

Indian Journal of Theology

Volume 65:2, 2023

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Editorial

I am elated to bring out another issue of our prestigious Journal with stimulating and diverse content contributed by scholars across India and abroad. This issue contains 6 essays, 4 book reviews and Statement of the 58th North India Theology Students' (NITS) Conference. I am extremely grateful to all our contributors for making this issue a work of genius and assuring the readers a stunning read.

In the first essay, "*Characteristics of Major Greek New Testament Critical Editions: Textus Receptus and Its Subsequent Editions*," H. Joseph Lalfakmawia studies the characteristics of the printed editions of the Greek New Testament by selecting fifteen Greek critical editions. By writing this essay, he wishes to address the tensions that exist between the supporters of the King James Version and other modern English Versions towards textual critical studies. The Byzantine text-type and its derivative Greek New Testament editions such as *Textus Receptus* and other editions are the main focus of study. The author mentions that he is on the venture to work on the counterpart essay, i.e., the Alexandrian text-type and the consequent Greek New Testament editions, and we hope to publish it again soon.

In "*To Parade or Not to: Resistance and Reclaiming Queen Vashti in the Book of Esther*," Nokcharenla asserts that gender-based violence in the form of stripping and parading women naked is generic in India, a country known for plethora of inter-faith discourses and highlights the recent incidents in Madhya Pradesh (2021) and Manipur (2023). Such a similar toxic and dictatorial environment is found in the Book of Esther in which she presents the annihilated character Queen Vashti as an audacious woman who rose against all odds in the context of hegemonic masculinity,

serves as a model of resisting injustice, and gives “hope” to the suffering bodies.

In ***“The House of El,”*** Revelation E. Velunta, begins by stating that diversity is a gift and thereby plurality is God’s gift. He elaborates on forcing a single truth upon a plural world in the form of “imperialism” and critiques on how western Christianity is being used to provide ideological legitimization for today’s empire. The Bible unfortunately remains imperialism’s most effective text and the author suggests that we “stop using” the Bible but actually “start reading” it. He proposes a new “Canaanite” reading to contribute to the developing archive of resistance and liberation discourses from the Third World and Fourth World – a reading aimed to disrupt and challenge the hegemony of Western discourses, especially in plural Asia.

In ***“Indigenous Philosophies in Folklore: Re-Storying Its Essence through Reoralizing Hermeneutics in North East India,”*** Supongmayang Longkumer identifies various dominant agents such as colonialism, westernization, modernism, etc. that have come along the paths of the indigenous communities and have subsequently sidelined the traditional understanding and practices of folklore and diminished many essential indigenous rudiments. He, therefore, highlights certain significant prospects of re-storying folktales and stresses on the need for reoralizing the indigenous philosophies in North East India and applies “reoralizing hermeneutics” to re-story folklore and recognize indigenous resources, values, and principles.

In ***“Religious Iconoclasm: Bible Engagement and Contextualization,”*** Joel Patrick attempts to find out the reasons behind the dichotomous views of Christians toward the use of sculptures in homes and churches. The study was done through “participant observation” and “in-depth interviews” on ten Christian families of the Jabalpur Diocese of Church of North India. He explores the biblical perspective on icons and the role they play in Christian faith and brought out a number of ways in

which icons serve different purposes. He notices how Protestant churches are hesitant towards the use of art, especially images. He proposes Contextualization and “Rule Theory” of Lindbeck’s to fill the gap between tradition and culture.

In ***“Unsung Heroines: A Historical Appraisal of the Role and Contribution of the Mizo Bible Women in building Mizo Society and Upliftment of Mizo Women,”*** P. C. Vanlalhruaia assesses the role and contribution of the Mizo Bible Women in building up Mizo society and uplifting the Mizo Women. Using subaltern and feminist historical perspectives, he critically evaluates how the historical writings ignored the ministry of the Bible Women as most documents were a product of male writers written from a patriarchal perspective, making the written history of Christianity in Mizoram incomplete. He brings out the need for reconstructing Biblical hermeneutics, reconceptualizing Christian ministry, restructuring church polity and paradigm shift in the Mizo Christian historiography.

Characteristics of Major Greek New Testament Critical Editions: Textus Receptus and Its Subsequent Editions

*H. Joseph Lalfakmawia**

Introduction

The topic, 'Characteristics of Major Greek New Testament Critical Editions' indicates that our aim is to study the characteristics of the printed editions of the Greek (hereafter, Gk) New Testament (hereafter, NT). It is not easy to count how many Gk NT editions have been published (printed) so far, and we do not intend to do so even now. Instead, our aim is to study the critical editions as far as we can. It is not an attempt to plainly narrate the features of the critical editions. We put forth this effort hoping to meaningfully address the tensions that exist between the supporters of the King James Version and other modern English Versions especially towards textual critical studies.

The topic will be divided into two parts. The first part will deal with a brief introduction of the Gk NT Manuscripts (hereafter,

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mss.) and how these mss. were divided into families or text-types. The Byzantine text-type and its derivative Gk NT editions such as *Textus Receptus* (hereafter, TR) and other editions will be the focus in this part. The second part of the topic will be dealt in a separate essay. That part will deal with the Gk NT editions that depart from the TR tradition; and are also called modern versions.

