility but not in the same way as "progress" is often understood in the current world in immanent terms.

Race, a human construct, may not have existed in the beginning. Yet the potential for diversity in nearly every aspect of life was there. Thus, diversity of humanity in ways of living and probably in ways of looking, i.e., skin color, was a distinct possibility and was actually built into what it meant to be human. Imaging God as creative humans would have led to a celebration of differences rather than boundary-building based on those differences.[113]

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[111] Fretheim, *God and World*, 26.

[112] Edgar, Created and Creating, 141.

[113] There is, however, a sense of commonality among humans based on Genesis 1-2. Thus, while humans are extremely diverse in how they live their lives it is relatively easy for humans from diverse backgrounds to still recognize elements of life in those who are different from themselves even if they cannot fully comprehend all that the elements of life are being used for and producing. For a discussion of the theoretical concept of human commonality in the field of anthropology see Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross Cultural Perspective*, Revised 25th anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), chap. 5. What is lacking in Kraft is both concrete evidence and biblical evidence. He relies far too heavily on a select few anthropologists for his theory, even quoting Margaret Mead's study in Samoa positively, a study that has not only been proven to be contrived but has been shown to have totally misrepresented many Samoan's lives. Genesis 1-2 does allow for a sense of commonality between humans within the elements of life that are found in this passage, beyond that theories should probably be careful making categorical statements.

Andy Crouch believes that culture is a gift from God.[114] Grenz and Smith argue that God created structures for our benefit, and that humans have the freedom to develop and work within those structures. This freedom is rooted in God's desire for a genuine relationship with his creatures, for without it they could never love God unreservedly or create loving ways of living relationally.[115] Grenz and Smith add that the angelic host act as guides within these structures,[116] but after the Fall demonic beings as well as the angelic host of God battle over human beings who create within these structures.[117]

What about Religion?

Part of the purpose of this study is to look again at the modern categories of culture and religion from the perspective of the creation account recorded in Genesis 1-3. Before delving into the Fall of humanity, it is important to ask: what about religion in Genesis 1-2?

Recognizing that there is no set definition of religion is the first step in approaching this question carefully. Biblical Hebrew does not contain a term that can be easily translated as religion. While there is a tendency to define any sort of divine and human relationship, or belief, as religious, this is not necessarily a fact in all definitions of religion. But taking those assumptions as part of many of the definitions, what can we learn from Genesis 1-2?

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[114] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 108.

[115] Peckham, *Theodicy of Love*, 41.

[116] Grenz and Smith, *Created for Community*, 54. Geertz argues that without "culture patterns" life would be chaotic and render humanity without meaning. Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 46, 49.

[117] Grenz and Smith, *Created for Community*, 55. There will be more on this later in this Chapter.

Considering that the previous section on life elements dealt with all the texts

concerning humans and God in Genesis 1-2, there is little left to be said. Modern

definitions would most likely categorize the elements as cultural and not religious. Does

that mean that religion is absent from Genesis 1-2? In one sense the answer to this is

probably yes, but this is a qualified yes. The only way around this is to redefine religion,

as Michael Goheen does. He claims that the original design of humans reveals that

"human beings are, at the deepest level of their being, religious."[118] Later in the same

paragraph it becomes apparent that Goheen's unstated definition of religion is more like

the average definition of culture. His definition includes, "public and private [life], social

and cultural, individual and communal."[119] Therefore it is probably fair to say that

Goheen agrees with the holistic understanding found in this study, but he still uses the

term religion to make a point. This however, can create confusion on what exactly is

meant by culture and religion. If they can be used interchangeably then why the need for

more than one term?

Humanity and God were in constant interaction with each other in the first

chapters of the Bible. There is no doubt that they had a relationship, and it appears that

God was even in the habit of walking in the Garden with Adam and Eve (Gen 3:8). It was

simply part of everyday life, not a separate sacred part.[120] It may be argued that the

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[118] Goheen, Introducing Christian Mission, 104.

[119] Goheen, Introducing Christian Mission, 104.

[120] This appears to fit with Davidson's assessment of humanity as portrayed in Genesis 1, "it may be noted that the Hebrew words *selem*, 'image,' and *dĕmût*, 'likeness,' although possessing overlapping semantic ranges, in the juxtaposition of v. 26 appear to emphasize respectively the concrete and abstract aspects of the human being and together indicate that the person as a whole—in both physical/bodily and spiritual/mental components—is created in God's image." Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 36. See also Davidson, "The Nature of the Human Being from the Beginning," 18-19.

seventh day was set aside as holy therefore religious in nature. While it is true that that

the seventh day is holy, it could also be argued that all things created in the beginning

were blessed.[121] The seventh day was unique in what it was meant to portray and provide

humanity with, in that the Sabbath was meant to provide time for special interaction

between humanity and God. But this does not necessarily make it *more* religious than any

other aspect of creation but certainly unique in its relational purpose.[122]

    It may be safest to say that all aspects of life were sacred in the beginning.[123]

There was nothing that was purely neutral and secular. Jacques Doukhan in his

commentary on Genesis, makes this point abundantly clear. He argues that the concept of

being made in the Image of God is "wholistic" and that the Bible "never dissociates the

spiritual/functional dimension of the human being from his or her physical/material

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[121] Tonstad believes that the blessing of the seventh day was for all those who come under the influence or experience the rest and intimate relationship with God that the seventh day is meant to bring to humanity. See Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning*, 36.

[122] Nehrbass says something similar in relation to the working of the land in Genesis 2, "Working the land was a way of serving the Lord as was sacrifice or prayer." Nehrbass, *God's Image*, 66. This does not negate the biblical emphasis on separating certain days, items, or people as sacred rather than profane. The Sabbath is sacred as opposed to common or profane, but this is not the same as saying some days are holy and some secular, which would imply God being present or at least more present on the Sabbath, which is not an accurate statement. God is equally present on all days but the Sabbath still holds a sacred and unique function that is meant to be maintained as unique and sacred.

[123] Ajith Fernando argues that in creation the seeds of religiosity were planted in humanity which is why humanity is constantly turning to religions. Fernando's point has a flaw in that he fails to fully define what he means by religion in this particular instance. It also takes for granted the category of religion which is not clear in Genesis 1-2. It would be better to say that in creation God endowed a part of the human being to always desire to be in relationship with God, this includes all aspects of life and does not relegate God to some sort of spiritual or religious realm. See Ajith Fernando, *The Christian's Attitude toward World Religions* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1987), 107.

reality."[124] Each and every part of life was meant to be lived with God in mind and in relationship directly with God.[125] Humanity was given freedom to develop their lives in ways that were appropriate—all aspects of their lives. There was no sacred or secular, culture or religion.[126] It is impossible to tell where culture ends and religion begins in Genesis 1-2. Life was holistic, each part was important, and nothing was done outside the influence of God. Dyrness interprets the language in which Adam is told to serve as "liturgical language," and that this service was an act of worship.[127] While interpreters should be careful not to read current definitions of worship back into the Garden of Eden Dyrness point is still a valid one.[128] At the same time the text does not emphasize worship

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[124] Doukhan, *Genesis*, 63. The Native American theologian Richard Twiss argues that Native Americans have understood this since time immemorial and yet this aspect of their understanding is often pushed aside by rationalistic theology rooted in Western categories. Of course there is the danger of pantheism or panentheism which would require a more careful articulation by Twiss to know exactly what he has in mind. Richard Twiss, "Living in Transition, Embracing Community, and Envisioning God's Mission as Trinitarian Mutuality," in *Remembering Jamestown: Hard Questions About Christian Mission*, eds. Amos Yong and Barbara Brown Zikmund (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), 106.

[125] Grenz, *The Social God*, 194.

[126] It is interesting to note the words of missiologist Timothy C. Tennent in his book *Invitations to World Missions* who wrote separate chapters for a theology of culture and theology of religion but recognized that "religion, like all other expressions of human behavior, falls clearly within the parameters of how culture is defined and understood." Tennent, while adhering to the categories of culture and religion, does so with a type of asterisk reminding his readers that religion is really just a part of culture. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 193. Dyrness on the other hand argues that religions lie at the heart of "every culture" which is not far from Paul Tillich's approach, although they end up with very different conclusions. Dyrness, *Insider Jesus*, 35. Tillich, *Theology of Culture*. These contradictory statements do not necessarily mean that Tennent and Dyrness have totally differing understandings, rather it shows the arbitrariness of the two categories further strengthening the need to relook at them from a biblical perspective. In a footnote on the same page Dyrness recognizes that "the notion of religion as a separate sphere of human activity…is a modern invention." Dyrness, *Insider Jesus*, 35.

[127] Dyrness, *Insider Jesus*, 33.

[128] There are textual links between Genesis 1-3 with later references to the sanctuary and the priestly roles found in Exodus and Leviticus that give the impression Adam and Eve were types of priests even in the Garden of Eden. What this meant for their roles on earth was greatly altered at the time of the Fall, whereby they were then expected to carry out sacrifices and pass on this work to subsequent generations. In a sense then one could argue that there is religion in Genesis 1-3 if "religion" is meant to convey special activities or rituals meant to bring humanity and God into relationship. For more on this see Richard M. Davidson, "Earth's First Sanctuary: Genesis 1-3 and Parallel Creation Accounts," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 53, no. 1 (2015).

as a separate part of life, rather all activity and work were done with God in mind or in

his presence. This begs the question, has anything changed since then so that there is now

a need for categories of religion and culture? In Genesis 3 there was a change whether or

not this change created the need for separate categories will be dealt with in the next

section.

Relational Life after the Fall

Genesis 3 quickly alters the flow of the biblical narrative from one of goodness

and joy to one of deception, fear, and shame. It began with a serpent, who is Satan or the

devil, as revealed in other texts of the Bible.[129] The serpent desired to question God's

character and corrupt God's creation in the process.[130]

The cosmic conflict between God and Satan and their respective followers had

already begun before the events of Genesis 3.[131] But it was the first point in Scripture in

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[129] A majority of biblical and theological scholarship over the past century and a half have leaned towards reading Genesis 1-3 as a myth. This has led away from seeing the serpent in the Garden as representing an actual being. This undermines the cosmic conflict framework that is vital to fully grasping the work of God in history as presented in the Bible. Peckham, *Theodicy of Love*, 89. Tonstad critiques the approach of the majority of scholarship on Genesis 3 in defense of a cosmic conflict framework which sees Satan as present in the Garden and as a real being who plays a major role in the events that transpire after Genesis 3 to the end of Scripture. See Tonstad, *God of Sense*, 93.

[130] Christopher Wright makes the valid point that "if our mission is bringing *good news* into every area of human life, then it calls for some research and analysis as to what exactly constitutes the *bad news* (emphasis in original)." A clearer understanding of the cosmic conflict, as it relates to life and the fallout from Eden, may fit the type of research Wright has called for above. See Wright, *The Mission of God*, 432.

[131] When I use the term "cosmic conflict" it is in a similar way as that proposed by Peckham. Peckham argues persuasively that "God's love is at the center of a cosmic dispute and that God's commitment to love provides a morally sufficient reason for God's allowance of evil, with significant ramifications for understanding divine providence as operating within what I call covenantal rules of engagement." Peckham, *Theodicy of Love*, 4. Peckham cites key biblical passages such as Genesis 3:15 and Revelation 12:9 to demonstrate that this conflict preceded and included the events recorded in Genesis 3 as a whole, Peckham, *Theodicy of Love*, 60-61. Vanhoozer sees five drama acts that divide up Scripture. The first of these acts is found in Genesis 1-3, which sets the stage for all that follows. Vanhoozer notes that each of the five acts is initiated by God and then countered by satanic forces, see Vanhoozer, *Pictures at a Theological Exhibition,* 169.

which humans became players in the conflict. Adam and Eve used their endowed ability and chose a direction that led away from God through the deceptive promptings of the serpent. By doing this they entered into the cosmic conflict over God's character; they chose to believe that God was not trustworthy and honest and that they deserved to know more and have more, when in reality they had all they needed to survive and thrive.[132]

Adam and Eve's choices had repercussions for all aspects of their lives.[133] Nothing was the same after they believed and followed through with actions based on the serpent's half-truths and lies. Humans originally played the role of "viceroys" over the earth, they appear, however, to give up that role to Satan and his evil forces at the Fall.[134] This is true, especially for the five elements mentioned previously: work and rest, food and eating, language, human relationships and marriage, and clothing. The serpent in partnership with humans corrupted these elements, which had a direct effect on ways humans created relational life from that point forward.[135] "Because of the sinful state of all humans, all societies are fallen and fail to attain God's intention for human fulfillment, culture, and government."[136]

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[132] Fretheim, *God and the World*, 74.

[133] This choice continues to have an impact on how humans live out their lives on earth, making good and bad choices constantly. Gregory A. Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 165.

[134] Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 211. See also Boyd's defense of prayer in light of humans' roles as co-regents of this earth despite the fact that human regency is not fully realized until the eschaton which comes after the destruction of Satan and evil forces and humans. Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 233-34.

[135] Barram, without referencing Satan, recognizes that in the case of Genesis 3 the choice of Adam and Eve brought with it disorder at a systemic level. See Barram, "Occupying," 394.

[136] Ott, Strauss, and Tennent, *Encountering Theology of Mission*, 150.

The actions of Adam and Eve were devastating. Those actions created a separation between humanity and God, and resulted in a relationship that had been altered for the worse. The act of rebellion was the beginning of "human beings misuse [of] their cultural power for selfish and exploitive purposes."[137] But this did not completely cut off humans from God. Nor did it erase the Image of God within humanity. The image was marred, but it still remained the Image of God.[138] All human beings in all places and at all times are made in the Image of God. Sin did not nullify this. Although sin definitely altered the way relational life would be carried out, God would not be without influence, and humans still have the ability to be creative.[139] Through the freedom of choice bestowed on humanity, each person is developing who they will be as they engage with their cultural context.[140] "Human cultures, therefore, are simultaneously a sign of God's creative design as well as a manifestation of human sin, which stands in opposition to God's rule."[141] Creating culture and the creation of the self are intertwined.[142] This is vital to keep in mind when reviewing the five elements listed above in relation to Genesis 3 and the effects of sin on the methods humans use to create new ways of life.

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[137] Goheen, Introducing Christian Mission, 105.

[138] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 424. See also Grenz, *The Social God*, 185, 201.

[139] Vanhoozer, "What is Everyday Theology?," 43.

[140] Barram notes that as humans we should be reflecting "the values of the *ought* of God's creation, described in Genesis 1-2 (emphasis on original)." Barram, "Occupying," 394. See also Vanhoozer, "What Is Everyday Theology?," 54.

[141] Tennent, Invitation to World Missions, 172. Newbigin, The Open Secret, 176.

[142] Vanhoozer, "What Is Everyday Theology?," 53.

Work and Rest

The entrance of sin altered the gardening that was the primary occupation of the

first humans. The ground would no longer yield crops so easily according to Genesis

3:17-19. The very food needed for survival would not be so readily available as it was in

Eden. While humans were expected to creatively work with nature to yield crops prior to

sin, they did not have to compete with "thorns and thistles" in order to obtain food to

eat.[143] Work was still meant to be a joy and privilege, but because of doubt, it would no

longer always be understood that way. Work would be hard, considered bad, and to be

avoided in the new world of sin.[144]

In some ways it seems strange that the seventh day of rest is not mentioned in

Genesis 3. Despite this the seventh day would also go through changes. It would slowly

take on the form of a burden to be kept rather than a restful moment in time to be

cherished (Neh 13; Is 58; Mark 2:23-28; 3:1-6). Many would no longer see value in a day

of rest and do away with the seventh day as unique.[145] After sin entered the world rest is

needed more than ever, but through the deceptions of Satan, rest is often neglected and

forfeited to the demands of busyness and labor.[146] This has had a negative effect on the

relationship between humans and God; the seventh day of rest was meant to be a special

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[143] Kirk has a wonderful description of the effort and precautions that must go into berry-picking among thorny branches as well as the additional dangers of chiggers, mosquitoes, and snakes that roam in the patches of the garden. She does this as a way of demonstrating that while the good (berries) remain they are now surrounded by the effects of sin in a very tangible way. Kirk, "Wild Fruit," 2.

[144] Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 209.

[145] For a discussion of this through history see Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning*.

time of connection which sin corrupted.[147] Swoboda points out, as well, that "the Bible

has a word for work without a Sabbath: slavery."[148] Slavery, has been one of the most

diabolical deceptions of the evil one that has played itself out among humans. Returning

to an understanding that all humanity is made in the Image of God and that this includes

the proper balance between work and rest undermines this horrible institution. At the

same time the seventh day would continue for some to be a special time to remember the

good creation of God, as well as a time to connect with God in an intimate way. God

would have to constantly remind those who followed him of the importance of the

seventh day to the wellbeing of human livelihood.[149]

Sin could not completely corrupt work and rest.[150] Work continues to be

something God desires humans to engage in,[151] and humans continue to have the freedom

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[146] Stackhouse, Jr. argues that we need a stronger theological grasp of the importance of art, sport, and play as they relate to rest from our work. While he recognizes all of these can be focused and overemphasized they can also be underemphasized and lose their position as appropriate portions of our life in relation to each other and God. Stackhouse, Jr., *Making the Best of It*, 226-27. Swoboda goes so far as to say, "the biblical story tells us that to rest one day a week is to be truly human, and to not rest is to be inhuman." Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath*, 11. For more on Satan's role in deceiving people in relation to work, oppression, and the Sabbath see Swododa, *Subversive Sabbath*, 105-06.

[147] Minamino, commenting on the possibilities of the Sabbath as a concept for Japan, believes that, "The economic function of the Sabbath can function in Japanese society as a call to the recovery of human dignity." Minamino, "Genesis 1," 167.

[148] Swoboda, Subversive Sabbath, 35.

[149] For more on the effects of the fall on the seventh day see Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning*, chap. 3. Moltmann also points out that for the Western Christian tradition creation has been relegated to the "six days of work" with the Sabbath being overlooked regularly. Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 276.

[150] Volf, Work in the Spirit, 128.

[151] White writes insightfully that,

when, as a result of his disobedience, he [Adam] was driven from his beautiful home, and forced to struggle with a stubborn soil to gain his daily bread, that very labor, although widely different from his pleasant occupation in the garden, was a safeguard against temptation and a source of happiness (Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Wasington DC: Review and Herald, 1890), 50).

to create the world around them through work. A requirement for those who follow God is to demonstrate a work ethic that puts others first within a world filled with injustice, exploitation, and power brokering.[152] It is a sin-filled world, but wherever humans worked for each other to honor God, a bit of God's good creation is retained and carried forward. This is one way to worship God in a sinful world. "Work is good."[153]

Food and Eating

In a disturbing twist to the narrative of Genesis, it is the eating of food that becomes the iconic first sin humans committed. The Hebrew term for eat, or eating, is found seventeen times in Genesis 3 alone. The serpent played on the appetite of the first humans and convinced them that God was unfair when he forbid them to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The serpent distorted God's words to sound as though God was restrictive when in reality he was being libertarian in his approach to eating in the garden (Gen 3:1). Out of pride Eve and Adam engaged in the first act of uncontrolled appetite. Crouch notes that the serpent's invitation was an invitation to consume not to create, as God had desired for them.[154] Since that time humanity has struggled constantly with the temptation to please their own consumptive desires, even at the expense of other people around them.[155]

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[152] Stackhouse, Jr., *Making the Best of It*, 224-25.

[153] Ott, Strauss, and Tennent, *Encountering Theology of Mission*, 150. For a combining of the beauty of the Sabbath with the beauty of food see Margaret Hathaway, "For a Sweet New Year," in *The Spirit of Food: 34 Writers on Feasting and Fasting toward God*, ed. Leslie Leyland Fields (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010).

[154] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 114.

[155] Elizabeth T. Groppe, *Eating and Drinking* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 49. Crouch makes the astute observation that the tendency for humanity to be sucked into the marketing and advertising for consumption found throughout the world today is simply a replay of what happened in the Garden, see Crouch, *Culture Making*, 114.

There is something deeper here than the mere act of eating food. Appetite and human-decision making in the narrative of Genesis 3 were closely connected.[156] The process behind deciding what was eaten had major consequences if chosen poorly. Eating was a prominent part of Genesis 1-2; God gave clear guidelines as to what Adam and Eve should eat while still leaving room for choice. To be made in the Image of God meant eating should bring joyful relational life. Sin changed that to a certain extent. Eating would no longer always be a source of joy and life-giving nourishment. Some types of eating would lead to early death and suffering.[157] For example, Kirk makes the point that reliance on pre-packaged food that requires little or no effort to prepare often usurps the creative process of cooking, thus cutting humans off from the originally intended process of creativity implied in the freedom to combine the foods God made.[158] Eating often becomes "divorced from authentic community," and then becomes a dull routine extracting the joy that eating was meant to convey in community.[159]

But sin did not completely corrupt food and eating. The plants would continue to yield forth their bounty, albeit a harder to get bounty (Gen 3:18). Eating, could be a time of joy and festivity when done appropriately, not merely a means for survival. Satan's deception brought negative effects, but God's influence on eating choices was not

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[156] Some studies have suggested that appetite and desire are "integral to human nature" and are thus a "deeper principle of life" than even DNA. Shannon Jung, *Food for Life: The Spirituality and Ethics of Eating* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 14.

[157] Sarah Hall Maney meticulously describes the potential of cooking and eating with family to bring life and that eating in binge form and with uninhibited addiction can lead to death or feelings of despair. Sarah Hall Maney, "Cooking: Divine and Destructive," in *Sacred Dimensions of Women's Experience*, ed. Elizabeth Dodson Gray (Wellesley, MA: Roundtable Press, 1988).

[158] Kirk, "Wild Fruit," 5-6. The rapid rise of fast food chains around the world have also undermined the beauty and potential of eating. Gorringe, *Furthering Humanity*, 89.

[159] Jung, *Food for Life*, 6. Parks, "The Meaning of Eating," 189.

completely negated. Fick argues that what we choose to eat has an impact on far more than just the one who is eating. Depending on the choices, the environment and sustainability of societies is at stake.[160] Often those who hold power over a given society also use culinary manipulation to reinforce stereotypes and exotification of those who are different in order to keep them on the margins.[161] Fick goes so far as to write that our eating choices are "ethical and religious" decisions.[162] This fits with the overall thrust of Genesis 1-3. God would continue to help humans make positive eating choices and would continue to facilitate the creation of ways of life through acts of eating.[163]

More than any other material item on earth food may contain the power to bring people together into community in a positive way.[164] This is a testament to the deeper significance of food and eating and the continued positive influence of God on the

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[160] Fick, Food, Farming, and Faith, 1.

[161] For a recent publication, that demonstrates this very well in relation to Thai food in the United States of America see Mark Padoongpatt, *Flavors of Empire: Food and the Making of Thai America* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017). He argues that Thai food has become, in many cases, a stand-in for Thai people and thus allows for those in "control" to avoid dealing with the foreigner. At the same time Padgoongpatt recognizes the creativity of Thai cooks and restaurateurs to use food and eating as a way to connect communities and create a space for themselves in a context far from "home." For a historical study of "food manipulation" to maintain power and undermine the Maori of New Zealand see Hazel Petrie, "The Sanctity of Bread," in *Food and Faith in Christian Culture*, eds. Ken Albaala and Trudy Eden (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

[162] Fick, *Food, Farming, and Faith*, 2. Fick does not quote Genesis here but his arguments fit very well with the way Genesis 1-3 portrays the act of choosing as it relates to food and eating.

[163] As Jung reminds her readers, "Eating is something we do every day: we can either approach it as a task, something to get done, or we can approach it as an occasion for appreciation and enjoyment, something to be experienced." Jung, *Food for Life*, 9. For a brief overview of food and eating in other parts of the OT see Fick, *Food, Farming, and Faith*, 125.

[164] The philosopher Clemens Sedmak has developed a wonderful analogy between doing theology and cooking in the kitchen. While not directly related to the thoughts in this project it illustrates the level of depth that can be drawn from food and its preparation. See Clemens Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology: A Guide for Artisans of a New Humanity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 19-20.

choices surrounding the types of food eaten and what it means to eat together.[165] As Lisa McMinn so gracefully reminds her readers, "Food and faith are deeply intertwined… After all, God appears throughout Scripture when people gather to eat. God causes food to grow, feeds the hungry, satisfies the thirsty, and establishes days for feasting—all reasons to celebrate God's goodness and faithfulness."[166] The goodness of creation can continue to manifest itself every time people gather around a bountiful table to eat and fellowship together.[167] Food is also a constant reminder of the grace of God, it is something that humans cannot "create" without outside influencers.[168]

Language

The concept of language is not expounded on directly in Genesis 3.[169] Rather it is the usage of language that reveals the effects of sin on language. In direct contrast to the positive use of language in Genesis 1-2, there is a negative use in Genesis 3. First, the

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[165] Brian Volck's description of his father's close ties with produce from the garden and the people he shared it with, while also receiving produce from them, led to communal meals with friends and family. This created intimacy that otherwise would be impossible, leading to the conclusion that food played an essential role in creating and sustaining relationships. Brian Volck, "Late October Tomatoes," in *The Spirit of Food: 34 Writers on Feasting and Fasting toward God*, ed. Leslie Leyland Fields (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 9. Doukhan has similar feelings, as the following comments on Genesis 1:30 demonstrate: "No wonder the blessing of the meal is one of the most common practices throughout the religions of the world." Doukhan, *Genesis*, 66. I would be more comfortable with this statement if the term "people" was substituted for "religions." Religions do not eat, people eat.

[166] Lisa Graham McMinn, *To the Table: A Spirituality of Food, Farming, and Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 6. The classic text that combines cooking, eating, and theology is Robert Farrar Capon, *The Supper of the Lamb: A Culinary Reflection* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969). Capon uses cooking in combination with theological insight to create a masterpiece on the theological significance of food. With this said, Capon's writing is done with a sacramental understanding of food that firmly is entrenched, which I cannot go along with. However, this does not take away from some of his theological insights, and I tend to agree that food is much more significant theologically than it typically gets credit for.

[167] Fick, Food, Farming, and Faith, 10.

[168] Jung, *Food for Life*, 21.

[169] Poythress, *In the Beginning*, 104. Poythress wrote an entire chapter on the effects of the fall on language in Poythress, *In the Beginning*, chap. 14.

serpent manipulated spoken language to bring doubt into the mind of Eve, an abuse of language to gain power and negative influence over someone else. When God discovered Adam and Eve after they sinned, the use of language continued on its downward spiral. Formerly used in adoration, praise, and creativity the couple turned language into a tool of condemnation and blame: first Adam toward Eve, then Eve toward the serpent, and ultimately both of them toward God.

Before sin, language was meant to aid in the creative endeavor of shaping the world, as seen through the naming of the animals. After sin language continued to have that function, but it could also be used to bring distrust, hate, and belittling into relationships.[170] Language was no longer a pure medium after Satan used it to deceive humanity.

And now, when words are spoken, there will always be that lurking doubt as to whether or not the ideas communicated are true or not.[171] There may not be anything on earth that has brought as much pain and suffering as the harmful use of language. As Pasquale and Bierma put it, "because of the effects of sin, we often … speak chaos into beauty," the opposite of what God intended.[172] God would eventually mix up the languages of the people in order to push them back towards the diversity he intended

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[170] As Wittgenstein notes, the use of a term is it's "meaning." What this means after the entrance of sin is that while the same language was being used by humans they were often using it for new purposes including the tearing down of each other, thus even the "meaning" of words is corrupted in the process of this change. Wittgenstein of course does not discuss the Fall and its relation to language, rather I am applying some of the insights on language that we find in Wittgenstein to what happened in Genesis 3. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 20.

[171] This agrees with Vanhoozer. "The doctrine of the fall directs us to view human speech and action with a certain suspicion, for sin, which is universal, distorts everything we say, think, and do." Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 302.

[172] Pasquale and Bierma, *Every Tribe*, 4.

language to have from the beginning (Gen 11). But history demonstrates that there has been a constant struggle to dominate people through language, whether by forcing people to learn the language of the "overlords" or by marginalizing speakers of certain languages.[173] This domination in language has been termed the "colonization of the mind" by Ngugi Wa Thiong'O.[174]

God also continued to influence language, for it could be used to build people up and to help create a world that kept God at the center. Language has produced some of earth's most beautiful poetry, literature, and songs that bring life and joy to those who hear them. The Bible itself uses human languages to convey the message and portrait of God to humanity. Satan could not totally corrupt language; God continued to take a part in the choices of humans and how they communicate. The simple act of speaking a sentence is an example of the level of creativity built into the very essence of language.[175] There are millions of different types of sentences that can be formed with the average person's vocabulary.[176] Compound this with the thousands of spoken languages around the world and it begins to become clear that there are limitless possibilities. Language can

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[173] Jennings demonstrates how language and racialized concepts were perpetuated through the colonialist movement right up into the present. He uses the example of "Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'O's account of Kenyan children being beaten for speaking their native language in school rather than English." Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 231. See his entire chapter entitled, "White Space and Literacy." I have witnessed the same thing in India with a significant difference. Rather than the person doing the beating coming from a White European background it was Indians who were beating children for not using English even though they actually share the same first language as the children they were beating, and use the same mutual language at home. This demonstrates the far reaches of the colonialist project through language. See also Mignolo, *The Darker Side*, 19.

[174] Ngugi Wa Thiong'O, Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature (Nairobi, Kenya: Heinemann, 1986), 12.

[175] In a similar vein, although outside of a faith-based discussion, Noam Chomsky argues for the "creative aspect of language." For Chomsky the sheer vastness of potential difference in normal language use leads him to write that "language is innovative." Chomsky, *Language and Mind*, 10-11.

[176] Poythress, *In the Beginning*, 43.

also be used to describe God in such a variety of ways that it allows the chance for understanding new aspects of God's loving character that are beyond imagination. "Humans are called to speak beauty into the chaos."[177] This also means that every time a language dies, a way of thinking about God and the world also dies. Creating new ways of life would not be conceivable without language. And the many languages that have emerged over the millennia have enriched the world and brought a level of depth to life that would not be possible without the ability to create language.[178] Whether it is through the spoken word, signs and wonders, dreams and visions, or the written word God continues to use language in various forms to communicate with humans.[179]

Human Relationships and Marriage

Where once there was a loving trust between Adam and Eve, there quickly became a distrust and a condemning attitude.[180] The passage in Genesis 3:16 and 3:17b-19 contains direct implications for the human family. Giving birth would become a painful experience, the complete opposite of rest—"Painful labor" is how the New International Version translates it. Creating a family would become difficult and full of heartache and pain. And yet humans still retained the ability to create life, which brought

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[177] Pasquale and Bierma, *Every Tribe*, 2.

[178] This means that we must avoid the temptation of elevating our own mother-tongue to the level of superiority in relation to other languages, which is often the tendency of people who are threatened by immigrants, for example. Pasquale and Bierma, *Every Tribe*, 3. For more on the importance of variety and creativity in language, and the tendency of people to demonize ways of using language that are outside the "norm" of those who are in power, see Pasquale and Bierma, *Every Tribe*, chap. 7.

[179] Pasquale and Bierma, *Every Tribe*, 2. Poythress, *In the Beginning*, 37-38.

[180] Tonstad, *God of Sense*, 293.

them immense joy as in the case of the birth of Cain (Gen 4:1).[181] Not only would

childbearing become painful, but as subsequent portions of Scripture detail, it would

become messy and stigmatized. But it was not all a sad tale. Humans kept the ability to

create relational life for their families through the positive influences of God which gave

hope and meaning to life.

The two humans condemned each other before the God who created them to love

each other (Gen 3:12-13). Their marriage was no longer one of shameless loving

devotion, but one of shame and blame (Gen 3:7, 12-13). Their own pride after the

entrance of the serpent and sin came before their love for each other. The serpent's

cunning came between them and separated them from each other. Genesis 3:16 also

describes a change in the way males and females would relate to each other because of

sin. There would be superiority and inferiority where once there was equality. This is not

to say that equality is not to be sought, but often this ideal would be neglected with males

attempting, and often succeeding, to dominate females. Davidson clarifies this by arguing

that "the synonymous parallelism between v. 16a-b and v. 16c-d, as well as the

parallelism with vv. 17-19, also reveals that it is not inappropriate for humankind to seek

to roll back the curses/judgments and get back as much as possible to God's original

plan."[182] History reveals that the ideal has often been missed and continues to be missed

in many parts of the world today.

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[181] Many people around the world have elaborate or semi-elaborate ritual celebrations at the birth of a child which is highly appropriate. Unfortunately, in some places, such as the United States, this is less the case see Elizabeth Dodson Gray, "Giving Birth," in *Sacred Dimensions of Women's Experience*, ed. Elizabeth Dodson Gray (Wellesley, MA: Roundtable Press, 1988), 48.

[182] Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 75. For more on this see Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 76.

The shame that came upon both Adam and Eve was more than a sense of nakedness. It revealed a loss of trust and may even have been a reference to sexual desire turning toward lust rather than love. Marriage would no longer automatically bring joy and happiness, but would require patient work on the part of both the male and the female. As time would demonstrate such actions as divorce, marital unfaithfulness, and other relationship-destroying activities would become common occurrences.

Nevertheless, marriage would not fall to total corruption.[183] Satan desperately wanted to separate humans and lead them away from meaningful relationships; this would mar the Image of God to such an extent that it would be hard to recognize that image in humans if Satan succeeded. But he was thwarted from total success. Marriage would continue to remain an ideal that many humans would participate in. The creation of life through sexual union would go forward and keep intact the Image of God from generation to generation (Gen 5:3).[184] In reference to babies being born, Sydney Morris extolls, "Creation is right here among us in the human community every time a child is born."[185] Add to this the idea that, "family life is the most fundamental social structure for procreation and human relationships," and it is comforting to know that sin can

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[183] Coleson, commenting on the change that occurred between Adam and Eve after sin, states that "Having no existential reality, evil can only taint, tarnish, pollute, and sometimes destroy what is good." While I can agree with the basic thrust of this argument the idea that evil does not have an existential reality does not fit well with a robust understanding of Satan as a real being who influences people to do "evil." Coleson, however, is reluctant to see the serpent and Satan as necessarily the same being. Coleson, *Genesis 1-11*, 124.

[184] Davidson has convincingly argued that the Song of Songs is an example of marriage theology post-fall that points back to the pre-fall example in Genesis. See Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, chap. 13. For more on the Image of God as it relates to the genealogies of Genesis see Fretheim, *God and World*, 50.

[185] Sydney Amara Morris, "Homebirth: The Sacred Act of Creation," in *Sacred Dimensions of Women's Experience*, ed. Elizabeth Dodson Gray (Wellesley, MA: Roundtable Press, 1988), 57.

disrupt this ideal but it cannot remove it completely.[186]

Marriage would retain its centrality in many societies as a time of the utmost joy and happiness. Every time a wedding is done with the goal of joy and loving union, it is a testament to the ongoing work of God through the Holy Spirit in the lives of humanity. The Image of God, through the willing choice of people, continues to have a positive impact through marriage and healthy human relationships despite the ongoing influence and work of the devil.

<center>Clothing</center>

Of the five elements developed in this study, clothing may seem like the most mundane. And in some societies certain types of clothing portray influence or power within the community. While fashion and clothing are important to a lot of people, for many others the act of wearing clothes is not overly important.

Clothing in Genesis 3, however, may be the most significant of the five elements dealt with above. There are two points in Genesis 3 where clothing, or covering of the bodies, is mentioned. The first instance is Genesis 3:7, when Adam and Eve realized they were naked and thus felt shame. They attempted to cover their bodies and their shame with fig leaves. Crouch notes that this was an act of culture-making. Now instead of creating "freely and spontaneously" they were "protecting themselves from the sudden alienation they feel from one another and their own bodies. But what they are doing is culture—creating and cultivating—all the same."[187] This continues on into the present

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[186] Ott, Strauss, and Tennent, *Encountering Theology of Mission*, 150.

[187] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 114.

seen in the direct connection between feelings of vulnerability and the need for clothing.[188]

The second mention of clothing is in Genesis 3:21, and is related to the first. Apparently when Adam and Eve met God the fig leaves they used to cover themselves did not bring them security; they continued to feel shame at a deeper level than a mere covering of the body could overcome.[189] As a result, God clothed Adam and Eve in the skin of an animal which then covered their shame.

Many scholars interpret Genesis 3:21 to be the first instance of sacrifice in the Bible. Adam and Eve's reaction to sin was feeling naked, and God's reaction was to cover it. This shame went beyond simple coverings; mistrust, pride, and doubt in the love that they once felt for God and each other brought on shame. Only God could provide the covering needed to remedy the shame Adam and Eve experienced. Combining this with the promise of Genesis 3:15, along with the fact that Abel brought a lamb for sacrifice in Genesis 4:4, reveals that God was enacting a ritual that would instill hope into a humanity faced with continual feelings of shame.[190]

It was noted that in Genesis 1-2, religion as a separate category was basically non-existent. This is based on modern definitions of the term. What about after the entrance of sin into the world? Did sin create a need for religion? The quick answer to these

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[188] Michele Saracino, *Clothing* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 21.

[189] Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 57.

[190] Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 57. It is significant that the act of clothing Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:21 in combination with the narrative in Genesis 4 appear to support the idea that Adam and Eve were a type of priest. The terminology used to describe God clothing them is found in a very similar form in Leviticus in connection to the clothing of the priests at the tabernacle. The fact that the concept of sacrifice was also passed on to Cain and Abel is further evidence that Adam and Eve played the role of priests and their clothing is a part of this evidence. For more on the clothing of Adam and Eve and its ties to the Levitical priesthood see Davidson, "Earth's First Sanctuary," 76-80.

questions is that sin dramatically altered the way the world operated. All aspects of life brought pain, suffering, and shame. Even so, God demonstrated his loving desire to still be with his created beings and work out the problem; in the immediate wake of sin God walked in the Garden and helped humanity deal with the curse of sin. The rest of this section will show that life was still understood holistically after sin and that sin did not create the need for a separate category called religion. Life was not divided into sacred and secular at that point.