1. A Brief Introduction to the Greek New Testament Manuscripts

Let us briefly introduce the Gk NT mss. and its transmission for the benefit of newcomers. The original edition of the Gospels or Letters, written or dictated by the original authors such as Mark, Luke, Paul etc. are called ‘autographs’.¹ Since they are handwritten, they are also called ‘manuscripts’. As the church grew and expanded, the need of such sacred writings was also increasing. Hence, autographs were reproduced by copying down from the original. Once that process got going, the duplicate of the autograph served as a new source for manufacturing more copies. When the copies of the mss. were made, usually one person read it aloud while the other person meticulously penned down. Even if such copying work was meticulously done, there were several opportunities for accidental errors and intentional corrections/changes from the source mss. This process of reproduction of manuscripts continued for hundreds of years in various places.

The original documents in the handwriting of Paul, Mark, Matthew and the other authors have not survived. What is called the autograph copy of their works is not available.² The extant mss. we have today are copy of the copies of the autographs. Scholars of the Institute for the New Testament Textual Research (Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung, hereafter INFT),³ University of Münster, Germany, continue to decipher NT mss. and therefore, number of Gk mss. keep on increasing. According to the latest record, there are 5,700 Gk NT mss. that are intact:⁴

Category	Latest GA number	Oldest	Latest	Removed	Total Mss
Papyri	P ¹⁴¹	P ⁹⁰ (100-199 CE; Jn 18,36-19,7) P ¹⁰⁴ (100-199 CE; Mt 13,55-56; 14,3-5)	P ⁴¹ (700-799 CE; Acts)	5	136
Majuscules	0326	0171 (175-225 CE; Mt 10,17-23.25-32)	0325 (1000-1299 CE; Rev 21:20-23)	44	282
Minuscules	1-3019	2224 (800-899 CE) Gospels, leaves 453 2464 (800-899 CE), ap, leaves 212		159	2860
Lectionaries	12555			133	2422
Total					5700

High resolution images of these mss. are stored in the New Testament Virtual Manuscript Room (NTVMR) of the INFT. Expert Users (members) can access this site any time. As it has been depicted in the table, the oldest extant mss. were copied at the beginning of the second century CE.

Despite the multiplicity of mss., only few are complete NT (for instance, Cod. Sinaiticus) while some are not even a full page, a small fragment. Shockingly no two of these 5,700 mss. are exactly alike. It is suggested that not less than 2,34,000 variant readings existed (could be even much more than that)! However, about 99% of these variant readings are insignificant, mostly spelling variation.⁵ About 1% has to be taken care cautiously and vigilantly.

How could there be inconsistencies or variant readings, is not the question we try to answer now. As we are aware, there are

several New Testament verses or part of the verses not included in modern English translations such as Revised Version (1881), American Standard Version (1901), Revised Standard Version (1947), New Revised Standard Version, New International Version, Today English Version etc., while these verses exist in older English translations (primarily the King James Version). This reality creates confusion among lay people and theologians.

This confusion can be addressed from the textual critical studies of the NT. However, it is extremely difficult to answer it satisfactorily because the debate over the supremacy of text-types is too difficult and sensitive.

We have said that there are more than 2,34,000 variant readings in the 5,700 Gk NT mss. Though 99% of these variant readings are minor and insignificant, causing no big problem, but there are good numbers of variant readings that are significant. We cannot make a full list of those variant readings in this essay. In order to illuminate the significance of our topic, we will point out some few variant readings that are found in the KJV but not in other modern versions:

KJV	Missing in modern English Versions such as RSV, NRSV, NIV, TEV etc.
Mt 6.13	For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.
Mt 17.21	Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.
Mt 18.11	For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.
Mt 23.14	Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.
Mk 7.16	If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.
Mk 9.44, 9.46	Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.
Mk 11.26	But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.

Mk 15.28	And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, "And he was numbered with the transgressors."
Lk 17.36	Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.
Jn 5.3-4	...waiting for the moving of the water. For an Angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.
Acts 8.37	And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.
Acts 15.34	Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still.
Acts 24.6-8	Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law. But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands, Commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him.
Acts 28.29	And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves.
Rom 16.24	The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.
1 Jn 5.7-8	For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the holy Ghost, and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth

Apart from these, there are plenty of 'clauses' that are missing in modern English versions but are found in the KJV. What is the reason for these discrepancies? Why are such verses and clauses found in KJV while they are missing in modern English version (NIV is usually quoted)? Whether KJV or some Gk mss. added them or modern versions dropped or removed them from the original, is the main question.

Though KJV is quoted for this, the actual root of this issue is the base text of the KJV, i.e., the *Textus Receptus*. The TR was developed from one of the textual families, the so-called **Byzantine**

text-type. Hence, TR and KJV ruled NT studies for hundreds of years. With the discoveries of more mss., textual scholars slowly departed from the TR and KJV, and eventually edited Gk NT basing on other textual family called the **Alexandrian text-type**. This is the birth of modern Gk edition and consequently modern English versions.