With this in mind there are some qualifiers that need to be handled. When sin entered the world, God initiated a new ritual system to aid humanity in its dealings with sin. This is found in its earliest form in Genesis 3:21, when the first sacrifice of an animal took place in order to make clothing for Adam and Eve. This ritual was new, and according to modern definitions, could be understood as religious. But this would be reading a concept, that of religion, anachronistically back into a world that had not divided life into concise categories.[191]

Sacrifice as a ritual became another part of life. In some ways it replaced the previous part of life in which humanity freely walked and talked with God. The ritual of sacrifice symbolically brought God and humanity back together, closing the gap of separation. It was to point toward atonement. The sacrifice added to the life of humans, not as a separate category of living, but as a new way of connecting with God and reminding them of God's promise given in Genesis 3:15. It was simply part of the

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[191] This is often done by scholars. For more on this see Robert A. Divito, "Anthropology, OT Theological," *The New Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Katherine Doob Sakenfeld (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 1:172. See also Larry Perkins, "Anthropology and the OT," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:258-262.

everyday experiences of humanity, to be done alongside eating, working, and raising a family, but meant to enhance these activities by being done alongside them.

Therefore, it is inaccurate to read the category of religion back into the world of Adam and Eve.[192] Each part of life underwent drastic changes due to sin, but the basic understanding of what it meant to live, was still holistic.

God created humanity in such a way that each part of life, as given in the beginning, was essential to the overall well-being of humanity. Life was not broken down into categories, such as cultural and religious or sacred and secular. This was true before and after the entrance of sin into the world. The rest of the Old Testament maintained this basic outlook on life with no clear dichotomization between culture and religion. Even when the rituals surrounding interaction with God grew in complexity, the holistic nature of life did not change.[193] Harold B. Kuhn points out that "the Scriptures do not contain the word *society*…. The terms employed in the Bible are concrete and empirical ones,

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[192] Many scholars have done this. Clendenin argues that the fall brought "distortions of various kinds and degrees in human religiosity." Clendenin then faces the difficulty of navigating the implications of this statement by trying to show that not only pagan religions experienced this but also Israel. The problem with this logic is that if taken to its conclusion it means there was a time when religions were perfect, leaving room for a wide range of questions about the origin of various differing "religions." Clendenin, *Many Gods*, 121.

[193] The argument that some make for religious diversity breaks down when it is recognized that religion as a category is extra-biblical. March attempts to defend religious diversity by referencing the creative power of God as manifesting itself in the many religions we see today. This, however, seems to be a confusion between culture and religion. There is no indication that God created humanity with the desired effect that they would create multiple gods or goddesses or other types of deities or idols to follow Him. We should expect a variety of ways of living which approach the God of the Bible in different ways and from various perspectives, but to say that all religions are part of the divine plan at creation goes beyond Scripture and is a type of imperialism in that it assumes all religions are the same at the core, which they are not. The other challenge scholars like March face is the lack of recognition given to the forces of Satan and the role they play in the development of ways of living and their ways of approaching God or atheism or whatever ultimate commitments people choose to follow. March, *The Wide, Wide Circle*, 21. For a counter to this argument see Dyrness, *Insider Jesus*, 60.

such as *people* and *nation(s)* (emphasis in original)."[194] This does not mean that the different elements of life were all of equal or similar importance. But it does mean that all aspects of life were equally valid as God originated, and that God continued to influence each part of life because they played a role in what it meant to live and be in the Image of God.

Clothing is more than a covering. It is a symbol of something deeper. There is a connection with the use of clothing as a status symbol found in various ways throughout the world.[195] Wrogemann reports on the issue of clothing in South Africa during colonialist rule that illuminates potential roles of clothing in relationships. The early missionaries were often pushing for local converts to take up European dress as a symbol of their changed hearts. Later, South African whites began discouraging South African blacks from wearing European-style clothing as this was understood to be a symbol of equality, which many white South Africans were opposed to.[196] Satan has deceived people into thinking that what they wear is more important than who they are. This results in separation between the "haves" and "have nots." At the same time the issues that occurred in South Africa are a reminder that "clothing is therefore never just a matter

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[194] Harold B. Kuhn, "Society," in *The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible*, eds. Merrill C. Tenney and Moisés Silva, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 5:546.

[195] Jayson Georges, Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures: Biblical Foundations and Practical Essentials (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2016), 41.

[196] Wrogemann, *Intercultural Hermeneutics*, 136-38. Wrogemann works from two sources in this section of his book which are detailed and helpful on this particular issue. The issue was a serious one in which people were attending or not attending church based on clothing. Kirsten Ruether, "Heated Debates over Crinolines: European Clothing on Nineteenth-Century Lutheran Mission Stations in the Transvaal," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 28, no. 2 (2002). The other source which Wrogemann references, although uses in a lesser form, is Helen Callaway, "Dressing for Dinner in the Bush: Rituals of Self-Definition and British Imperial Authority," in *Dress and Gender: Making and Meaning*, eds. Ruth Barnes and Joanne Bubolz Eicher (New York: Berg, 1993).

of 'outward formalities' but rather a multifaceted, meaningful event."[197] This statement is accurate when read in light of the deeper significance of clothing in Genesis 3 for either good or bad.

Clothing, as we know it, is only necessary because of sin. But God, as seen in Genesis 3:21, used clothing for a positive role on behalf of humans. Thus, the creative spirit of humanity can choose to use clothing as a part of their message of hope and love towards all. Wearing clothing that brings unity and crosses class lines, or making sure that the clothing worn is meant to uplift people is part of creating ways of life as God intended.[198] Sin forever changed what it means to be covered, but it did not erase the Image of God which brings trust between people, which then overcomes shame.

The exploitation of people in relation to nudity and pornography is a direct betrayal of "the gift of life," and an attack on God's image because of the shame it brings deep down inside both those being exploited and the exploiters.[199] The human body has been shaped in the minds of people by all sorts of factors leading to exploitation and false

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[197] Wrogemann, Intercultural Hermeneutics, 137.

[198] While dated the edited volume by Ruth Barnes and Joanne B. Eicher presents some interesting essays on different ways of thinking about and using clothing from around the world. Ruth Barnes and Joanne Bubolz Eicher, eds., *Dress and Gender: Making and Meaning in Cultural Contexts* (New York: Berg, 1992).

[199] It is true that men are also exploited through the medium of pornography but not on the same scale as women. Gray, "Giving Birth," 50-51.

senses of beauty.[200] God has given us the ability to choose modesty and to fight against those who desire to leer at what should not be revealed while sin exists.[201] Clothing is meant to bring comfort and hope where there is little hope. This is the guiding principle that Genesis 3 reveals in the process of living in relation to clothing.

Current Categories of Religions and Genesis 1-3

Objectifying Descriptions of Humanity in Light of Genesis 1-3

From the biblical perspective Genesis 1-3 provides a foundation for defining life both in its wider transcendent elements and immanent human to human elements which overlap. While delimiting to Genesis 1-3 does not allow for a comprehensive description of relational life, it does give a minimal starting point that can then provide a critique for existing attempts to describe life.

The basic understanding that all humans carry the Image of God (marred as it is), within them through the original design of the Creator pushes against the objectifying language of much of the anthropological, sociological, and religious studies descriptions of humanity. Humans can never be reduced to scientific objects, but rather must always

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[200] North American history demonstrates this issue in specific details in the important work of *The Altars Where We Worship*. The human body and sex are so wrapped up in false narratives and historical exploitation that it has become difficult to live daily life outside the lies and manipulations of society as a whole in regards to how the body and sex should be perceived and engaged with. Juan M. Floyd-Thomas, Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, and Mark G. Toulouse, *The Altars Where We Worship: The Religious Significance of Popular Culture* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2016), chap. 1. While the implications and outcomes would differ in other parts of the world, the corruption of the body and sex, is rampant everywhere in its own forms. The themes of colonialism, race, and objectification found in the previous chapters are equally present in the history of the body and sex whereby white males have set the benchmark, in a negative sense, for exploitation, although no group of people is exempt from its effects.

[201] Modesty is not an easily defined concept, certainly there is no "universal" articulation of what is or is not modest from the biblical standpoint. Modesty varies from place to place and a constant interaction with local settings is required to understand appropriate modesty but also to understand when a rhetoric of modesty is being used as a method of control, often from males towards females. Saracino, *Clothing*, 69.

be first and foremost recognized as beings made in the Image of God. Much ink has been spilled since the Enlightenment on theorizing about the essence of humanity, especially in the field of religious studies. While some of these studies have been illuminating, they often fail to take into account the biblical understanding of relational life. Human reason alone is not up to the task of categorizing people. Taking the concept that each human is created in the Image of God, is an alternative normative source which answers the question, minimally speaking, as to what the essence of humanity is. While this position requires faith, it is a valid alternative nonetheless.

The dichotomy that the Western academy created between culture and religion is not found in Genesis 1-3. These three chapters describe life as multi-faceted and multi-dimensional but never delineated based on cultural or religious terms. Rather life is viewed relationally and holistically including the five elements discussed. While not all aspects of life contain the same purpose or goal, they cannot be easily separated into cultural or religious categorizations, without moving toward the objectifying critiqued in the previous Chapter. This dichotomy is not in Genesis 1-3, but rather life is described as fully integrated and important both from the transcendent and immanent perspective.

Much of the work of anthropologists, sociologists, and religious studies scholars has taken seriously the elements of life mentioned earlier in this Chapter. Although they have often attempted to do so from an overly exaggerated posture of neutrality and objectivity, there is still much that is useful in their descriptions. Yet they all too often quickly develop into abstract generalizations that leave behind the richness of the varied parts of life as seen in Genesis 1-3.

Race and Religion in Light of Genesis 1-3

Race, whether in skin color or some other identifier, falls outside the immediate

scope of Genesis 1-3. There is no discussion of the physical features of God, Adam, or

Eve. Beyond the difference of male and female, little is known about this couple. What

can be understood minimally is that the potential for a tremendous amount of diversity

both in how life was lived, but even in how humanity would change, is implicitly found

throughout the passage.[202]

The central place of freedom, implies the potential for a great many varieties to

emerge. And this appears to have been part of the creational plan of God in partnership

with humanity. It is safe to assume that even in a perfect world humanity would look, act,

and live differently today than humans did in the past.[203] This, however, can never alter

the base line assumption that all human beings are made in the Image of God. This

precludes any differences and creates an intimate relational connection between humanity

that should lead toward the celebration of diversity rather than the fear of it.

This idea must be tempered with the recognition that not all diversity is rooted in

God's love and goodness after the Fall. There are inevitably some parts of living that are

inappropriate and that may be tied to whole communities of people. Theologians and

missiologists must always be cognizant of the use of categories in describing people and

filter them through the Genesis 1-3 test. The test should recognize the potential positivity

of diverse ways of living and also be on the lookout for aberrations of living that lead to

pain, suffering, and marginalization. If categories of religions become the primary lens

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[202] Kreitzer, The Concept of Ethnicity, 101-02.

[203] Edgar, Created and Creating, 169.

for understanding certain groups of people at a more fundamental level than the concept of the Image of God, inevitably this will create rifts in relational life that cannot be overcome easily. When certain presuppositions are tied to each religious category, whether grand such as Hinduism or Buddhism, or more simple descriptors such as primitive or tribal, this can then replace the dynamic holism of life that is found in the descriptions of Genesis 1-3.

The potential for diversity in ways of living was there from the beginning, which reveals that at least in theory God created humanity to be able to create diverse ways of living and still remain within his framework for abundant life.

While racism and categories of religions overlap, they also impact the ways relational life is played out in the elements found above. Religiously racialized categories have impacted these segments of society: availability of work which leads to dignity, who gets to eat with whom and when,[204] deciding which forms of language are "grammatically correct," and differentiation in clothing fashions. It is beyond the scope of this Chapter to give details to each of these areas but it is in the throes of everyday life that racialized categories of religions gain tangible effects.

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[204] Gillian Feeley-Harnik's book on food and Christianity points out that it was highly significant that part of the main thrust of the civil rights movement took place at lunch counters. Gillian Feeley-Harnik, *The Lord's Table: The Meaning of Food in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 13. The strict rules of who can eat with whom in India cannot be easily separated from the long-time separation of people based on caste and background which is often racialized at least in theory.

Human Progress as Teleology in Light of Genesis 1-3

It may appear out of place to discuss teleology in connection to Genesis 1-3. Yet Genesis 1-3 contains the potential for creative change. This was built in as a possibility that could result from the freedom humanity had to create new ways of living in tandem with God who walked among them. It is more difficult to say that humans would progress. Change yes, but progress is a term that often hinges on the idea that whatever preceded the progress was of lesser value and somehow defective in comparison to what it replaced, whether technological advance, an idea, or general way of living life. This understanding of progress would appear to be out of place in the perfect world of Eden where change was built into the creative human way of life, but change would not necessarily have to be viewed as progress.

After the Fall, however, there may be an element of progress that is possible. In other words, now that each element of life would have the potential for corruption, there would need to be correctives all along the way. Progress is a future-centered concept that views the past primarily as building blocks to the present and future progressive events and goods.

When it comes to the Bible, looking forward in one sense involves aiming for what is prior. Vanhoozer brings the themes of my Chapter here together when he writes, "the remembered past is rendered through a plot, which in turn renders a proposition: a possible way of viewing and living in the world. The reader, thus propositioned, becomes a player in the ongoing drama of creation and redemption."[205] This reading of the passage and embodying the passage then involves looking back toward creation. Based on

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[205] Vanhoozer, The Drama of Doctrine, 18.

Vanhoozer's logic the passage of Genesis 1-3 should serve as a guide on how to live now, thus to a certain extent looking forward involves moving backward. Although as Chapter 6 will show, it also involves looking and moving forward as well.

Conclusion

The foundational narrative sequence in Genesis 1-3 sets the stage for all subsequent biblical discourse. Therefore, it is vital that the narratives contained in these three chapters be permitted to speak to the missiological and theological understanding of relational life. This paper has attempted to allow these passages to begin the discussion on these two concepts.

The basis of the foundation is found in Genesis 1:26-28. The text is absolutely clear that humanity is made in the Image of God. What exactly is entailed with being in the Image of God is often the subject of debate and while a complete definition is probably not possible, a working definition emerged in the process of this research. All humanity is of immense value in the eyes of God, and all humanity retains the Image of God even after sin has entered the world, albeit in an altered fashion.[206] The image also includes the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:26 which can be understood to represent the root of the positive possibility of relational life.

The parallel narrative of creation found in Genesis 2 is also important in the discussion of relational life. This study isolated five elements as the main aspects of life as delineated in Genesis 2: work and rest, food and eating, language, human relationships and marriage, and clothing. God ordained each of these elements to be a part of what it means to be human and in the Image of God. Each of these flow together so that they

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[206] Vanhoozer, "What Is Everyday Theology?," 43.

represent humanity in its fullness. If any element is removed or altered, life for humanity is changed for the worse.

The deception of Satan disguised as a serpent contains the narrative of the Fall of humanity in Genesis 3. This moment drastically changed the way life would be lived from that point forward, and each of the five elements would undergo changes that were negative in nature. But they also carried forward positive aspects which they had prior to the fall. The cosmic conflict between God and Satan takes place among humans and within the five elements listed above. It is the goal of Satan to divide and conquer, to separate the elements. Regardless of the ways this happens, it is always destructive to remove any element from the overall structure of human fullness. God is constantly trying to remind humanity of the importance of each of these elements to Him and to us as humans.

This Chapter also revealed that the concept of religion as a separate category is absent from Genesis 1-3, which does not separate the sacred and the secular, or culture and religion the way that modern-day scholars have. This has major implications for how the category of religion is to be understood and used. While this Chapter stopped short of a call to abandon the terms, it should cause the reader to carefully reflect on the concept of religion in light of its absence in the beginning of this earth.

While Genesis 1-3 is only a small portion of Scripture as a whole, it may be one of the most crucial three chapters in the Bible. It lays the foundation for all that comes after it in the Bible, and therefore is a set of passages that must be consulted when attempting to understand the concept of relational life. Each Chapter after this will continue the themes found in Genesis 1-3.

CHAPTER 5

THE INCARNATION, RELATIONAL LIFE,

AND RELIGION IN JOHN 1:1-18

To argue the centrality of the Incarnation—the life, death, and resurrection of

Jesus, central to much of theological and missiological scholarly output throughout

Christian history—is not necessary. That centrality is justly deserved and is part of the

reason this Chapter will focus on John 1:1-18 as a vignette into the Incarnation presented

in the Gospel of John.[1]

This Chapter will focus on the passage of John 1:1-18 and the Incarnation as a

whole in order to evaluate the categories of religions as portrayed in Chapters 2 and 3 of

this dissertation. To comprehensively deal with the Incarnation, even as it relates to

relational life and religion, is beyond the scope of this Chapter; but certain minimal

conclusions that bear on the overall project are isolated in order to aid in construction of a

biblically framed way of referencing life in contrast to the inherited categories of

religions.

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[1] Jey J. Kanagaraj understands the Prologue of John to act as a "window through which the whole Gospel may be read." Jey J. Kanagaraj, *John*, New Covenant Commentary Series (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 1.

The Incarnation and Creation

The description in John 1 demonstrated that Jesus, who became human, was the same One intimately involved in the creation of the world through his Word. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:1-3). The ties to Genesis 1 are so evident that very few scholars over the past millennia would disagree with finding a connection between the words of John and those of Genesis.[2] The reference to light is another unmistakable allusion to Genesis as well.[3] So the Word that spoke the earth into existence also contains within himself the light that brings life to all humanity (1:3, 4).[4] There is no doubt John desires the reader to be directly reminded of the original creation of the earth and all it encompassed.[5] "John's message is that the Incarnation represents an event of equal importance with creation."[6]

Jesus is the connecting point between the original perfect creation and the fallen disrupted creation (John 1: 10, 11). Jesus demonstrated perfect love leading to life in a sin-marred world where constant bombardment against life through hatred and pain led to death. Jesus' daily life was a type of re-creation pushing humanity back towards the

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[2] Paul A. Rainbow, *Johannine Theology: The Gospel, the Epistles and the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2014), 85.

[3] Light and life, both clearly tied to Genesis, are repetitive themes throughout John's writings. Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 118.

[4] Kanagaraj, *John*, 2.

[5] Tonstad argues that the book of John cannot be "fully understood" unless the connection to Genesis is recognized. Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning*, 191.

[6] Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 41.

original creation plan ordained in the beginning.[7] While the five elements discussed in the previous Chapter are not so easily isolated in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection on earth, they can be assumed to be the realm whereby Jesus lived out a demonstration of abundant life. Each element finds relevance in Jesus' time on earth, demonstrating that the Incarnation cannot be reduced to a spiritual experience that does not include the physical and experiential pieces.[8]

Making the connection to creation is crucial in helping illuminate what exactly the Incarnation was meant to accomplish. The God who created the earth was on the earth as a human, to begin the process of re-creation by overcoming sin through his life, death, and resurrection.[9] This was extremely important from all angles,[10] significantly for the

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[7] And, as Musa W. Dube and Jeffrey L. Staley note, this was a world where the "power" of God was tested and at times even Jesus appeared powerless, though in the end his love demonstrates that his power is over all just as it was in the beginning when all things were created through him (John 1:1-3). Musa W. Dube and Jeffrey L. Staley, "Descending from and Ascending into Heaven: A Postcolonial Analysis of Travel, Space and Power in John," in *John and Postcolonialism*, eds. Musa W. Dube and Jeffrey L. Staley (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 6-7.

[8] This is akin to Guder's argument that all too often in Western theology the life of Jesus has been separated from the death and resurrection of Jesus. This creates the potential for a truncated understanding of salvation in Jesus that should include his life as he lived it. Darrell L. Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church's Witness* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 8. N. T. Wright also points to shifts in interpretation brought on by the Enlightenment that tended to explain away the material actions of Jesus as a real person, N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 55. Wright adds, "if the victory of the cross is not worked out in the life of the world, if it is to be confined only to the so-called 'spiritual' sphere, we are implicitly denying part of Jesus' own meaning." Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus*, 94. Langmead also writes in this vein, "In creation Go proceeds from resolve to word, and then to the creation of material and bodily forms. Humans are God's image on earth not just in their spirituality but in their total bodily existence." Ross Langmead, *The Word Made Flesh: Towards an Incarnational Missiology* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2004), 151. The Incarnation of God goes a long way to confirming and affirming this.

[9] Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 374.

[10] Guder, The Incarnation and the Church's Witness, 1. Dyrness, Insider Jesus, 34.

categorizing of humanity.[11] A major part of Jesus' Incarnation was meant to remind humanity what "abundant life" through love looked like and to give humanity a chance to choose life over death.[12] "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10).

The theme of life and creation that is found throughout the book of John can serve as a hermeneutical guide for the theological and missiological approach to understanding human life in connection with the Incarnated God. This can then inform the critique of current categories of religions (John 20:31).[13] While it is clear that "life" is a major theme of the Gospel of John, it is less evident what the definition of life is.[14] However, the connection to creation found in the Prologue to the book of John is crucial in recognizing that the life Jesus referred to is rooted in God as Trinity, manifested in the original creation of the earth described in Genesis 1-2, and modified in Genesis 3 with the

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[11] Kanagaraj, *John*, 3.

[12] Peckham reminds his readers that Jesus himself "desired to avoid the cross, if it were 'possible' (Matt. 26:39), but he desired to save humans more and thus 'for the joy set before Him endured the cross' (Heb. 12:2)." Peckham, *Theodicy of Love*, 50.

[13] The first chapter of John emphasizes light and life, John 20:31 wraps up the book by saying that those who believe in Jesus will gain or have life in his name, thus life encompasses John's whole gospel. D. A. Carson rightly chooses John 20:31 as a verse that illuminates the purpose of the book. Carson, however, proceeds to spend the rest of his discussion on the purpose of John focused on the first half of the verse. Carson's focus is on John being written so people would believe in Jesus while neglecting the last half of the verse concerning life. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 90-95. See also Wilson Paroschi, "Incarnation and Covenant in the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel (John 1:1-18)," PhD dissertation, Andrews University, 2003, 111-15.

[14] According to Paul A. Rainbow "Nowhere does John define life. He assumes that his readers know of life and death from experience." Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 77. This surely could be disputed, but Rainbow may have a point here. It would seem that the gospel of John trusts the intuition of its readers on the theme of "life." Rainbow is clear, though, that life is a major theme found in the writings of John and is discussed by John more than any other New Testament author. For statistics on this see Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 277. Keener also argues that life is a major theme of John's Gospel, Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 382, 385-86.

entrance of sin. Therefore, when Jesus referred to life, Genesis 1-2 is the background foundation of this reference.

The Importance of the Incarnation for Relational Life

Proceeding with the recognition that God becoming a human is intimately tied to the original creation of this earth leads to the next step of this project which is to evaluate what the Incarnation means for relational life. This will be done in three parts: the universal aspects, the particular aspects, and the cosmic conflict aspects.

Universal Meaning

In the Creation account of Genesis 1-2 it is indisputable that all humanity was endowed with the Image of God. This was a universal fact that applied to all humanity; John 1 affirms this universal when Jesus was recognized as coming into human flesh, embodying the very thing that he created in his image (1:14). This was a visible sign that beings created in the Image of God were of such high value that God deemed it worthwhile, in order to save them and have an eternal relationship with them, to become one of them (1:12, 13).[15]

The Incarnated being claimed to be the light that brought life—a universal claim (1:4, 9). While there is some controversy as how to best interpret this part of John 1, it appears the best interpretation is to apply this to all humanity.[16] Thus, Jesus as the Incarnated God revealed his universal desire for all humanity to have life and have it

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[15] Kärkkäinen, *Creation and Humanity*, 284-89. Scott W. Sunquist, *Understanding Christian Mission: Participation in Suffering and Glory* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 196.

[16] This light is enough to aid each person to choose to follow God at some level. Peckham, *Theodicy of Love*, 136n72.

abundantly.[17] Throughout history, both before the Incarnation and after, the light of God has been manifested in various ways to all humanity creating a sense of unity that joins humanity despite the different ways of living life that are manifested on this planet. As Musa W. Dube writes concerning John 1, "I discover that the Word embodied light that was the 'light of all people' (verse 5). In these first five verses, I have been taken on a journey and travelled back to the beginning of time and discovered my very origins."[18]

This had to be the case in order for the love of God to be recognized as encompassing all people. This love led to the desire for everyone to have access to eternal life in relationship with God which could only be accomplished through the life, death, and resurrection of God as Jesus. Salvation was and is meant for all humans who have ever lived on this earth (John 3:16). Therefore, in a sense, the Incarnation is a universal event with consequences that far exceed the localized physical presence of Jesus in Palestine.

This universality is non-discriminative and does not differentiate between Jews and Gentiles or any other category or criteria (John 1:16). There is a general sense that the Incarnation encompasses all people regardless of background. It is also eternal in scope. The life that comes from the light and the Word is meant to foster eternal life, not just temporal earthly life. It is a sign of a universal eternality which is beyond the human mind's comprehending in its finite state.

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[17] This is along the lines of the concept of "prevenient grace." John 1:9 is used by some as scriptural evidence for prevenient grace, without which no human could even respond to God's love. John C. Peckham, *The Love of God: A Canonical Model* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2015), 141.

[18] Musa W. Dube, "*Batswakwa*: Which Traveller are You (John 1:1-18)?" in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends*, eds. Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube (Boston: Brill, 2000).

Without this universal aspect the Incarnation, and all of its ramifications would not be relevant for all humanity.[19] The God, who created humans in his image, is also the God who loved humanity so much that he was willing to become a being in his own image in order to save all who were willing to accept and believe in his life-giving salvation.[20] This universality lacks details that the next section on particularity will provide but it is the necessary foundation for understanding how the life that Jesus lived is meant to have an impact on each person, for all time.[21]

Based on Genesis 1-2, the Image of God that every person carries is the underlying core of what it means to live as a human being on this earth.[22] The Incarnation affirmed this core identity and gave it inestimable value when God himself became an Image-bearer, in such a way as to fully identify as a human yet still be divine. The Incarnation into the Image of God by God is meant to affirm the love of God towards all humanity and to provide all humanity with an example of relational life as it was meant to be lived from the beginning.[23]

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[19] Gorringe makes the point that "if there is a God, and if God has revealed Godself, then there must be a meaning which is not only universal, but in some sense transcendent to all human culture, and able to critique it." Gorringe, *Furthering Humanity*, 211.

[20] The Bible defines God as love in 1 John 1:16 and it is in the act of Incarnating that we see this definition most tangibly. The Incarnation is an act of love by God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as John demonstrates each of their important roles in the Incarnative act. Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 83.

[21] For more on God's universal love, including passages from the book of John, see Peckham, *The Love of God*, 235-38.

[22] Kärkkäinen, *Creation and Humanity*, 284.

[23] Peckham calls this "God's universally relational love." This love comes from God to humans, prior to any human response but with the hopes of getting a loving human response in return. "Desiring the salvation of all and not wanting any to perish, God loves everyone foreconditionally for the purpose of loving them particularly and intimately, employing various actions to draw all humans into reciprocal love relationship." Peckham, *The Love of God*, 241-42.

Particular Meaning

Oftentimes in Christological discussions there is a strong emphasis on the death of

Jesus, sometimes on the resurrection, and much less so on his life. It has proven difficult

for scholars and preachers to find the balance between these three stages of Jesus' sojourn

on earth. As a result, many of the discussions on the significance of the Incarnation tend

towards the abstract and spiritualized.[24] Without diminishing the mysterious aspects of

the Incarnation this section will focus on some of the particularities of the Incarnation as

they relate to the overall theme of this project which is focused on relational life,

specifically as it impacts discussions of categories of religions and its application to

missiology and theology.[25]

There are at least two ways of seeing the Incarnation in particularities. The first is

that God became a human in a particular place among a particular group of people or

society (John 1:14).[26] This is non-duplicable but highly significant.[27] This affirms

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[24] The fact that the "Word" became flesh, a real, physical, and material person should guard against extreme abstraction. Colleen Warren, *Annie Dillard and the Word Made Flesh: An Incarnational Theory of Language* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 2010), 35.

[25] For a defense of Jesus as primarily concerned with the "local" while he was on earth see Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology*, chap. 2. Kärkkäinen argues that theologians through history have struggled to focus and develop the contextual and localized aspects of Jesus life in meaningful ways, the turn to contextual theology in the past century has strengthened this area of weakness, in the estimation of Kärkkäinen, see Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Christ and Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 71.

[26] I am persuaded that this section is necessary in the overall flow because "wherever the particularity of Jesus Christ is avoided or seen as religiously problematic, the likelihood is great that some kind of Gospel reductionism is being espoused." Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church's Witness*, 19. The passage of John 1:14 is pregnant with meaning when it is recognized that the way Jesus dwelled in Greek is the same term as tabernacle in the Old Testament. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus*, 113-14. Andrew Walls finds tremendous significance in the idea of God "pitching tent among us." For Walls this is an act of "translation." Walls, *The Missionary Movement*, 23.

[27] Ramachandra calls it, "the 'once-for-all' character of the incarnation." Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict?*, 131.

particularity in ways of living.[28] God joined into the ways of living of first century

Palestine as a member of society, which at some level affirms the creative ability of

humans to develop societies and unique ways of living.[29] "God took flesh at a particular

time and place, taught in a particular language, and was tortured to death under a

particular law."[30] How Jesus lived was dictated, to a certain extent, by his social location

in history, geography, economic, social, etc., that he found himself in.[31] Yet this must

never be severed from the universal aspects of the Incarnation, lest a person begin to

believe that life must become like first century Palestinian life in order for it to be

authentic. This particularity affirms that the various manifestations of human ways of

living can be infiltrated by God in the most tangible way possible (John 1:14).[32] There is

no rejection of humanity's creative and diverse ways of living, at least not in whole, but

there was correction to many of the particular ways of living that Jesus offered with love

and grace. Jesus by living within a physical setting, gave some credence to the human

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[28] It is important to keep in mind the Trinitarian aspects of the Incarnation, as Tennent reminds his readers, "the life of Jesus as concretely revealed in real history is God the Father's validation of the sanctity of human culture." Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 179.

[29] N. T. Wright has written extensively on the particularity of Jesus context and Jesus self-perceived role in this context. While his theses are disputed he has gone a long way in placing Jesus within the actual Palestinian context which is very helpful in understanding many of Jesus words and deeds. For an introduction to this research see Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus*. See also Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 322. Crouch, *Culture Making*, 135.

[30] Gorringe, Furthering Humanity, 100.

[31] Jesus was in no way extraordinary in the sense that he was "no superhuman *avatar*, no handsome prince or ascetic recluse in total mastery of his bodily reactions, but a man who sheds tears, feels hunger and pain, experiences anger at the evil he encounters, and overflows with humour and the joy of life." Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict?*, 103.

[32] "It is the once-for-all incarnation of Christian belief that guarantees the permanent value and significance of our common humanness." Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict?*, 131. I would leave out the terminology "Christian belief" here because it is the person of God, Incarnated in Jesus, that gives the permanent value, not beliefs. "The Good News of the kingdom came in the person of Jesus, who embodied all he proclaimed." Langmead, *The Word Made Flesh*, 47.

ways of living.[33] T. J. Gorringe comments on the "Flesh" of the Incarnation in the following way: "Flesh, as John spells out in some detail in the course of his meditations, means culture—food, the world of symbols, the way in which we cherish bodies. The gospels rather prominently highlight the connection between culture as a metaphor and culture in its original sense as the reproduction of life through farming."[34]

The second way to view the particularity of the Incarnation is by checking the elements of life found in Genesis 1-2 within the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. How did Jesus engage with these elements, keeping in mind that he lived in a world that was heavily marred by sin? This is important because the Incarnation then impacts, "bodies and what we do with them, all the issues of housing, food, clothing and so on, are declared issues of decisive importance."[35]

Work and Rest

When it came to work and rest there are several relevant narratives and sayings of Jesus that have implications for this element of relational life.[36] Jesus constantly referred

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[33] In general, the creative spirit of humanity in ways of living was affirmed, but there is clearly the need for Jesus to impact and alter all human ways of living to a certain extent due to the all-pervasive influence of sin. Gorringe writes, "No policy informed by incarnation can be universalizing if this means the elimination of difference." Gorringe, *Furthering Humanity*, 101. See also Richard E. Waldrop and J. L. Corky Alexander, Jr., "Salvation History and the Mission of God: Implications for the Mission of the Church among Native Americans," in *Remembering Jamestown: Hard Questions About Christian Mission*, ed. Amos Yong and Barbara Brown Zikmund (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), 116. "The very fact of the incarnation reminds us that what God wants to make known of himself is not available in culture per se. The human cultural world provides the raw material, as it were, for the gospel; but the gospel cannot be reduced to the means of its cultural production." Vanhoozer, "What Is Everyday Theology?," 42.

[34] Gorringe, Furthering Humanity, 18.

[35] Gorringe, *Furthering Humanity*, 126. Wright, tying Jesus with YHWH in the Old Testament descriptively writes that Jesus is "the loving God, rolling up his sleeves." Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus*, 121.

[36] For a description of the importance of Jesus to the Sabbath as it relates to the character of God, especially as narrated in the Gospel of John, see Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning*, chap. 11.

to the work he was doing as being given to him by the Father (John 4:34-38; 5:17, 36;

10:25, 37-38; 14:10-11; 17:4). Work was always framed within his relationship with

God, emphasizing the relational aspect of work that brings life (John 1:9; 17:4). His work

was primarily focused on bringing more abundant life, whether that was through his

speaking or physical acts of healing or teaching on the mountainside.[37] Jesus experienced

exhaustion in this work of giving life (Mark 6:31). He recognized the need for quiet times

of rest as well as the necessity of keeping the Sabbath (Matt 11:28-29; Mark 1:35; 6:2,

31; Luke 23:56 in the tomb).[38] However, because sin abounded, the type of activities he

did on the Sabbath were not altogether different from the activities he did during the

week (John 5:1-9; 5:17; 7:22-24; 9:13-17; cf. Matt 12:1-13; Mark 1:21-28; 3:1-6; Luke

4:31). He continued to heal and compassionately bring forth life.[39] He argued that the

burdensome rules that had surrounded the Sabbath were taking away from its original

intent to be a life-giving blessing to human beings (John 5:10-15; 9:16-34; cf. Matt 12:1-

13; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-11).[40] Thus, he demonstrated a way of understanding work

and rest that was meant to re-create the original design for Sabbath and rest that had been

forgotten by many. There is another rarely commented on connection to the cosmic

conflict and the curses related to work that comes into play in the final hours of Jesus'

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[37] As a result of this those who experienced his love should have an other-centered view of work. As White wrote, "Love to Jesus will be manifested in a desire to work as He worked for the blessing and uplifting of humanity." Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1892), 77.

[38] Swoboda, Subversive Sabbath, 35.

[39] While the Sabbath is about rest the distortions of sin have altered the Sabbath considerably. Part of Jesus work on earth was to turn the Sabbath back into rest, but in order to do this it required that both the Father and he continue working to heal people and make them whole so they could rest. Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning*, 197.

[40] As Wright notes, "the Sabbath was the most appropriate day for healing to take place. It was the day that signaled release from bondage and captivity." Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus*, 60.

life. Part of the curse found in Genesis 3 includes a curse on the plants, thereby causing

hardship. It is no coincidence that Jesus was crowned with thorns before his death. Jesus

in a very literal way took the curses of sin on himself.[41] Even in his death Jesus' words,

"it is finished" harkened back to creation and the Sabbath. Jesus even rested in the tomb

over the Sabbath, which is a witness of rest after experiencing earth's most tiring work

(John 19:30-31).[42]

Food and Eating

If you were to remove all the instances that food or eating are referenced in the

life of Jesus, much of the narrative history of Jesus would be lost.[43] From his first miracle

in Cana, which appears to have been primarily about bringing abundant life to the party

(John 2:1-12),[44] all the way to the last recorded meal of fish with his disciples (John 21:9)

there are numerous instances of Jesus eating or talking about food and drink. Many of the

most significant symbols Jesus used are connected either to bread, water, or wine (John

6:25-59).[45] While these are often undoubtedly symbols, disconnecting them completely

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[41] Swoboda, Subversive Sabbath, 31.

[42] Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning*, 200.

[43] For more on what Jesus ate and its significance see Stephen H. Webb, *Good Eating* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2001), 128-35.

[44] Rainbow points out that one purpose of Jesus' miracles was to show himself as the "divine bringer of life." Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 196.

[45] When Jesus tells those listening to eat his flesh and drink his blood he is tying food and drink to relationality as Langmead points out. Langmead, *The Word Made Flesh*, 27.

from actual food and drink may be unwarranted (John 6:50-54; 15:1-17).[46] Jesus eating

with the marginalized of society was about far more than sustenance; it was a statement

about grace and life (Matt 9:9-13; 11:19; 25:35, 42; Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:27-32; 7:34).[47]

"He [Jesus] dramatically altered the practice of meals, which were culturally central not

just for nourishment but for delineating social boundaries, horizons of possibility and

impossibility that demonstrate who was 'in' and who was 'out' of a person's social

circle."[48] The feeding of the five thousand was about more than filling the crowd's

hunger, although this obviously played a role in the events that transpired.[49] The last

supper, which has been carried forward after the resurrection, was the last time Jesus

would drink wine until the relationality with humanity will be made complete at the

Second Coming (John 21:15; cf. Matt 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26).[50]

> To the degree that the patterns, protocols, rules, roles, and religious beliefs associated
> with eating and drinking are windows on the values and norms of our social
> relationships and society at large, it is not inconsequential that Jesus instituted a ritual
> of memory and hope while sharing a meal with his followers."[51]

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[46] The act itself of eating together served to bring people together and is also a potential symbol of the relationship people can have with God who desired them to "eat his flesh." Elizabeth Dodson Gray, "Feeding as Sacred Ritual," in *Sacred Dimensions of Women's Experience*, ed. Elizabeth Dodson Gray (Wellesley, MA: Roundtable Press, 1988), 169.

[47] "One of the most revolutionary of Jesus' actions, as far as the Jewish leaders were concerned, was his invitation to 'sinners' to share in table-fellowship with him." Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict?*, 99. See also Wrogemann, *Intercultural Hermeneutics*, 109.

[48] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 137-38. Groppe adds, "His table fellowship was an invitation to a restoration of communion, an act of compassionate welcoming that can transform hearts. "He invited his followers, in turn to practices of eating that would heal the divisions of society (Luke 14:12-14)." Groppe, *Eating and Drinking*, 67. Some have argued that Jesus' style of eating and the company he kept while eating played a significant role in the Jewish leader's desire to kill him. Jung, *Food for Life*, 27.

[49] John 6:1-15; Matt 14:13-21; 15:29-39; Mark 6:30-44; 8:1-13.

[50] James E. Brenneman, "Turning the Tables: War, Peace, and the Last Supper," in *Compassionate Eschatology: The Future as Friend*, eds. Ted Grimsrud and Michael Hardin (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 106.

[51] Brenneman, "Turning the Tables," 101.

Jesus' eating and engaging with food revealed the relational power of food to bring life or to take it away when used to separate people for reasons of perceived or conjured impurity (Mark 5:43; 7:1-23).[52] Gorringe reminds his readers that this is part of what it meant for God to come in the flesh.[53] Food was more than eating. Jesus affirmed the creativity that was put into the meal and used this for what it was meant to be—life giving and relational building in love.[54] Those who follow Jesus are led to see the potential for abundant life in food that Jesus demonstrated while he was on earth, including sharing food with those who did not have much, which became a demonstration in God's eyes, of a person's love for God (Matt 25:31-46).[55] "The community that still clusters around Jesus through the Holy Spirit recognizes in food the grace of the incarnate one who hungered and thirsted just like us."[56]

Language

John 1 starts with the profound statement that the Word was with God and was God. This reference to language is deeply intriguing and has fascinated biblical interpreters from the earliest known manuscripts of Christian history. This statement

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[52] Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict?*, 100-01.

[53] He writes, "Jesus feeds the five thousand; his first word to Jairus is to give his daughter something to eat; his parables are about sowing and harvesting, banquets, feasts, the need to obtain a loaf when the shops are shut; he shares table fellowship with his disciples and with the outcast." Gorringe, *Furthering Humanity*, 19.

[54] I am echoing Gorringe here: "That food plays such a central part in the Christian dispensation is no accident for food is a vital aspect both of culture as a way of life, and as an expression of high culture." Gorringe, *Furthering Humanity*, 19. Many of the recorded meals that Jesus ate, or even his references to wedding feasts, are descriptions of joy which is something food is meant to foster. Groppe, *Eating and Drinking*, 69.

[55] Groppe, Eating and Drinking, 89.

[56] Jung, *Food for Life*, 123.

moved language beyond merely communicative acts, though it was that as well, to something more mysterious and powerful.[57] The Word became flesh suggests that language took on meaning and became tangible in human form.[58] The Word created meaning rather than meaning creating the Word.[59] The Word or language also integrated the different elements of life.[60] All of this has major implications for discussions of language even in its philosophical sense.[61]

Jesus spoke with authority (Matt 7:29; 9:6; Mark 1:22; Luke 4:32, 36; 5:24). He told stories to trigger the imagination—a source of creativity and reason that Enlightenment influenced thinkers onward often shied away from. During this era of human reason serious discussions of scholarship ignored this role of stories, leaving it to the realm of the arts as a marginal aspect of what it meant to live.[62] Jesus used language to build relationships and call back to life those who had died (John 11:43-44; cf. Luke 8:54). Reason and language are intimately tied together, and while it is not wise to see reason as the core of humanity, it certainly is a significant part of life, especially in its

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[57] I agree with Vanhoozer who renders "*logos* as 'communicative act,'" Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 321n42.

[58] Abraham Akrong has a similar understanding of language. He writes, "Language, as Africans used it, means more than a tool for communication…Language is not just a concept, but a deep reality in the life of the people." Abraham Akrong, "Christology from an African Perspective," in *Exploring Afro-Christology*, ed. John S. Pobee (New Nork: Peter Lang, 1992), 133.

[59] Poythress, *In the Beginning*, 255-56.

[60] Akrong, "Christology," 134.

[61] There is a connection between the God who became flesh as the Word and actual language that is mysterious and yet profound. Revelation 21:6 even refers to God as the "Alpha and Omega" which is more than just a reference to beginning and end; it is a reference to language and God tied together organically. Warren, *Annie Dillard*, 39-40.

[62] Stories are often the best way to create questions in the mind of people, and to help people consider alternative ways of living relationally. Jesus was a master of telling interesting stories from the local context that required people to think and then make decisions about daily and eternal life. Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology*, 77-79.

creative ability to conjure thoughts that lead to ideas, which lead to changes of how life is

lived. Jesus demonstrated an acute ability to reason through challenging discussions and

situations in order to arrive at a point where a choice could be given for life or against it,

with his desire plainly for life (John 3:1-21; 7:15; 8:12-58).[63] The intimate tie between

the Word and the flesh is a concept that gives added impetus to seeing language as being

near the core of human life.[64] Jesus was constantly doing "speech-acts," which is the

performance of an action by speaking something, thus revealing the power of language in

life (John 1:1, 3, 14).[65]

Marriage and Relationships

Jesus never married, though he did comment on it and attempt to move humanity

towards the life-giving ideal he had originally set for marriage from the beginning. But

Jesus certainly had relationships and affirmed creative ways of fostering relationships;

whether at the wedding in Cana (John 2:1-12), through the deep discussions and

interactions with his twelve special companions,[66] or in the love he portrayed to his

mother (John 2:3-5), Jesus was about bringing life through meaningful relationships.

When Jesus claimed that all humanity were his brothers and sisters this was a significant

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[63] Sedmak, Doing Local Theology, 22.

[64] Language has fascinated social scientists for a long time because they recognize this as well. Engelke, *How to Think*, 221-32.

[65] Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict?*, 105.

[66] John 13-17; 20:19-29; 21:1-23; cf. Matt 5:1; 10:1; 26:17-46; Mark 1:16-20; 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16; 9:28-36; 22:1-46; 24:13-49. Remember that they left their vocations to live with Jesus day in and day out. This is a profound point that is often not emphasized enough. The idea of living with God is one of tremendous privilege, and yet it is what his followers are called to do. Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church's Witness*, 26-27.

comment on relational life and family (Matt 12:46-50; Luke 8:19-21).[67] Mary, Martha, and Lazarus accepted Jesus as one of their own family members, which was highly meaningful to Jesus (John 11; 12:1-11; 20:11-18; cf. Mark 14:1-11). Even as Jesus was being nailed to the cross he was attentive toward his mother as well as concerned for those who were nailing him to the cross (John 19:25-27).

Clothing

Clothing was not an element that appeared to consume much of Jesus' time. Yet he did comment on it as it related to human focus. People should not be consumed with worry about what they would wear because God promised to take care of all their needs (Matt 6:25).[68] Matthew recorded a parable Jesus told about a wedding banquet that ended with reference to improper clothing. When the host spotted someone who was not dressed properly, that person was thrown out of the wedding into "darkness" (Matt 22:11-14). Jesus' use of clothing in this parable is directly tied to relationality between people and God and demonstrates the importance of the "covering" God provides for those who love him, which is part of the deeper significance of clothing. The symbolism is evident when the Roman soldiers mocked Jesus and placed a scarlet robe on him as though he were a king (Matt 27:27-31; Mark 15:16-20). It is significant that the Psalmist prophesied that Jesus' garments would be divided up at his death, which they were (John 19:23-24; 20:5). Jesus was crucified naked and probably arose naked from the grave—both reminders of

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[67] Michael Banner turns to this narrative as a way of reframing what "kinship" means and the implications this can have for ethics and moral theology whereby the "family" includes far more than blood relatives, see Michael Banner, *The Ethics of Everyday Life: Moral Theology, Social Anthropology, and the Imagination of the Human* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 42-43.

[68] This is a direct confrontation of ways of living that have persisted in looking at clothing as a marker of status leading to worry over what to wear, that continues to be a tool of Satan for deception. Saracino, *Clothing*, 31.

how humans come into the world and how humans were originally created. Jesus' death

was also the fulfillment of Genesis 3:21 which was the first instance of a sacrifice, and it

was done to provide a covering for shame.

Summary

This is a sampling that reveals how Jesus, in the particular setting he found

himself in, engaged with these elements as they were lived by real people and how he

brought life before people in a new and profound way.[69] The death of Jesus was

necessary and has been explained in many different models, most of which complement

each other. Jesus died and then rose so that not only could humanity have eternal life, but

they could have it abundantly (John 10:10). By living on this earth and demonstrating the

abundant life, Jesus provided a glimpse of the Kingdom of God.[70] While life of this type

cannot be fully realized on the earth as it is now, Jesus demonstrated it can be semi-

realized. Humans experience grace that impacts how life is lived in countless ways.[71]

Jesus manifested this grace in his life, death, and resurrection as both an example and a

sign of the Kingdom.[72] "This vision of discipleship is wider, more behavior-oriented,

more concrete, and more public than a view of discipleship as 'the imitation of Christ,'

the interior quest to become more like Jesus in one's 'spirit' or attitudes."[73] Abundant

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[69] "The portrait we find in the gospels shows how much Jesus' theology depended on the people, on their pains and wounds, questions and concerns." Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology*, 21.

[70] Tennent says it well: "The Incarnation is, therefore, not only a revelation of God to humanity but also a revelation of humanity to humanity." Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 180.

[71] Finding a balance between the grace of Jesus and human attempts to follow his incarnational example have proved challenging for theologians and missiologists. Langmead, *The Word Made Flesh*, 75.

[72] "The incarnation…affirms the necessity of gracious living, living as graced, as gift, receiving first and then giving." Gorringe, *Furthering Humanity*, 128.

[73] Langmead, The Word Made Flesh, 49.

life—through work and rest, food and eating, language, human-to-human relationships, and clothes—is possible through the work of Jesus in partnership with the Spirit and the Father.[74]

Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to his followers in order to continue his work of bringing abundant relational life (John 14:15-31; 15:26-27).[75] This is a powerful promise that gives all those who follow Jesus the opportunity to experience that abundant relational life in some form.

<center>Cosmic Conflict, the Incarnation, and Relational Life</center>

The element of conflict in was introduced into the world of life that God created in Genesis 3. This involved the deceptions of the serpent who played a major role in leading humanity away from life toward death. Without detailing the long history between Genesis and the Incarnation there is plenty of biblical evidence portraying an ongoing battle between God and his followers and Satan and his followers. The time of the Incarnation was no exception to this struggle.[76]

The serpent or Satan is not explicitly mentioned in John 1, but the chapter implies the ongoing presence and active work of a diabolical being when it portrays darkness as

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[74] Gorringe, *Furthering Humanity*, 101. While the Incarnation is often tied to Jesus, it is imperative that the other members of the Trinity be recognized as essential to a robust understanding of the Incarnation. Langmead, *The Word Made Flesh*, 154.

[75] Wright, The Challenge of Jesus, 182.

[76] For an overview of the cosmic conflict between Satan and God in the Old Testament see Peckham, *Theodicy of Love*, 68-76. See also Barna Magyarosi, *Holy War and Cosmic Conflict in the Old Testament: From the Exodus to the Exile* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society, 2010). And in the New Testament see Peckham, *Theodicy of Love*, 58-68. For arguments in favor of Old Testament descriptions of Satan that are similar to New Testament descriptions see Peckham, *Theodicy of Love*, 76-82.

trying to overcome the light (John 1:5, 10).[77] Recognizing that John wrote his Gospel

after Jesus ascended and physically left the earth is a reminder that the darkness was still

pervasive in its attempt to spread.

Just as the light of Jesus is universal, the darkness intends to be universal in

scope, although it cannot overcome the light, thus revealing that it does not have the same

inherent power as the light of life (John 1:5). Yet the darkness is no respecter of persons

and can influence even the covenantal chosen people, some of whom John explicitly

called out in the text for choosing darkness (John 1:10-11).[78] Keener argues that "the

language of John 1:5 indicates some sort of conflict between light and darkness."[79]

Darkness, Satan, and death go hand in hand in the gospel of John.[80] While Jesus

set out to bring life and bring it eternally, Satan worked towards the opposite goal. On

several occasions Jesus identified people or moments that participated in or spread

darkness which ultimately would lead to death (John 3:19; 8:12; 12:35, 46). The constant

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[77] Kanagaraj sees the "light and darkness in John [as] symbols of good and bad qualities of life, respectively, and they engage in combat against each other." Kanagaraj, *John*, 3.

[78] This is not an eternal cosmic dualism; Satan is a created being who freely chose to follow a path away from God which led him to be the great deceiver he is today. Peckham, *Theodicy of Love*, 64. Peckham clarifies: "Insofar as one accepts the premise that 'God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all' (1 John 1:5) such that God cannot even look on evil (Hab. 1:13), 'cannot be tempted by evil,' and 'does not tempt anyone' by it (James 1:13), it follows that the constituents of the 'domain of darkness' were created entirely good by God but fell into evil of their own accord." Peckham, *Theodicy of Love*, 66.

[79] Keener, The Gospel of John, 387.

[80] It is quite common for scholars, especially from North America and Europe, to refer to the darkness as a vague evil or force and avoid tying it to any sort of actual being. Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 36-37; Colin G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, Revised ed., Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2017), 57-58; Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 119. I go against this trend in favor of a more robust understanding of darkness that ties it directly with the work and being of Satan. Rainbow seems to bounce back and forth but certainly recognizes the very real fight between Jesus and the Prince of this World. Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 121. Carson is willing to admit that "darkness in John is not only absence of light, but positive evil." Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 119. For a scholar who equates the darkness of John 1:5 with Satan see Köstenberger, *John*, 31. See also Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, vol. 2 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 1504.

back and forth between Jesus and demons is another manifestation of the ongoing struggle between forces of light and forces of darkness (Matt 8:23-34; 17:18; Mark 5:1-20; Luke 4:31-37; 8:26-39; 9:37-43).[81] It is comforting to note that in the direct confrontations Jesus had with demons, they always recognized his authority as far more powerful than theirs and were compelled to obey his commands (Matt 8:32; 17:17-20; Mark 5:12; Luke 4:35; 8:31; 9:42). Yet Jesus did not completely expel darkness or the evil beings from the earth. He desired to bring life, but he chose to do so in a non-coercive way allowing humans to choose light or darkness (John 7:17; 8:12; 10:4-5; 10:25-30). This was even true of the twelve followers who were closest to him. Judas turned out to be a "son of the devil" and chose a dark path that led to his early death (John 13:18-30; cf. Matt 27:1-10).

This cosmic conflict between God and Satan with their followers impacts the universal aspects of the Incarnation as well as the particular aspects. Just as the Light and Word are going out to everyone so is the deceptive darkness through lies and deceit (John 1:11-12).[82] Just as the Image of God is affirmed in the Incarnation, the deceiver continues to push people to dehumanize each other through whatever means they can.

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[81] Kärkkäinen is right to point out that the legacy of the Enlightenment has meant glossing over the contemporary relevance of Jesus exorcising of demons in the Western world, see Kärkkäinen, *Christ and Reconciliation*, 66. For a discussion of Jesus and the warfare theme of Scripture as it relates to casting out of demons and miracles see Boyd, *God at War*, chaps. 7-8. While I would argue Boyd is prone to exaggerated language at times, he has still contributed much to the understanding of Jesus' conflict with the devil as it played out on earth during the Incarnation.

[82] Boyd gives ample evidence to suggest that the reference to light and darkness in John 1 is a reference to the ongoing war between God and Satan played out in Scripture, which escalates while Jesus is on earth. Boyd, *God at War*, 228-29, 376n39. When John writes that Jesus was not accepted by his "own" this very well may be a reference to all humanity, not just the Jews. Because the Prologue is written with all the created world in mind and especially humans, thus this reference to rejection is probably meant to convey the general trend of humanity to reject Jesus. J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 65-67.

On the particular level, just as demonstrated from Genesis 3, the darkness continues to distort each element of relational life. By the time of Jesus' sojourn many of the ways of living relationally were greatly distorted. Jesus took it upon himself to try and redeem these elements through his life, death, and resurrection.[83] He did in fact give signs of life within these elements but up until the present he has not totally removed the stain of evil and darkness from each element of life.[84]

At the time of Jesus' death, the Bible recorded that darkness was at its strongest point (Matt 27:45; Luke 23:44; 22:53). There is also an undeniable message of hope that reveals that the death and resurrection of Jesus went a long way in defeating Satan, making space for the light of life (Luke 10:18; John 12:31).[85] Yet darkness continues to spread and at times overwhelms people on the earth, reminding humanity that the full defeat of Satan's forces is yet future but rooted in the hope of the Incarnation (John 14:1-4). Jesus, while loving all people, has a particular love for those who follow him and choose light and life over darkness.[86]

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[83] The light "exposes evil, guides human beings, illuminates and transforms human life, and judges human works (John 3:19-21)." Kanagaraj, *John*, 3. This required confrontation at some level. Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology*, 25.

[84] As a result, until the New Earth, we as humans can never know with one hundred percent certainty whether our discernment of good and evil is completely pure. This, does not mean we cannot move in the right direction toward abundant life. It simply means that until Jesus comes again there will continue to be aspects of doubt and impurity mixed with life on this earth. Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 166. For an example of one of the elements being involved in the cosmic conflict, Tonstad remarks that the battles over Sabbath issues and healings that Jesus faced were battles not just with human beings but at heart with Satan himself. Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning*, 192.

[85] Peckham points out that the redemption of Jesus is often framed as being in the context of an adversary who is constantly opposing him at every turn. Peckham, *Theodicy of Love*, 59. Boyd argues that "according to John, the central reason why the Son of God appeared was to 'destroy,' 'drive out' and 'condemn' this evil ruler." Boyd, *God at War*, 229. This may be a bit of an overstatement, but certainly it is a prominent theme in the writings of John. Boyd has a full chapter on Christ's victory over Satan and death in *God at War*, chap. 9.

[86] John 1:12. Peckham calls this "God's particularly relational love." Peckham, *The Love of God*, 242-44.

The Gospel's have many reminders that all aspects of life can be infiltrated and corrupted by darkness, which leads away from life towards death.[87] The goal of the enemy is to deceive and destroy humanity (John 10:10). Created beings are called to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, in identifying the darkness and shedding light on it, without feeling the burden of being the perfect example. This includes each element of life detailed above. The ways of living found in such diversity throughout humanity can be evaluated with the help of the narrative of the Incarnation as well as the rest of the Word of God.[88] Just as Jesus spent a lifetime looking for people that needed new life infused back into them and then living relationally with them, he calls his followers to do the same. By doing so they reveal the light which illuminates the Image of God that all are intended to bear (John 1:4, 5).[89]

John's portrayal of darkness is also a reminder that the darkness influences all people in different ways. Jesus went through life assuming evil was lurking nearby and so must his followers.[90] This could help people avoid the pitfalls of relativism and ethnocentrism that plague many in the world today. It also reminds people that the labels used to describe others and their lives must be judged according to the criteria of Creation

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[87] John Perkins reminds those who are serious about following Jesus that many individuals they love will be "twisting God's Word and drawing out disciples to themselves." But this is meant to keep people alert, not to undermine the loving of others demonstrated most clearly in the Incarnation. John Perkins, *Dream with Me: Race, Love, and the Struggle We Must Win* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017), 95.

[88] Langmead makes a valid point when he states that it is hard to fully grasp and know Jesus' internal attitudes. But he adds, importantly, that Jesus distinctly "embodied love for others, and was radically open in his friendship and showed a remarkable combination of humility and certainty of purpose." Langmead, *The Word Made Flesh*, 51.

[89] Wright, The Challenge of Jesus, 183.

[90] A narrative example of this is Jesus rebuking Satan for influencing Peter in the midst of a conversation between Jesus and Peter (Matt 16:23).

and the Incarnation. This may not have the same results everywhere, but it does impact everywhere and everyone in unique ways.

The Ongoing Work of Incarnating

In the last several decades there has been an ongoing debate on whether or not the Incarnation is a model to be followed or a one-time event that is beyond the ability of any human to replicate.[91] This has been an especially rigorous debate among missiologists, with some theologians weighing in as well. While it is beyond the scope of this project to analyze the history and options of this debate there are certain elements of it that are relevant to the discussion of a biblical approach to relational life and categories of religions.

In one sense it appears that the argument against replicating the Incarnation is correct.[92] There is no possible way to compare any human endeavor, whether it be a move from one geographic location to live with people who approach life differently or an attempt to identify with a certain marginalized group of people. Such situations cannot compare to the gap that God traversed to become human from divinity. Nor can the fact that Jesus was both fully divine and fully human ever be achieved nor sought after by any created being. In that sense the Incarnation is not repeatable. There is a certain finality to the Christ event that is impossible to replicate, which includes a calling and access to eternal life in a way that had not been done before and will never be done again.[93]

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[91] For an overview of the different way's missiologists have considered the Incarnation and mission see Ott, Strauss, and Tennent, *Encountering Theology of Mission*, 97-104.

[92] Wright, The Challenge of Jesus, 181.

The argument that the Incarnation cannot be replicated does not upend the angle that Lamin Sanneh and Andrew Walls have taken, whereby the translation of the Word of God and the taking of this Word to new locations, is in a sense the Incarnation happening over and over again.[94] For Walls the "Incarnation is translation."[95] Historical documentation strengthens the argument that the Word of God travels to new places in astounding ways and that abundant life can be found in its wake.[96] Sanneh and Walls document this in global history and especially in Africa.[97] While missionaries can be applauded for elevating the importance of Scripture and recognizing that it should be translated into the mother tongue of people, Sanneh demonstrates the results were not always to the liking of the foreign Western missionaries. Sanneh documents independent movements that took pride in local culture, aided by the translation of Scripture that went against the often-domineering missionaries.[98] There are critiques of this viewpoint that deserve further reflection such as that posed by Jennings who rightly points out that

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[93] Schnabel argues that it is "preferable to use other terminology" than Incarnation to describe what followers of Jesus do because the Incarnation is so unique and unrepeatable. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1575. Langmead reviews several authors who take a similar approach to the Incarnation. Langmead, *The Word Made Flesh*, 3-5. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 254.

[94] Walls, The Missionary Movement, chap. 3.

[95] Walls, The Missionary Movement, 27.

[96] Lamin O. Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, Rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009). See also Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict?*, 132.

[97] Walls latest publication clarifies that there was a struggle for the modern mission movement of the late eighteenth century into the nineteenth century in West African to take seriously local languages. Walls, *Crossing Cultural Frontiers*, chap. 8.

[98] Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 149, 196. The history of the positive beginnings of the Niger Delta Mission, which was led by local Africans early on, and then its bitter turn when foreign missionaries stripped the Africans of their leadership and stunted the movement and translation of Scripture is told by both Sanneh and Walls. Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, chap. 5. For more from Walls see Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), chaps. 5-9. Surgirtharajah has documented something similar in India which deserves further research. See Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and Asia*, chap. 3.

Walls and Sanneh are overly simplistic and optimistic in their equating of the Incarnation and translation. With that said, it appears that Jennings has not totally rejected their thesis but rather nuanced it and pushed it farther. He argues that the Incarnation is "scandalous in its particularity" which should lead those who follow Jesus to "learn each other's languages in the process of lives joined, lives lived together in new spaces, and constituting a new history for a new people."[99] If it can be shown that the translation of the Word has brought with it abundant life, then there is a solid argument that at least at some level an Incarnation-like event has taken place.[100] Vanhoozer sees in this process an "*analogia missio* between the incarnation of the Son and the inscripturation of the biblical texts."[101]

In order to hold true to the original Incarnation it would have to dispel darkness and bring light, which could be best evaluated by looking into the way life was lived in particularities before and after the arrival of the Word.[102] It does not mean all of life would be totally upended, for some aspects of the daily life of any given group of people may have already been influenced by the Holy Spirit, which would only be affirmed by

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[99] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 160-61. For his discussion of Walls and Sanneh see Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 155-61. For more on the importance of the Christ event for language see Samuel H. Larsen, "A Christocentric Understanding of Linguistic Diversity: Implications for Missions in a Pluralistic Era," in *The Centrality of Christ in Contemporary Missions*, eds. Mike Barnett and Michael Pocock (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2005).

[100] Priest, "Experience-near Theologizing," 181.

[101] Vanhoozer, The Drama of Doctrine, 70.

[102] Sanneh argues that this is the case in parts of African history where the translation of the Bible radically altered life. Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 8. There is a tension here between the potential for moralism or legalism and the reality of grace. Yet, if everyday life is not the place where the Incarnated Word, through love, is seen and experienced then it becomes very difficult to see why the Incarnation matters unless a person believes in a Platonic separation of body and soul. As Guder poignantly states, "the word always becomes flesh, embodied in the life of the called community." Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church's Witness*, 22. But Guder is also definite that this should never lead to the understanding that the followers of Jesus must be perfect. They must rely on grace to transform them, always keeping in mind that the transformation will never be fully complete on this earth. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus*, 94.

the arrival of the Word.[103] Other areas of life may need more correction due to evil

influences that the Word could illuminate and provide alternatives to.[104]

There is also the option of Darrell Guder and others who view the Incarnation as

an ongoing example for human mission in the present.[105] This view should be tempered

by the critique of those who argue against replicating the Incarnation, yet there is an

element of this view that retains biblical validity.[106] Jesus lived out his life in such a way

that he expected his followers to take note of what he did and do their best to follow his

example (John 17:6-26).[107] John 17:18 says, "As you sent me into the world, I have sent

them into the world." While his death and resurrection cannot be replicated in their

salvific aspects, Jesus still expected his followers to take up their cross and follow him

(Matt 10:38; 16:21-28). John Perkins both writes about, and has lived out, the idea of

"relocation" which for him is another term for incarnation. This requires being willing to

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[103] Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict?*, 134.

[104] One of the classic statements on this is found in the works of Lesslie Newbigin: "A three-cornered relationship is set up between the traditional culture, the 'Christianity' of the missionary, and the Bible. The stage is set for a complex and unpredictable evolution both in the culture of the receptor community and in that of the missionary." Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 147.

[105] Guder isolates two significant discussions related to the idea of the Incarnation and mission. First, turning to the Incarnation has aided in the response to the "modern missionary movement" which was often undertaken contrary to the principles of the Incarnation. Second, the Incarnation suggests a biblical basis for mission "motivation, its content, and its method in direct relationship to the life and ministry of Jesus." Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church's Witness*, xii. Guder goes on to write, "by incarnational mission I mean the understanding and practice of Christian witness that is rooted in and shaped by the life, ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus." Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church's Witness*, xii.

[106] Guder is very much aware of the potential critiques of his approach to the Incarnation and mission. Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church's Witness*, xiii.

[107] There does appear to be truth to the liberation theologians emphasis that a person cannot really understand what Jesus taught if they do not try to live what he taught. Langmead, *The Word Made Flesh*, 121. These times that Jesus told his disciples if they really loved him they would live out his commandment's points in this direction (John 14:15, 21-23; 15:10; 1 John 2:3-5; 3:23; 5:3).

live with those different than you, at times even putting yourself in a situation that is

uncomfortable and risky; but this is the only way to actually experience life with people

and build meaningful relationships.[108] His argument is that Christ did this, and the risks

were real as Christ's death demonstrated. But the ability to build relationships was also

real and changed the world, in fact saved the world through love.[109]

This makes sense in connection with the previous chapter on Creation. Humanity

was given a certain amount of responsibility and freedom to live out their lives in creative

ways with each other.[110] The Incarnated God does not negate this responsibility and

freedom but rather gives an example of it lived out perfectly.[111] People can continue to

point to the Incarnate God as the ultimate example while also doing their best to imitate

it. In the power of the Spirit individuals can demonstrate what abundant life looks like in

each diverse situation, remaining aware of their tendency to move toward darkness and

death and thus they should always be suspicious of their own endeavors to live

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[108] This includes such things as being willing to learn new languages, new ways of eating and dressing, new ways of understanding how loving relationships can be formed, etc. Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church's Witness*, 54-55. Learning these things is not done as a means to an end, but rather as a way of pursuing abundant life in community with God and other people. Langmead does reveal a fault-line here that missiologists have not adequately dealt with in their literature on incarnational missions; namely that not all people are created equal, some people have a fullness of life that can be put aside incarnationally on behalf of others. Some people, however, are born into and are living as oppressed people. How does the oppressed follower of Jesus live incarnationally? While there are potential answers to this, as it relates to living out abundant life in the everyday, Langmead still provides his readers with a challenging question. Langmead, *The Word Made Flesh*, 57.

[109] Perkins, *Dream with Me*, 75-77. Vanhoozer would appear to have a similar line of thinking when he writes, "It takes imagination for Christians to translate or transpose Jesus' kingdom practices…into the contemporary context." Vanhoozer, "What Is Everyday Theology?," 57.

[110] Choan-Seng Song, *Christian Mission in Reconstruction--an Asian Analysis* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1977), 53.

[111] Guder, The Incarnation and the Church's Witness, 50.

abundantly and the endeavors of those around them (John 13:34, 35).[112] By claiming the promise of Jesus to send his Spirit to help people creatively live out the life they were meant to live as Image bearers in the everyday elements of their lives people can demonstrate love in diverse ways, such as through eating and drinking, working and resting, use and development of language and thought, marriage and other relationships, and use of clothing (John 14:15-31).[113] Without the historical event of the Incarnation there would be no hope of humans living out an abundant life either now or eternally.[114] And without the example of the Incarnation it would be much more difficult to know what it means to live abundantly in a world filled with darkness.[115]

What about Religion?

In discussions of theology of religions and mission to other so-called religions John 1 has often been invoked. This chapter often serves as a primary passage used to create a more congenial view of other so-called religions by Christians. This section of the Chapter will briefly review some uses of John 1 in theology of religion debates. It

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[112] As Tinker reminds his Euro-American readers, they are going to have to be particularly sensitive to issues of power and dominance rooted in a history of colonization and power relations that have yet to be overcome or admitted to in full. This may mean, for Tinker anyways, that missiology has only one way forward among Native Americans, and that is through the living of daily life in a more submissive and less overbearing way. Tinker, "The Romance and Tragedy," 27.

[113] Pobee makes a statement that is helpful here. "If the *depositum fidei* is important for *homo africanus*' statement of Who Jesus is, equally important is who the African is, because *homo africanus* is encountered by Christ as he or she is." John S. Pobee, "In Search of Christology in Africa: Some Considerations for Today," in *Exploring Afro-Christology*, ed. John S. Pobee (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), 15. While Pobee is specifically concerned with ways of understanding Christ that are rooted in Africa, his statement is true for anyone reflecting on their ways of living in Christ; that they must take into consideration their own social location and allow others to help them reflect on their social location.

[114] "Once we have glimpsed the true portrait of God, the onus is on us to reflect it: to reflect it as a community, to reflect it as individuals." Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus*, 124.

[115] "To speak of the incarnation missionally is to link who Jesus was, what Jesus did, and how he did it, in one great event that defines all that it means to" follow Jesus. Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church's Witness*, 9.

will conclude with an alternative approach that takes seriously the understanding of the Incarnation developed above.

The Word and Light in All Religions

There are currently a number of theologians and a few missiologists who cite John 1, especially the passages on the Logos and the light going to all humanity, as proof that other religions contain light from God. This is rooted in the missiological history of Western missionaries encountering people in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who self-identified as something other than Christian.[116] While often the reactions were initially negative towards "non-Christians," as relationships were fostered and knowledge of different people from around the world increased in the West there were some who moved away from wholesale condemnation.[117] There was a subtle shift toward a more nuanced theological understanding of Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, and others.[118] This corresponds with some of the theories that are found in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, there were attempts to find light and truth in other "religions."[119]

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[116] There is a much older and longer tradition of identifying the Logos in all humanity. Langmead, *The Word Made Flesh*, 21. But this project is more interested in the recent emphasis on this universal aspect of the Logos as clarified by modern mission writings and theology.

[117] The book that stirred up the most controversy in this regard was William Ernest Hocking, *Re-Thinking Missions: A Laymen's Inquiry after One Hundred Years* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1932).

[118] Notice the change in categorization that does not include "ism" or the idea of "ism" but rather uses terminology which leads towards an actual human being who self-identifies as "Hindu," "Buddhist," or "Muslim." These types of categorization are less problematic, though still need to be understand within the particular social location of their use and cannot stand in as universal descriptors for all those who self-identify using the same terminology.

[119] For an interesting history of these developments, with several sections that deal with the concept of light, life, and the Logos in relation to fulfilment of other religions, see Ivan M. Satyavrata, *God Has Not Left Himself without Witness* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011). See also Cracknell, *Justice, Courtesy and Love*.

In a globalized world in which it is now plausible to find nearly all types of people in all parts of the world with varying degrees of diversity, this desire to find commonality in order to create peace and goodwill has only increased. As a result, some strands of theological and missiological thinking continue to use John 1 as a primary proof text for defending the view that God is working in all people through all religions.[120]

Those defending this view have contributed a recognition that John 1 contains points that are universal in nature and apply to all humanity, maintaining more truth and hope are found in other religions than many Christians historically have allowed for. The goal is not necessarily to place the Incarnation, or the Word of God, on the same level as other religions—although in some cases this does not come across—but rather to try and explain how God relates to such a diverse world.[121]

A vast majority of theologians and missiologists who invoke John 1 in the discussion of religions do not question the categories of religions which have been inherited as demonstrated in Chapter 2. It is not always clear how the light referred to in John 1 can be equated with the modern concept of religion. It often is implied that what is meant is systems of belief, not necessarily ways of living. In this strand of theological

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[120] For a critique of this interpretation because it leads to false "universalizing" see Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict?*, 131-32.

[121] Yong fits this caricature to a certain extent. Amos Yong, *The Missiological Spirit*, 69. For a sampling of other authors who argue in this direction, see Kenneth Cracknell, *In Good and Generous Faith: Christian Responses to Religious Pluralism* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2006), chap. 2. George M. Soares-Prabhu, "John 1:1-18: An Asian Perspective," in *Return to Babel: Global Perspectives on the Bible*, eds. John R. Levison and Priscilla Pope-Levison (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1999). Mariasusai Dhavamony, *Christian Theology of Religions: A Systematic Reflection on the Christian Understanding of World Religions*, 3rd ed. (New York: Peter Lang, 2002). Clark H. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 86-87.

thinking there is a real danger of relegating the historical work of God through Jesus as something less than a divine event in order to create a frame of mind toward "inclusivity" which fails to do justice to the actual Incarnation as presented in Scripture.[122] As Lesslie Newbigin wrote, "John tells us that Jesus is the light that lightens every man. This text does not say anything about other religions, but makes it impossible for the Christian to say that those outside the church are totally devoid of truth."[123]

<div align="center">John 1 and Exclusive Views</div>

There is also a group of theologians and some missiologists who argue that John 1 does not defend the more universal views of some theologians and missiologists, but rather defends their exclusive views of Christianity. They place stronger emphasis on the localized nature of the Incarnation and the passages in John 1 that point out that many if not most people rejected Jesus. These texts, they argue, actually place other "religions" outside the pale of the light of God and into the darkness category.[124]

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[122] Paul Knitter and John Hick are the most prominent names connected with an explaining away of the historical Jesus in order to create a more inclusive stance towards other religions. Guder points out the potential for this error as well. Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church's Witness*, 12.

[123] Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 170.

[124] A recent example of this is Strange, *Their Rock*, 225-26. He bases his arguments off of the work of Carson and Ed L. Miller. He also claims that Wesleyan theologians can be faulted for using John 1:9 to defend their view of "previent grace." This is a pitting of Calvinistic theology versus Wesleyan theology rather than merely taking the Bible as the final norm in the argument. Strange, *Their Rock*, 224. As a result, Strange disconnects the "light" of John 1:9 from Creation because if he were to leave it connected this would then lead him to the Image of God, and would challenge him to be more open to the light flowing to all humanity. Carson, in his commentary on John, does not give as clear an objection to the "Wesleyan" interpretation as Strange does, although Carson is not comfortable with the idea that John 1:9 refers to general revelation. He does not find a satisfactory solution and leaves this passage ambiguously interpreted. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 123-24. For the chapter of Ed L. Miller see Ed L. Miller, "'The True Light Which Illumines Every Person'," in *Good News in History: Essays in Honor of Bo Reicke*, ed. Ed L. Miller (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1993). Keener leaves his interpretation of this passage somewhat ambiguous, Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 393-395.

This group of theologians and missiologists reminds their audience that the Incarnation is not meant to show that all paths to God, are equal, or that the cosmic Christ can be found in equal measure everywhere. The Incarnation does have value in its particularity and exclusivity in that it changes the flow of history and disrupts all understandings of God that take it seriously.[125] In John 1:10-11 there are those who failed to see Jesus for who he truly was. This continues to happen and will continue up through the Eschaton. But this begs the question: Can the people being referenced as rejecting Jesus and not seeing him be equated with entire religions?

These scholars often suffer from the same issue as those who use John 1 to promote light in all religions. Often, they assume that "light" and "life" are synonymous with "religion," i.e., D. A. Carson who wrote these comments about John 1:4, "'Life' and 'light' are almost universal religious symbols."[126] Yet Carson fails to defend this view or to render it plausible from the text. The passage is not about religions but about a personal being, Jesus. They assume that readers understand what religions are and move forward using the inherited categories, again often assuming that religions can be reduced to a system of beliefs.

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[125] Langmead argues that reducing Jesus to some sort of universal incarnation runs the risk of downplaying the uniqueness of the cross and resurrection which can then lead to baptizing culture without challenging it. Langmead, *The Word Made Flesh*, 56. Some other scholars who argue in this direction include Cate, "The Uniqueness of Christ, 51-52. Köstenberger, *John*, 35-36. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1354-55.

[126] Carson, The Gospel According to John, 118.