Though it is not conclusive to say, Gk NT mss. can roughly be divided into four families or text-types:

i) Western Text-Type

Some scholars hesitate to consider it as a separate text-type. It is a second century CE text in which there is no strict consistency. It lacks homogeneity. Paraphrasing and additions of words were extensive. It is believed that such a text was so old that second century figures such as Marcion, Justin, Heracleon, Irenaeus, Tertullian used it. The most important witness is the Cod. Bezae (D05).⁶ There are several corruptions in this text. *Codex Bezae* (D05), P²⁹, P³⁸, P⁴⁸, P⁶⁹, 0171, 1739, 614, 383 are considered to be the most important western texts.

ii) Alexandrian Text-Type

Probably due to the birth and circulation of the uncontrolled and loose western text, Alexandria produced a conscious and conscientious controlled text, in order to check the western text. It is believed that transmission of a high quality text was witnessed from the earliest time in this area. Notable mss. such as P⁶⁶, P⁷⁵ Cod Vaticanus (B03), Cod Sinaiticus (x01) etc were Alexandrian texts. The quotations of the 3rd and 4th century church Fathers such as Origen, Athanasius and Didymus the Blind were categorized within this text-type.⁷

iii) Caesarean Text-Type:

It is considered that this text-type was made up of a blending of both Alexandrian and Byzantine text-types. Hence, it is not as old as these two texts. Codex W is the best witness of this text.⁸

iv) Byzantine Text-Type

This text is known differently: i) *Syrian text* (Westcott and Hort); ii) *Koine text* (Hermann Freiherr von Soden); iii) *Ecclesiastical text* (Kirsopp Lake); iv) *Antiochian text* (J. H. Ropes). It is estimated that this text-type, the latest of all, emerged since 4th century CE from the works of Basil the Great and John Chrysostom.⁹ Nearly all critics today see the Byzantine text as a later development in the history of transmission. It can be said that it is the work of the editors of the earlier extant traditions, choosing variant readings from among those already available.¹⁰ About 90% of the extant Gk NT mss. belongs to Byzantine text-type. Due to this, it is also called Majority Text.¹¹ This is the source of the TR and consequently the KJV.

2. Towards Printing the Gk NT

By 1450, that is, not long after Johannes Gutenberg invented printing press, he improved his press in Mainz, Germany, then started printing books for sale. The first book printed in Europe (1456) was a complete Latin Bible.¹² In 1488, complete Hebrew Bible was printed by Soncino Press. Before 1500, Bible had been printed in other languages such as Bohemian, French, German and Italian. Gk NT, except short extracts, was printed rather lately.

There were some reasons for the late printing of the Gk NT. Latin Bible was widely distributed and was officially used. Jerome's Vulgate was too prestigious that its rival translation was a threat. However, translation of Vulgate into vernacular encountered no issue because such translation did not outshine the supremacy of the Vulgate. Greek was different from that because it was also understood that Gk is the original language of the NT, which would definitely bother the then revered and official version of the Bible, Latin. Apart from that, Gk NT scholars of that time loved the calligraphy (handwritten). They also despised and undervalued the printed scripture.¹³ However, Gk NT began to be slowly published in the midst of various problems. The

Gk NT publication timeline and the major characteristics of those versions/editions are highly neglected in the institutions (particularly in India) which the author of this article believes, is very significant in order to have a firm basis in the New Testament textual studies.

As the title of this article specifies, our focus is on the ‘critical editions’ of the Greek NT. Some editions are deliberately missed out such as the base-text collated mainly for fresh translation into English, etc.

A slightly different style of classification is made. For instance, Philip Schaff (who even wrote introduction to the American Edition of the Westcott & Hort NT Greek) classified it in era wise. Some delineate it according to the sequence of publication. But in this article, classification is made according to the text-type: 1) *Textus Receptus* and its subsequent tradition (KJV tradition) and, 2) those that depart from it. The first group would be studied till the latest edition in this essay. The second group will be dealt with in another writing.

3. Origin of TR and its Tradition

The origin of the TR is traced back to Erasmus’ Gk NT. Hence, Desiderius Erasmus’ name will be resounding throughout this article.

i) Erasmus, Desiderius. *Novum Instrumentum Omne, 1516 (Novum Testamentum, 1535)*

This is the first printed Gk NT published for sale. Printer and publisher, Johann Froben was of the opinion that Gk NT would be highly profitable to sell. Despite his knowledge of the ongoing printing work project of the *Complutensian Polyglot*, he wanted to pursue Gk NT selling market. He made up his mind to urge the then prestigious NT scholar, Desiderius Erasmus to take up the work hastily. He immediately pursued Erasmus who was in England to start editing Gk NT. He then came home soon and settled the matter in no time.¹⁴

Erasmus started his editing work from July¹⁵/August¹⁶ 1515. He collected some few mss. he could obtain from Basel, Switzerland and started printing the Gk NT on October 2, 1515.¹⁷ He completed his editing work within 5 months!¹⁸ Since he could not obtain Gk ms. on Revelation, he borrowed a mutilated text from his friend Johann Reuchlin in which the text and commentary were intermixed. Thus, he used the Latin Vulgate for his guide, retranslating into Gk as best as he could. He did this especially for the last six verses of Revelation because it was mutilated in Reuchlin’s text.¹⁹