John 1 as a Holistic Passage

In the above passage, I have argued that John 1 serves as an overview of the Incarnation of Jesus as a whole. This includes the life he lived on earth in all its intricacies, his death for all who have sinned, and his victorious resurrection which provides the hope that life can be lived how he exemplified it and that we can be saved from the darkness which brings death.[127]

The first chapter of John is not about so-called religions. There are three primary types of beings in focus in John 1. God, Satan (through the metaphor of darkness), and human beings who are influenced by light and darkness. The meeting point for these beings is life on earth in its various diversities. The universal aspects of the Incarnation affirm life as good and that all humans are Image bearers of God and have been influenced by the light which is life from God in varying degrees.[128] There is also a universal side to the darkness which has spread, through the work of Satan, to distort and overcome the light. The Incarnation addresses the particularities of human life when Jesus became a human being who had to make choices in order to live in community with others, impacting all aspects of life. The gospel is about bringing abundant life through love and grace to all who are open to it.[129] Religions are not in the purvey of the passage but people are.

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[127] Part of Langmead's impetus for studying the Incarnational idea is rooted in what he perceived to be an imbalance between the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Langmead, *The Word Made Flesh*, 5. See also Kärkkäinen, *Christ and Reconciliation*, 48.

[128] Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 174. There may be validity in the argument that people have varying degrees of light influencing them through the Spirit, but that encountering Jesus directly through his Word in connection to an experience is an overwhelming Light that brings life. Robert K. Johnston, *God's Wider Presence: Reconsidering General Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 135.

Allowing the full passage to work together would help overcome some of the differences between those who see the more inclusive aspects of John 1 and those who see it as defense of exclusive views. Possibly more important though is that the presuppositional positions concerning religion may actually be creating a situation that is difficult to overcome as long as the inherited categories of religions, which are rooted in a non-biblical paradigm, continue to hold sway over the discussion.

The Incarnation and Categories of Religions

The current categories of religions, have been deconstructed in Chapters 2 and 3 and evaluated at a minimal level from the perspective of Genesis 1-3 in Chapter 4. This section will add to the work of the previous Chapter by subjecting categories of religions to the passage of John 1 and the Incarnation.

One major issue with categories of religions is their attempt to mix universal language with particularities. As seen above, this is part of the challenge in understanding the Incarnation as well.[130] However, when rooted in the Creation account of Genesis 1-2, the Incarnation as a universally applicable event makes sense. The Incarnation, in various ways, encompasses all of humanity and affirms them in their humanity while at the same time providing universal possibilities for salvation.[131] There are certain particular elements of the Incarnation that are also important. These affirm the diversity of

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[129] It is essential that love and grace frame the background of the whole discussion concerning the Incarnation lest those turning to the Incarnation as a mission paradigm event look to outward behavior alone as the measure of Incarnationality. Langmead, *The Word Made Flesh*, 231.

[130] Gorringe argues that the Christian claim to universal salvation is "rooted" in the universalism and particularism of the incarnation. Gorringe, *Furthering Humanity*, 100.

[131] "Possibilities" is a key term here, because, the work of Jesus provides the possibility not necessity of salvation. All "nations" have the possibility but not all people will accept salvation. Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 413.

humanity in its many complex ways of living without having too high a view of human

ways of living in a world with darkness and sin abounding.[132] Because of this real

diversity "each people, as well as each generation, will need to meet Jesus on their terms,

rather than on the terms of the missionaries or of their parents."[133] This is part of the

Incarnational principle seen in the Gospels. There are already numerous examples of

descriptions and interpretations of people from a vast variety of backgrounds

encountering the Incarnation through the Word and through experience which has led to a

number of rich additions in Incarnational and Christological understandings.[134] These

potentially broaden the understanding humans can have of who God is in his Incarnated

form.[135]

The Incarnation also undermines theologians and missiologists use of the

categories by keeping the focus on the real-life historical experiences of Jesus. This then

leads those attempting to learn from and emulate the Incarnation to focus on how

relational life is lived on a day to day basis, which leads away from theoretical

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[132] As Walls writes, "Christian diversity is the necessary product of the Incarnation." Walls, *The Missionary Movement*, 27-28.

[133] Amos Yong, "The Missiology of Jamestown--1607-2007 and Beyond: Toward a Postcolonial Theology of Mission in North America," in *Remembering Jamestown: Hard Questions About Mission*, eds. Amos Yong and Barbara Brown Zikmund (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), 160.

[134] Examples include Anh Q. Tran, "Jesus Beyond the West: Christological Conversations in the Age of World Christianity," in *World Christianity: Perspectives and Insights*, eds. Jonathan Y. Tan and Anh Q. Tran (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016); Volker Küster, *The Many Faces of Jesus Christ: Intercultural Christology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001); Clifton Clarke, *African Christology: Jesus in Post-Missionary African Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011); Sung Wook Chung, ed. *Christ the One and Only: A Global Affirmation of the Uniqueness of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005); Stephen T. Pardue, Khiok-Khng Yeo, and Gene L. Green, eds., *Jesus without Borders: Christology in the Majority World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014).

[135] For examples see W. Anne Joh, "The Transgressive Power of Jeong: A Postcolonial Hybridization of Christology," in *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire*, eds. Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner, and Mayra Rivera (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2004).

discussions limited to comparing beliefs or "religious" practices.[136] Rather it includes

issues of belief as they relate to the Word and all other aspects of life that are being

judged by the Incarnation as either being influenced by the light and leading to abundant

life or leading towards darkness and death. Jesus was focused on people and how they

lived not just their thoughts, though it included them, not just their actions, though it

included those as well.[137] This then would seem to require that if theologians and

missiologists are going to turn to the Incarnation—as they rightly should—for motivation

and example they must be focused on people in their everyday lives, how they think and

act in relation to the elements of relational life as discovered in Genesis 1-3.[138]

Particular settings of people become the focus of theology and missiology just as

it was for the Incarnated God. But these localized settings are also the place where the

universals of the Incarnation can be found. Thus, the universal and the particular find

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[136] John Mbiti gives concreteness to this idea when he writes:

In fostering such values as peace, justice, joy, harmony, love, fight against evil; in celebrating fellowship with one another and maintaining harmony with nature; in mutual helpfulness among people; in celebrating birth as victory over death and in renewing community life through rites of passage, through music and dancing; in praying, praising and giving honour (glory) to God—in these activities, followers of African Religion are in a real sense walking in the way of the Lord, and it cannot be denied, that Jesus Christ is walking with them, or behind them, or over them. Yet, Jesus Christ is hidden from them, revealing only flashes of Himself (John Mbiti, "Is Jesus Christ in African Religion?," in *Exploring Afro-Christology*, ed. John S. Pobee (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), 28).

My main concern with this statement is how the term "African Religion" is used. This is about people doing real things that are influenced by the Spirit in positive ways but that could live much more abundantly with a clearer knowledge of Christ as shown in the Bible. They may call this life African Religion but as I have argued above there is something at work that is much more personal than merely an abstract "religion."

[137] Part of the main theme of the Prologue of John is, God and "his encounter with all human beings." Kanagaraj, *John*, 9.

[138] Langmead puts it this way, "Theology often says that to know God we must know Jesus, but we must go further and say that to know Jesus we must know people, the sort of flesh-and-blood people Jesus knew." Langmead, *The Word Made Flesh*, 139.

their meeting point, not in conceptual "religions" but in the lives of real people each and every day. Kant, Hegel, and others were right to look for the universal and particular in life but their starting points, I argue, led them in a direction that the Bible does not support. The search for the universals and the particulars of life in philosophy is much older than either Kant or Hegel. Many scholars like to trace this stream of thinking to the so-called "Axial Age." [139] I am arguing that the universals and particulars of life are much older than even the so-called "Axial Age." They have been a part of reality since the Creation in Genesis and thus it is natural to recognize these poles. However, it is best to allow the Bible to construct the relationship between the universals and the particulars rather than relying on human reason to do so. The categories of religions that emerged over the last few centuries, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, are not universal enough in their evaluation of humanity—they only describe portions of the globe's people. Nor are they particular enough—they get stuck in theoretical points or limit humanity to generalized statements that do not really describe any actual people in their lived complexity. This makes theological and missiological statements on religions or strategies toward religions highly suspect and limited in practical application.

The Incarnation also provides the affirmation of human diversity that can help those who take the Incarnation seriously to move away from the debilitating influence of race in its historical ties to religion.[140] The focus is on people and their connection to the light or darkness, not on their ethnicity or skin color. This is not meant to destroy the beauty that comes from different skin colors nor the historical identity that people

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[139] For example, Gorringe does this by referring to Karl Jaspers. Gorringe, *Furthering Humanity*, 97.

[140] Guder, The Incarnation and the Church's Witness, 55.

possess, which has often been influenced by racial categories. It is because of the Incarnation that Paul can say there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, woman nor man.[141] Focusing on relational life moves people toward creatively finding where the light and where darkness is at work among diverse groups of people.

The Incarnation actually gives followers of Jesus little choice, as Jennings writes: "Those who under normal circumstances would never be together must be together to find Jesus of Nazareth, to hear him and gain from him their desire."[142] The Incarnation gives space to move outside the inherited categories, which are broken down at the cross where all people are equalized as sinners in need of grace. Lesslie Newbigin illustrated this with two sets of stairways both leading down to a meeting point, which serves as the foundation for the cross that is shooting up between the stairways. Newbigin commented on this illustration, "Our meeting, therefore, with those of other faiths takes place at the bottom of the stairway, not at the top."[143]

The Incarnation ultimately undermines the categories as they are related to the long history of colonialism, racial issues, hegemony, etc., by demonstrating a way to serve from below. The Incarnation is the greatest act of humility and yet also the greatest act of mission the world will ever witness (Phil 2). If humans are to follow this ideal it requires serious reflection on issues of life and power relations in mission.[144] It is also

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[141] This should not be confused with some sort of hope in a uniformity of humanity because all differences have been removed. The differences are not all removed but the animosity between people because of differences is removed through the gracious inbreaking of God's love demonstrated most clearly in the Incarnation. Dyrness, *The Earth Is God's*, 103.

[142] Jennings, The Christian Imagination, 264.

[143] Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 181-82.

[144] Ott, Strauss, and Tennent, *Encountering Theology of Mission*, 103.

significant that "the crucifixion of Jesus, however, reveals the illegitimacy of the power of the strong."[145] The Incarnation was an act of vulnerability which did not rely on brute force or power, which should be reflected in the ways Christ's followers choose to live.

The Incarnation is also the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God which will find full meaning at the Second Coming and in the New Earth.[146] But it is a sign nonetheless of the Kingdom to come and creates an understanding of future possibilities that impact the present. At the same time, just as the Incarnated Jesus had to constantly battle with the evil forces of darkness, so must all people in their own particular situations continue this battle until the Second Coming. This battle, however, is based on a teleology of hope grounded in the power of the Spirit, which is the same Spirit who upheld the Incarnated Son and was promised by the Son to help his followers. Therefore, the teleology is neither built on an overly optimistic view of humanity nor on the pessimistic or relativistic view of some in the postmodern turn. As demonstrated in previous Chapters, teleological understandings have influenced the current categories of religions, which either have too high a view of idealized religions or put too much hope in human capacity for creating a perfect world.[147] The Incarnation provides a balanced approach to teleology, which takes seriously the ongoing threat of evil while at the same time providing the hope that Jesus desires to give all people—no matter the label they have been given—abundant life and life eternal. Ultimately, the example of the Incarnation should lead followers of Jesus toward "loving, caring, intimate joining. That joining is a

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[145] Gorringe, *Furthering Humanity*, 151.

[146] Wright, The Challenge of Jesus, 94.

[147] Wright correctly recognizes that in light of Jesus this explanation just does not work see Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus*, 101.

sharing in the pain, plight, and life of one another."[148] This can be combined with the narrative of Creation to move toward a more appropriate theological and missiological interpretation of relational life as an alternative to the inherited categories of religions. It also leads into the Re-Creation theme of the next Chapter, which is only possible through the sacrificial work of the Incarnated God.

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[148] Jennings, The Christian Imagination, 165.

CHAPTER 6

RELATIONAL LIFE AND RELIGION IN

REVELATION 20-22

Introduction

This Chapter will be the final biblical exposition of this dissertation. Starting with

Creation and moving to the Incarnation still leaves people in this world full of evil, sin,

and suffering. Moving to Revelation 20-22 moves people beyond this world as it is into a

re-created earth that reveals radical discontinuity from this earth as well as radical

continuity.[1]

The New Earth Connection to Creation and the Incarnation

Many scholars recognize the connections between the act of Creation in Genesis

and the re-creation of a New Earth in Revelation 21. To use Davidson's

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[1] It has been a struggle historically for theologians and missiologists to draw from the New Earth implications for this earth. Koester writes, "On the one hand, there is a clear discontinuity between the first heaven and earth that pass away and the new heaven and earth that appear. The new is not a natural outgrowth of the old; it comes from God's new act of creation. On the other hand, there is also continuity, in that people who live in the present creation have a future in the new creation." Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 803. See also Richard J. Mouw, *When the Kings Come Marching In: Isaiah and the New Jerusalem*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 19-20. See also Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 736-37; Robert P. Vande Kappelle, *Hope Revealed: The Message of the Book of Revelation Then and Now* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 202.

terminology, they are like two bookends.[2] There are obvious links to the perfect Edenic

world in Genesis and the perfect New Earth in Revelation. In Genesis 1 the narrator

describes the "heavens and the earth," and Revelation 21:1 depicts a new heaven and a

new earth.[3] Life is under a curse in Genesis 3, but Revelation 22:3 says there will be no

more curse.[4] Also in Genesis 3, there is a dreadful type of separation between God and

humanity, but in Revelation 21 God will live among humanity. And finally the Tree of

Life is found in both places.[5] In a sense the "creation has come full circle, with the

Edenic state not merely restored but superseded."[6] While the Tree of Life is present there

is no longer any need for a Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, nor will there be

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[2] Davidson, "Back to the Beginning," 10. Tonstad understands Genesis and Revelation to be more than "mere bookends." He argues they enhance and clarify each other and that the story of Scripture is incomprehensible without both of them read together. Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning*, 404. Richard Bauckham claims that, "In Revelation's universal perspective, the doctrines of creation, redemption and eschatology are very closely linked." Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 163. Timothy Tennent writes, "the biblical witness is framed by God's creation of the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1) and the account of the new heaven and the new earth (Rev. 21). Thus, all of human history and culture falls within the parameters of God's creative and sustaining acts." Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 176.

[3] For an in-depth study of the concept of new creation throughout the canon see Mark B. Stephens, *Annihilation or Renewal? The Meaning and Function of New Creation in the Book of Revelation* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

[4] For more on the links between these passages in Revelation and Genesis see Lois K. Fuller Dow, *Images of Zion: Biblical Antecedents for the New Jerusalem* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), 205. I find it odd that G. K. Beale in his comments on this passage hardly mentions any reference to Genesis 3 here, instead he ties this to several other OT passages but not Genesis. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 1112-13. Osborne on the other hand does detect the possibility that this passage is an allusion to Genesis 3. Osborne, *Revelation*, 773. Ranko Stefanović also finds a connection between 22:3 and Genesis 3. Ranko Stefanović, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 2nd ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 605.

[5] Compare the following passages with each other: Gen 1:1; Rev 21:1; Gen 3; Rev 22:3; Gen 3:24; Rev 21:3, 22:3-5; Gen 2:9; Rev 22:2. See Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning*, 405.

[6] Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 262.

any deceptive serpent.[7] The Incarnation provides an important link between the two types of Creation and is actually what makes the re-creation possible.[8]

Revelation 21-22 mentions the Lamb of God several times reminding the readers that the New Earth is only possible because of the Lamb's sacrifice, resurrection, and ascension to the throne (Rev 21:9, 14, 22, 23, 27; 22:1, 3).[9] This is a New Earth infused with grace, rooted in the Incarnating act of God through Jesus.[10] The act of re-creation began with Jesus but reaches a climax with the arrival of the New Jerusalem on the New Earth (Rev 21:1-2; 21:5). This creates, for the reader, an atmosphere of astounding hope beyond anything that this world can offer and is seen in the exclamations of John asking for God to return quickly so that what he has seen can be fully realized (Rev 22:20).[11]

Light and life is a discernible link between the three biblical passages that make up this research. In the beginning, light was created first and was a major part of the life-giving conditions of Genesis 1. In John 1 the light and life of God and the life from God

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[7] While the Garden of Eden was perfect Scripture is clear that the great deceiver, Satan, was lurking in that perfect sphere which does separate the New Earth from the original Creation in a significant way. Peckham, *Theodicy of Love*, 89. See also Wilson, *God's Good World*, 136-37.

[8] The re-creation began when Jesus was on earth as Kanagaraj notes, "in the coming of the Logos in human flesh, the end-time has dawned." Kanagaraj, *John*, 7. A majority of commentators agree that it has been a misinterpretation to claim the earth as we know it is totally done away with, rather it is more accurate to claim that the earth as we know it is radically re-created. Catherine Gunsalus González and Justo L. González, *Revelation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 137.

[9] Davidson, "Back to the Beginning," 23.

[10] Koester notes that throughout the book of Revelation there is a constant refrain of hope and grace leading to salvation amidst what is an otherwise dreadful world. This finally culminates in the grace filled judgement of Revelation 20 whereby those who have accepted God's grace are found in the Book of Life and those who have not experience the second death. Koester, *Revelation*, 791-92.

[11] "When God does what God intends to do, this will be an act of fresh grace, of radical newness. At one level it will be quite unexpected, like a surprise party with guests we never thought we would meet and delicious food we never thought we would taste." Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus*, 179.

cannot be differentiated.[12] The light extends to all people in both Genesis and John. In

Revelation light is a vital theme and is connected to life. The light, however, is directly

linked to God himself and negates the need for any sort of physical object to light the

world such as the sun or a lamp (Rev 21:23, 24; 22:5).[13] There is also no darkness in the

New Earth which means there is only life without death (Rev 21:25; 22:5).[14] This light,

emanating from God, is the same light found in Genesis and in John, and brings life to all

it touches. In Revelation the whole city is covered in this light, implying that it will be a

place of abundant life beyond comprehension (Rev 21:23-24).[15] The Tree of Life will

also be present, which is tied to eternal life in Genesis (Rev 22:2). Life in the New Earth

originates through the power of God. This "rule of God" is not an "oppressive rule or

subordination but only life-giving and life-sustaining power characterizes God's

eschatological reign."[16]

Exuding light and life, Revelation 21 provides a scene of possibilities for endless

life that will be lived in God's presence, much like it was meant to be in the beginning

(Gen 3:8; Rev 21:3; 22:3-5).[17] This future life always includes relational qualities

between God and people, between other beings such as angels and people, and people

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[12] Mouw also finds a connection between the light in Revelation 21 and John 1. Mouw, *When the Kings*, 103.

[13] Osborne, *Revelation*, 762.

[14] Beale, The Book of Revelation, 1096.

[15] Dow gets excited thinking about this future possibility, she writes, "The huge amount of light in the New Jerusalem shows the extreme holiness and abundance of the life there, an unimaginably enjoyable existence that includes ultimate meaning and satisfaction in perpetuity." Dow, *Images of Zion*, 211.

[16] Kappelle, *Hope Revealed*, 207.

[17] "This city will perfectly embody God's presence with God's people in the midst of creation." Dyrness, *The Earth Is God's*, 73.

with people.[18] There will not be complete autonomy in the New Earth, although personality or self-hood will continue as well. Life is meant to be lived in relationships, thus relational life is a strong link between Creation in Genesis, the Incarnation in the New Testament, and through re-creation in Revelation. The difference is that "in the incarnation of Christ, God came among human beings as one of them, but still in a hidden fashion. Now, in this new creation, God will not be hidden, but will come among redeemed humanity in a direct, unmediated way."[19]

<div align="center">The End of the Cosmic Conflict and Relational Life</div>

The serpent's deception, and Adam and Eve's choices radically ruptured the perfect world God made and intended for those created in his Image. That event changed the world drastically and placed the world inside the great conflict between God and his followers with the serpent/dragon or devil, and his followers. This is the background to all of Scripture, but is explicitly delineated in the book of Revelation on several levels. Without getting into all the details of what this cosmic conflict entails it is enough to recognize that evil deceptions and actions in this world constantly threaten the abundant relational life even after the Incarnation and ascension of Jesus.[20] The links to Genesis 3 are apparent within several passages in Revelation including Revelation 20.[21]

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[18] Eric O. Jacobsen, The Space Between: A Christian Engagement with the Built Environment (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 19.

[19] González and González, *Revelation*, 138. For a description of the various ways Revelation 21-22 describe and discuss life see Dow, *Images of Zion*, 207-11.

[20] This has been the reality since the time of Genesis 3, and will be the case until the time Revelation 20 is consummated. Peckham, *Theodicy of Love*, 60.

[21] Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 1993), 193.

According to Revelation 20, there will be a time when this conflict comes to an end. Satan and his followers will be judged fairly and will even admit this to a certain extent (Rev 20:11-15).[22] But they will attack the New Jerusalem as they react in anger to this fair judgment (20:7-10). This will result in their eternal death through consummation from the glory of God's light which death and darkness cannot withstand (Rev 20:10, 14-15).[23] Death, the greatest enemy of abundant life, will be destroyed along with all the deceptions that lead to death when Satan himself is thrown into the lake of fire.[24] "The end of death is the counterpart to resurrection: As God brings the dead to life, he also terminates death's power to hold anyone captive."[25]

The re-created world will be in some sense radically different from the world people live in now.[26] The influence of darkness through deception and temptation will no longer be a part of the New Earth's equation which will profoundly change how relationships can function (Rev 21:4, 9; 22:3). This in turn will alter all aspects of life; the text is clear that the curses of Genesis 3 go through a full reversal to the point where they are no longer a factor in how life will be lived in the New Earth.[27] This is crucial for the hope that the New Earth brings into the present world.

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[22] In this instance his followers are not limited to demonic beings but include human beings as well who have chosen to follow his leading as opposed to the leading of God. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1024, 132-34. For more on this judgement scene see Osborne, *Revelation*, 721-25.

[23] Stefanović, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 578. Just as life is holistic throughout Scripture so is the second death. "Revelation refrains from using terms like physical death and spiritual death and assumes that both death and resurrection affect the whole person." Koester, *Revelation*, 792.

[24] Boyd, *God at War*, 112. In an otherwise thorough book Boyd has surprisingly little to say about Revelation 20.

[25] Koester, *Revelation*, 792.

[26] Beale, The Book of Revelation, 1040.

[27] Koester, *Revelation*, 824.

Humanity can look forward to a time when the sin, darkness, and evil that persists now, both through humans and through the diabolical work of other beings, is no more a sinister reality, but is totally and completely removed.[28] And while free choice will continue to be operative, there appears to be evidence from Scripture that it will never again be used to choose evil over good.[29] Free will can then operate without the tensions of constant tug between choices that lead to life or to death.[30] This will produce a magnificent creative freedom to develop abundant ways of living that is beyond current human imagination.[31]

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[28] Ellen G. White, one of the founding leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist tradition, has influenced my own thinking in certain ways, she wrote concerning this event: "The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space…. All things…declare that God is love." Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 678.

[29] "He [God] manifests his character over against evil such that the universe will be forevermore inoculated against it." Peckham, *Theodicy of Love*, 135.

[30] Or as Anthony W. Bartlett puts it, "It means that the power of the human to make a world has been freed from its inner content of death." Anthony W. Bartlett, "From Ontology to Iconochrony: A Positively Anthropological Second Coming," in *Compassionate Eschatology: The Future as Friend*, eds. Ted Grimsrud and Michael Hardin (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 177. Dow, *Images of Zion*, 231.

[31] Dow, *Images of Zion*, 227. Kärkkäinen argues that if eternity is filled with authentic freedom this then impacts how "time" is understood in relation to the New Earth, this is an area that deserves further reflection and discussion. Kärkkäinen, *Hope and Community*, 93. Kärkkäinen rightly argues that the theological concept of the "timelessness of God" creates serious conundrums for the argument of freedom for eternity. While God cannot be solely limited to time as construed by humans there is a real sense in which God is a part of the temporality of the world, and the descriptions of the New Earth would seem to uphold this concept. Kärkkäinen, *Hope and Community*, 95-97.

The Nations and Relational Life on the New Earth

One of the more fascinating details of the New Earth is the immense amount of

diversity that will be found there. While details as to how life will be lived or what it will

look like in the New Earth and New Jerusalem are limited, there is evidence for diversity

of life. This is true of the description of the city and of the description of the nations that

are present in the new city.

The gates and the foundations of the city represent the diverse backgrounds of

God's people through the ages, from Israel to the apostles of the New Testament (21:12-

14).[32] Along with this there is the detailed description of the precious stones that decorate

the city. These are a reminder of the priestly garments found in the Old Testament,[33] but

just as important, they are also reminders of the rich diversity found in God's good world

(Rev 21:15-21).[34] Each stone carries its own color and its own preciousness that adds to

the overall wonder of the city (Rev 21:18-20).

The diversity is explicitly portrayed in the description of the many nations that

continue to survive on the New Earth (Rev 21:24, 26; 22:2).[35] Nations in Revelation are

not comparable to current-day nation-states, but rather are indicative of the diverse

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[32] "The integration of the apostles together with the tribes of Israel as part of the city-temple's structure prophesied in Ezekiel 40-48 confirms further our assessment in the comments on 7:1-9; 11:1-2; and 21:2-3 that the multiracial Christian church will be the redeemed group who, together with Christ, will fulfill Ezekiel's prophecy of the future temple and city." Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1070.

[33] Beale, The Book of Revelation, 1080-88.

[34] Bauckham, The Theology of the Book of Revelation, 135.

[35] For a discussion of who these nations represent, especially in connection with OT passages in Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah see Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, chap. 9. Bauckham equates the kings of the nations in Revelation 21 with the kings influenced by Babylon in the rest of Revelation. He follows several significant scholars in this regard, however, I see no reason why it is not just as plausible that the kings described in Revelation 21 as being true to what light they had of God, and are thus citizens of the New Earth.

societies and groups of people that have been on this earth from nearly the beginning.

They will continue to be diverse in the New Earth, and at no point does the text suggest

all people in the New Earth will speak one language and have one way of living.[36] What

is clear is that the kings of the nation's bring the best of their nations into the city (Rev

21:26).[37] Adam and Eve were meant to be co-regents of the earth and producers of a wide

variety of ways of living prior to the entrance of sin (Gen 1:28).[38] This duty was taken

from humanity but is returned to them in the New Earth as witnessed through the kings of

the nations. But the nations will release their former ways of living, handing control back

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[36] Other passages in Revelation contain evidence that diversity in language and people will continue (Rev 5:9; 13:7; 14:6). Edgar, *Created and Creating*, 225. Stefanovic argues that the leaves of the tree of life will "heal" people from their linguistic diversity. Not only does this go beyond what the text says but it implies linguistic diversity is bad and needs healing. When in fact, understood within the framework of Creation and the Incarnation, diversity in languages is a positive part of what it means to live and makes it possible for diverse ways of living to continually be created. Stefanović, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 604. I think Stefanovic is on safer interpretative ground when he claims that the leaves are to heal "racial, ethnic, and tribal" problems that have divided humanity on this earth. Stefanović, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 605. This, however, does not by necessity require everyone to speak the same language. Timothy Tennent speculates that "Every culture in the world is ultimately validated, judged, and redeemed through the revelation of the New Creation." Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 178. The thrust of Tennent's statement is fine, there is no need, however, to claim that "every culture" will be redeemed.

[37] There is a line of scholarship that argues these "kings" are the same "kings" of the nations that did evil works earlier in the book but are now redeemed. This, however, seems to contradict earlier passages that show those who choose to oppose God will burn in the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:15). It is just as plausible that many among the nations, including some leaders, will not be among those who oppose God and then finally receive their just reward through the same grace as everyone else. For various interpretations of this passage see Koester, *Revelation*, 806. Koester favors a view that sees these passages about nations and kings "as an invitation" rather than an actuality. Beale gives strong evidence against any type of universalism in this passage. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1097-98.

[38] Mouw, When the Kings, 56.

to God—the symbolism is powerful.[39] They will be under the Lordship of God to be lived out forever beneath his loving gaze.[40]

The Tree of Life will grow leaves that are meant to heal the nations (Rev 22:2). This will not be to push the nations toward uniformity, but a symbol that the nations will put their historical problems and differences behind them, and will live together in harmony and peace, celebrating one another instead of fighting each other.[41] This will lead toward the completion of humanity, because without diverse people coming together and sharing life it is impossible to fully experience the diversity of the Trinitarian God.[42]

Somewhat like Genesis 1-2, there is little detail in Revelation 21-22 on how life will be lived in the New Earth. There are indications that life will continue to be diverse, but readers are not given any definite details as to what this will look like. It may be that this will be a result of the wonderful freedom people will have to continue to be creative in their ways of living, with the difference being they are now able to do so in a perfect

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[39] Mouw, *When the Kings*, 57. Mouw goes beyond the text when he argues that even the corrupt rulers of the earth are present for this moment as portrayed in both Isaiah 60 and Revelation 21. I see no reason to interpret the passage this way, it appears that at this stage all those in the New Jerusalem are saved. He admits that there are few answers as to "how long these politicians stay in the City?" Mouw, *When the Kings*, 58. Mouw makes another unfounded comment that

It may also be that this reckoning will require that non-Christian victims appear in the City. But their entrance will have nothing to do with permanent residence in the city that God is preparing for his people; rather, it will have to do with debts that must be settled with respect to the persecution of non-Christians by non-Christians (Mouw, *When the Kings*, 59).

This rather odd statement finds no bearing in the text and begs a host of questions.

[40] Dyrness puts it this way, "Then the kings and the people will bring all their treasures into it to signify the tribute that all the cultures of the earth will one day pay to the living God." Dyrness, *The Earth is God's*, 73. See also Dow, *Images of Zion*, 231.

[41] González and González, *Revelation*, 144.

[42] While Jennings does not comment directly on Revelation 20-22, he seems to be imagining something similar for this earth. Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 264. Twiss writes, "The diversity in heaven is the reality of what God intended to be from the very beginning because only in the diversity of humanity could the indescribableness of God be 'mirrored.'" Twiss, "Living in Transition," 106.

setting where darkness and Satan will no longer interfere.[43] This would imply that eternal

life will invigorate diversity with constant positive changes and new ideas that will lead

to more interesting ways of living.[44] This is all done in the sphere of relationships

between God and his people and people with people.[45] God living among humanity will

add to the creative potential because Genesis is clear that God loves to create good things

(Rev 21:3; 22:4).[46]

Work and Rest

Of the elements of life highlighted in Genesis 1-3 some are explicitly mentioned

in Revelation 20-22. Work and rest are not as evident in the biblical description of the

New Earth although there is no reason to doubt their continued existence.[47] The

difference is that work and rest are now outside the world of the curses of Genesis 3 and

can return to something similar to what was expected in Genesis 1-2.[48] In a sense

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[43] As Bauckham points out, it's true that the city and new earth are provided by God but "this does not mean humanity makes no contribution to it." Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 135.

[44] As Mouw argues, "It may be that the exchange of those cultural gifts forged under the pressures of sinful historical development will not be a single event but an ongoing dialogue in the continuing life of the Heavenly City." Mouw, *When the Kings*, 96-97. I would argue this is partly what the healing that comes from the leaves on the Tree of Life are for.

[45] Often the focus of commentators dealing with these passages of Revelation is on God and his relationship with humanity. This is fine, but it should not be forgotten that the vision is also radically reorienting human to human relationships. Dow, *Images of Zion*, 229.

[46] Revelation 21:3 is reflective of several OT passages but also reflective of John 1:14 when it says Jesus "tabernacled" on earth, so in the New Earth God will bring his tabernacle among humanity. For more on the OT parallels see Koester, *Revelation*, 797-98. See also Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1048. The Greek term *skēnoō* used in 21:3 is only found outside of Revelation (7:15; 12:12; 13:6) in John 1:14. This means that the Incarnation pointed to the New Earth when God would permanently dwell with humanity. Köstenberger, *John*, 41. For another source which finds a parallel to this passage in John 1:14 see Kappelle, *Hope Revealed*, 203.

[47] Volf builds his theology of work from a new creation perspective. Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 79.

[48] Edgar's writes, "The cultural mandate of Genesis thus has its ultimate accomplishment in the new heavens and new earth." Edgar, *Created and Creating*, 230.

humanity will have entered into eternal rest, but this need not be confused with a world of eternal lounging.[49] Work is so essential to the Image of God that it is likely to continue in some form or another in the New Earth.[50] As Kärkkäinen argues, "If work is related to the divine purpose of creation that points to new creation, then work gains its ultimate meaning from God's future; work is not only a matter of the present world."[51] Jürgan Moltmann went so far as to say, "The sabbath is the prefiguration of the world to come" thus equating the Sabbath as instituted in Creation with the eschatological New Earth.[52] Sigve Tonstad hits on a potential connection between the Sabbath in Genesis 2, Jesus in the Gospel of John, and the New Earth although rather than turn to Revelation he turns to Isaiah 66:23.[53] It is very possible that the Sabbath continues to play a major role in the

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[49] If "eternal lounging" were the ideal of the New Earth than how work is understood in the original Creation and in all of life between then and the Second Coming would be irrelevant. In fact, the ideal for this world would then be to achieve a state of life whereby a person works as little as possible. Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 89-91. This is, unfortunately the view of some, but I argue this is a distortion rooted in the devil's desire to lead humanity away from abundant life. For another supporter of work in the New Earth see J. Scott Duvall, *Revelation*, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2014), 316.

[50] Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath*, 27-28.

[51] Kärkkäinen, *Creation and Humanity*, 457. For those who are stuck doing tasks of drudgery or are stuck in works of severe boredom there is also hope in that work in the New Earth will be neither drudgery nor boring. Dow, *Images of Zion*, 232-33.

[52] Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 6.

[53] Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning*, 13. Isaiah 65:21-22 also is important backdrop. In v. 22 work is explicitly mentioned.

New Earth, and that rest and work will finally be held in balance.[54]

Food and Eating

Food and eating will continue to be a part of the New Earth. The bride and

bridegroom will feast together, and it will be the first time Jesus will drink of the fruit of

the vine since the Last Supper (Matt 26:28; cf. Rev 19:9).[55] In the same way that the

plants and trees provided food in the Garden of Eden so will the Tree of Life continue to

provide an abundance and diversity of fruit in the New Earth (Rev 2:7; 22:2).[56] The water

of the river also provides life and creates connections with the water of life that Jesus so

frequently referenced during his time on Earth (Rev 21:6; 22:1, 17; cf. John 4:10, 14;

7:37-39).[57] There is no reason to assume that there will not be physical drink and food in

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[54] Tonstad argues that it is quite common for John, when writing Revelation, to allude to the Old Testament with the intention to fill some of the details missing in Revelation's sparser descriptions. This, he argues, is potentially why the Sabbath is not mentioned explicitly in Revelation, because it is mentioned explicitly in Isaiah 66, which Revelation echoes. Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning*, 406. The Sabbath, and abundant or eternal life, are intimately tied together. The Sabbath was present in the perfect world of Genesis 1-2; so, there is no reason to think it will not be a part of the New Earth.

[55] Working off of Moltmann, Langmead sees incarnational mission as being more than mere ethical imitation of Christ. "To take Jesus as our pattern for mission includes eating, drinking, and dancing. To live in the kingdom of God is to be guests at the feast of God." Langmead, *The Word Made Flesh*, 148. I am fine with this as long as the intention of the statement is pointing toward the New Earth and not humans' ability to convert the existing earth into a perfect world aside from the inbreaking of God at the Second Coming.

[56] Beale, The Book of Revelation, 1105.

[57] Koester argues that these passages on living water do not have a direct connection with Jesus' words in John. I disagree. Considering that I believe the authorship of John and Revelation to be the same person, namely John, and that it makes contextual sense in the passage to connect Jesus and the water of life that flows from God's throne, I see no reason why this cannot be directly connected. Koester, *Revelation*, 800. For more on the water of life in Revelation see Koester, *Revelation*, 834. Some commentators do find a strong connection between the water of life in Heaven and the words of Jesus while he was on earth. González and González, *Revelation*, 139.

the New Earth.[58] And the fruit of the Tree of Life cannot be separated from the leaves

which bring healing to the nations (Rev 22:2).[59] If the experience of food bringing people

together even in the marred current world is any indication of its future role, then it will

likely play a part in the healing between peoples.[60] Eating food with different people has

the ability to break down barriers, thus the fruit of the Tree of Life may serve as an

important part of this healing.[61] The New Earth is meant to influence how we live in the

present, therefore, Jung's words are appropriate here. She writes, "through eating

together we taste the goodness of God…. God intends food and eating to be for the

purposes of delight and sharing."[62]

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[58] González and González, *Revelation*, 144. Keeping in mind what Crouch writes in a comedic tone, "For the cows' and fishes' sake, I suppose the transformed meals in the new Jerusalem will be vegetarian, but surely they will be a grand improvement on tofurkey." Crouch, *Culture Making*, 170.

[59] The interpretation of Beale is lacking because he limits the healing of the leaves to the work of Christ in overcoming our sins on our behalf. While this is no doubt what makes the healing possible, the use of the term "nations" here conveys a specific type of healing between nations that is the result of Jesus sacrificial death and resurrection, but is about overcoming human differences between people, not merely overcoming sin in a general sense. I agree with Beale, however, when he writes, "Does the tree's fruit continue to heal throughout eternity even as it continues to produce fruit? The answer must be negative." Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1107-08. Bauckham, although he lacks detail in his theological interpretation on this point, does create space for what I am arguing here. Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 138.

[60] As Sharon Parks puts it, "Food has a particular capacity to serve as a means of more than mere feeding and eating. Food as a common, essential object of the physical world readily links us with the intangible that is also essential, thus lending itself to symbolic use." Parks, "The Meaning of Eating," 185.

[61] This can impact the here and now as well.

We learn that different people have different preferences [of food]. . . . We learn that we come to the meal from various locations and experiences, in differing moods and bearing different expectations. In the shared meal we weave together those differences of place and preferences into a sacrament of belonging together anyway (Parks, "The Meaning of Eating," 187).

While I would remove the term sacrament here, the passage overall appears to reflect what is found in Revelation 21-22. Brenneman, "Turning the Tables," 110, 14.