With much defects and innumerable errors, Johann Froben published Erasmus’ Gk NT on March 1, 1516 at Basel as the first Gk NT printed book ever. Since there were too many defects, Erasmus himself described it later as *thrown together rather than edited/praecipitatum verius quam editum*.²⁰ Philip Schaff sharply made a comment on the last six verses of the book of Revelation which Erasmus retranslated from Latin to Gk as ‘poor Greek.’²¹

Erasmus revised and published his Gk NT five times during his lifetime (1516, 1519, 1522, 1527 and 1535). It is noted that he used only 8 mss. for his complete edition²² out of which five were heavily used (Ms. 1, 2, 2ap, 4ap and 1r). Unfortunately, these mss. are not considered good mss. except Ms. 1 (which he did not use much).

Second edition appeared in 1519 with many improvements. According to John Mill, there were 400 alterations from the previous edition; many of which had arisen from over-haste in printing the first edition.²³ One of the outstanding omissions in the first two editions was 1 Jn 5.7,8 (*Johannine Comma*) which the rival Gk NT edition, the *Complutensian* Gk NT had included. Therefore, Erasmus got a serious criticism. They claimed that Erasmus omitted this verse, while he affirmed that he did not add it to the text because no Gk NT mss. he obtained contained this verse. It seems that about 3,300 copies were printed for the first two editions.²⁴

His third edition was published in 1522 in which 1 Jn 5.7,8 (*Johannine Comma*) is included because a rather late Gk ms. called *Codex Britannicus* (also called *Codex Montfortianus*) contains this verse. The 3rd edition differed from the previous version in about 118 places.²⁵

His 4th *edition* was published in 1527 in which three versions are collated side by side (his edition of Vulgate, the Vulgate and his Gk NT). It differed from the 3rd edition only in about 10 places. The 5th edition was published in 1535 in which only 4 places witnessed alteration from the 4th edition. This 5th edition is always quoted for Erasmus' Gk NT.²⁶

Although we have pointed out loopholes and defects, yet Erasmus' Gk NT served a very great purpose in the history of the Gk NT.

ii) *Novum Testamentum: Complutensian Polyglot, 1520.*

This Gk NT is also called *Polyglot Bible of Complutum*. It was prepared/completed earlier than the Erasmus' 1516 edition. Cardinal Primate of Spain, Francisco Ximenes de Cisneros (Arch Bishop of Toledo) began this mega project since 1502.²⁷ NT editors were Aelius Antonius Nebrissensis, Demetrius Cretensis, Ferdinandus Pitianus and Stunica (Diego Lopez de Zuñiga).²⁸ This polyglot comprised of the whole Bible in 6 volumes. Vols. 1-4 are the OT, and Vol. 5 is Gk NT. The printing of the NT portion was completed in January 10, 1514 (two columns, Gk and Latin Vulgate). Vol. 6 is Hebrew lexicon and grammar. Though the editing work was done early, yet the authorisation for publication from Pope Leo X, to whom it was dedicated, was sent late and hence, it was delayed (March 22, 1520). Its general circulation happened not before 1522.²⁹

It is not known how many mss. or what mss. were used to edit this book. While the editors claimed that they used mss. that are "very ancient and correct procured from Rome," yet it is believed that they were late mss. and not specified.³⁰

This seems to be correct because the library of Madrid that preserved the sources of Polyglot NT proved that the mss. claimed by the editors as their sources were not there. It was also claimed that Pope Leo X sent ms. from Vatican Library. That ms. could be Codex B (Vaticanus). However, it took place too late compared to the early completion of the Complutensian Bible.³¹ Therefore, Codex B as its base text is also doubted.

It is also found that wherever modern mss. (13th–15th centuries mss.) differ from the ancient mss. and from the quotations from the early Greek fathers, the Complutensian Gk NT agrees to the modern mss, in opposition to the ancient mss.³² So, its preference on the modern mss. to the ancient mss. cannot be appreciated from the textual critical point of view. Hence, this edition cannot be given a heavy weight textually.

Since only 600 copies of *Complutensian Polyglot Bible* were produced in 1522 (only after Erasmus' 3rd edition) for public access, it did not get chance to supersede Erasmus' Gk NT.³³

iii) *Gerbel, Nikolaus. Novum Testamentum Graece. Hagenau: Thomas Anshelm, 1521*

This Gk NT might not be counted as a pure critical edition. However, we have included here since the German scholar Nicolaus Gerbel (1485–1560) is the first person who edited Erasmus' Gk text and since this text is one of the earliest Gk texts without Latin parallel. The high-resolution images of this edition are preserved in the official website of the University of Munster.³⁴

iv) *Estienne, Robert (Robertus Stephanus). Της καλυης Διαθηκης Απαντα: Editio Regia. Lutetiae: Estienne, 1550*