[62] Jung, *Food for Life*, 43, 49.

Language

Languages can be inferred to continue because nations rarely are described without diversity in language.[63] This reminds readers of Genesis 10-11 and the nations that stemmed from the Tower of Babel, as well as the Pentecost moment of language diversity seen in Acts 2. This is not a reversal of Babel, as some have argued, rather it is the ultimate end of Babel which was meant to push humanity toward the mosaic of diversity God intended from the beginning—language which will be a part of that mosaic found in the New Earth. There is no reason to believe all people will have one language although whether we will have to learn new languages to communicate is speculation. This should disturb those currently on earth in light of the many languages that are dying out or being suppressed by the domination of just a few languages; in a sense humanity is attempting to return to Babel, which goes against living out the New Earth now.[64] There is also the reference of Revelation 21:6 where God calls himself the "Alpha and Omega" which is the beginning letter and ending letter of the Greek alphabet. Much like Jesus is the Word in John 1 so here God and language are fused in a mysterious way that deserves further reflection.[65]

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[63] Poythress, *In the Beginning*, 125.

[64] For a sample of books dealing with the disappearance of language see Daniel Nettle and Suzanne Romaine, *Vanishing Voices: The Extinction of the World's Languages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); K. David Harrison, *The Last Speakers: The Quest to Save the World's Most Endangered Languages* (Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2010).

[65] Warren, *Annie Dillard*, 39-40.

Marriage and Relationships

Marriage and relationships take on new meaning in the New Earth. According to

the words of Jesus, marriage will not continue in the same form as has on the present

earth (Luke 20:34-35). But the symbol of marriage, which may be understood

typologically at some level continues to play a significant role in Revelation 19:9 and

21:9.[66] Humanity will then be married to God. The ultimate purpose of marriage on earth

is to create oneness between a wife and husband, but in the New Earth marriage becomes

a oneness between humanity and God.[67] This is not a conflating of God and humanity—

humans will always remain created beings who cannot be God. Yet at a level, shrouded

in mystery, there will be a oneness where humanity can look God in the face without

fearing death from a consuming fire (Rev 22:4). At this time God will also finally be able

to realize his desire "that everyone love him as an ultimate end in itself."[68] Relationality

will be a major part of what it will mean to live in the New Earth. But the details are

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[66] Many commentators argue that the city is described as God's bride in 21:2, and the description of the city in 21:1-21 is a description of a bride fully dressed in her finest jewels. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1066-67. This may have some impact on how we think of the various way's humans attempt to portray their finest beauty here on this earth as they anticipate the ultimate marriage with God on the New Earth. This interpretation then implies that marriage on this earth, despite its shortcomings and problems, when at its best is a foretaste of the marriage to come in the New Earth where relationality with God and fellow humans will be perfect. Douglas F. Kelly, *Revelation: A Mentor Expository Commentary* (London: Mentor, 2012), 400.

[67] Marriage is one of many intimate portrayals of the God-human relationship in the New Earth. Dow, *Images of Zion*, 197-98. For more on the marriage theme in Revelation 19 and 21 see Koester, *Revelation*, 804. "The bridal imagery is relational." Koester goes on to describe the beauty that this bride entails with all her wonderful jewelry adorning her. Koester, *Revelation*, 829. I would add that the jewelry stones are extremely diverse and radiant highlighting the importance of the diversity of the people who dwell in the New Jerusalem.

[68] Peckham, *Theodicy of Love*, 42.

missing as to exactly what this looks like.[69] While this may be frustrating to some, it should instead create a sense of excitement and anticipation to see how humanity will live together in a perfect world where self-interest and other effects of sin cannot interfere in relationship-building.

Clothing

Clothing is briefly mentioned in Revelation 22. The robes that humanity will wear are symbolic of the cleansing received from the blood of the Lamb (Rev 3:5; 22:14). It appears that clothing may remain as a reminder of the love and sacrifice that God performed on behalf of humanity which was first symbolized in the garments of skin God provided in Genesis 3:21.

Summary

It is plausible to assume a level of literality to the descriptions of life in the New Earth considering these elements of life in Genesis 1-2 make up part of what it means to be in the Image of God.[70] Therefore, there is no reason to spiritualize away the elements of relational life described in Revelation 20-22 since they fit with the holistic understanding of human life found

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[69] Dyrness sees the vision of John on Patmos as a thread that brings the biblical narratives together "into a final vision of God dwelling in a new creation with God's people." He adds, referring to the vision of Revelation 21-22, "it does not analyze the stories so much as collect them." Dyrness, *The Earth is God's*, 162.

[70] Tennent argues similarly: "John does not see disembodied souls or some generic gathering of the redeemed… In short, John sees men and women in all their cultural particularities." Tennent, *Invitation to World Mission*, 178. Kärkkäinen documents his belief that the Image of God is a connector between Creation, Incarnation, and Eschatology and references others who hold a similar view. Kärkkäinen, *Creation and Humanity*, 284.

throughout Scripture.[71] The biblical writers understood life in far more concrete terms with some abstraction and symbolism than the Platonic or Kantian understanding. While many may "think of the eschaton as ushering in some kind of nonphysical world," the reality is that "the New Creation is a completely new kind of world with an even more profound kind of physicality, a new cultural reality that is not subject to decay."[72]

What About Religion on the New Earth?

There is no doubt that worship is a major component of human life on the New Earth. This is apparent in the way the nations bring in their offerings before God in the city (Rev 21:24-26). But does this mean there is religion on the New Earth? There are few extant definitions of religion that reduce it to worship. While worship may be a component of religious analysis it rarely serves as the totality of what is meant by religion.

The same holds true for the New Earth. Worship is an element of life as it is lived on the New Earth. This cannot be separated out as a totally unique sphere of life from all other elements. Worship goes alongside the other elements of life and is part of the relational aspect within these elements between humanity and God. But religions are absent from Revelation 20-22.[73] The fact that theology of religion discussions rarely reference this passage of Scripture may be a reflection of this.

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[71] Mouw argues something similar:

If we think of the future life as a disembodied existence in an ethereal realm—which is not, I have suggested, our ultimate goal—then it is difficult to think of our present cultural affairs as in any sense a positive preparation for heavenly existence (Mouw, *When the Kings*, 19).

[72] Tennent, *Invitation to World Mission*, 183. See also Duvall, *Revelation*, 297.

[73] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 173.

Humanity will bear the Image of God forever. No matter how distorted sin makes it, the image persists. In the New Earth the image is fully restored to perfection through the grace of Christ. Humans carry the Image of God into the New Earth; this inevitably includes the elements of life that make up that image. When Jesus was on earth he constantly discussed eternal life. This implies that life, in some analogous form, carries over from this world into the New Earth. This life is the same as that found in Genesis 1-2, which is clarified in John 1, and Revelation 20-22. But religion is not clearly defined in Genesis 1-3, nor in the life of Jesus. Therefore, it is unnecessary to argue that religion is a part of the eternal plan of God. Life in God's image is an eternal life, and this includes all aspects of life, they cannot be reduced to certain spiritual elements. All parts of life are meant to be lived before God and with God and before people and with people. This continues in the New Earth.[74]

It is revealing that there is no "temple" because God is the temple. The temple would be the place normally allocated for worship, but the whole city is like the temple and God, who once dwelt in the tabernacle and temple on earth, will reside in the city itself, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them" (Rev 21:3). Jesus, while he was on earth, equated himself with the temple and his Incarnation was also equated with the tabernacle in the wilderness (John 1:14; 2:19-21; cf. Matt 12:6). This demonstrates the holistic nature of the New Earth where all of life will be lived worshipfully in direct proximity to God.[75]

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[74] Bauckham, The Theology of the Book of Revelation, 141.

[75] For more on the temple imagery of Revelation 21 see Koester, *Revelation*, 820-21.

Objectification, Racialization, and Teleology in
Light of the New Earth

The challenges faced by theologians and missiologists in using the current

categories of religions were demonstrated in Chapters 2-3. The passage of Revelation 20-

22 has major implications for all these challenges and will be the focus of this section.

Why the New Earth Matters for the Present World

Among theologians dealing with other religions and among missiologists in

general, Revelation 20-22 is not often cited.[76] For this project it is essential that this

passage be consulted in order to have a distinct understanding of what the grand finale of

Scripture says about relational life. This is based on the presuppositional position that

Revelation 20-22 along with Genesis 1-3 and John 1:1-18 make up the "theological

center of Scripture."

For those who adhere to a restoration approach to human life and its relation to

the Bible, it may seem that turning toward the Creation model of Genesis 1-2 is all that is

needed to create an ideal type. But this is not the approach I take towards restoration.

Restoration means understanding the original Creation as a type of what is to come in the

re-creation of the New Earth. Therefore, if the Creation narrative impacts how we think

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[76] Kärkkäinen points this out in Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, "Response 2," in *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions: An Evangelical Proposal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 303. For example, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, which is quite thorough concerning New Testament passages on mission, hardly has anything to say regarding Revelation 20-22. Köstenberger and O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*. Others are not much better. In Ott, Strauss, and Tennent's book on theology of mission Revelation 20-22 is hardly referenced and certainly does not play a major role in their construction of mission theology. It figures most prominently in the sections defending an eternal burning hell fire as a legitimate motivation for mission—something that I would disagree with but that falls outside the scope of this project. Ott, Strauss, and Tennent, *Encountering Theology of Mission*. Goheen's introduction to Christian mission does not touch on the New Earth at all. Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today*. Arthur F. Glasser devoted a heading to Revelation 21-22 but used nearly all the space to discuss the fate of "non-Christians." There is no reference to what significance the New Earth may have for mission in the present. Arthur F. Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God's Mission in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 368-72.

about creatively developing ways of living relationally, then the New Earth must have an equal impact on how we live in the present.

There is also a sense in which the description of the "yet to come" reveals what God is hoping to find among his faithful followers in the present (Rev 22:10-11, 17).[77] This is not meant in a dogmatic sense of perfectionism but rather in a trajectorial sense as an aim that is at times a realized hope.[78] Those who approach creative ways of living with the end in mind will approach it differently than those stuck in an immanentized world where there is no definitive break from the Earth's current status.[79] Those who view ways of living as purely human attempts to cope with the realities of this world cut themselves off from the "not yet." That anticipation provides theoretical reinforcement for the

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[77] Dyrness, *The Earth is God's*, 74. Dow argues that "Eschatological teaching in the New Testament is generally used as motivational material in exhortations to faithful witness and holy living." Dow, *Images of Zion*, 222. She adds the caveat that, "the motivational value of the vision of the New Jerusalem depends largely on two things: belief that the city is real and belief that it is desirable." Dow, *Images of Zion*, 223. I have presupposed both of these in this dissertation. Stefanović brings balance to this when he writes, "Revelation seems to portray the new Jerusalem as a real place inhabited by real people. Yet it is important to keep in mind the symbolic character of the book of Revelation as a whole." He goes on to add, "It is not always clear to us, however, exactly where the line of demarcation is drawn between the literal and the symbolic with regards to the new Jerusalem." Stefanović, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 606-07.

[78] Bauckham addresses this issue: "There can be no question that 22:17c really does mean that the water of life, the life of the new creation, is available to people in the present. But it is nonetheless the life of the new creation, coming to people from the future." Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 168.

[79] Bauckham highlights Revelation's emphasis on the transcendence of God which makes it possible for an alternative initiated by God to this earth. This transcendence need not be understood as a barrier to intimate relations between humanity and God, but rather gives hope that this world is not all there is to look forward to. Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 160-61. As Dyrness writes, "human life points toward the future God is planning for it, in which God and creation are perfectly integrated and God's trinitarian life perfectly displayed." Dyrness, *The Earth is God's*, 162.

creative ways of living that humanity was meant from the beginning to enact.[80] The grace

of Jesus empowers those creative ways of living to demonstrate his Incarnation and all it

entails.

An important characteristic of the New Earth for the present time is its hope-

creating power. In a world where humanity has decided to label all ways of living and

place them within certain fixed categories, the diverse freedom of the New Earth provides

the hope for a different approach to understanding human differences.[81] There is no way

to avoid the effects of the cosmic conflict on humanity in the present. But through the

ongoing work of the Spirit, the promise of the New Earth gives humans a wellspring of

hope to draw from in order to overcome human-derived categorizations that take away

from the abundant life God intended (Rev 22:2).[82] Hope may be the most powerful factor

in altering the social imaginaries of people who are stuck in an immanentized world,

often viewing differences as innate. A loving and personal God who plans to make his

permanent home with humanity will create the New Earth (Rev 21:3, 22; 22:4-6). This

goes against the flow of most current narratives of life that despite their verbal ascent to

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[80] Bauckham writes concerning the vision of Revelation, "one of the functions of Revelation was to purge and to refurbish the Christian imagination. It tackles people's imaginative response to the world, which is at least as deep and influential as their intellectual convictions." Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 159. David Bosch describes the tension in the following way, "It must be an eschatology that holds in creative and redemptive tension the already and the not yet; the world of sin and rebellion, and the world God loves; the new age that has already begun and the old that has not yet ended." Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 520. It is this same Incarnated Lord who attracts all the "nations" to the city in the New Earth. Mouw, *When the Kings*, 104-05.

[81] For a description of the various way's labels get used in identity formation see Appiah, *The Lies That Bind*.

[82] Koester says it well when he writes: "The portrayals of Babylon and Jerusalem are designed to shape the commitments of the readers." Koester, *Revelation*, 828. This life is "God's answer to all human longings and dreams of the ideal city which are permeated with hopes and anticipation for a better life." Stefanović, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 610. It is important to remember the role of the third person of the Trinity in keeping this hope alive in humanity. Kärkkäinen, *Hope and Community*, 19.

the supernatural or wholly other are lived as though humans are the beginning and end of existence.[83] The New Earth is a promise against the social imaginary that has propped up the categories of religions which have been used for coercive power.[84]

Objectification

When the world is immanentized it is an easy step to turn people into objects. This is the slow but steady history of the categories of religions in the twentieth century that eventually calcified into accepted objective categories in which people could be placed according to various criteria. This has often created a false sense of reality based on simplistic categorizations of people, reducing them either to their perceived beliefs—found in their sacred writings—or to their outward practices based on observation. The New Earth is a promise that this earth is not all there is and that our categories that rely on an immanentized world are plagued with inaccuracies. Human beings cannot easily be reduced into categories that are semi-arbitrarily applied. As the New Earth will demonstrate there will be a plethora of diversity found among humanity. Categorization will be an impossible task because changes continue for eternity.[85] But the New Earth will not be filled with objects. It will be filled with people who will be in relationship

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[83] Bosch, Transforming Mission, 521.

[84] Kappelle, *Hope Revealed*, 208.

[85] Kärkkäinen argues this implies a view of "time" that is at least anologous to "time" as it is understood in a linear fashion on this earth. Kärkkäinen is right that the use of the terminology "end of time" does not actually fit with the biblical description. "Fulfilment of time" may be better, but the best option he argues is probably "new time" which is time that lacks any effects of sin but still includes embodied persons with infinite potential ways of living ahead of them. Kärkkäinen, *Hope and Community*, 102-03.

with God. They will not merely live out their own derived views of the world but will thrive in a diverse place in real-time connection with God.[86]

Racialization

In the New Earth racialization is unthinkable. Whatever racialization that has occurred before the inbreaking of God in his Second Coming will be removed. The healing that results from the leaves of the Tree of Life reveal this, although not in detail (Rev 22:2). Yet we do not find a unifying of the human race in looks or ways of living. Rather diversity will continue and will be celebrated in the New Earth as a part of what it means to be remade in the Image of God (Rev 21:24-26).[87] Earthly categories of race will not be part of the New Earth in their negative forms and uses but there will still be diversity; how that diversity will be lived out and understood is beyond the details of the passage in Revelation.

In the New Earth diversity will be celebrated through the various possibilities the "nations" bring for living life.[88] While there will be no discussion of skin color or other physical markings that could be used as segregators, this does not mean everyone will look or act the same. Rather it signifies that these markers will not act as the primary identifiers of people. Nor is there a distinct delineation of how people will worship or

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[86] Dow, Images of Zion, 227.

[87] There is a strong argument that it is impossible to fully represent the Image of God without diversity in human ways of living and looking. Mouw, *When the Kings*, 85.

[88] Kreitzer, The Concept of Ethnicity, 346.

understand God that would create a precise category development from a racial perspective.[89]

Freedom from racialization should be the aim of those who have hope in the New Earth. People who hold to this hope are given this promise as a way to cope through the sin-infected racialized world of the present.[90] But this hope is also meant to play a role in how those who adhere to it live out their relational lives on this earth. The New Earth reveals an ideal type that can impact the imperfect present for those who take it seriously. That means it is imperative for those who believe in the Second Coming of God and the re-creation of the New Earth, that they aid the process now by living out, to the best of their ability, the hope of the New Earth. It also means fighting against categorizations that undermine abundant life as described in Revelation 20-22.[91] Categories of religions have no place in the New Earth and thus must not be allowed to become primary categories for separating

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[89] It may be that the diverse kings of the nation's bring forth diverse ways of worshipping God. Koester, *Revelation*, 822.

[90] In a sense Tennent fits with this description when he writes, "our primary cultural identity is in the New Creation." Tennent, *Invitation to World Mission*, 187. This is fine as long as he means this in a general sense, but not in a sense in which the New Earth contains a monocultural setting. Based on other portions of his writing, he appears to adhere to an understanding that sees diversity continuing on in the New Earth.

[91] Gorringe, using strong language in regards to the Apocalypse but which is similar to what I have written above states: the Apocalypse "is counter cultural in resisting compromise and accommodation and advocating a critical distance from dominant ideas of social relations adopted and the language of religious discourse." Gorringe, *Furthering Humanity*, 141.

humanity in the present.[92] Those who take Revelation 20-22 seriously should view

humanity through the lens of their potential instead of limiting them to their perceived

actual. Once humanity is placed within categories of religions, even those self-imposed,

results in them moving away from the New Earth ideal.

There is a rootedness in the shared identity found in the New Earth, but it is still

diverse and this is to be celebrated rather than bemoaned.[93] At the same time all are equal

in their relationship to God, which is the core of humanity's existence on the New

Earth.[94] As Newbigin exhorted, "The Christ who is presented in Scripture for our

believing is Lord over all cultures, and his purpose is to unite all of every culture to

himself in a unity that transcends, without negating, the diversities of culture."[95]

Therefore, the differences are real and celebrated while the similarities are also real and

celebrated.[96] And the potential for continued diversification and mixing under the Tree of

Life appears infinite (Rev 22:2).

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[92] Some see an even stronger connection between Heaven and the earth. For example, Twiss argues that the Euro-American dominated theology and Christianity that has been and continues to be used as an oppressive reading of the Scripture toward Native Americans. He says, "Will they be there waiting to welcome me into heaven when I cross over to the other side? Some days I say, I sure as hell hope not!" Twiss, "Living in Transition," 101.

[93] Jennings, The Christian Imagination, 265.

[94] Dow, Images of Zion, 202.

[95] Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 149.

[96] I cannot go along with the interpretation of Osborne when he writes, "In eternity all ethnic and racial distinctions will disappear, and we will be one." Osborne, *Revelation*, 734. As I have stated elsewhere in this chapter, and cited others to support my arguments, the New Earth is still diverse in physicality and ways of living. There is a long history of attempting to create "color blindness" mostly initiated by White people who have not had to think about their own ethnicity in careful ways due to balances of power and systems that favor them. While I am not trying to imply this is the case in Osborne, these types of interpretations, that are not founded in the text, lend themselves to this false initiative that favors Whiteness.

Human Progress as Teleology

Both an end and an infinite beginning are described in Revelation 20-22. This may not fit the classic definition of what a teleology is but it serves as the closest thing to a teleology in the Bible. Revelation 21:6 contains the Greek word *telos*. In English it reads, "He said to me: It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life." Here the term does not refer to a teleology as often understood in current technical writing, but rather to God himself as the ultimate end. *Telos* is a relational term in that a relationship with God is clearly meant in Revelation 21:6 where it is written, "the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of life." This impacts how teleology is understood from the perspective of Revelation 20-22.

But Revelation 20 does have the ring of finality in it. While many of the social imaginaries found currently in the world do not have a final end of evil, pain, and suffering—much less the removal of death—the Bible does. This creates an end to this world that is a radical break into another world without pain, suffering, and death (Rev 21:4).[97] This requires that God intervene to eliminate evil beings and evil in order to re-create the world (Rev 20:10, 14-15). This is of course far removed from the Kantian teleology of the Enlightenment or any of the other Western approaches to teleology that were built on humanity's ability to create its own progress. While the postmodern turn, and the postcolonial critique among other things have altered the Western understanding

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[97] Gorringe gives a striking description of the Apocalypse that is relevant here: "The Apocalypse unmasks reality, refusing to accept that the dominant powers are the ultimate point of reference for the world." Gorringe, *Furthering Humanity*, 140.

of progress, for many there is no viable alternative narrative to serve as a better teleology.[98]

The biblical understanding of the end not only involves the destruction of evil and death but also the re-creation of life in a whole new world (Rev 21:1). This is not totally cut off from the old world in the sense that the human occupants of the new world come from the old world (Rev 20:4).[99] Nevertheless, where Kant and others lack detail in their teleology, the Bible contains some detail. It describes a world recognizable in its elaboration on life and diversity that will make up the New Earth. But the lack of detail and lack of finality lend an infinite feel to the future in this New Earth. "Thus the words and ways of one people join those of another, and another, each born anew in a community seeking to love and honor those in its midst."[100] Therefore, the end is not fully understood because there is no end, but the infinite potential to live out lives in new and creative ways together as a diverse group of people living with God.[101]

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[98] Kärkkäinen claims that after the devastating world wars and other catastrophes, the Western world began giving up its teleology of progress, but instead of turning to theology it turned to philosophy, which has not been able to provide adequate paradigms of hope. Kärkkäinen, *Hope and Community*, 76-77.

[99] "Despite the discontinuities, the new cosmos will be an identifiable counterpart to the old cosmos and a renewal of it, just as the body will be raised without losing its former identity." Beale goes on to add, "But renewal does not mean that there will be no literal destruction of the old cosmos, just as the renewed resurrection body does not exclude the destruction of the old." Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1040.

[100] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 273-74. When Jennings wrote these words, he was not referencing the New Earth but rather putting forth a vision for the current earth. While I agree wholeheartedly with this vision, the Bible is clear that we will not fully realize it until the New Earth is created. Until then we draw on the vision of the New Earth as a model for what we must strive for in the world today.

[101] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 173-74. The "togetherness" is important to emphasize in light of the fact that much of Christian history has focused on the individual aspect of the hope found in the eschaton as opposed to the "kingdom of God" or community of resurrected and redeemed people living together forever. Kärkkäinen, *Hope and Community*, 17.

This teleology, if it qualifies as such, is one that takes the burden off of humans to expect human progress and human ability to overcome the world's evils and sufferings, much less death. Humans cannot do this, nor should they expect it to happen through their power.[102] This is more easily understood when a robust understanding of the cosmic conflict is in place that recognizes there are evil forces beyond the human realm who will continue to wreak havoc on earth until they are destroyed. This, however, does not mean humans who are faithful to God should hunker down and quietly wait for the end to come.[103] Rather they should be living out the ideal presented in the future hope of the New Earth as best they can, here and now, with the original Creation as a reference point for what is hoped for and the Incarnation as the empowering historical moment that provides the grace for living it out.[104]

Living with this future in mind relieves the pressure to categorize people so neatly, whether religious or otherwise. Whereas religious categorization is tied to a historical teleology that is bankrupt, the New Earth creates a teleological lens that foresees diversity but not a clear categorized diversity. This frees up humanity to explore diversity in the hope of the future without becoming wrapped up in categories of religions that are essentialized in a reductionistic way.

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[102] Recognizing that human endeavors to bring about progress are futile can be the foundation for developing a radical hope in the re-creation that only someone from outside the earth, namely God, can produce. Kärkkäinen, *Hope and Community*.

[103] Bauckham argues that Revelation actually portrays the opposite of "hunkering down." Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 161.

[104] Gorringe, Furthering Humanity, 128; Bauckham, The Theology of the Book of Revelation, 161; Tennent, Invitation to World Mission, 187.

Summary

The New Earth is a radical disconnect from this earth in many ways. This creates a hope that the unspeakable ways of life exemplified by so many on this earth are limited in time and scope. With this hope comes the opportunity to focus on ways of living that are in line with Scripture's trajectory without the pressure or burden of expecting humanity to create its own perfect teleological course. God will overcome evil; humans do not have to worry about this. Thus, even in the midst of negative religious essentialization, often seen most blatantly in the mainstream media in outlets across the globe, there is a hope that these essentialized categorizations of humanity do not get the last word. A time is coming when life will be lived to its fullest in diversity, but not based on poorly essentialized, objectified, and racialized teleologies that create harmful spaces for relationships. The diversity in the New Earth will create the potential for new types of relational life beyond the imagination of current human finitude. And while it is beyond our imagination there is also something about the New Earth that can aid our imagination and give us a wellspring of resources to cope in our present lives.[105]

Minimal Alternatives to Current Categories of Religions

Just as the original Creation and Incarnation narratives assisted in constructing alternatives to the current religious categorizations and ways of describing life, so can the narrative of Revelation 20-22 aid in the same construction. This will require building on the Creation and Incarnation alternatives. The focus is on the ways of living portrayed in Revelation 20-22.

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[105] Vanhoozer, The Drama of Doctrine, 377.

The idea of interculturality has gained momentum in the last few years. This is the idea of mutual engagement between cultures without one perceptible winner or superior side in the engagement. This is a commendable trend in many respects and in some ways reflects the New Earth ideal presented in Revelation 20-22. But what we find in the New Earth cannot be reduced to most secular definitions of culture or interculturality. Rather it is best understood as diverse groups of people living out their lives in diverse ways. This living is always done in front of the face of God, guaranteeing its sanctity which does not lead to uniformity. Instead, the scene of Revelation 20-22 describes an ongoing diversity, healed from all strife, but diverse nonetheless continuing on for eternity. This is the ongoing creative interaction between diverse people and their ways of living that was part of the original mandate for humanity found in Genesis 1:26-28. It was demonstrated in particular ways with universal implications and made possible again through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Incarnate God.[106]

The categories of religions cannot stand up to this ideal presented in Revelation 20-22. They rely too much on essentializing people into bounded groups. There has been an ongoing hope among many scholars and theorists of religion that humanity was progressing, and that this could be seen in the religious makeup of people. Unfortunately, this was based within a social imaginary that could not see beyond this earth, which is plagued by sin and suffering. While some have questioned the evolutionary language connected to religion, the only alternative for many appears to be relativism, which fails to consider the cosmic conflict and which comprises people in all groups. The New Earth is made up of a diverse group of humanity that celebrate their differences in front of God

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[106] There is a sense in which the description of the New Earth continues this balance between the universal and the particular as argued in Kappelle, *Hope Revealed*, 203.

together. Categories describing humanity should reflect this hoped-for New Earth. Those

who understand and believe in the New Earth should be living out now what they, in faith

believe will be fully realized in the future.[107] This can be done in a vast amount of ways

of living that can still reflect the "not yet" but the "one day." The cry, "Please come Lord

Jesus," should be spoken in all languages.

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[107] Dyrness, *Insider Jesus*, 69.

CHAPTER 7

CREATION, INCARNATION, RE-CREATION,

AND RELATIONAL LIFE

Introduction

The previous three Chapters explored relational life as it was portrayed in the

Creation narrative texts of Genesis 1-3; the Incarnation as found in John 1:1-18 with

additional Gospel references; and in the radical re-creation of Revelation 20-22. Below is

a brief overview of the three previous Chapters in order to bring them together and

prepare the way for the rest of this Chapter which attempts to draw out the implications

of this biblical portion of the study for categories of religions as they are used in theology

and missiology in the present.

Creation as the Original Ideal

Relational life as found in Genesis 1-2 was described as the original ideal God put

in place for humanity, a place of immense freedom. Each element of relational life was

given to humanity to work with and to use their God-given creativity to form a new

world. This ideal was thoroughly fractured through Adam and Eve's choice to follow the

serpent's deceptive advice against God. While this decision led to major repercussions on

the earth, the original ideal remained intact, though greatly marred.

Made in the Image of God, humanity has maintained this core identity even in a world of suffering and pain. The elements of life in Chapter 4 dealt with work and rest, food and eating, language, marriage and relationships, and clothing. The ongoing cosmic conflict affected each of these elements in a tangible way after the Fall of Adam and Eve—a permanent part of earth's history. But these elements continued to have the possibility for greater good in the world and continued to make up a part of what it meant to be made in the Image of God as creative creators.

Even in a perfect world diversity was inevitable and was a part of what God intended for his creatures. It was meant to bring joy and become the fruits of humanity's creative endeavors, leaving an infinite amount of ways of living in which humans could create. Relational life, which all abundant life was meant to be, was intended to be diverse. With the entrance of sin, it continued on that track but it was more difficult to know what was good and what was evil.

Creation gave the ideal of what relational life was meant to be like with limited details, which highlighted the freedom humanity was given. This was an act of love, for without freedom from the beginning, love would not have been possible. Even after sin love remained the benchmark for measuring the life-giving capabilities of various ways of living. Creation became a core unifier of humanity and an identifier of the good life God intended for humans both in relation to himself and to each other.

The Incarnation as the Normative Example
for Relational Life

While Creation continued to serve as the original ideal that all humanity should aim for, it was the Incarnation that acted as the normative example of what relational life

could be in a sin-filled world. It is not only the example but also the act of God which makes the ideal of Creation obtainable again for a sinful humanity. Without the grace of God rooted in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the ideal of Creation would be meaningless.

God Incarnated into a particular point in history, into Palestine, a particular place, among a particular group of people in particular ways. Jesus' desire was for all people throughout the world to experience abundant and eternal life with him. When God became human and lived on Earth, he affirmed the creativity of human ways of living. Jesus showed humanity what relational life was really all about. Even in death, Jesus was primarily focused on life, making a way for all humans who choose to follow him to have eternal life. Jesus' resurrection is a powerful example of life in all its glory.

The Incarnation was an act of supreme love, which showed that God had created the space for humanity's free will to operate through his grace, even in the midst of the cosmic conflict. Humans are not required to re-live the life Jesus lived in exact detail. But they can gain insights and recognize trends in how Jesus built relationships across boundaries in order to move toward more appropriate ways of living in the present. This was done within the elements of life found in Creation.

While the ongoing cosmic conflict was not finished at the death and resurrection of Jesus, Satan and his followers were given their death blow. This was a sign and a symbol that Satan's time was running out. Jesus' kingdom had come, though there was, and still is an element of "not yet" in this kingdom. Therefore, whenever people share the Word of God and live out their lives within the particularities found in Genesis 1-2, and as seen in the life of Jesus they are pushing forward the light of life through the Spirit.

Re-Creation as the Ultimate Ongoing
Form of Relational Life

The re-creation of the New Earth found in the book of Revelation is possible because of the Incarnation and is rooted in the original Creation. Life as found in the New Earth is recognizable because it resembles life in the Garden of Eden when God walked with humanity. In the New Earth people will see God face to face. This is the result of the love and grace that is manifestly demonstrated and seen in the Incarnation of God through Jesus and the power of the Spirit.

While the details of the New Earth are limited, it is safe to assume that the elements of relational life continue to be a part of the New Earth in transformed ways. Humanity's freedom is not removed, they continue to have the ability to create new ways of living, working from the immense diversity portrayed by the term *nations* found in Revelation 21. But diversity will no longer be hindered by the cosmic conflict and the deceptions of Satan and his followers who meet their final end at the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:15).

Relational life in the New Earth presents a beautiful picture of hope and abundance that will lend itself to creating more hope, though not yet fully realized in the present. People who have heard the good news of the New Earth can gain revitalized energy in living out the Creation ideal of relational life through the grace of God in Christ and the power of the Spirit. The Second Coming and the re-creation of the earth are God's ultimate acts of love toward a humanity that he holds so dear. God plans to live among humanity for eternity and enjoy the fruits of their diversity by creating alongside them.

Life in all its elements will be good in the New Earth. Relationships will be lived in diverse perfection forever and there will be no end to the creative possibilities on the New Earth. Even the fissures between different groups of people and their ways of living will be healed. The ongoing interaction promises to be so enriching that whatever people have done on this earth in terms of ways of living cannot compare. These three biblical passages have provided a foundation for constructing an understanding of life that provides a plausible alternative to the categories of religions critiqued in Chapter's 2-3. The implications of this make up the rest of this Chapter.

Alternatives to the Enlightenment Rooted Categories of Religions

The first part of this dissertation focused on overviewing and deconstructing the long history that was the foundation for the categories of religions most commonly used today. This focused on the Western world's development of these categories out of the Enlightenment. These are the categories that gained the broadest acceptance both geographically and academically across disciplines around the world. At this stage in the dissertation it is appropriate to return to this history, but within the parameters the last three Chapters set in place which teased out what the theological center of the Bible has to say about relational life.

I have argued that categories of religions take a wide range of forms that are attempts to essentialize large groups of people and ideas into definable categories. This is often done in such a way to detach religion as a separate domain from the rest of life, creating descriptions that are abstract and limited to systems of belief, which are often removed from everyday living. Other descriptions are focused on rituals and practices but

those developing the descriptions attempt to do so as neutral observers, creating language that dehumanizes the subjects in order to create objects for research.

The turn to empirical science played a major role in shaping the language and approach to studying religion and the people of the "religions." This was done in tandem with explicit desires to replace the God of the Bible and the Bible itself as a normative source for knowledge concerning life and ways of living. While descriptions of religion have changed some in the past century, the categories have basically stayed the same; empirical approaches to research that rely heavily on human reason continue to be the normative way of studying religion in the West and many other parts of the world. These approaches are complex for reasons presented in Chapter 3.

Relying on these categories to describe even a portion of life falls short of the biblical description of life presented in the passages of Scripture chosen for this dissertation.[1] Even secular scholars recognize the pitfalls of relying on these categories. "Human behavior and belief systems cannot be reduced to the study of mere regularities, simple patterns, and constant laws, as if all human beings in situation W will do X, will say Y, and think Z."[2] As a result it is best for theologians and missiologists to move away from reliance on these categories.

While the fallout from the Enlightenment, which began in Europe and spread around the globe, has many negative side effects, it would be impossible to go back to a time prior to the Enlightenment, nor would that be advisable on several accounts. Seeing

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[1] "Religion, too, is hardly a biblical word. For the biblical writers, all that men and women do, in every sphere of life, whether it be dubbed 'religious' or 'secular', is expressive of their response to their Creator, who is the Source, the Judge and the Goal of all existence." Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict?*, 143.

[2] McCutcheon, The Insider/Outsider, 3.

value in learning about the ways of living of non-Europeans was a by-product the

Enlightenment helped create.[3] This was often done in less than ideal ways and led to

distorted views of those whom Europeans encountered in the rest of the world. But as

time has gone on and anthropologists and sociologists conduct more detailed work, there

has been a greater understanding of the diversity of humanity and their ways of living.[4]

Certainly slavery, colonialism, imperialism, and other awful global-scale actions

are to be shunned and historically pilloried. And there is no doubt these are intimately

tied to the Enlightenment drive of Europe and continue today through North America and

other regional powers in new and terrible forms.[5] The world has grown smaller as a result

of the technological advances that came out of the Enlightenment thinkers' turn to

science. This made it possible for diverse groups of people to mingle in positive ways

that was previously nearly impossible. This interaction created the space for new

possibilities for growth and learning when it comes to ways of living.

However, I argue it is time to move in a new direction away from the categories

of religions rooted in Enlightenment thinking that undermined the Bible and a robust

understanding of Satan and his evil followers on Earth. It is time to view people through

the lens of the Image of God in love and grace. One could argue that prior to the

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[3] While I have spent much of this dissertation deconstructing many of the errors or more negative aspects of this history, it is valid to recognize the value and importance in human exchange of ideas that has occurred in the past several centuries which has aided the world in understanding one another better. This does not negate the negative side I have highlighted, but attempts to recognize that the history is not all bad. Ramachandra, "Globalization," 216.

[4] In other words, "The light of the Enlightenment was real light." Gorringe, *Furthering Humanity*, 100. However, it is not always easy to separate light from darkness when studying the Enlightenment.

[5] The concept of "Manifest Destiny" which continues to be an operative concept among many of the leaders of the United States is very much implicated in this ongoing process of colonization and imperialism, especially as it is seen and understood by non-Americans as well as Native Americans. Miller, "Christianity."

Enlightenment there were ways of categorizing people that were just as harmful and dehumanizing as the current categories. And one could argue that this will always be the case no matter which group of people on the globe dominate politically or otherwise. These are legitimate arguments, but they do not release theologians and missiologists—who desire to experience God's abundant life and help others do the same—from the responsibility of critiquing the categories they have inherited which are rooted in the Enlightenment and evaluate them in a way that Scripture describes life between humanity and God and humanity with humanity.[6] The final sections of this Chapter will take in turn the implications of this study for theologians and missiologists.

Theology of Religions and Relational Life

In the past century there has been an ongoing debate about how Christians should understand and interact with people who identify as something other than Christian. This has evolved into what has become known as theology of religions. There are numerous books and articles on this topic at all levels of academic and popular forums. For most theologians who have ventured into this ongoing discussion the center part of the discussion has been questions of soteriology. This has two strands, the first being a question of who can or cannot be saved. The second being a question of whether or not "other" religions can lead to salvation. This Chapter will move away from those

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[6] Vanhoozer, though not dealing with categories of religions, argues persuasively that the theological times are such, especially within the linguistic turn, that new horizons are now open for interpreting Scripture and following God in dynamic new ways that the Enlightenment did not allow for. I follow him in this evaluation and apply it to the issue of categories of religions. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 7-12.

discussions and instead focus on the implications that the description of relational ways

of living in the previous three Chapters create.[7]

The Universal and the Particular

Moving between the universal and the particular has been a preoccupation of

philosophers for millennia. There is nothing inherently wrong with trying to work out the

universal and particular aspects of humanity and life. What is at issue is the starting point,

or the presuppositions behind the universal and particular.

For theologians who take the Bible as an authoritative document on human life,

the universals and particulars must be understood and applied from the Bible itself and

not limited to human reason. This dissertation proceeds from that starting point and thus

has outlined an understanding of relational life as it is biblically described in Genesis 1-3,

John 1:1-18, and Revelation 20-22. The life described is not just about humans living

with humans, but includes the God-human relationship as well. It has been shown that it

is nearly impossible to separate out religion as a distinct facet of life from the biblical

perspective. This then has implications for how theologians deal with the concept of

religion in light of the universal and particular.

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[7] I tend to follow Lesslie Newbigin's approach to this issue. He writes, "I must confess…that I find it astonishing that a theologian should think he has the authority to inform us in advance who is going to be 'saved' on the last day." He goes on to add,

It is almost impossible for me to enter into simple, honest, open, and friendly communication with another person as long as I have at the back of my mind the feeling that I am one of the saved and he is one of the lost. Such a gulf is too vast to be bridged by any ordinary human communication… The truth is that my meeting with a person of another religion is on a much humbler basis. I do not claim to know in advance his or her ultimate destiny (Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 173-74).

He clarifies this in even greater detail in Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), chap. 14.

Because theologians of the last century and a half have decided to approach questions of religion primarily from within the inherited categories that were being developed through human reason during the last several centuries, they are beholden to the troubling characteristics of these categories seen in Chapters 2-3.[8] One of the major challenges results in categories such as animism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and even Islam is that they are so abstract as categories that they are neither universal nor particular enough; these categories cannot describe all of humanity universally because they are meant to apply to only certain portions of humanity. Yet, they are too broad and vague to apply to any given person or even a clear group of people in any detail, thus they are not categories of particularity either. This has been inherited from the Enlightenment spirit to find the universals in humanity through human reason. This led to an unrealistic forming of universals that failed to consider particularities and that continue to guide much philosophical and theological discourse.[9] This begs the question what exactly are theologians of religion talking and writing about? Often, they are primarily discussing theoretical "religions" based on their own or others interpretations of sacred texts and practices that are rarely rooted in the actual lives of people, nor are they rooted in clear universal guiding concepts of life from the Bible.

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[8] McDermott and Netland claim that, "A Christian theology of religions should offer a Christian theological understanding of the religions." McDermott and Netland, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, 227. My argument is that "the religions" do not actually describe real life entities, therefore, a theology of human life or ways of living is needed, which this dissertation is a start toward, more than a theology of religion. Henning Wrogemann's book *A Theology of Interreligious Relations* was published after I had completely the dissertation and thus I was unable to incorporate this work into the main thrust of my arguments but his overall thesis and approach is in general similar to my project, see Henning Wrogemann, *A Theology of Interreligious Relations* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2019).

[9] Jennings, The Christian Imagination, 147.

This leads into the trap of objectifying people into categories that cannot possibly describe their lived realities in any sort of meaningful way.[10] It also tends to create an "otherness" between those who do not self-identify as Christian and those who do, which is rooted in vague and abstract understandings of interpretation of sacred texts.[11] Often the language of theologians inadvertently slips into a teleological type of language of progress describing religions outside of Christianity as somewhere lower on the progressive scale. Rarely are qualities of relational life included in theological discussions of religion. The particularities of everyday life are often ignored in favor of abstract and nebulous descriptions of "religions," which are neither universal in scope nor particular in description.[12] It is better to recognize that "theology should grow where it is meant to serve a purpose—within the everyday life of a community."[13] Andrew Walls reminds theologians that, "Theology does not arise from the study or the library, even if it can be prosecuted there." He goes on to argue that it is in the throes of people's everyday

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[10] Leading to those who use the categories of "living detail" drown "in dead stereotype." Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 51.

[11] Yong points out that often criteria for discernment is inadequate. For example, it can be argued that confession of Christ is a sign of orthodoxy for a Christian. The challenge Yong asks, is how "to distinguish genuine from nominal or verbal confession of Christ"? The reality, as Yong points out, is that "the confession of the lordship of Jesus is a vague norm, requiring interpretive applications to determine if and how it can be brought to bear in discerning specific situations, events, and experiences." Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 159. Reducing theology of religions to comparison of beliefs or worldview often falls into the trap of comparing things that cannot be discerned without concrete lived examples, which then get messy, because often Christians are guilty of many of the same lived problems as people who self-identify as something other than Christian. For an intentional case of "othering" in theological discourse on religions see Strange, *Their Rock*.

[12] There appears to be a general challenge for theologians of getting caught up in "distant abstractions" that particular things of life "like food and eating" for example, "seem too mundane for theological treatment." Jung, *Food for Life*.

[13] Sedmak, Doing Local Theology, 120.

choices where theology is born and that new questions or variations of old ones are

constantly cropping up in need of careful theological reflection and engagement.[14]

There is plenty of space for going to the Bible and working with the universal

givens of Scripture. This would include taking the creation of all of humanity in the

Image of God as a starting point, then moving forward by intentionally choosing to live

within the particular elements of life God has created humans.[15] This helps in advancing

the universal into the particular ways of living found in the everyday worlds of people.[16]

Therefore, theologians should engage and learn from everyday life and allow this to be

the primary informer of their theological questions and output,[17] and applying "the Bible

to all areas of life."[18] The circle between the universals and the particularities is an

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[14] Walls, *Crossing Cultural Frontiers*, 74-75. It is true that many of the problems raised in this and the previous paragraph have been grasped by scholars who do not turn to the Bible for their solutions to the problem. But their arguments are not equal to the biblical solution in my estimation.

[15] Vanhoozer argues persuasively that, "In order to be competent proclaimers and performers of the gospel, then, Christians must learn to read the Bible and culture alike." Vanhoozer, "What Is Everyday Theology?," 35. I use the term relational life in a similar way to Vanhoozer's use of culture.

[16] While the diversity of the world is overwhelming many researchers have demonstrated that there are more than enough shared ways of living among all people, and that communication and living together are more than possible even for people from extremely diverse backgrounds. Nehrbass, *God's Image*, 142-47. See also, William A. Dyrness and Oscar García-Johnson, *Theology without Borders: An Introduction to Global Conversations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 31.

[17] "Norms for discernment, in other words, need to be applicable to the things being discerned—to the specific forms and functions of such things' spatiotemporal modality. In short, discernment is particularistic in nature, focused on specific actualities and assessing such according to the norms and criteria appropriate to them." Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 157. I would add that while different situations require different types of discernment, the Word of God has an answer or discernment, for all situations. This is why knowledge of the whole Scriptures is so important because different situations will require different portions of Scripture to bring transformation toward abundant life. Walls also sees the local as the place where all theology starts and finds its richest meaning. Walls, *The Missionary Movement*, 10. For a manifesto-style chapter on why theology must be lived, read R. Paul Stevens, *The Other Six Days: Vocation, Work, and Ministry in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), Epilogue.

[18] Vanhoozer, "What Is Everyday Theology?" 15. Vanhoozer got this phrase from one of his theology professors, yet he goes on to add that rarely was he taught how to do theology in order to apply it to everyday life. Vanhoozer thus argues that theology is best done in order to understand "how our faith is affected by the world we live in and how we are to embody our faith in shapes of everyday life." Vanhoozer, "What Is Everyday Theology?," 16.

ongoing work of the theologian with the Word of God being the constant reference point throughout the circle.[19]

The current categories of religions need to be subservient to the universal concepts of Scripture that are so plainly affirmed in the Incarnation and where they cannot align as descriptors they should be discarded. This does not mean that theologians should disregard or disrespect the ability of human beings to self-identify as a Hindu or Muslim or Buddhist, etc.[20] It should mean that theologians recognize that self-identifying markers are limited in what they actually reveal about a person.[21] There is already a universal starting point before any new encounter of individuals, namely that all are rooted in the Image of God and his love for all humanity. Theologians have the responsibility to learn from individuals and groups of people what their identities mean and look like in everyday relational life.[22] As Vanhoozer puts it, "Cultural literacy—the

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[19] Yong, in my reading, appears to argue for something similar, although he uses language that is much more philosophically sophisticated than I have. He follows C. S. Peirce's tripartite description of life in terms of "firstness," "secondness," and "thirdness."

Firstness is pure potentiality…. What we perceive directly, for instance, are greens as greens, chairs as chairs, persons as persons, or buildings as buildings…. Secondness is the element of struggle or of brute, resistant fact. It is that by which a thing is related to others…. Thirdness is what mediates between firstness and secondness…. Thirdness is the universals, laws, generalities, or habits that ensure the continuity of the process of reality (Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 133).

This is a helpful way of framing life. What I am arguing is that reliance on the categories of religions that theologians have inherited leaves a person discussing none of the these three aspects in depth but rather discussing only a little of each without a clear goal.

[20] Respect should not be misunderstood as theologians necessarily agreeing with the beliefs of any given person. Vanhoozer, "What Is Everyday Theology?," 51.

[21] As Walls reminds his readers, the Bible was not written to help its readers discern "systems" of religion. It was written for people, about people, and to help people have relational life with God and each other to the fullest. Walls, *The Missionary Movement.*

[22] This can be a complicated process that involves much patience and recognition that the factors which go into the life choices and orientations of life for each group of people and each individual are countless thus making quick judgements ill-advised. For more on this see Ante Jerončić, "Inhabiting the Kingdom: On Apocalyptic Identity and Last Generation Lifestyle," in *God's Character and the Last Generation* eds. Jiří Moskala and John C. Peckham (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2018).

ability to understand patterns and products of everyday life—is thus an integral aspect of obeying the law of love."[23] This requires theologians to foster more patience.[24] It also requires surrendering their position of self-perceived authority in which they decide who is "in" and who is "out" of the salvific circle of God.[25] Instead, theologians' focus should be on working out how abundant life is lived, and how it can be lived in more appropriate and meaningful ways around the world without turning to any given ways of living as the primary example. They should allow the Word of God to play the role of arbiter and authority.[26] This requires, as Nancy Elizabeth Bedford states that: "the process of reading Scripture begins explicitly 'not in books but in life' and allows the Bible to unlock its surplus of meaning."[27] This leads to the next sub-section on theologians' imperative need to interact with diverse ways of thinking and living as they create theological output.

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[23] Vanhoozer, "What Is Everyday Theology?," 19.

[24] Dayanand Bharati, *Living Water and Indian Bowl* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2004), 23.

[25] Most of the books that fall under the genre of "Theology of Religions" seem to be trying to figure out who is "in" and who is "out."

[26] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 308. Some have argued for "intercultural theology" which is often a similar argument to the one I am making. However, in my own construction I have largely avoided this term because it appears to work off of the idea that cultures, or in my case, ways of living, are "homogenous conceptions of culture" which the diversity of the world, even among individuals within their own spheres, deems false. There is, however, no perfect terminology and I am sure mine could be as much flawed if not more so than others. Wrogemann, *Intercultural Hermeneutics*, 352.

[27] Nancy Elizabeth Bedford, "The Most Burning of Lavas: The Bible in Latin America," in *Colonialism and the Bible: Contemporary Reflections from the Global South*, eds. Tat-siong Benny Liew and Ferndando F. Segovia (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018), 223. There will always be a tension between prioritizing the Bible or the local context. The Bible has no meaning if it is not connected to some sort of lived reality in a particular context, yet the temptation to read the Bible purely through the social location is also problematic in that the Bible needs to have the final word in order to create abundant life from God. Vanhoozer, "'One Rule to Rule Them All?'", 105.

The Implications of Diversity of Relational
Life for Theologians

When it comes to theologians interpreting the Word of God, there is an important

element of diversity that needs to be recognized and celebrated. There is also a growing

awareness that Western white males have dominated much of written theology.[28] Their

theology has typically been labeled as systematic or biblical theology—universal terms as

if to say their output is applicable everywhere for everyone. As more and more

theologians write from backgrounds other than the above, such as females, or persons

who identify as something other than white, the theology they have developed often is

labeled as contextual or feminist theology.[29] This marginalizes these theologians' work

and makes it seem as though their theological output is relegated to their own limited

context.[30] Tite Tiénou calls out such theologizing and argues that this amounts to: "the

West's

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[28] Soung-Chan Rah, The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), 18. See also Amos Yong, Renewing Christian Theology: Systematics for a Global Christianity (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 3.

[29] Tite Tinéou mounts a devastating attack on this type of "exoticizing" of contextual theology in Tite Tiénou, "Christian Theology in an Era of World Christianity," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, eds. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 45. For examples of books that could easily be labeled contextual theology, and probably are by Western theologians see Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, Rev. ed. (Delhi: ISPCK, 1975); Gerald H. Anderson, ed. *Asian Voices in Christian Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976); Bujo, *African Theology*; Peniel Rajkumar, ed. *Asian Theology on the Way: Christianity, Culture, and Context* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015); Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008). This is, of course, a minor sampling of what is currently available. I personally am grateful for the influx of theological output from around the world. But there is something disturbing about referring to something as African Christology when an African writes it and merely Christology when a Westerner writes it. It is probably best for all theologians to give some information concerning their social location and historical maturation process in order to help readers understand where their theological output is coming from and what it is in dialogue with. I have in mind here something similar to what Oscar García-Johnson and William A. Dyrness do in Dyrness and García-Johnson, *Theology without Borders*, 1-4, 23-26. See also Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism*, 78-79.

[30] García-Johnson surmises that

'hegemony postulate',[31] the West's self-perception that it is 'the center,' the perception of third world scholars as 'purveyors of exotic, raw intellectual material to people in the North,' and the 'dialogue of the deaf'[32] between the West and the rest of the world."[33]

The reality is that all theological output is reliant on a limited context—that of the social location of the author. Thus, to a certain extent all theology is contextual, which is fine as long as it's recognized as such. There is strength in recognizing this for theologians. It means that the potential pool for biblical interpretation is massive and includes a wide variety of approaches from many backgrounds.[34] This creates the potential for an immense amount of theological creativity and inter-learning much like that exemplified in Revelation 21-22. But there is more than merely recognizing all theology is contextual. Wrogemann points out that it is also important to analyze the

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this insurrection against the theological status quo has been resented in the theological establishment of the West, which usually refers to these decolonial efforts with names such as 'local theologies,' 'ethnic theologies,' 'Liberation theologies,' 'Black theologies,' 'Asian theologies,' '*mujerista* theologies,' 'indigenous theologies,' 'theologies from the margin,' 'ecotheologies,' and so forth

He continues in the next paragraph to describe how Western "classical theologies" are "referred to simply by totalizing nomenclatures: 'biblical theology, 'historical theology,' 'systematic theology,' 'Christian theology,' or simply 'theology.'" Dyrness and García-Johnson, *Theology without Borders*, 8.

[31] This is when Western theologians are willing to interact with Global South theologians only when they are willing to abide by the "theological rules" they set. This is often seen in gatherings where Western theologians dismiss Global South theologians for being "theologically" immature because they do not use the same so-called sophisticated language. Tiénou, "Christian Theology," 46-47.

[32] "Dialogue of the deaf" refers to Western theologians "bad listening skills" whereby they are more than happy to give theology to the rest of the world but appear unable to incorporate the rest of the world's theological insights. This is also a reference to the dominance of English in theological parlance. Tiénou makes a strong case that the many languages of the world are not viewed as suitable for theological discourse by Western theologians. This is easily seen in that many doctoral programs in the West continue to require students to be fluent in English and able to read in French and German as if this is what a person needs to do theology well. Tiénou, "Christian Theology," 48-49. Jennings documents the real tragedy of forcing the world to think, speak, and live in one language, namely European languages, which the colonial period has left us with. Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, chap. 5.

[33] Tiénou, "Christian Theology," 46.

[34] Local theology should empower people rather than limit the act of theologizing to a few select elite. Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology*, 127.

positions from which the theologizing comes from. In other words, what role does power play in the process of interpretations? Are certain possibilities of interpretation either overlooked or outside the purview of a person because they have marginalized others or are unaware of them because of their social location?[35] These are all valid questions that require careful reflection that should undermine any attempts at simplistic approaches to intercultural interaction.[36]

The central authority in these theological discussions should be the Bible, which alone can serve as an authoritative arbiter and meeting point. This creates a challenge when it is recognized that a majority of the world does not read the Bible or take it seriously as an authority. Then the requirement is that theologians become more missiological in mind and action.[37] They must begin doing the hard work of observing and learning from people's everyday relational lives in order to interpret local contexts. Theological interpretation from the Bible then begins in relation to the world theologians

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[35] Musa W. Dube adds to this idea when she writes,

I came to realize the sad implications of reading and living with or by stories written for me and not by me. This is a crucial issue, given that oral Sub-Saharan black African people who live in the age of the information superhighway, do not own the means of producing and disseminating information for themselves. Most of what we read about ourselves and other subjects, is not written or published by us. Moreover, it is written by people that have centuries of stereotypes about black Sub-Saharan African people (Dube, "*Batswakwa*," 155).

[36] Wrogemann, *Intercultural Hermeneutics*, 223. Kärkkäinen also pleads for theologians to be aware of resources, power, and colonizing forces as they do Christology. Kärkkäinen, *Christ and Reconciliation*, 96.

[37] To use the words of a theologian,

Theologians must strongly reject the current pedagogical schemas that separate missionary texts from theological texts, missiology from theology, both historical and systematic. The current practice of teaching systematic theology (and all its varieties—dogmatic, pastoral, and so forth—and all its historical epochs) and then of teaching missions (historically conceived) or intercultural studies or both as separate realities only slightly related may in some instances be pedagogically defensible, but ultimately it is immoral in the current situation (Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 115).

see and experience.[38] This requires that relationships be pursued by theologians among those who may not take the Bible seriously and very well may self-identify as something other than Christian. Kärkkäinen does an admirable job of attempting to bring together a variety of sources, although when it comes to living faiths he is overly reliant on sacred texts as opposed to incorporating practices and ways of living. There is nothing wrong with interacting with sacred texts, but it is best to interact with those texts that can be clearly linked to the relational life choices and experiences of people, thus prioritizing the people rather than the text.[39] It also means, "interpreting culture in light of a biblical-theological framework and, second, interpreting Scripture by embodying gospel values and truths in concrete cultural forms."[40] Some theologians have taken on this task, such as Justin S. Ukpong and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen.[41]

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[38] Vanhoozer, "What Is Everyday Theology?"

[39] Self-identifying as a Christian reveals very little about a person as this label suffers from all the same problems that the other categories of religions suffer from. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 121. Thus, even those who self-identify as Christian often have little or no interest in reading the Bible and using it as an authority for daily living. Vanhoozer, working off of Gramsci, argues that those who have the most impact on the world around them are those who leave their ivory towers and interact with people on a regular basis. Vanhoozer, 'What Is Everyday Theology?," 57.

[40] Vanhoozer, "What Is Everyday Theology?," 55.

[41] Justin S. Ukpong, "Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa: Historical and Hermeneutical Directions," in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends* eds., Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube (Boston: Brill, 2000). What follows is a methodological statement which Kärkkäinen writes at the beginning of each of his constructive theology volumes:

In order to practice well constructive theology, one has to utilize the results, insights, and materials of all other theological disciplines, that is: biblical studies, church history and historical theology, philosophical theology, as well as ministerial studies. Closely related fields of religious studies, ethics, and missiology also belong to the texture of systematic work. That alone is a tall order. But as the rest of the working definition implies, to do constructive theology well, one has to engage also nontheological and nonreligious fields such as natural sciences, cultural studies, and, as will be evident in this project, the study of living faiths (Kärkkäinen, *Christ and Reconciliation*, 13).

There are theologians in other parts of the world outside of North America and Europe engaging in a more dynamic theological interaction such as in Latin America, according to Bedford, "The Most Burning of Lavas."

There should be an openness among theologians that allows them to remain faithful to the Bible and its descriptions of relational life (as shown in the previous three Chapters), while still interacting at a deep level with people in contexts that are very different from the theologians' own ways of living.[42] For those whom they meet from differing backgrounds who take the Bible seriously theologians must also be open to alternative interpretations of Scripture that may be quite different from their own.[43] As an example, Walls ably demonstrates that the theology of the West is unable to answer many of the questions that Africans are asking about ancestors and the spirit world because this is foreign to Western theologians.[44] Therefore, openness to new problems and questions and openness to new theological answers is required.[45] Rather than dismiss them out of hand theologians must suspend judgment and develop honest discussions grounded in trust.[46] This leaves the possibility for theological growth unobstructed as well as more

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[42] Theology and doctrine is ultimately about life whether within God or between God and created beings. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 13-15.

[43] Sometimes this may even include poor interpretations, although being a theologian certainly does not make a person somehow less fallible in interpretation. Bharati, *Living Water*, 23.

[44] Part of the reason for this is because Western theologians have been steeped in an aura of human reason and have neglected "imagination" as something childish, when in fact much of the best theological work and most meaningful is imaginative. I am indebted to the work of Vanhoozer in pointing this out. Vanhoozer, "What Is Everyday Theology?," 51. See also Johnston, *God's Wider Presence*, 9.

[45] This of course goes both directions. There are issues in all places of the world and among all types of people that those from outside will struggle to understand and answer biblically without immersing themselves in a learning process. It is true, however, that in more recent history Western theologians have, for the most part, failed to listen long enough and genuinely enough for meaningful interaction to take place with a majority of the world. Walls, *Crossing Cultural Frontiers*, 68-70.

[46] Jan Hendrik Prenger points out that much of the debate surrounding Muslim's who follow Christ takes place between Western theologians but rarely includes "Muslim" followers of Jesus voices. Jan Hendrik Prenger, *Muslim Insider Christ Followers: Their Theological and Missional Frames* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2017), xix.

creative ways of living through combining and expanding humanity's understanding of

relationships with God and with each other.[47]

It is often assumed that a person should either be very fearful of the "others" faith

and thus avoid it or be open to reading their sacred texts and interacting with these texts.

What appears to be forgotten are the people themselves who identify as those who look to

authorities for life other than the Bible.[48] Too often the categories themselves stand in

place of actual people and thus theologians get stuck talking about abstract ideas rather

than dealing with real people and their real ways of living. Putting aside the categories

does not preclude the need to respect people's self-identity and learn what that means to

them. Rather, it allows space for learning directly from people—how they view life and

live it and why. From there it is much easier and more appropriate to build relationships

between persons, rather than primarily seeing the interaction between a Christian and a

Buddhist, Muslim, atheist, animist, etc. This goes against the grain of society as portrayed

in the media of the world today and against the categories themselves which were

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[47] Vanhoozer argues that to understand cultural discourse a person needs to be able to understand and appreciate life at different levels. I agree, but this cannot happen without a deep trust between people. Vanhoozer, "What Is Everyday Theology?" 47. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 319. Western theologians dismissive attitude toward theological questions and output from the rest of the world is located in an imperial past and present that allows such dismissiveness. Dyrness and García-Johnson, *Theology without Borders*, 5.

[48] This is part of the reason why focusing on local settings is important. When theology is done with local settings in mind it will also have local people in mind that become the focus of interaction, including God, rather than abstractions of people or systems of belief. Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology*, 97.

originally intended to separate people into different groups for a reason.[49]

The Incarnation of Jesus is a reminder that the best theology is done in a particular context with particular ways of life being addressed from the Word of God—which is universal in scope but diverse in interpretation and application.[50] It must be remembered that "those who have been classified…do not forget that they have been classified, while those who belong to and dwell in the memories that made possible the classification often forget."[51] This requires taking seriously the servanthood nature of the Incarnation whereby theology is done from a place of humility and weakness. Anglo-European male theologians[52] need to consider fading into the background in order for the history of power-dominance found in the colonialist endeavor, as well as in the

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[49] See Chapter 2 of this dissertation. This means looking for people and literature that can help the theologian gain a better understanding of actual ways of living. An example of such literature is John O'Brien, *Keeping It Halal: The Everyday Lives of Muslim American Teenage Boys* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017). In this book O'Brien attempts to draw attention to the everyday lives of a segment of the population in the United States who self-identify as Muslim. In the process he argues that while these young men are Muslims, and that their definition of this affects their daily life, they are also teenagers in America which probably has even more effect on their lives than being Muslim. This demonstrates the challenge of dealing with actual people who do not fit the stereotypes they are often placed in. O'Brien, *Keeping It Halal*, x, xxi. O'Brien draws on the work of Wayne Brekhus who theorized that much of social life occurs in "unmarked" way, which refers to the most common everyday ways of living among a group of people. These "unmarked" ways of living however, do not get nearly as much coverage as the "marked" which is often made up of the unusual ways of living or acting. An example being the media covering only extreme Muslims thus leaving most non-Muslims with an impression of Muslims that is strictly through the "marked" version rather than the far more common "unmarked" version. Wayne Brekhus, "A Sociology of the Unmarked: Redirecting Our Focus," *Sociological Theory* 16, no. 1 (1998).

[50] For an example of how theologians can better engage in this type of theologizing see Wagner Kuhn and Andrew Tompkins, "Theology on the Way: Hermeneutics from and for the Frontline," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 12, no. 1 (2016).

[51] Mignolo, *The Darker Side*, 45. Mignolo goes on to add concerning the quote above, "The observation is relevant on several counts. It helps in countering current universalistic claims that differences shall be forgotten because we, humans, are all equal."

[52] I realize this is "essentializing" language that I have elsewhere warned against. But in this case it is meant to point out very real and problematic realities of one type of group dominating theological discourse that needs to be called out in order to move in a new direction. This is not meant to say that all Anglo-White European theologians have produced "bad" theology, rather that they have produced "theology" that would be greatly enhanced and possibly altered if done within a framework where a wider representation of social locations was taken seriously.

dominance of males over females, to be overcome and replaced with a more appropriate

model of doing theology together.[53] Much of theology has been written answering

questions stemming from Western settings or out of Greek philosophical issues. There is

no reason to limit theology to such a narrow field of enquiry.[54] Humbly approaching the

questions of the wider world is imperative for all theologians.[55] This is the way of the

Incarnation and it takes seriously the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God represented

unmistakably in Revelation 21-22, as a place where no group of humanity dominates.[56]

Theologians and the Cosmic Conflict

While theologians must be open to everyday life from a wide variety of angles

and backgrounds, and must suspend judgment of these ways of life, this should not lead

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[53] Jennings is painfully clear of the serious problems he has seen and faced in the theological academy due to a lack of recognition from White theologians toward those who are not. Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 7. This means taking seriously the scathing rebuke of people such as Native American scholar and theologian Tink Tinker who problematizes the whole missiological enterprise of White North Americans from a Native Americans perspective. Tinker, "The Romance and Tragedy," 27. While some are of the opinion that White dominated "colonialism" and "paternalism" are a thing of the past, there is plenty of evidence to the contrary, see Waldrop and Corky, "Salvation History," 122. Ramachandra has written scathingly, but appropriately, on this issue, see Ramachandra, "Response 3," 310. I am an Anglo-European male and so I write this to myself and to a specific audience. I recognize that there are other issues of power and struggles with biblical interpretation and domination that do not include Anglo-European males. These I leave for other researchers to uncover and discuss. For an example see Kenneth Ngwa, "Postwar Hermeneutics: Bible and Colony-Related Necropolitics," in *Colonialism and the Bible: Contemporary Reflections from the Global South*, eds. Tat-siong Benny Liew and Fernando F. Segovia (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018). Ngwa includes elements that are connected to the all-to-real history of European colonization in Africa, but his focus is on African politics and uses of the Bible after independence and primarily among Africans.

[54] Scott Sunquist, "World Christianity Transforming Church History," in *World Christianity: Perspectives and Insights*, eds. Jonathan Y. Tan and Anh Q. Tran (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016), 29.

[55] When I write that Anglo-European theologians may need to fade into the background this does not mean fade out. There is still a role for them, and all others to play. This includes the rich history of theological thinking produced by white males over the centuries. Dyrness and García-Johnson, *Theology without Borders*, 28. But there is a place for stepping aside and spending more time listening and empowering than dictating.

[56] Those who are promoting the idea of incarnational mission need to be much more cognizant of issues of power through wealth and security than has historically been the case. Langmead, *The Word Made Flesh*, 135.

to a naivety in theological evaluation. Avoiding the use of categories of religions as primary descriptors of people is not meant to imply that relativism rules the day. Instead, it should imply that from the human angle we cannot make clear decisions as to which ways of living are more biblically appropriate and bring abundant life without first allowing time to interact with people and their ways of living.[57]

This earth is still wrapped in a cosmic conflict that will continue until Jesus comes again. Therefore, a healthy suspicion is always necessary in the work of the theologian as they process their own ways of living and those of others in dialogue with the text of Scripture. Taking seriously the ongoing work of Satan and his followers will help theologians recognize that they should not have too high a view of another person's way of living nor their own way of living, because at some level it is corrupted and needs correction.[58] The reality is that we need people from various backgrounds and social location to help one another to see the ways of living that lead to death. Often those living

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[57] There are of course exceptions to this when a person has a clear understanding that an action or process is not from God and should be avoided even if they have not had the time to build a relationship with someone. Child rape would be an example of such an action; this is never going to bring life more abundantly, no matter the background or social location of a person.

[58] Often the areas of life that need the most theological attention and analysis leading to change are not within the so-called "religious" sphere of life but rather the many other everyday aspects of life that have become "the altars where we worship" to use the title of a book on this issue. Floyd-Thomas, Floyd-Thomas, and Toulouse, *The Altars*.

in ways that lead to death are blind to their own faults.[59] This is true of all the elements of

living found in Genesis 1-3,[60] thus theologians cannot avoid evil or its consequences in

their discussions and must rely heavily on the Holy Spirit and people on a similar life

journey with Jesus to help them see where Satan and his followers are leading them

astray toward death.[61]

At the same time, the light of Life has gone out to all people in some form. Thus,

theologians must also keep an eye open for ways of living that reflect the light of Life.[62]

Categories of religions must not be allowed to preempt the potential for seeing light and

life in people's ways of living relationally simply because people self-identify as

something other than Christian.[63] If theologians allow Satan or darkness the power to

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[59] Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 149-50. More work needs to be done on creating frameworks that can help diverse groups of theologians analyze and understand contexts in order to better interact and interpret life, with the guidance of the Spirit. See Appendix A for Vanhoozer's list of "Guidelines for Everyday Theological Interpretation of Culture" as a starting point. Strange proposes the following, which I am not advocating but merely quoting here as another possible alternative approach. "From the presupposition of an epistemologically authoritative biblical revelation, non-Christian religions are sovereignly directed, variegated and dynamic, collective human idolatrous responses to divine revelation behind which stand demonic deceiving forces." Strange, *Their Rock*, 42. While I believe there are demonic forces drawing people away from God, I do not think it is wise to generally equate supposed "world religions" with demonic forces, rather interacting with smaller entities of actual people is the best approach to discover where demonic influences are active. Another major concern I have with Strange's statement is it basically credits God, in his sovereignty, with creating "religions" which are influenced by demons. This is a recurring theme throughout his book and appears to go against the free will presupposition that this dissertation is working within.

[60] I reiterate that the list of elements of life found in Genesis 1-3 is meant to serve as an example and is not meant to be comprehensive.

[61] This is tricky and requires time because often Satan parades around as an angel of light. Therefore distinctions between abundant life and death may be difficult to discern (2 Cor 11:14). Vanhoozer writes, "The world is a theater of action, not simply contemplation; a theater of operations in which a cosmic war is being fought on many cultural fronts. The drama of doctrine therefore involves the struggle over how best to perform one's discipleship." Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 59.

[62] Johnston states it thus: "Christian theology is best done with the "Bible" in one hand and the "newspaper" in the other." Johnston, *God's Wider Presence*, 173.

[63] Dyrness, *Insider Jesus*, 42. I am of the opinion that in this area Dyrness is a bit optimistic concerning the work of the Spirit in all cultures, his work would have benefited from a stronger emphasis on the cosmic conflict and what that means for ways of living everywhere.

reach around the world, surely they must afford even more power to God through his Spirit.[64] More balance is needed and this can be aided by focusing on actual people and their ways of living; recognizing that Satan is attempting to spread darkness and death, and God is attempting to spread light and life within all aspects of relational living.[65]

Relational Life and Mission to the "Religions"

The difference between theology and missiology should be seen as fuzzy. Therefore, I am reluctant to have separate sections for theologians and missiologists. Yet there is value in creating separate headings, not so much to differentiate between the task of a theologian and a missiologist, but to clarify different kinds of issues that are raised by the deconstruction of the current categories of religions and reconstruction of the concept of relational life found previously in this dissertation. This section will reiterate several things that have already been stated as well as add a few new thoughts to the discussion. A basic statement can be given here that frames the rest of this Chapter. While the Enlightenment influenced history of describing life has resulted in the superficial separation of culture and religion this project proceeds without this bifurcation

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[64] Johnston's book attempts to argue for something along these lines, although with a limited discussion on the role of Satan. His goal is to help readers see that the Spirit's work is wide and continuous and that people should actively look for the Spirit's working in the everyday elements of life. Johnston, *God's Wider Presence*.

[65] Wrogemann recognizes the need for balance but does not have a robust understanding of the cosmic conflict, as found in Scripture, to ground this balance. Wrogemann, *Intercultural Hermeneutics*, 335.

because the Bible does not clearly contain this dichotomy in life.[66]

Openness to the Spirit of God Among All People

There is now plenty of documentation to support the idea that God is appearing in

dreams and visions to people around the world in places where institutional Christianity

has struggled to take root.[67] These groups include people who self-identify as Muslim,

Hindu, Buddhist, Native American, etc.[68] These real people are journeying forward in life

toward God, exploring his Word in dialogue with their lives. While many of these people

are not turning toward institutional Christianity, or even the term Christianity for

identification, they are definitely attempting to follow Jesus as best they can in their

situations.[69] There are two implications to this that are important for missiological

thinking.

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[66] Tennent is to be commended for advocating for a more inclusive and worldwide theological interaction he is also apparently still working within this bifurcation as noted in Chapter 3 and in his book Timothy C. Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity: How the Global Church Is Influencing the Way We Think About and Discuss Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007). Dyrness has pointed this out in Dyrness, *Insider Jesus*, 61. I put this here to remind readers that it is very difficult to move outside the inherited categories even when it is demonstrated they are problematic. Other authors who see tremendous overlap between the categories but continue to argue for their separation include McDermott and Netland, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, 206. At the same time McDermott and Netland recognize that clarifying the difference is extremely complex and defies any easy definitions. They are especially suspect of the trend among some theologians and missiologists to regard "cultural" aspects of life as neutral or good and "religious" aspects, outside of Christianity, as bad. McDermott and Netland, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, 208. I am suspect of this type of approach as well.

[67] David Garrison, A Wind in the House of Islam: How God Is Drawing Muslims around the World to Faith in Jesus Christ (Monument, CO: Wingate, 2014).

[68] Notice the way Waldrop and Alexander, Jr. articulate this among Native Americans: "The Great Missionary Spirit of God has been present among Native peoples in this part of the world long before any of our European ancestors arrived here. Following the lead of the Spirit, then, we must find ways to affirm and appreciate the beauty of the arts and traditions, the integrity of the worldviews, and the value of material culture in the defense of the interests of both Native American peoples and of the Gospel we seek to proclaim and live." Waldrop and Alexander, Jr., "Salvation History," 112.

The first, is that this should not be much of a surprise to the follower of God who takes the Bible seriously.[70] There is a host of narrative examples of similar types of occurrence in Scripture.[71] The Spirit of God, which endowed humanity with a relational longing for God and each other, has sent his light which is life to all humanity.[72] Therefore, it should not be a surprise to find the Spirit of God at work around the world in diverse situations. One reason some Christians have struggled to accept this reality is

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[69] The history of movements towards Jesus and the Bible are numerous in history. Below is a list of sources that detail some of the recent movements which deserve further reflection. Unfortunately, most of these movements have received little or no serious interaction from Western theologians. I have listed the sources by regions of the world they occur in. For an introduction see Sunquist, "World Christianity," 32.
   Africa: David B. Barrett, Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements (Nairobi, Kenya: Oxford University Press, 1968); Dyrness, Insider Jesus, 75-80; Clarke, African Christology.
   India: Herbert E. Hoefer, Churchless Christianity (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2001); Bharati, Living Water; Dasan Jeyaraj, Followers of Christ Outside the Church in Chennai, India: A Socio-Historical Study of a Non-Church Movement (Zoetermeer, Netherlands: Boekencentrum Academic, 2010); Darren Todd Duerksen, Ecclesial Identities in a Multi-Faith Context: Jesus Truth-Gatherings (Yeshu Satsangs) among Hindus and Sikhs in Northwest India (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015).
   Southeast Asia: Dyrness, Insider Jesus, 90-99; Paul E. DeNeui, "A Typology of Approaches to Thai Folk Buddhists," in Appropriate Christianity, ed. Charles H. Kraft (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2005).
   North America: Johnston, God's Wider Presence, 22; Richard Twiss, Rescuing the Gospel from the Cowboys: A Native American Expression of the Jesus Way (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015).
   Muslim followers of Jesus have received the most treatment in this regard and span many different regions.
   The literature is too vast to cite all of it but what follows is a sampling: Prenger, Muslim Insider Christ Followers; John Dudley Woodberry, ed. From Seed to Fruit: Global Trends, Fruitful Practices, and Emerging Issues among Muslims, 2nd ed. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2010); Garrison, A Wind in the House of Islam; Talman and Travis, Understanding Insider Movements.

[70] Yet, as Dyrness reminds his readers, it does seem to not only surprise people but deeply trouble them. Dyrness, Insider Jesus, 2. For an example of someone who is concerned, though still able to engage in a meaningful dialogue see Coleman, A Theological Analysis. What is noticeably absent from Coleman's otherwise useful study is a discussion of the categories of religions. These are simply understood to be obvious and real entities.

[71] For some examples in the Old Testament see Andrew J. Tompkins, "God's Mission to the Nations and Hindus: Three Old Testament Narrative Models" (MA Thesis, Andrews University, 2013); Andrew Tompkins, God's Mission to the Nations: An Old Testament Study Applied in the Hindu Context (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2015). See also Johnston, God's Wider Presence, chaps. 4-5.