Stephanus (1503 – September 7, 1559) produced his own Gk NT with the title *Της καλυης Διαθηκης Απαντα*: He published this small but beautiful edition in 1546 and 1549. This edition contained a blended text of the Complutensian edition and Erasmus' edition. But the third edition (1550, Geneva) was

unique. The text seems to be Erasmus' 5th edition (1535), but he too put marginal notes as a textual apparatus. However, these marginal notes/textual apparatus were not critical enough. These variant readings are from Complutensian printed edition and others from 15 other mss. Unfortunately, it was discovered that the Complutensian text is often incorrectly cited in that margin. That made scholars concluded that those 15 mss. might not be faithfully studied and accurately cited. Thus, the marginal notes seem to be like ornaments, rather than real critical apparatus.³⁵ Among the 15 mss. claimed to be cited within the marginal note, *Codex Bezae* (D/05) and *Codex Regius* (L/019) are most valuable, but least used.³⁶

Since this edition was dedicated to King Henry II (of France), this version is also called *Editio Regia* (*Royal Edition*).³⁷ Due to the existence of marginal note as a textual apparatus, Stephanus met with various criticisms. His 4th edition (1551) introduced the verse number that are still followed in other printed Gk NTs till today.³⁸ Stephanus' 3rd edition (1550) was used as the basis for Geneva Bible (English) 1560.

v) Theodore Beza, *Novum Testamentum*

Theodore Beza (1519-1605) was a close friend and successor of John Calvin, the great reformer and scholar. He based himself at Geneva and edited Gk NT five times (1565, 1576, 1582, 1588, 1589). He was the owner of celebrated *Codex Cantabrigiensis* (*Cod. Bezae* or D^{ca} or 05) and *Cod. Claramontanous* (D^p or 06). Though he possessed this codex, he followed Stephanus' 1551 edition as a base text (but with some changes). As we have intimated above, Stephanus (he claimed) collated 15 mss. and utilized them in the marginal notes. Much more than that, Beza really made use of that collation, along with his own codex D/05 and D/06 (minimal though).³⁹

The uniqueness and significance of Beza's Gk text is the variant readings contained in the marginal notes. His 1588 and 1589 editions were chiefly consulted for the translation of the

King James Version 1611, in connection with the Stephanus' 1551 edition.⁴⁰

vi) Bonaventure and Abraham Elzevir, *H Καινή Διαθήκη: Novum Testamentum, 1624*

Elzevir brothers were publishers. They were famous editors of Erasmus' Gk NT. They published thrice in 1624, 1633 and 1641. We have to know that they simply edit the existing text, but did not produce a fresh text. The Elzevir Gk text is very similar to Beza's 1565 edition (1st edition) or Stephanus' 3rd edition.⁴¹ The preface of Elzevir's 2nd edition (1633) contained *Textum, ergo habes, nunc ab omnibus receptum; in quo nihil immutatum aut corruptum damus* (Thou hast the *text* now *received by all*, in which we give nothing altered or corrupted). From this expression in the preface has arisen the phrase "Textus Receptus."⁴² Henceforth, the Gk NT text as found in the Elzevir's edition is known as the *Received Texts* or *Textus Receptus*.

We can also say that this is how the history of the TR has begun, starting from Erasmus who produced the first printed Gk NT. It was edited and improved through editors such as Stephanus, Beza and Elzevir brothers. Hence, TR is not the handiwork of a single person. Some writers assume particularly Elzevir's edition as the TR while others assume it as Stephanus' edition.⁴³ The TR ruled NT Gk textual studies for about 250 years starting from Erasmus. Therefore, it stood as a standard text for NT studies. As more NT mss. were discovered, more Gk NT editions appeared. But scholars dared not depart from the TR due to its undisputed authority.

vii) John Fell (1625-1686), *Της Καινης Διαθηκης Απαντα: Novi Testamenti Libri Omnes, Oxford, 1675*

This is the first Gk NT published in Oxford (1675). Though the base text is Elzevir 1633 (TR), it contained variant readings from about 100 mss. Therefore, this edition is useful and significant.⁴⁴ Variant readings are located at the bottom of the page. Apart

from Gk mss., Coptic (Memphitic) and Gothic versions were employed.⁴⁵ But, Fell did not make use of the Church Fathers' quotations.

viii) John Mill (1645-1707), *Η Καινή Διαθήκη: Novum Testamentum, Oxford, 1707*

John Mill spent about 30 years to produce his own edition. However, he could publish only two weeks before his death. Wettstein, another prolific editor of Gk NT made a superb comment on him, "This learned man alone did more, in the labour of thirty years, than all those who had preceded him."⁴⁶ After making use of the variant readings in the editions (13) that preceded his, he also collated 33 mss., and produced his own edition called *Η Καινή Διαθήκη: Novum Testamentum* which he published in 1707.⁴⁷

Mill's contribution towards textual criticism is massive. His new edition contained about thirty thousand variant readings!⁴⁸ But these inputs instigated many opponents who considered that he made the scripture precarious, thinking that it challenged the reverence and authority of the Bible. However, he too had others who supported his works stating that it was not him who made up this, rather he stated the existing facts.⁴⁹

ix) Johann Albrecht Bengel, *Η Καινή Διαθήκη: Novum Testamentum Graecum, 1734*

Johann Albrecht Bengel (John Albert Bengel, 1687-1752) was born in 1687 at Wütemberg, Germany. While he studied in 1703-07 at Tübingen, he was interested when he came to know that there are various variant readings in the mss. He was really anxious to know whether it could be true that God had not guarded his own inspired word from material error?⁵⁰ He was disturbed by the 30,000 variant readings of John Mill's Gk NT.