[72] Newbigin, The Open Secret, 183.

that they are stuck in the categories of religions they have inherited, which are not rooted

in Scripture.[73] Therefore, many theologians and missiologists feel it is not possible for a

person outside the Christian category to have a meaningful relationship with God unless

they first come into contact with a Christian.[74] This puts too much power into the

categories themselves and takes it away from the Spirit.[75] The category Christian actually

contains no power, however, the actual person who follows Jesus can share the light of

life. That light can be found just as easily among other people in varying degrees.

Followers of Jesus must then expect to find the work of the Spirit active wherever they go

and with whom they interact, no matter what these persons self-identify as.[76]

The second issue is rooted in the first. If those who follow Jesus and take the

Bible as their sole relational authority were to put aside the categories of religions that are

currently available and take seriously Scripture's more holistic description of life as a

guide to how they should interact with people, many current barriers to relational living

between those who self-identify as something other than Christian and those who follow

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[73] Dyrness, *Insider Jesus*, 36-37.

[74] This is a result of the faulty understanding that God's work in Christ can be conflated with Christianity. Dyrness, *Insider Jesus*, 120.

[75] This phenomenon is not seen only among those who self-identify as a Hindu, Buddist, Muslim, etc. It is also about people encountering the Spirit in everyday experiences outside of church walls and outside of "Christian" influencers. For more on this, see Johnston, *God's Wider Presence*.

[76] Yong, who has emphasized the pneumatological, argues for something similar:

the Holy Spirit—pneumatology—draws on the conviction that God is present and active in the world and that such presence and activity is understood through the symbol of the Holy Spirit. Pneumatology thereby attempts to account for divine presence and agency in the world, understood comprehensively to include its natural, cultural, social, institutional, and interpersonal dimensions. The Christian belief that God is no respecter of persons—regardless of race or ethnicity, gender, social standing, religious affiliation, or geographical location—and that the Holy Spirit is being poured out universally means that whatever else we as human beings might be up to, we do not live apart from the Spirit of God nor can we escape the Spirit's presence and activity (Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 131).

See also Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 175.

Jesus would break down.[77] This does not mean that those who follow Jesus are open to all paths leading to the same place or other types of pluralism.[78] Rather it means that the relational focus of living comes before the categories and does not allow them to preempt the possibility of relationship by creating false senses of "otherness" that cannot be relationally crossed in a deep and meaningful way. It is worth quoting Rynkiewich at length here:

> The critical issue is not to be able to find a category in which to force the people you meet in a local context, but to discover how the people in the village or city where you live identify that person, how they function in society, and how God may or may not be working through them. The categories are not mutually exclusive, as more than one kind of practice might be carried out by the same person, and what seems like one practice might have different functions in different societies.[79]

This leads to the next sub-heading of this Chapter.

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[77] I want to be clear that this dissertation is not meant to answer the thorny questions of ecclesiology that many have raised in light of new movements towards Jesus around the world. I believe strongly in the concept of the church as presented in the New Testament. However, I think that if we are careful with how we use categories of religions it may require reflection on the relationship between the category of Christianity and the fact that it is often used synonymously with the term church. This is not necessarily a New Testament concept and very well may need to be rethought. Certainly, all who choose to follow Jesus should do whatever is in their power to meet with other believers in Jesus who turn to the Word of God as a final authority. Whether or not they have to call themselves Christian, in light of the issue's categories of religions, may need to be asked. For an attempt to raise some of these issues see J. Paul Pennington, *Christian Barriers to Jesus: Conversations and Questions from the Indian Context* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2017). I am often not comfortable with the interpretation of biblical passages used in this book, but it does raise questions that are being asked by many in India which deserve further reflection.

[78] People who defend the idea that religious differences are not that important or are really the same at the core are creating a new hegemonic understanding of the world that negates real differences to fit within the pluralists framework. The categories of religions have often played into this scenario simply by creating the illusion that all "religions" are actually similar, when in fact people can believe and do things that are vastly different in meaning and actual consequences, thus it is possible that ways of living are not compatible and that some are worse than others. Stone, *Evangelism after Pluralism*, 108-09.

[79] Rynkiewich, Soul, Self, and Society, 142.

Focusing on the Particular Ways of Living
While Applying the Universals

At several points in this dissertation the idea of the universal and the particular has come up. How this issue is approached can have major implications for how people who follow Jesus think about their role in mission.

Based on the previous Chapters on relational life as found in Genesis 1-3, John 1:1-18, and Revelation 20-22, the particulars of everyday life need to become the focus of those partnering with God in mission. This does not negate the universal aspects of each of those narratives above. The foundation for mission is rooted in the love of God that resulted in the creation of all humanity in his image. Therefore, all mission must put aside any category that preempts the fact that humanity is made in God's image. Mission must also be rooted in the universal love of God seen most clearly in the Incarnation of Jesus, which includes the life he lived, his death, and resurrection. These provide the means for grace that can lead to abundant life for all people. Finally, mission is also rooted in the hope of universal change which will take place in the future through the power of God when he re-creates this world in his perfect love, which is available to all people who desire to live eternally with God. These are the universals that drive people who have experienced Jesus' love toward sharing the light which leads to abundant life with all people.

While these universals are what mission is rooted in, they cannot serve as the primary locus of mission. This is found in the diverse particular ways of living found

around the world.[80] This places mission within the reality of everyday life where relationships are actually formed and relational life, as portrayed in Scripture, can take place.[81] As Shanta Premawardhana puts it, "Missionaries, representatives of the church with their feet on the ground are the ones most attentive to where creation is in need of mending."[82] I believe Nilüfer Göle is correct in stating that, "A people's style or culture is not defined by its transformations as a whole, but by the microscopic changes that occur in the details, in ways of doing, thinking, living, dressing, connecting, and being together."[83] This means those partnering with God in mission are focused on applying the universals of God's love into the elements of everyday relational life in particular situations among particular people. Much of this will be based on the "phenomenal appearances" that are more concrete. Often discussions of transformation and worldview get bogged down in "deeper layers" or "underlying assumptions." People are limited to some extent to the phenomenal world, which according to Genesis 1-2, most aspects of life includes visible and experiential forms that coincide with the relationality of life. To continually discuss deeper and deeper layers of a person often tends to deemphasize the

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[80] While the idea or concept of bounded cultures was never as true as anthropologists made it seem in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century it is even less true today. There is hardly a person on the globe that does not experience significant influence from a boggling amount of sources coming from vastly different social locations, as O'Brien puts it, people are living "culturally contested lives." O'Brien, *Keeping it Halal*, 10-11.

[81] For a short review of why the particular and local setting is primary in relation to mission, see J. Jayakiran Sebastian, "Evoking the Bible at a Funeral in an Indian-Christian Community," in *Colonialism and the Bible: Contemporary Reflections from the Global South*, eds. Tat-siong Benny Liew and Fernando F. Segovia (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018), 191-92.

[82] Shanta Premawardhana, "Jamestown and the Future of Mission: Mending Creation and Claiming Full Humanity in Interreligious Partnership," in *Remembering Jamestown: Hard Questions About Christian Mission*, eds. Amos Yong and Barbara Brown Zikmund (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), 130.

[83] This is not written in the context of mission, but rather is meant to describe how Muslims in Europe have changed in a variety of ways, not as a whole which is beyond definition, but in small ways of living here and there. Göle, *The Daily Lives of Muslims*, 11. I believe that it accurately describes both what happens in life and what should be the focus of mission in the particular.

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parts of life that humans actually live in the everyday.[84] This means finding "meaning in things that have never before been important, much less sacred."[85]

Genesis 1-2 provides a glimpse of what relational life was meant to include and what constitutes the life of a human made in the Image of God. But there are not many details as to exactly how relational life should look in each element, allowing a sense of freedom here that mission must take account of. Those who are sharing the love of God as they have experienced and learned it must recognize the immense potential for diverse ways of living found from the beginning of Creation, and thus they should be open to seeing many different positive ways of living in right relationship with God and each other.[86] This particularity and diversity is affirmed in the very act of God Incarnating into a particular place and time as a particular person. This did not universalize life in Palestine, rather it affirmed particular ways of living without becoming uniform throughout the earth, a model that can reflect the Image of God and remain diverse. This is also affirmed in the New Earth which is a model for how we should order our lives now. While the idea that missions should focus on the particular may seem obvious and simplistic, there is a reason why I have emphasized this focus.

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[84] While it is true that assumptions and philosophies correlate and influence ways of living, the access to these assumptions is through the phenomenal and requires extended periods of time and interaction to be able to discern. Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 153.

[85] Elizabeth Dodson Gray, "Introduction," in *Sacred Dimensions of Women's Experience*, ed. Elizabeth Dodson Gray (Wellesley, MA: Roundtable Press, 1988), 2.

[86] Peckham has made a statement that is relevant here, "I am not confident about what degree of consequentiality is required for genuine love relationship, but I am confident that God knows and grants whatever degree is required for the flourishing of love." Peckham, *Theodicy of Love*, 44. I would add that love manifests itself in diverse ways and it may not always be clear how, when, and what love looks like in any given situation without careful reflection over time.

It has been demonstrated above that categories of religions are neither universal enough in scope nor particular enough to describe any real ways of living.[87] Therefore, they cannot serve as mission-defining categories.[88] This means that mission concepts and strategies which utilize these categories will fall into several traps. First some mission entities tend to spend time and resources studying and training people to understand religions as primarily sets of belief or overarching concepts, hoping they can then be engaged in mission.[89] This takes out the human element and reduces people to belief systems and stereotypical descriptions that can be more harmful than helpful. There is a tendency for Christian mission trainers to think they know what Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and animism is, and thus think they know what is wrong with those groups

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[87] Netland seems to grasp this concept when he discusses a particular Japanese tradition known as *mikoshi*, whereby a shrine, which has traditionally been understood to hold spirits, is carried about during a festival while people crowd around. His argument is that attempting to understand whether or not the tradition of *mikoshi* is cultural or religious will not resolve anything. He argues that *mikoshi* has changed over time and the meaning and purpose is different for people now than before. Therefore, Netland argues, that what is important is whether or not the tradition "facilitates or hinders individuals or communities in becoming mature disciples of Jesus Christ." McDermott and Netland, *A Trinitarian Theology*, 210-11. I find Netland's analysis interesting because it seems to contradict, to some extent, his push to understand the categories of religions as highly useful and appropriate both within this same book and in his stand-alone publication Netland, *Christianity and Religious Diversity*.

[88] While Geertz was obviously not writing with mission or theology in mind he makes a statement that is appropriate here:

We must, in short, descend into detail, past the misleading tags, past the metaphysical types, past the empty similarities to grasp firmly the essential character of not only the various cultures but the various sorts of individuals within each culture, if we wish to encounter humanity face to face. In this area the road to the general…lies through a concern with the particular (Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 53).

[89] Take for example Islam. There are dozens of Christian universities teaching courses on Islam for the purpose of mission outreach to Muslims. How many of those courses are guilty of establishing an essentialized definition of Islam that fails to take seriously the overwhelming diversity of Islam as presented in Göle, *The Daily Lives of Muslims*. This book alone reveals that you could not possibly hope to teach a course on Islam that can properly equip a student to build meaningful relationships with all Muslims. Clifford Geertz undermined this kind of thinking decades ago when he accurately wrote that a condition of "cultural theory," which is any attempt to define how people live, is not "predictive." Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 26. Much of mission training moves forward with the assumption that if you understand people you will then know how to "convert" them. This of course is the complete opposite of what Geertz argued because it relies on ways of living being static and thus predictive which they are conclusively not.

and what they need to change.[90] This tends to dehumanize people and turn them into concepts of religion. This can be found in rhetoric used in books on mission towards a religion as if it is a living entity rather than actual people who may or may not fit the definitions of any given religion.[91] This is also evident in language that reduces people to being "unreached,"[92] "targets"[93] or "other" who need to become one of "us," whoever "us" may be.[94] This fails to either apply the universals or take seriously the particulars of everyday life that most humans live regardless of what they self-identify as.[95]

Missiological literature and training events should move away from using the current categories of religions as primary guides in mission thinking in order to figure out

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[90] What Christians often forget is that they are also easy to be labeled in broad strokes by those who are not Christian. It is also best to stop comparing the best of so-called "Christianity" with the worst ways of living among other people such as equating Muslims with terrorists, Buddhists as mind emptying sages, Hindus as polytheistic idol worshippers, animists as African witch doctors, etc. A stark reminder of the possible counter accusations can be seen in the witch trials of Ghana whereby predominately Christian-led groups treat other humans in heinous ways.

[91] For a typical example of this see Halverson, *The Compact Guide to World Religions*. In the end the generalization and essentialization of religions into categories, often ending in "ism" though not always, are "empty concepts" and thus of little use for mission and theological thinking. Dyrness, *Insider Jesus*, 102.

[92] The concept of the "unreached" has relied on definitions of ethnicity that are questionable at best, harmful at worst. Peter T. Lee and James Sung-Hwan Park have written an article that dismantles the concept of "unreached people groups" systematically from both the biblical and sociological/anthropological perspective. Peter T. Lee and James Sung-Hwan Park, "Beyond People Group Thinking: A Critical Reevaluation of Unreached People Groups," *Missiology* 46, no. 3 (2018). See also Nehrbass, *God's Image*, 71. In light of the Spirit's universal work this term also begs additional questions about what does it mean to "reach" a person?

[93] There is other terminology such as "winning souls" that invoke a kind of violent taking or overcoming of people much like the term "target" invokes. This is far from the language of persuasion through love that Jesus demonstrated in his sojourn on earth. Bharati, *Living Water*, 1.

[94] Twiss argues persuasively that Native Americans have never been accepted as equal participants in the *missio Dei* but are continually viewed as "unreached" peoples. Twiss, "Living in Transition," 103-04.

[95] Stone also recognizes an element of control and power in the move away from particulars when he writes, "One of the characteristic features of empire throughout history, for example, is the way it tends to devalue the particularity of peoples and of places." Bryan Stone, "The Ecclesiality of Mission in the Context of Empire," in *Walk Humbly with the Lord: Church and Mission Engaging Plurality*, eds. Viggo Mortensen and Andreas Østerlund Nielsen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 109.

how to "convert" people. The focus must instead be on particular situations and people, and how they live in everyday life. This requires a truthful attitude toward diversity among people who claim the same self-identity.[96] Over-reliance on the inherited categories will inevitably lead to the same old problems of objectification in the same direction that secular uses of the categories lead. Missiologists run a high risk of dehumanizing people and turning them into religious objects to be changed or altered— much like the trap of racialized categories. Once inside the trap, missiologists revert to offensive and hegemonic language and strategies in tone and action.[97] If missiologists succumb to the trap, they can then be accused of operating within a "diseased" paradigm that creates nearly uncrossable barriers between groups of people.[98] Arguing that this is a matter of semantics is a weak argument in light of the fact that the categories are often used in rhetorics of violence and "othering" that has real everyday consequences for life.[99] Those conducting mission training and writing on mission should do their best to focus on understanding particular ways of living found throughout the world regardless of

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[96] Nehrbass, *God's Image*, 47.

[97] One way to approach this issue is to test the language used to describe a certain group of people, or meant to inspire others in mission among a certain group of people. Ask the question if someone was physically present representing that group would you feel comfortable using the same language in front of that person?

[98] I use the term diseased in a similar way as Jennings uses it, Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 6, 233. This has been the experience of many who self-identify as Hindu and have come to a loving relationship with God but were either forced to abandon all ways of living that they previously had or were condemned for not becoming explicitly Christian, which often meant adopting a Western version of Christianity rather than simply being a devoted follower of Jesus. For one person's biographical account of this experience and what they believe it means for mission thinking see Bharati, *Living Water*.

[99] I refer to "othering" here in the same sense that Wrogemann does. "The term othering was coined to describe how people classify the world according to a binary code, i.e., when people consciously or unconsciously dissociate themselves from others by simultaneously stylizing both themselves and others." Wrogemann, *Intercultural Hermeneutics*, 349.

categories.[100] This method recognizes that the whole world deserves a chance to hear and experience a fuller understanding of God's love. People deserve a chance to live in new and creative ways rooted in the God who created everyone in his image, Incarnated, died, and resurrected for all humanity, and will re-create the whole world for all people who desire to have eternal life.[101]

Allow the Categories of Life to Come from the Bible

The core of humanity is the Image of God but this does not negate the real differences between individuals and groups of people. As those who are followers of Jesus share the Good News with others around them they must respect the freedom people have to self-identify. This means that the identifying markers such as Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, etc., should be respected. And it must not be assumed that when a person self-describes using these category markers that the listener actually

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[100] Toward the end of his life Paul Hiebert began writing about missionaries, not so much as going from one place to another in order to contextualize, but rather to be "inbetweeners" with the express purpose of bringing together different ways of seeing and living in the world in order to create a better understanding of who God is. Paul G. Hiebert, "The Missionary as Mediator of Global Theologizing," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, eds. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 297.

[101] This is where the social sciences may continue to serve as helping hands in the understanding of each other. There is a place for studying the ways people live. There is a tension when those who are trying to follow God also try to objectively learn about people. Rynkiewich describes this tension,

without participation, observation deceives us; without observation, participation is meaningless. There is no way out, no objective place on which to stand disconnected and hope to understand. So, the anthropologist and the missiologist make an epistemological choice: to participate while observing, and to observe while participating in order to have the best chance of understanding the meaning, feeling the emotions, and discerning the values of an event (Rynkiewich, *Soul, Self, and Society*, 245).

It seems theologians need to be doing something similar according to Vanhoozer. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 307. For an argument in favor of the continued use of anthropology, albeit a "chastened anthropology," in mission and theology see Darrell L. Whiteman, "Anthropological Reflections on Contextualizing Theology in a Globalizing World," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, eds. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006).

knows what those describing themselves mean by their self-identifier based on the

listener's reading about or hearing about Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc. Rather the

listener humbly accepts the identifier but continues to pursue a relationship that will then

allow the person's identity, as believed and practiced in daily life, to emerge. And that

identity may be very different from others who use the same self-identifying marker.

By allowing time and relational life to be the primary way of learning about a

person's life and beliefs much misconception and stereotyping can be avoided.[102] It also

allows for a deeper understanding of a person's actual struggles and joys in life which

can lead to shared living in a more meaningful way.[103] It is within this lived space that the

Word of God can speak into and shine light through the actions and words of the follower

of Jesus, which are then relevant to the elements of life rather than abstract

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[102] I realize some of my arguments could lead a person to believe that beliefs or the cognitive aspects of a person, including their ability to reason are not that important. This is not what I am trying to get across, rather I believe that these have been overstated at the expense of other aspects of life and thus need to be rebalanced. I do believe that beliefs and shared ways of thinking impact the world and how people live day to day. There is no doubt that the mere physicality of the world is limited on what it can tell us. Instead we need to see the physicality and try to understand how people think and interact with that physicality as it relates to their understanding and actual relationship with God and each other. But it is important to be aware we in the West have elevated the "cognitive" aspects of life and made all other elements inferior to it, which is not how much of the world approaches life. It may be that much of the discussions in missions and theology around the term "worldview" are also working from this paradigm, but that is beyond the scope of this project. Dyrness, *Insider Jesus*, 12. Back in 1973 Geertz was pointing out this problem among analyzers of culture, see Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*.

[103] There is an ugly history within Western philosophy that has typically attempted to force those from "outside" to think like those "inside" rather than allowing people to "be where they think." Mignolo, *The Darker Side*, 94.

understandings of religion.[104] This means eating together, knowing the first language of others,[105] building long-term relationships in shared space and time, being aware of the meaning of clothing and dress,[106] and demonstrating work and rest within the lives, no matter what they self-identify as.[107]

While a person could argue that people can do the above and have done it without reference to the Bible I argue the Bible provides a unique foundation that no other text or

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[104] The lived space includes beliefs. But it is not limited to cerebral discussions or comparisons of beliefs but attempts to see how beliefs and daily life intermingle. Often this will reveal that it is not so much the "system of beliefs" or sacred texts that are the primary movers but rather other life factors that include beliefs that shape a person's life. Floyd-Thomas, Floyd-thomas, and Toulouse, *The Altars*, 187. All too often missiologists and theologians reduce people to beliefs, but the Bible does not present humans or life as merely beliefs at their core. For an example of a missiologist reducing humans to "religious beliefs" see Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today*, 290.

[105] While missiologists have recognized the importance of learning the language of others for some time, theologians are much slower to incorporate this in the doing of theology. Tiénou is correct in arguing that theologians should be actively learning contemporary spoken languages from the Global South in order to understand and incorporate theology from a wider perspective. Tiénou, "Christian Theology," 50.

[106] Saracino has advised asking the following two questions regarding choices in clothing. "Are they life-giving? Are they death-dealing?" Saracino, *Clothing*, 62. Sanneh tells a fascinating story of Zulu followers of Jesus who read Genesis 3:21 and realized they did not have to wear European clothes to follow the Scriptures. They then used this to argue with Western Christians that Westerners were being unfaithful to Scripture in their lack of modesty. They were able to do something similar with music. Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 213.

[107] Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 184. While I am attempting to be constructive, this is a veiled reference to many of the short-term "mission" trips or endeavors that take place, usually from the Global North to the Global South. While I realize not all "mission" trips are the same and some may be better than others, it is difficult to see how long-term meaningful relational living within all the elements of life can be fostered in short-term formats. It is also imperative that local receiving populations be heavily involved in any process in order that sharing life is the final outcome in some form. Twiss, "Living in Transition," 95. See also Bharati, *Living Water*, 26-27. There are other potential models being explored, see Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism*, 136.

experience can provide for this type of living.[108] Creation, Incarnation, and Re-Creation

serve as the foundation for those who follow Jesus in forming their understanding of

people around them who may not follow Jesus or take the Bible as a guide for living.[109]

So, while it is important to respect how a person self-identifies, it is also important to see

underneath this self-identifying marker to the foundational level: where all humanity is

made in God's image; that humanity is in a state of fallenness and sin; that God loves the

whole of humanity and has sent his light of life to all people; that the Incarnated God

lived, died, and rose again out of his love to save humanity; and that this same God has

promised to save everyone who desires to live with him for eternity.[110] These are the

most basic markers of humanity that have been manifested in countless creative ways of

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[108] I am arguing here for something akin to what Vanhoozer writes, "We should be dwelling in the real world displayed in Scripture, not the counterfeit worlds projected by other, non-canonical texts." Vanhoozer, "What Is Everyday Theology?" 32. I must be careful here to be clear that non-biblical sources will play a role in category development at some level whether a person wants them to or not. And God cannot be limited to the Bible, but as the primary and most important authoritative source, the Bible does stand alone. The Bible should not be used as a colonizing tool, but rather recognized as something that can bring empowerment and life to those who are allowed to encounter the Word within their local setting and not on the terms of a foreigner's view alone. Sebastian, "Evoking the Bible."

[109] This could easily be misunderstood to be a return to some sort of colonialistic way of categorizing people with the Bible. As the following sections will show this use of the Bible to develop how human life is understood must be done in interaction and dialogue with a diverse group of people. Otherwise interpreters run the risk of using the Bible as a "tool of colonization," to use Dora Rudo Mbuwayesango's terminology. This is the historical reality of parts of sub-Saharan Africa where the Bible was used to prop up European ideals and demonize African ways of living. Dora Rudo Mbuwayesango, "The Bible as Tool of Colonization: The Zimbabwean Context," in *Colonialism and the Bible: Contemporary Reflections from the Global South*, eds. Tat-siong Benny Liew and Fernando F. Segovia (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018).

[110] Nehrbass provides a very helpful list of dyadic categories, that in their extremes are not reflective of the Image of God, but can have diversity and still reflect the biblical desire for ways of living. Often these dyadic categories will influence the daily ways of living he lists, and it is within these categories that the most fruitful interaction and discussion can take place between people who desire to follow God and explore the diversity he endowed us to create. The list consists of: individual and society; being and doing; time reckoning; order and flexibility; risk and vulnerability; planning for the future; fate and personal efficacy; logic; hospitality; hierarchy and equality; meritocracy; toughness and tenderness; and conflict resolution. Nehrbass, *God's Image*, 177-207.

living throughout history.[111] It may be that a more missionally guided hermeneutic for reading Scripture would uncover appropriate ways of moving forward in these types of relationships.[112] However, not all ways of living are rooted in God's ideal, which leads to the next section.

Taking Seriously the Cosmic Conflict

Respecting each person's self-identity need not lead to relativism or the glossing over of real problems that are sometimes found in the ways people choose to live. The cosmic conflict between God and Satan has affected all of humanity at some level. Therefore, while respect is right and necessary, so is a healthy dose of suspicion toward all new ways of living that a person encounters in others.[113] Many ways of living, while they are creative, are not positive, and in fact are filled with darkness that leads to death.[114] Mission thinkers must continually remind followers of Jesus of this fact so that

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[111] Stone has a similar vision, rooted in the work of John Wesley. He argues that prevenient grace, which God bestows on all humanity, means that we cannot argue against diversity, for it too is a partaker in grace. This is not the same as saying all things are equally good, for they are not, but all things are graced as it were, and thus we have freedom to explore our differences as humans looking for the grace and the Spirit of God in our diversity. Stone, *Evangelism after Pluralism*, 112-15.

[112] For a number of well-written essays on this topic see Michael W. Goheen, ed. *Reading the Bible Missionally* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016).

[113] Yong develops the idea of spiritual discernment: "It is strongly implied that the testing or discerning of spirits cannot be divorced from steadfast attention to all the features of life's existence." He builds his case on some of Paul's writings whereby Paul admonishes believers to be careful judges and evaluators of ways of thinking and living as they follow Jesus. Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 143-45.

[114] Nehrbass, in attempting to answer whether some "cultures are better than others," writes:

if the question means 'are there some societies where the sum total of shared beliefs and actions are better than others' the question is impossible to answer. How can we decide if the art, food preferences, music, social organization, economic practices, hospitality norms, etc., are all, in totality, better than others? But we may take the question to mean something else: 'Are there some cultural features which are better than others?' And that is a more practical and answerable question (Nehrbass, *God's Image*, 112).

It appears to me that what Nehrbass refers to as "cultural features" is similar to what I have labeled elements of life.

the various ways of living are not elevated to the point of no reproach.[115] All ways of

living are open for critique by the Word of God because there is an enemy at work

attempting to corrupt people and ways of living, just as God desires to bring life to all

people (John 10:10).[116] This means some ways of living may be corrupted. Followers of

Jesus are not immune to these corruptions, which means the follower of Jesus must be

open to critique from those they interact with regarding their own lives.[117] This is

comparable to the statement of Jesus concerning people who try and remove a "speck of

sawdust" from someone's eye while they have a "plank" in their own (Matt 7:3).[118]

    With that said there are individuals and groups of people whose ways of living are

moving toward darkness rather than light.[119] The Spirit and the Word of God are guides

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[115] "Although value judgments should be made cautiously, they are surely appropriate." Edgar, *Created and Creating*, 10.

[116] As Wrogeman writes

    intercultural theology is not a harmless pursuit, for it is concerned with achieving a successful life of faith and with criticizing those traditions that are harmful to life. This means that whenever intercultural theology is brought to bear, the element of conflict also plays an important role Wrogemann, *Intercultural Theology*, 85.

[117] Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 144. Those who have learned a second language, out of necessity because they are surrounded by people who do not speak their language, will experience this humility at a deeper level. But this can be experienced even by learning new ways of living that are different than a person's own. Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 266-67. Followers of Jesus need to realize that they must go through life asking questions about decisions and ways of living that will require a "yes" and a "no." Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission*, 291. Moments of "yes" come when ways of living manifest the love of God and moments of "no" when they manifest the death of Satan.

[118] Dyrness, The Earth Is God's, 67.

[119] While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to delve into the biblical description of evil influences over nations, there is much in Scripture to defend this view. Nations in this sense are not to be confused with modern day nation-states. What exactly this means for individual free will still needs to be researched in a careful manner. For some thoughts on this, see Peckham, *Theodicy of Love*, 106-07.

in helping the follower of Jesus know when darkness overshadows life.[120] Relational life

in all its facets, (work and rest, language, food and eating, marriage, clothing, etc.,)

constantly changes—often not for the better.[121] When these elements are used to harm

others, to build up self, or to take glory and worship away from God, they should be

avoided.[122] It is also true that "since God's vantage point alone is comprehensive and

infallible, anything undesirable to God provides the absolute standard of what is evil."[123]

In this regard patience is important.[124] While some ways of living are clearly

satanic, other ways of living may not manifest their source when first observed or even

practiced. Time in dialogue with the Word of God and other believers will help in

discovering whether certain ways of living bring about abundant life or lead to death

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[120] While some attempt to pit Christianity in opposition to other religions, it is better to take a humbler approach which admits that the demonic powers are not only "out there" but are constantly vying for the hearts of believers and their ways of living as well. This was Jesus' experience. Therefore, no one should be quick to point out the demonic or evil in others without admitting they too are in combat with the demonic and only by the grace of God can they hope to fend it off. Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 164-65.

[121] Yong may be correct to argue that part of discernment lies in understanding the proper function, as God has given it, for different elements of life in order to discern if that element, lived by a certain person or group of people, is veering away from its original functional intention. Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 158. I argue that this requires having a foundational understanding of life rooted in Creation, Incarnation, and Re-Creation.

[122] I am in agreement with Yong, that "real evil ultimately cannot be understood as being ontologically separable from its determinate and particular incarnations." Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 138. In other words, evil is not merely a spiritual issue, but rather are real life spirits that manifest themselves through the bad decisions in life of actual people which lead away from light and life toward death. It becomes difficult to discuss the world of actual people and life in a meaningful way without having an understanding, unclear as it may be in details, of evil spirits tempting human beings to make bad choices. These choices are visible and experienced by others. Evil spirits are not other-worldly in the sense of existing outside the same reality as humans exist, and thus when evil takes place on earth under their influence and guidance it manifests itself in felt ways. Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 155. See also Dyrness, *Insider Jesus*, 120.

[123] Peckham, *Theodicy of Love*, 50-51.

[124] Each subsequent generation of those learning to follow Jesus will build on the previous generation and thus patience must extend beyond one person's life into generations. That is how change takes place in most cases—slow and over time. Walls, *The Missionary Movement*, 51.

without constant worry over the matter.[125] Patient and deliberate attempts to observe,

learn, and practice in relational settings with daily reference of the Word of God can

bring the followers of Jesus assurance and generate positive change over time.[126] It is

worth quoting Vinoth Ramachandra at length here:

> In conversion, the word of Christ penetrates the intellect, emotions and attitudes of an individual in such a way that everything that makes him what he is—his past, his network of relationships, his work, his thought-patterns and moral processes—are given a new direction: namely towards Christ. Conversion is about a radical reorientation, not substitution. It is a risky enterprise, especially in first-generation Christian communities where there is no precedent for what form discipleship to Christ should take in that particular context and culture. Conversion has a beginning, but no end. It's a lifelong process of discovery and transformation.[127]

John Perkins, who has spent a lifetime learning from and about people in order to

help them, writes, "When we try to understand people's actions, whether at a crime scene

or just in everyday life, the most important thing to look for is their motivation." And the

best way for us to approach people, recognizing that evil abounds, is the John 3:16 way

as Perkins says, "Love is what brought God down from heaven… Love was always

God's motivation, which is why it must be ours as well."[128] In the end, "God takes

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[125] Gorringe, *Furthering Humanity*, 101. For a helpful discussion of the appropriateness of patience and privileging the receiver of the Word of God see Edwin Zehner, "Beyond Anti-Syncretism: Gospel, Context and Authority in the New Testament and in Thai Conversions to Christianity," in *Power and Identity in the Global Church: Six Contemporary Cases*, eds. Brian M. Howell and Edwin Zehner (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009).

[126] Yong has found in his study of the concept of discernment in the Bible, that "discernment is a skill that is developed over time, one that is attuned to both the past and present features of the historical and social world and that enables understanding and appropriate action." Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 146. Vanhoozer argues in favor of what he terms, "critical syncretism" which is a branch off of Paul Hiebert's "critical contextualization." Vanhoozer, "One Rule to Rule Them All?," 104. The challenge a person will find even with "critical syncretism" is that people are constantly changing and adapting the way they live so that what might be "critical syncretism" today is irrelevant tomorrow. Thus constant interaction is necessary with the possibilities of change being endless both on the negative and positive side. Wrogemann, *Intercultural Theology*, 292n2.

[127] Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict?*, 134.

[128] Perkins, *Dream with Me*, 29.

delight both in the cultural renewal of human ingenuity and in the renewing work of the Spirit. Where the one leaves off and the other begins is often a mystery we cannot decipher."[129] I would add it is also not always clear whether the Spirit of God or Satan dominates. Only time can tell in many instances.[130]

The cosmic conflict as described in the Bible is also a reminder for those involved in mission thinking and practice that the world is not going to get better prior to the Second Coming of Jesus.[131] The teleology of progress had a major impact on the mission enterprise coming out of Europe and North America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This was manifested on a grand scale at the Edinburgh 1910 mission conference. But it has since been recognized as a broken telos; yet mission thinking has struggled mightily to replace that model, leaving an underlying trend in mission thinking to focus on the bettering of this world until it is perfected. There is a lack of earnestness put into the biblical evidence that points away from the majority of the world turning toward God prior to the Second Coming.[132]

This means that triumphal language in connection to mission is based in a faulty teleology that fails to take the cosmic conflict seriously as presented in Scripture. While

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[129] Dyrness, *Insider Jesus*, 42.

[130] This paragraph contains elements that should lead to a rethink on how many theologians and missiologists have used the term syncretism, that however is beyond the scope of this dissertation. For starters Wrogemann posits that, "the term syncretism is quite obviously self-referential, which means that it says less about the phenomenon as such and more about the position of the particular individual or group using the term." Wrogemann, *Intercultural Hermeneutics*, 345.

[131] According to Bosch, pessimism has often hampered mission thinking, thus he argues in favor of an eschatological understanding which is quite vague on what the end actually looks like. This is a trend in mission thinking in general as noted earlier in the fact that passages such as Revelation 20-22 are cited so rarely in missiological literature. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 516-18.

[132] This is surprising considering that "the cross refutes progressivism, the idea that human beings can steadily improve their way into blessedness." Crouch, *Culture Making*, 141.

the overt triumphalistic language of mission, so prevalent from the Age of Discovery

through the early twentieth century, has been removed from mission rhetoric, it was

replaced by other types of language that is eerily similar to the triumphalistic language of

the past.[133] In order to be true to the cosmic conflict theme it means being able to look

back into history and admit that many of the so-called Christian missions projects were

on the wrong side of history and have negatively impacted how the God of the Bible is

understood today.[134] This is a reality that I have had to grapple with in my own

interactions with Indians who have not only excoriated the past history of Christian

compliance in colonialism, but pointed out my own tendencies to ride this "hegemonic"

wave in the present. More than once I have had to humbly apologize and ask for guidance

in how better to share my faith and learn from my Indian friends and family members.[135]

Triumphal language ignores the profound reality of the cosmic conflict. This is

often seen in "mission reporting" or books that detail massive movements which can

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[133] Thus, a book published as recently as 2018, felt the need to plea with its readers, "evangelism must ever remain uninterested in competing for space in the world or triumphing over other faiths in a crowded market of options." Rather, it should "not shrink from commending its truth to others as good news even while it seeks repentantly to receive correction from others." Stone, *Evangelism after Pluralism*, 116.

[134] This continues to play a major role in the minds of many in Asia who may have found God in Jesus and the Bible but do not feel comfortable associating with Christians because of the past colonialistic tendencies often still observed and experienced in the present. Dyrness, *Insider Jesus*, 68.

[135] Many foreign "missionaries" who live in or visit India, often unknowingly, or at least unreflected upon, continue to benefit from their hegemonic positions of power, but do not receive the same reprimands that I have. This is because I have married an Indian and thus find myself in a position both of profound trust among many Indians but also vulnerable to more open and direct critique not only of my actions but of other foreigners. This is a difficult blessing to swallow sometimes but a blessing nonetheless.

rarely be verified.[136] Part of the problem lies in seeing the task of evangelism in

competition with other social imaginaries.[137] Rather than see it as a competition it must

be understood as a viable alternative that is presented with humility and as Good News

rather than better news.[138] The cosmic conflict between God and Satan means there is

always a give-and-take, and those who follow Jesus recognize that relational life on this

earth is often spiraling in the wrong direction. And it will continue in that trend until

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[136] For an example of such a publication see Jerry Trousdale, *Miraculous Movements: How Hundreds of Thousands of Muslims Are Falling in Love with Jesus* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2012). There is not enough details in the book to verify the reports that it contains. The book also uses language that implies if people follow the methods outlined mass movements would break out all over the world in numbers beyond count. The Bible does not paint this type of picture in the buildup to the Second Coming creating a suspicion on my part toward books of this nature. Part of this is in the tendency for much of Western mission enterprise's over-reliance on "business" models for how to practice and organize mission. As a result Ramachandra states in unflattering terms, "The obsession with sociology and statistics to the near exclusion of historical and theological reflection, and its [Western missions] complicity with global capitalism, has meant that evangelical churches have largely been shorn of their prophetic voice in global civil society." Ramachandra, "Globalization," 229. See also Werner Ustorf, "1910-2010: From Foreign Missions to the Home Policies of a World Religion," in *Walk Humbly with the Lord: Church and Missionn Engagin Plurality*, eds. Viggo Mortensen and Andreas Østerlund Nielsen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 37. For more on the negative fallout of exporting Westernized models for mission see Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism*, 133; Twiss, *Rescuing the Gospel from the Cowboys*, 63.

[137] For an example of this kind of approach see Strange. Strange writes concerning "world religions:"

If we understand, 'other religions' to be 'other' in respect to Christianity, then what we are dealing with here are rival social realities (still flowing from inner personal heart commitments) that are *competitors* to Christianity. We shall understand these to refer to social or corporate rather than individual realities, as this seems to be the dividing line in contemporary discourse between 'religion' (social) and 'spirituality' (individual) (Strange, *Their Rock*, 37-38).