After he spent many years to study Gk texts, he concluded that the various readings are less numerous than it might have been expected, and that they do not shake any article of the evangelical doctrine. This led Bengel to see the need of a Gk text based on

really sound principles of criticism applied to exact and complete collations.⁵¹ After he worked really hard, he started and completed his own edition and was published in 1734.

At the beginning, Bengel did his work for his personal research. He was a textual critic but his thorough research did not shake his faith. Unlike others, he divided the textual witnesses into families, made a method of comparing and weighing the readings, and then suggested true principles of criticism. He took a very bold step by departing from the TR in the book of Revelation!⁵² However, he followed Stephanus' text so much so that he hardly departed from it (except in Revelation). Since he followed Stephanus' text, he put in the marginal note what he accepted as genuine (over against Stephanus' text) with a mark by which he indicated their value.⁵³

Bengel put many critical apparatuses in the marginal notes. The uniqueness of his version is that the critical apparatus was discussed at the end of the text (not on each page). He analysed not every variant reading, but only that he judged to be of significant. Unlike other critics, he gave the evidence FOR as well as AGAINST each variant reading, clearly stated.⁵⁴

His other uniqueness is that in cases of variant readings, and in case of equal evidence, he regarded the more difficult reading higher than the easier reading.⁵⁵ He divided the text into paragraph format, and also developed punctuation marks. Hence, his edition was highly valued.

Another contribution of Bengel is noteworthy. He highly valued the oldest Gk mss. and Latin versions. He divided Gk mss. into two families: 1) African Family (most ancient Greek mss. such as Cod. A/Alexandrinus; and the most ancient versions such as the Ethiopic, Coptic, and Latin versions); 2) Asiatic Family (more recent Greek mss. and versions). He gave the African family mss. heavier weight (always ancient) and the Asian family mss. often little weight.⁵⁶ This classification seems to be the foundation of

what we call today as *Alexandrian text-type* and *Byzantine text-type*.⁵⁷

Bengel is the first critic to classify mss. into family (can be understood as text-type). His type of classification was adopted in some form or another by all modern critics. Therefore, he can be considered as the father of modern criticism.⁵⁸

Since he faithfully followed Stephanus' Gk text, the value of his textual apparatus outweighed the actual text. His plentiful textual apparatus invited criticism like his predecessors. Nevertheless, his Gk edition was highly valued. Therefore, he edited and published number of times. As a hard-working scholar, he intensively revised and edited several times.

x) Johann Jakob Wettstein (1693-1754), *Novum Testamentum Graecum, 1751.*

Wettstein's contribution in the NT textual studies is immense. Strangely, he strongly criticised against Bengel regarding his approach. From Wettstein, the nomenclature of the mss. greatly improved. He introduced a new system of naming the mss.: capital Roman letters to majuscules/uncials (A B C etc.) and Arabic numerals to minuscules (1, 2, 3 etc.), including lectionaries. He was the first person to make a full collation of the NT portion of Codex Ephraemi (C), a fifth century ms. that had been erased and later overwritten it (technically called palimpsest).⁵⁹

He used Elzevir 1624 as his base text with some readings from John Fell's text.⁶⁰ His critical apparatus is rich. He wrote a very comprehensive introduction of his edition (*prolegomena*) containing 222 pages in which he narrated his sources in detail. In the midst of strong opposition, this *Prolegomena* was published in 1730 anonymously.⁶¹ He seemed to use about 14 uncials/majuscules and 112 minuscules which he gave names. He diligently classified all these mss.⁶² In spite of all these textual studies, he was reluctant to depart from the TR.

As his critical apparatus and sources were plentiful, the criticism of the existing Gk NT seemed to be harsh too. His

work was considered by the theological faculty of the University of Basel as needless, and dangerous work, and sued him before the town-council of Basel to prohibit his text from publication. Though this petition was not granted, he was strongly opposed by many.⁶³

After many hindrances and long preparations, he published his Gk NT in two volumes as *Novum Testamentum Graecum*, the first in 1751 and the second in 1752. His text looks like modern commentary (or Study Bible). The upper page is the Gk text and the lower part of each page contains textual apparatus and comprehensive comments in Latin.