He is, admittedly, highly reliant on the works of Hendrik Kraemer and J. H. Bavinck, both of whom developed ideas of "competition" between religions even if they used different terminology. This is especially true of Kraemer. Hendrik Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1938). Terry Muck and Frances Adeney portray religions as competitors in the open marketplace. This negatively frames their otherwise helpful approach to interaction with people who live differently than the follower of Jesus. Terry C. Muck and Frances S. Adeney, *Christianity Encountering World Religions: The Practice of Mission in the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 16-23.

[138] Stone, Evangelism after Pluralism, 2-3.

Jesus comes again.[139] What is needed in the world is a divine word from the Spirit that results in new life, but this divine word cannot be simply spoken—it must come in the context of communion.[140]

This does not mean that followers of Jesus should become pessimistic and retreat to rural centers of safety until Jesus comes. Nor does it mean that the primary role of followers of Jesus is to identify all the groups of people who fail to live abundantly and then condemn them. It means that those who truly experience the love and grace of the Creator and Incarnated God, will always mediate on behalf of the people on the earth trying to share the light with them in meaningful ways through relational living. It is a sign that the love of God has actually penetrated a person's life when they not only begin to creatively live in new ways but share this with others in a respectful fashion, no matter

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[139] The Gospel will confront all people in the their ways of living, nothing in life should remain totally the same after encountering Jesus. Dyrness, *Insider Jesus*, 121. As a result of this I am in basic agreement with McDermott and Netland when they argue we need some way of differentiating between those that follow Jesus and those that do not. The alternative is rampant relativism which is not helpful nor can it lead to more abundant life. Their answer, however, is to turn to categories of religions to describe the differences, which I argue are not sufficient for this purpose. Rather, focusing on observing and interacting with people and the ways they live within the elements of life described in Scripture is a better approach. McDermott and Netland, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, 232. They turn to what they label "paradigm examples of religion" such as Shinto, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. This begs the question, who gets to define what a "paradigm religion" is? This definition is, not surprisingly, very much in line with textbooks on world religions that are rooted in the problematic history delineated in chapters 2 and 3. McDermott and Netland, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, 233. There is much that is useful in this volume and it appears to be headed a direction somewhat similar to what I am attempting. The section on Buddhism demonstrates that the book struggles to place itself on a stable footing. At times the authors defend the idea of "Buddhism" as important and at other times they demonstrate that there are so many versions of Buddhism that differ so greatly as to deem the concept useless for missiologists. In the end they appear to land on the side of prioritizing the local expressions and taking seriously the local persons explanations of their ways of living, which is what I argue for as well. McDermott and Netland, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, 236-46.

[140] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 270. For case studies that support this see Prenger, *Muslim Insider Christ Followers*, 248.

what the people around them self-identify as.[141] I follow the lead of Bryan Stone in

arguing that mission should be "concerned more with the character and beauty of our

witness than whether that witness yields 'results' measured in terms of conversions."[142]

Sharing the hope of the New Earth involves living out the ideals of the New Earth as best

one can. This is a primary mission work of the followers of Jesus.[143] And there will

always be a remnant of followers who will keep this hope alive until Jesus comes

again.[144]

<center>Intentionally Building Diverse Ways of Living Together</center>

God made humanity with the capacity and desire to creatively develop new ways

of living with the elements of life he provided in the beginning as shown in Genesis 1-2.

The Incarnation was God's exemplary act of intentionally joining with humanity in

creating new ways of living in the midst of a sin-filled world. The description of the New

Earth in Revelation 21-22 is a tension-free world of diverse and abundant ways of living

outside the world of sin. These three scriptural themes provide the framework for what it

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[141] I think Dyrness advocates for something similar when he states, "But a fundamental movement in this direction, an openness to the centrality of Jesus and a longing for God's renewing work, will surely be characteristic of movements we ought to celebrate." Dyrness, *Insider Jesus*, 43.

[142] Stone, *Evangelism after Pluralism*, 17. This need to measure people's faith journey is rooted in "the Enlightenment's legacy—the way of knowledge and the way of piety—'is that we attempt to measure the quality of our spirituality in black-and-white terms: either by what we know or by what we do (and do not do).'" Johnston, *God's Wider Presence*, 41.

[143] After referencing Revelation 21:5—the only time Bosch quotes any passages from Revelation 20-22—Bosch writes, "Like its Lord, the church-in-mission must take sides, for life and against death." Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 436.

[144] For more on this as it relates to mission and the biblical concept of the remnant see the following book chapters. Tarsee Li, "The Remnant in the Old Testament," in *Toward a Theology of the Remnant*, ed. Ángel Manuel Rodriguez (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2009). Richard P. Lehmann, "The Remnant in the Book of Revelation," in *Toward a Theology of the Remnant*, ed. Ángel Manuel Rodriguez (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2009). Ángel Manuel Rodriguez, "Concluding Essay: God's End-Time Remnant and the Christian Church," in *Toward a Theology of the Remnant*, ed. Ángel Manuel Rodriguez (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2009).

means to live everyday life as creatively as possible within the elements of life God graciously provided humanity.

Discussions of mission often hinge on taking the Good News to people who have not heard it in order for them to be saved. While this may be a worthwhile topic, and certainly deserves careful contemplation and reflection, there is another equally important aspect of mission that is often neglected or misunderstood. This can be found in the terminology "contextualization," which is often meant to describe something along the lines of "making the gospel understandable to people who live life differently than the gospel bearer." This coincides with terminology such as cross-cultural, or inculturation, etc. While these terms are important and certainly are an improvement over mission language of a century ago, there is still room for reflection and possible alternatives to describe what missional relationship building is all about.[145]

Contextualization frequently comes across as an "us" to "them" kind of relationship.[146] While there is always a purveyor and a receiver in healthy communication, the roles are usually mutual. Thus, for a more appropriate mission approach, terminology should represent the give-and-take that healthy relational living

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[145] I am indebted to Dyrness for clarifying some of my own misgivings about the way contextualization is regularly discussed and applied in missiological and theological literature. For example, "Of course, as we have argued, the gospel will judge (and redeem) elements of culture, but not in terms of some other inculturated form of the faith. Here is where the contextualization debate proved unhelpful, for it was not able to define either what was contextualized or who was doing the work." Dyrness, *The Earth Is God's*, 79.

[146] A. Scott Moreau has written a helpful overview of the concept of contextualization and its understanding and use by Evangelicals. There is much to be commended in this book. However, he comes across as promoting and "us" and "them" mentality in which the receiver continues to be understood as a passive recipient of the message they are given. Thus, the emphasis is on how the messenger packages the message. Part of this can be seen in the long critique of Charles Kraft toward the beginning of the book, which is helpful in pointing out a number of Kraft's short comings concerning the concept of revelation, but struggles to deal with the main issue Kraft was trying to deal with, namely the relationship between the receiver and messenger in the sharing of the gospel. A. Scott Moreau, *Contextualization in World Missions: Mapping and Assessing Evangelical Models* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2012).

requires.[147] Part of the challenge in mission language has been that those who are not

Christian are frequently portrayed, even if inadvertently, as wholly "other."[148] Thus,

contextualization is an "us" to "them" dynamic.[149] But this dissertation argues that rather

than approach mission as an "us" to "them" dynamic, the Bible allows for and promotes

an "us" to "us" approach to mission.[150] This approach will be difficult to maintain as long

as the current categories of religions are employed as core markers of "othering" for

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[147] This is where much, if not most, of the discussions and even implications of contextualization in missiological literature fall short, as persuasively argued by Dyrness. Dyrness, *Insider Jesus*, 4. This is a flaw I have found in the concept of "critical contextualization." While critical contextualization allows the community to make decisions together it was missing a component that allowed the community to question the messenger's message and ways of living, in other words, it still gave too much power to the messenger.

[148] Strange explicitly states up front that he understands "other religions" and those who adhere to them to be "Other" with a capital O to emphasize the otherness. Strange, *Their Rock*, 38. For example, reflect on the following heading of a primary theology of mission textbook: "What Do We Do With Traditional Practices?" Ott, Strauss, and Tennent, *Encountering Theology of Mission*, 281. There are two issues with this heading: First, it implies an "us" and a "them," and the "us" gets to decide what to do with the ways of living of "them." Secondly, the author immediately takes away the agency from the receiver by turning them into a "traditional practice." So, the discussion is no longer about people but about practices, as if the people are simply passive objects to be told what to do. Often there are attempts to allow the local believers some say through consultation. This was what Hiebert called for in his model of critical contextualization, but by that point in his theoretical model a clear hierarchy of decision-making was already established in the language used and implied concerning the local person and their practices. To be fair, the chapter in the above book ends with a call for "globalizing theology" which I applaud, but I am afraid that the way they speak of contextualization and the call for global theology do not match up completely. Ott, Strauss, and Tennent, *Encountering Theology of Mission*, 287-90.

[149] While Paul Hiebert's development of "critical contextualization" has been rightly hailed as a landmark contribution to mission and theological theory, there is a sense in which missiology and theology are moving beyond this conceptually. It may be that even Hiebert himself was thinking in new ways toward the end of his life. His chapter in the book *Globalizing Theology* appears to be moving toward a new way of thinking about missions that is not directly tied to his previous concepts of contextualization. He only uses the term contextualization once in the chapter in a fairly innocuous way. This, however, is a little known work of Hiebert's that deserves more attention. Hiebert, "The Missionary as Mediator." Dyrness, I believe, accurately argues that a weakness of Hiebert's model is that the "emphasis still came to rest on the intellectual sorting of alternative frameworks." Dyrness, *Insider Jesus*, 15.

[150] Notice what Hiebert argues in the chapter referenced in the previous footnote, "missionaries must not only present Christ to Hindus and Muslims but also help churches see how Muslims and Hindus see themselves and Christians and Christ." Hiebert, "The Missionary as Mediator," 304. John 1:14 serves as a strong support for this way of understanding humanity as "us" and "us." If the God of the universe could identify with humanity in a general sense, surely humans should be able to identify with each other even if the ways of life are very different. Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 78.

segments of the Earth's population in relation to "Christians."[151]

The "us" and "them" is particularly troubling in that the "us" is usually white Anglo-European and male, while the "them" is persons other than that.[152] This is the reality of the long history of both theology and missions.[153] Anglo-European males have dictated the categories long enough and need to give space to others in producing theological and missological categories.[154] Contexutalization rhetoric falls into this same "us" and "them" trap. In order to have a more appropriate give-and-take in the sharing of

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[151] It is important to read writers such as Dayanand Bharati who has had to struggle through what it means to follow Jesus in the Indian context as a Hindu. He has many insights as to how "missions" and "contextualization" have been attempted in India and he has written fairly recently that "yet in evangelistic endeavors among Hindus almost all efforts to communicate the gospel remain one way traffic." Bharati, *Living Water*, 1.

[152] One may think that missiology is immune to this type of problem because of its focus on contextualization and culture but this is unfortunately not the case as poignantly demonstrated by Daniel White Hodge in *Homeland Insecurity: A Hip Hop Missiology for the Post-Civil Rights Context* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2018), 9-11, 18. Ramachandra reminds his readers that once you choose to follow Jesus you join a network of believers that stretches back to the beginnings of the Old Testament and includes people throughout history into the present from all over the world and from varying backgrounds. He then writes, "I often wonder what a revolution this simple gospel concept would cause in Western theological education if grasped and applied in the curriculum!" Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict?*, 136-37.

[153] Jennings gives a moving account of this history and also deconstructs the language and understanding of contextualization as understood by many today. He argues, with vigor, that often the language of contextualization hides a way of mission that actually stands in the way of true intimacy. Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 167.

[154] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 275, 290. For more on the white male dominance in categories of humanity see Mignolo, *The Darker Side*, 45. This can even be seen in the seemingly appropriate language that portrays Africa as the new center of Christianity and labeling Africa as incurably religious in a positive sense as though all of Africa is united in one train of thought and action. Stan Chu Ilo, "The Search for Abundant Life in African Christian Religion: Historical Reinterpretation of Christian Mission in Africa," in *Wealth, Health, and Hope in African Christian Religion*, ed. Stan Chu Ilo (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018), xx.

life as Jesus would have it, those advocating for contextualization will need a humbler approach.[155]

The other major issue with contextualization is that it often implies there is "one" message and faith to be contextualized.[156] This begs some challenging questions, such as; Who gets to define the Christian faith? Or Whose hermeneutics is being employed to discover what should be contextualized? This very easily can get in the way of allowing people to interpret and interact with Scripture themselves. Even Hiebert's model of critical contextualization gives interpretative power to the "outsider" who appears to own the message. But the reality is that its God's message and the Spirit was in that place prior to the messenger; thus there is a fine line that can quickly revert into a mode of approach that continues to "carry colonial baggage," whereby the outsider is superior to the local person.[157] This impedes the Word of God from having the final say in the

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[155] It is advisable to listen to those who have written from the position of oppressed on these issues. James H. Cone wrote the following concerning "integration" which is in many ways something those involved in mission thinking and contextualization should reflect on:

If integration means accepting the white man's style, his values, or his religion, then the black man must refuse… The white man, in the very asking of the question [what about integration?], assumes that he has something which blacks want or should want, as if being close to white people enhances the humanity of blacks…. On the other hand, if integration means that each man meets the other on equal footing, with neither possessing the ability to assert rightness of his style over the other, then mutual meaningful dialogue is possible. Biblically, this may be called the Kingdom of God (James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 17).

[156] This paragraph is largely a paraphrase and expansion of Dyrness in Dyrness, *Insider Jesus*, 22-23. Goheen writes, "contextualization is not about applying universal ideas to new contexts but rather finding ways to faithfully translate and indwell this story of the renewal of creation in the various cultural contexts of the world." Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today*, 290. This is a definition that is at odds with many other Evangelicals attempt to define contextualization as taking universal ideas into new contexts.

[157] I think Dyrness is correct when he writes,

there hovers over the whole project of contextualization, as this is often practiced, the whiff of hegemony based on political and economic inequality. Again, I would not want to imply that missiologists have not understood this, or that discussions of contextualization have not come to recognize and adjust for these new realities. But I argue that it is time to acknowledge the importance that contextualization has played in the history of missions and move beyond it (Dyrness, *Insider Jesus*, 26).

process. It is better to recognize that, "Incultured readings are not only inevitable; they are to be encouraged, for they can expand our comprehension of the inexhaustible riches of Scripture."[158] This does not negate a need for "messengers," for "God is present and active by the Spirit when the gospel is being proclaimed and Scripture read in a way that is special and unlike the general way God is otherwise present in all cultures."[159]

Once individuals have put in place the presuppositional positions (that God created all humanity in his image, that he Incarnated in an exemplary fashion as a human to affirm human diversity and to save all those who choose life, and that the New Earth is also a place of diverse ways of living), they can start to alter how they think and approach humanity. After adding the dynamic of the cosmic conflict to the above, which the Bible teaches, along with a healthy level of suspicion toward relational living in all elements of life a healthier balance can be achieved.[160] A person can take the Bible as the sole authority on this earth to serve as the arbitrating source to test the ways of living through

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Twiss holds a similar view and even calls out several prominent North American missiologists as being partly complicit in this process, Twiss, *Rescuing the Gospel from the Cowboys*, 195.

[158] Dyrness, *Insider Jesus*, 25.

[159] Dyrness, *Insider Jesus*, 119.

[160] I agree with Vanhoozer, who advises a hermeneutic of suspicion when reading contexts as valuable and important, even as we look for the good in humanity. Vanhoozer adds that, "the hermeneutics of suspicion therefore has something to teach us about cultural texts, but by itself it takes us no further than 'thin' description and thus falls short of true understanding." Vanhoozer, "What Is Everyday Theology?," 39-40.

the power of the Holy Spirit.[161] Thus, as Dyrness argues, a person is constantly

"rereading" the Scriptures in connection with lived reality which forms the questions. For

Dyrness "rereading" is actually a replacement for contextualization because it allows the

text to judge both the message giver and receiver as they read the texts over and over

again while living together.[162]

Final Synthesis

What is the best way to grasp all of the above in order to mature towards more

abundant ways of living? This dissertation argues that the best way to understand diverse

ways of living and to incorporate the beauty of the variety into daily life, is to interact

intentionally with people who live in ways different than our own.[163] Humility combined

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[161] Vanhoozer describes this well when he writes concerning bringing the Bible and daily life together. "To interpret cultural discourse as it relates to God and the gospel is, I submit, a comprehensive approach inasmuch as it enables us to give the thickest possible description of what is really going on in culture." Vanhoozer, "What Is Everyday Theology?" 47. Having this arbiter means that, while interpretations are very diverse, having a shared reference point does create some boundaries of interpretation that then lead ways of reading and living that are understandable by those who turn to the Bible as an authority. Walls, *The Missionary Movement*, 29-30.

[162] Dyrness, *The Earth Is God's*, 80. This also means being open to the "whole" canon, rather than always returning to a person's favorite portions of Scripture, and also being open to others finding things in different parts of the Bible that answer their questions which could have been totally missed. Walls, *The Missionary Movement*, 11-12. Walls has a similar articulation to Dyrness: "The translations of Christ that take place as believers within different cultures respond to him are retranslations." Walls, *The Missionary Movement*, 29. For a case study example of this see Prenger, *Muslim Insider Christ Followers*, 254.

[163] Twiss, creatively, argues for a similar definition for the concept of *missio Dei*. Twiss, "Living in Transition," 104. One of the difficulties in promoting such an approach is that there are so few people who have actually taken the time to build deep and meaningful relationships with others who are very different from them in how they live, especially if they self-identify as something other than Christian. Wrogemann, *Intercultural Hermeneutics*, 331. This has often been my frustration when talking about my experiences of sharing my faith and learning from others who self-identify as Hindu or Muslim there are so few people who have similar experiences to even be able to frame the discussion in. Muck and Adeney have done an admirable job in pointing followers of Jesus in a direction of interaction that is more open to building deeper and meaningful relationships, especially through their use of the metaphor of gift. One of the major weaknesses, other than the framing of their argument in language of competition noted above, is that they do not ground their theory sufficiently in Scripture. This does not mean their approach is not grounded in Scripture, rather it means that if it is they need to demonstrate this grounding more explicitly for the reader. Muck and Adeney, *Christianity Encountering*.

with a healthy suspicion are both necessary elements when approaching each detail of life in its interconnectedness.[164] Ways of living on this Earth will be flawed. But in order to move toward a fuller life as demonstrated in the description of the New Earth, it is necessary to diversify those ways—interacting with people different from ourselves in order to learn and share ways of living that bring love, hope, and joy.[165] Those who follow Jesus cannot rely on, nor should they even contemplate using hegemonic methods of power to spread abundant life; they should depend on a loving, persuasive, and faithful witness through acts and words of abundant life.[166] In order for this "faithful witness" to draw people to Jesus it must take place within the framework of existing and trusting relationships.

There are two characteristics to this that are particularly relevant for mission. The first is that the Bible must serve as the final arbitrating authority in ways of living. Unfortunately, a majority of the world's population does not take the Bible to be an authority in their lives. Therefore, one of the primary tasks of the followers of Jesus is to

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[164] I am intentionally keeping the focus on people rather than "religions" or "cultures" here. This is where I believe some theologians and missiologists, who appear to be heading in a direction similar to me, tend to fall back into the old categories. For example, Amos Yong describes the importance of interacting with people in all aspects of their lives but proceeds to argue that the best approach to other religions is by studying what psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, historians, and church workers say about other religions. Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 175-76. I am not opposed to reading widely and interacting with these disciplines, although this should be done critically based on Chapter 2 of this dissertation, but ultimately the human element and ways of living everyday are the priority. Consulting so-called experts of religion can never be a substitute for living among people.

[165] There are good books that demonstrate the possibilities of looking at elements of life from a particular social location which can then be compared and contrasted with ways of living in other social locations leading to a broader and more appropriate approach to abundant life as rooted in the Bible. For an example see Stan Chu Ilo, ed. *Wealth, Health, and Hope in African Christian Religion: The Search for Abundant Life* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018).

[166] Walls, *Crossing Cultural Frontiers*, 51. Gorringe writes, "What is unique about the…gospel is that those who are called to be its witnesses are committed to the public affirmation that it is true and are at the same time forbidden to use coercion to enforce it." Gorringe, *Furthering Humanity*, 253. See also Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 274.

creatively find ways to live the Bible, and thus demonstrate how an experience with the

God of the Bible impacts daily living within the spheres of the elements of life found

throughout this dissertation.[167] The translation of Scripture has proved to be a

transforming instrument in history to bring life and bring it more abundantly.[168] This is

important because "without the canonical witness we would not be able to know God

truly either through creation or through Christ."[169] Thus, one of the primary roles of those

actively living their faith among people different than themselves is to "sow" the seeds of

God's Word hoping that fruit will sprout even though they themselves may not get to

harvest much of the fruit. Historically it has been local people who have reaped the

fruit.[170] Those who follow Jesus have a deep and ongoing interaction with the Word of

God, constantly reading and rereading it. Without this connection it will be impossible to

have meaningful interaction with the everyday lives of people, who are unpredictable and

constantly changing. Those following Jesus need a working knowledge of the Word that

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[167] Stone writes that the challenge for followers of Jesus to "bear witness to the good news in ways that make it a present and habitable possibility for others, without contradicting that good news in very act of offering it—that is, without becoming competitors for space in the world." Stone, *Evangelism after Pluralism*, 7. Andrew Walls argues that,

Bible translation aims at releasing the word about Christ so that it can reach all aspects of a specific linguistic and cultural context, so that Christ can live within that context, in the persons of his followers, as thoroughly at home as he once did in the culture of first-century Jewish Palestine (Walls, *The Missionary Movement*, 29).

[168] Lamin O. Sanneh, "Translations of the Bible and the Cultural Impulse," in *The New Cambridge History of the Bible: From 1750 to the Present*, ed. John Riches (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015). Vanhoozer is right to make the point that the very fact of Scripture's existence shows God to be a God of mission. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 68-69. There is some contention, however, that some acts of translating the Bible were openly colonialistic and that translators used their position of power to undermine local people's understanding of the world in ways that led them to repudiate their own heritage unnecessarily. For more on this ongoing debate see Skreslet, *Comprehending Mission*, 40-42.

[169] Vanhoozer, The Drama of Doctrine, 47.

[170] Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 152. Frykenberg demonstrates that it was nearly always Indians who were behind the movement of the church historically in India, see Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*.

can guide them in any given situation, even if they do not have time to "go and study the matter."[171] This is a primary act of mission—helping people see the relevance of the Word of God through relational life as well as through reading it with them as a mutual partner in the process. That gives them the freedom to follow the leading of the Spirit. This will then serve as a guide on how to live creatively in relationship with God and humanity inside the elements of relational life found in Scripture. This act of mission is rooted in the original Creation mandate, but is demonstrated in the sinful world most clearly through the Incarnation of Jesus.

The second act of mission is to pursue diverse relationships that include interpreting the Bible together, recognizing that all people who choose to take the Bible seriously can bring fresh and new insights to the understanding of the Bible, broadening the understanding of who God is and how humanity can have abundant life.[172] I argue in favor of taking the whole Bible as the Word of God, recognizing that all of it has the potential to speak into and change the way people think, live, and interact.[173] This can be combined with a robust interpretation of each social situation and each use of the

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[171] Sedmak, Doing Local Theology, 120.

[172] Studies of language and formation of how a person thinks and lives have revealed conclusively that humans can read something and make decisions that alter their life without someone else necessarily telling them how to interpret it. Thus, those who are sharing the importance of Scripture will need to often back off and allow people to read the Bible for themselves rather than try to interpret it for them. Dyrness, *Insider Jesus*, 13-14. Interpretation is not "an exact science" and is "both messier and more provisional than explanations that work with causal laws." Vanhoozer, "What Is Everyday Theology?," 36. All the more reason to include a diverse group in the process.

[173] I adhere in general to what John Peckham has described in Peckham, *Canonical Theology*. This is even more dynamic when combined with Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 25. There are some who advocate for Scripture to be the norming authority but actually turn primarily to the New Testament at the expense of the Old. For an example of someone advocating this, see Wrogemann, *Intercultural Hermeneutics*, 392-93.

elements of life in their diversity.[174] Combining the Bible and the social context with the

interpreters from various backgrounds creates the potential for wonderful new ways of

living, rooted in the Creator God who Incarnated and promises to create a New Earth.[175]

By constantly approaching the text with fresh questions stemming from diverse ways of

living it also keeps the Word alive rather than turning it into a "dead" word that becomes

wooden and boring.[176] This work of interacting with people from varying social locations

to pursue God and relational living is the work of an eternity.[177] Humanity will never

exhaust the knowledge of God nor the creative ways they use the elements of life that

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[174] Dyrness sees

the process of translation always involves finding equivalent patterns and structures in scripture and in the receiving culture. In this way the process of translation is a part of the larger process of our human interpretation of God's truth in the real life setting of family, work, and school (Dyrness, *The Earth Is God's*, 80).

Ramachandra is probably on to something when he writes, "Perhaps another way we can distinguish authentic evangelism from religious proselytism is that the evangelist is also transformed in the process of conversion." Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict?*, 135. The diversity of humanity is reflected in the diversity of genres in Scripture, therefore, it makes sense that the best way to interpret Scripture is among a group of diverse people. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 275. For an example of the possibilities of this concerning clothing, see Wrogemann, *Intercultural Hermeneutics*, 140-46.

[175] Those who come to the interaction from positions of power, even if it is perceived power, must be ready to hear new interpretations of the text that are informed by those on the margins and lead them to relate more closely with the marginalized stories of Scripture. Dube and Staley, "Descending," 5. Dube gives an important list of possible markers to help those who read the Word know from what position they are reading, whether it is one of power or one of marginalization or a mix. Dube and Staley, "Descending," 8-9. Pobee says something similar on Christology, "Given the pluralism of Africa one would hope for a plurality of christologies which need to be entering into dialogue. Then there is need to go beyond the plurality of Africa to continue the debate in the context of the Church Universal." Pobee, "In Search of Christology," 19-20. See also Rynkiewich, *Soul, Self, and Society*, 173. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 314.

[176] Bedford argues, persuasively, that the bringing of new questions to the text from the many marginalized perspectives around the world helps keep the dynamic aspects of the Bible alive. Bedford, "The Most Burning of Lavas." For an example of this see the reference to the work of Mercy Amba Oduyoye in Wrogemann where an understanding of Jesus as a male, but still encompassing what it means to be a mother and how this can broaden and deepen human understandings of marriage and family life is discussed, see Wrogemann, *Intercultural Hermeneutics*, 202-03.

[177] Poythress, *In the Beginning*, 140.

God has endowed them with.[178] This is a vision of mission that is not limited by the

categories of religions. Interaction between diverse groups should be pursued—whether

that means choosing a new neighborhood to live in or following God's leading to another

part of the globe—both are legitimate if led by the Spirit.[179] Jennings encompasses much

of what I have been trying to argue when he writes:

> Imagine a people defined by their cultural differences yet who turn their histories and
> cultural logics toward a new determination, a new social performance of identity. In
> so doing, they enfold the old cultural logics and practices inside the new ones of
> others, and they enfold the cultural logics and practices of others inside their own.[180]

This act of mission is rooted in the original Creation mandate for diversity, but also draws

on the vision of the New Earth meant to begin here and now.

These two acts of mission—living biblically-informed, relational lives with the

desire that it become meaningful to those around us who do not follow Jesus and his

Way, and reading the Word together in diverse groups all around the world—are done in

full recognition that people are at different stages in their relationships with God and

humanity. These acts are lived out in full recognition that the cosmic conflict impacts

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[178] For a fascinating set of essays which demonstrate the possibilities of reading the Bible within diverse ways of living see Hans de Wit et al., eds., *Through the Eyes of Another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2004); John R. Levison and Priscilla Pope-Levison, eds., *Return to Babel: Global Perspectives on the Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999); Musa W. Dube Shomanah, ed. *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001).

[179] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 467; Gorringe, *Furthering Humanity*, 180. There is an excellent appendix titled "Intercultural Bible Study: Three Principles" in the book *From Every People and Nation*, which can serve to aid those who are serious about broadening their understanding of God through intentionally pursuing reading the Scriptures with people from different social locations than their own. The principles are: (1) Be open to more than one valid interpretation. (2) Recognize the complexity of intercultural differences and relationships. (3) Seek justice in the power dynamics of cross-cultural interactions. Each of these is discussed in detail in Appendix A. From the book David M. Rhoads, ed. *From Every People and Nation: The Book of Revelation in Intercultural Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), Appendix 1. I have copied a list of guidelines for interaction that is also found in the book in Appendix B of this dissertation.

[180] Jennings, The Christian Imagination, 273.

how humans live in the present. Some people will be confronted with the chance to pursue God and more holistic relational ways of living but choose to reject his path for their own—influenced by Satan and his demons, which leads to death. Those who follow Jesus, no matter which stage in their journey, will continue to pursue the first act of mission until this world is radically changed at the Second Coming of Christ. And they will continue to pursue the second act of mission throughout both the span of this sinful world and the re-created world to come, for the second act of mission is part of eternal life which has no end.

CHAPTER 8

RECOMMENDATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This Chapter offers a brief set of recommendations and areas for further research. Rather than normative, dogmatic statements, these recommendations open the way for discussion, further reflection, and possible change.

Recommendations

The first recommendation holds that missiologists, theologians, and biblical scholars should focus much of their energy on assessing and reassessing translations of the Bible while creatively living out and sharing the Word of God in order for all people to meet the God of love as portrayed in the Word. A significant portion of missiological and theological energy should focus—and already is in some quarters—on the work of translating the Bible, not only into new languages but also in revising existing translations to assure they are understandable within a given audience. Alongside the need to translate the Bible is the need for the followers of Jesus to humbly and openly live out their understandings of Scripture on a day-to-day basis. They should seek out relationships with those who do not explicitly turn to the Word of God as a normative guide—which may require breaking out of their current comfort zones. Genuine relationships with those who have no experience with the Bible will often result in a fresh exposure of the love of God for both the long-time follower of Jesus and those newly

experiencing his Word. I argue that this dual work comes before any other type of mission work because a lack of the Word in people's lives stunts the growth of relational life and the ability to transform ways of living toward life and away from death.

The second recommendation pertains to those who are followers of Jesus, no matter what they self-identify as, and their ongoing development in all ways of living. It is vital that missiologists, theologians, and church administrators put forth more intentional effort to create spaces where people from a wide variety of backgrounds can come together to discuss and live Scripture in dialogue and interaction with each other in order to increase their knowledge and experience of God. This can lead to creative ways of living that carry forward the Image of God until he comes again. It requires moving beyond barriers of historically conditioned stereotypes, reductionistic essentializations, prejudices, and hate, whether they be religious, racial, economic, or otherwise. This intentionality requires humility, especially on the part of those who have access to privilege and power through money, status, nationality, skin color, gender, etc., to relinquish some control in order to allow those typically marginalized, to have equal say in theological interpretation and application in ways of living relationally. This can be done through churches, official gatherings and meetings of organizations. Followers of Jesus can do this informally in their homes or other locations as well.

The third recommendation pertains to theological and missiological nomenclature used to describe people and their ways of living. It is recommended that when referring to people their voices are allowed to be heard whenever possible and that vague essentialized terminology that objectifies and/or racializes people and their ways of living be abandoned. This means moving away from terminology such as Hinduism, Buddhism,

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and other "isms," as well as certain uses of terms such as Islam, Christianity, "tribal," etc. While there is no one list of appropriate and inappropriate nomenclature, theologians and missiologists will constantly need to evaluate the way they describe people and how they live in order to be as accurate as possible to local situations. This process is in line with the thrust of a portion of this dissertation to draw categories of description that are rooted in Scripture rather than categories that are overly reliant on human reason.

The fourth recommendation pertains to the teaching and training methods of theologians and missiologists on "religions." It is currently common to teach courses and conduct training events that attempt to describe "religions" using the inherited categories of religions critiqued in this dissertation. Based on the constructive theological interpretations of the three passages included in this dissertation, I argue that it is more appropriate to focus theological and missiological teaching and training on local settings and issues rooted in real people and real-life situations. This will help keep theologians and missiologists connected to lived realities on the ground helping them to avoid the overly abstract approaches to describing people, which inherited categories often lead to. Humanity is fluid in its ways of living and thus theologians and missiologists must always be re-evaluating their teaching and training methods.

The fifth recommendation proposes that theologians focus far more theological attention on the elements of life that come from the biblical text in connection to lived realities in the world around them. This requires that theologians be more aware of their own social location and the social location of those around them, especially if those around them self-identify in a way that is significantly different than the theologian. This may require that theologians reach out to missiologists in order to better understand what

it means to learn in a context that is outside the norm for a theologian. This also requires theological projects which attempt to interpret and clarify biblical descriptions of relational life throughout the whole canon in order to move towards abundant life.

The sixth recommendation is that missiologists and theologians work more closely together in order to develop hermeneutical approaches to people that draw on the Bible to move both themselves and others toward more abundant ways of living through the grace of God in the power of the Holy Spirit. Missiologist need to intentionally reach out to theologians in order to have a stronger biblical basis for the reflection and application they engage in. This collaboration should result in more dynamic and meaningful approaches to both theology and missiology as it relates to the everyday living of all people no matter what they self-identify as.

The seventh and final recommendation pertains to evaluation of theological and missiological methods. Typically, evaluation of mission methods has been done by measuring either baptismal numbers, membership totals, or using other statistical models. These are generally unhelpful ways of assessing mission methods. This dissertation has presented the idea that the ways people live in relationship with God and each other is at the center of this world. Therefore, any evaluation of mission must prioritize relationships over statistics. This may prove to be a challenging process, whereby there are no clear normative guidelines for success other than the Word of God. Thus, measuring of success may need to be relegated to a much lesser role in the church. Because measuring ways of living is reliant on human interpretations of Scripture, hasty evaluations of success should be abandoned and careful ongoing reflection of each localized situation analyzed in dialogue with all those involved before decisions are made.

Further Research

While there are several directions of research that could be pursued out of this dissertation, I am delimiting this section to three that I argue are needed. The first is that the elements of life found in Genesis 1-2 be studied within the whole canon—the aim being, a theological and missiological understanding of these elements that can then be dynamically applied. It also may be that further research will uncover a number of other elements of life that deserve articulation and discussion. Those engaging in canonical studies should be actively searching out interpreters of the Bible from social locations other than their own—the greater the diversity, the greater the potential for a dynamic, relevant, and more accurate interpretation of Scripture.

The second direction for further research concerns the need to find and document situations where there has been mutuality in biblical interpretation between people from differing social contexts which has resulted in creative ways of living from around the world. This could be studies in history or studies of present practices and experiences. These studies could create a database of possibilities for more appropriate communication and biblical interpretation between equals rather than an "us" and "them" approach.

The third possible direction for further research regards new movements toward the God of the Bible happening around the world now. While there have been some good studies on these movements, and the literature is growing, much more is needed. An area of weakness in existing research of these movements is the role that the Word of God plays in each movement. Research should be developed and focus on learning whether or not the Word of God is central to these movements, and if it is how has it impacted

relational life in a local setting. These studies are needed in all parts of the world, and it should not be seen as something researched only in Asia, Africa, or South America, but also in European and North American contexts where current studies are showing there has been a move away from institutional approaches to God, but not necessarily a move away from God in general. This brief list of recommendations and possible avenues for further research concludes this dissertation.

APPENDIX A

GUIDELINES FOR EVERYDAY THEOLOGICAL

INTERPRETATION OF CULTURE[1]

1. Try to comprehend a cultural text on its own terms (grasp its communicative intent) before you 'interpret' it (explore its broader social, political, sexual, or religious significance).
2. Attend to what a cultural text is *doing* as well as saying by clarifying its illocutionary act (e.g., stating a belief, displaying a world).
3. Consider the world *behind* (e.g., medieval, modern), *of* (i.e., the world displayed by the cultural text), and *in front of* (i.e., its proposal for your world) the cultural text.
4. Determine what 'powers' are served by particular cultural texts or trends by discovering whose material interests are served (e.g., follow the money!).
5. See the 'world hypothesis' and/or 'root metaphor' implied by a cultural text.
6. Be comprehensive in your interpretation of a cultural text; find corroborative evidence that makes best sense of the whole as well as the parts.
7. Give 'thick' descriptions of the cultural text that are nonreductive and sensitive to the various levels of communicative action.
8. Articulate the way of being human to which a cultural text directly or indirectly bears witness and gives commendation.
9. Discern what *faith* a cultural text directly or indirectly expresses. To what convictions about God, the world, and ourselves does a cultural text and/or trend commit us?
10. Locate the cultural text in the biblical creation-fall-redemption schema and make sure that biblical rather than cultural texts have the lead role in shaping your imagination and hence your interpretative framework for your experience.

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[1] Taken from Vanhoozer, "What Is Everyday Theology?," 59-60.

APPENDIX B

GUIDELINES FOR INTERCULTURAL

DISCUSSION OF THE BIBLE[1]

1. Genuinely seek to understand Scripture through dialogue with others and be open to multiple interpretations.
2. Give priority to relationships that foster the liberation of all participants as more important than arguing the correctness of views. Respect persons while engaging their views.
3. Agree to share your views and feelings and to explain them to others in persuasive and passionate ways, but without seeking to impose them.
4. Agree to listen empathetically and to ask questions of others for clarification and understanding. Represent faithfully the views of others. Challenge the views of others only after understanding them.
5. Agree to negotiate the ground rules for interrupting or correcting or debating or challenging or criticizing another person or point of view. Be patient with the style of others.
6. Accept the idea of multiple valid interpretations. Agree to disagree and clarify where those differences lie, where there are difficulties with other points of view, and where interpretations may result in injustice.
7. See to be open to learn about other people in terms of their cultural, social, and personal perspectives.
8. Be open for something genuinely new to occur—transformation/change/new insights/new commitments—in light of engaging the Bible and different cultural points of view.
9. Honor confidentiality so as to create an atmosphere of trust. Agree to discuss positively and constructively with other members of the group outside the gathering.

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[1] Taken from Rhoads, From Every People and Nation, 234.

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