His principle, *a shorter reading is to be preferred over a longer*,⁶⁴ is noteworthy. He asserted that (in opposition to Bengel) in case of variant readings, the text that is supported by the greatest number of mss. be opted.⁶⁵ According to him, the oldest Gk mss. were corrupted by the interpolation from the older Latin mss. Hence, he said that the textual critics must move to more recent mss. if a pure text is to be found (which the author of this article could not follow).⁶⁶

Wettstein made up 19 critical principles which he followed to make his new edition. Some of the significant points are:⁶⁷ 1) A better and clearer reading is not usually preferable to the contrary reading; 2) unusual expression is more preferable; 3) a shorter reading is preferable over a longer reading; 4) a reading that conforms to the style of the author is preferable; 5) a more orthodox reading is not necessarily preferable; 6) Gk reading that accord with the ancient version should not easily be set aside; 7) other things being equal, the ancient reading is preferable; 8) other things being equal, reading of the majority of manuscripts is preferable.

xi) C. F. Matthaei, *Novum Testamentum Graece et Latine.*

Professor Matthaei was the former professor of Wittenberg and Moscow. He was the strong opponent of Griesbach (who departed TR). He also ridiculed the system of recension and despised the

most ancient mss. He claimed that he furnished a text from about a hundred Moscow mss. all of Constantinopolitan origin (*Byzantine text-type/Majority Text*), to which he attributed too great a value.⁶⁸ He published 12 volumes within 1782-88.

xii) J. M. A. Scholz, *Novum Testamentum Graece*.

Though Scholz might not be considered as a great textual critic, he is at least a great collator. Good numbers of Gk Mss were discovered during his time which he studied them extensively. At the beginning, he intended to classify mss. into 5 families, but eventually grouped into two: 1) Alexandrian text (old Gk mss., Old Latin, Jerome's Vulgate, Coptic [Sahidic and Bohairic] and Ethiopic version) and, 2) the Constantinopolitan text (later Gk mss., Old Syriac [in part] and later Syriac versions, Gothic, Georgian and Slavonic versions as well as Church Fathers from 4th century onward).⁶⁹ After his careful studies, he preferred Constantinopolitan text-type (as we call Byzantine text-type now) to Alexandrian text-type because the *Constantinopolitan/ Byzantine text* are more uniform, having been preserved in general purity.⁷⁰ This conclusion of Scholz, according to modern textual critics, is hard to accept, even from the perspective of the author of this article. However, his hard work and plentiful contributions deserve respect.

He departed from TR to some extent. However, generally speaking, he followed TR much more than the Vulgate. He then published his Gk edition as *Novum Testamentum Graece* in two volumes during 1830-36. His edition found greater favour in England than in Germany.⁷¹

xiii) Scrivener, F. H. A. *The New Testament in the Original Greek*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1894.

The complete title of this edition (*The New Testament in the Original Greek according to the text followed in the Authorised Version together with the variations adopted in the Revised*

Version) interprets the nature of this edition. As we have said, the translators of the King James Version (Authorised Version) consulted the TR (mainly Beza's 1588, 1589 and Stephanus' 1551 editions). The same is mentioned by Scrivener too. However, his main concern, as he wrote in the introduction of his edition, is to display before the readers that the revisers of the KJV in order to make the Revised Version were not faithful enough to represent the Gk text represented by the KJV/Authorised Version. This proves his loyalty to the TR or KJV.

Scrivener is no doubt one of the greatest textual critics. He published good numbers of mss. He also published Beza's Cod. D^{ea}. He collated about 80 minuscules and published it.⁷² His preparation to publish his own Gk edition was quite satisfactory. Before he finalized his Gk edition, he published several books concerning the Gk NT such as: *A Full and Exact Collation of About Twenty Greek Manuscripts of the Holy Gospels* (1853), *A Full Collation of the Codex Sinaiticus with the Received Text of the New Testament: To which is Prefixed a Critical Introduction* (1864) and *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament* (1861, 1874). His book *Novum Testamentum: Textus Stephanici A.D. 1550: accedunt variae lectiones editionum Bezae, Elzeviri, Lachmanni, Tischendorfii, Tregellesii, Westcott-Hort, Versionis Anglicanae Emendatorum* (1887) is, as the title indicates, the collation of critical Gk editions that preceded his edition. This unique book demonstrated how deliberate and industrious critic he was. He enumerated 3,791 Gk mss. known in 1894.⁷³ He made use of several mss. from this list.

Scrivener seemed to base his edition in Beza's 1598 edition. However, he departed from it in about 190 places.⁷⁴ Compared to the former critical editions, critical apparatus is less in Scrivener's edition. However, his edition is significant to learn the base text of the KJV.

xiv) Hermann Freiherr von Soden, *Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments*, vols. 4, 1902-1913.

Von Soden (1852-1914), a Berlin pastor, contributed a lot in the field of textual studies. With the support of a wealthy woman Elise König, he, with the efforts of his 40 colleagues, collected and collated many mss. from various libraries of Europe and other lands.⁷⁵ Their collection was so huge and was really mouth-watering for other textual critics.

He then published his Gk edition in four volumes in 1902-1913 under the title *Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments in ihrer ältesten erreichbaren Textgestalt hergestellt auf Grund ihrer Textgeschichte* (The Writings of the New Testament, restored to their earliest attainable form on the basis of their textual history).

According to his finding, there were three major text-types (or recensions). He believed that Gk mss. were already divided into three families by 3rd or 4th century CE such as:⁷⁶

- a) **K (Koine) group:** Majority of the mss. belong to this group. It is also called *Syrian, Antiochene* or *Byzantine type*.
- b) **H (Hesychian) group:** It is also called *Egyptian/Alexandrian text*. It is old, copied during 200 CE. Soden regarded P⁶⁶ and P⁷⁵ as belonging to this group.⁷⁷ Coptic and Alexandrian Fathers such as Athanasius, Didymus and Cyril were put in this group.
- c) **I (Jerusalem) group:** What other textual critics called Western Text fall in this group. Origen belongs to this. He thought Cod. Bezae also belongs to this group.

In case of variant readings, von Soden tended to give preference to readings supported by two of the three main texts.⁷⁸ This argument gives high significance to the Koine (Byzantine) text since absolute majority of the Mss belong to this type.

His classification and indication of the contents of the mss. is as follows:

d (διαθηκη): Mss containing the whole NT

e (εὐαγγέλιον): Mss containing the four Gospels

a (ἀποστολος): Mss containing other parts of the NT

He also included the date of a ms. in its symbol such as d150 (mss of 11th century), d250 (mss. of 12th century) etc. Though his attempt was ingenious, but new discoveries were plentiful that his numbering system was quite insufficient. He edited according to the new findings and therefore, more and more complicated.⁷⁹

The variant readings in his edition are too detail and not orderly. Therefore, it is not very friendly even for the experts. Moreover, scholars argued that there are good numbers of errors, missing and wrong information as well as groundless quotations in the critical apparatus. Aland and Aland criticised it as “a failure, though a splendid one.”⁸⁰ One of the harshest (or merciless) critics was Kirsopp Lake. One of his points against von Soden is that he neglected the great versions which Lake put it as equal value to Cod. x and B.⁸¹ He too criticised since von Soden attached importance to the Diatessaron too much.⁸² He ruthlessly said that his book has proved a tragic failure and his numeration was merely a literary curiosity. He preferred to follow slight modification of Tischendorf’s method of presentation and of Gregory’s notation to von Soden’s new introduction.⁸³

This does not mean that Soden’s edition is worthless or unreliable. Though Lake criticized Soden’s text harshly, it is not too far from the Gregory-Aland system of classification (the most popular system now) and can be viewed together.⁸⁴ In fact, Gregory too had his former system which he himself abandoned it.

xv) Robinson, Maurice A. and William G. Pierpont, *The New Testament in the Original Greek: Byzantine Textform*. Southborough: Chilton Book Publishing, 2005.

The title of the book indicates that it is one of the devotees of Byzantine text-type (it uses textform, not text-type). We must

remember that TR and Byzantine text are not two identical terms. TR is a Byzantine text and not *vice versa*. Though the TR closely resembles the Byzantine text, it is found that the TR diverges from it in over 1800 instances generally due to the inclusion of weakly supported non-Byzantine readings. So, the editors of this edition claimed that “This Byzantine Textform volume is offered as an accurate representation of the New Testament canonical text, the written word of God according to the original Greek.”⁸⁵ Therefore, they claim that this edition differs slightly from the previous versions (even from the TR).

The editors claimed that this is an accurate representation of the NT to the original Gk. Hence, this edition is meant to satisfy the needs of students, clergy, and scholars alike.⁸⁶ The first edition was printed in 2005 and the second edition appeared in 2018.

The editors accepted the existence of four major text-types within the NT:⁸⁷

a) Western Text: This is the earliest deviation from the autographs (the writings of the real author of the NT books/ letters such as Paul, Matthew, etc.). These texts appeared as early as the second century CE. But this text is ‘uncontrolled text’, characterised by free expansion, paraphrases and alteration of previously existing words. These texts are few and diverse.

b) Alexandrian Text-Type: They claim that Alexandrian text-types appeared as an attempt to purge and purify the alterations and accretions/additions found among the western mss. The mss. of this type occurred during the second and third century in most early Egyptian and Palestinian papyri. The editors of this edition claim that the scribes of the Alexandrian text-types were overreactive and overextended. As they were trying to remove the additions and alterations in the Western texts, they even removed not only the western texts’ expansions, but also many longer and original readings in the sources. The Alexandrian text-type is represented by the Codex Vaticanus (or B/02) and Codex Sinaiticus (ⲁ/01), also some mss. such as P⁷⁵ and L/019.

c) Caesarean Text-Type: This text appeared to be a mixture (amalgamation) of readings from Alexandrian and Byzantine traditions. Since this text-type did not seem to appear before the Alexandrian and Byzantine text-types, it is not seriously taken regarding autograph originality.

d) Byzantine Text-Type: These text-types were large in number and are consistent. It dominated the Greek speaking world at least from the 4th century to the invention of printing press in the 16th century. It is also presumed that this text-type existed and dominated Greek-speaking region of the Roman Empire (southern Italy, Greece, and Asia Minor) prior to the 4th century CE. This text-type is considered the most reliable and an accurate representation of the NT to the original Gk. So, they boldly claim, “The editors here present the newly edited Byzantine Textform as the strongest representative of the canonical autographs of the Greek New Testament text.”⁸⁸

The primary sources for establishing the Byzantine Textform (the text of this edition) are the massive critical apparatus of Hermann Freiherr von Soden’s Gk NT (2 vols) and Herman C. Hoskier’s *Concerning the Text of the Apocalypse*, 2 vols. Apart from these, they also consulted the materials in the other editions (Alexandrian text-types) such as UBS⁴, NA²⁷, volumes of International Greek New Testament Project and *Novum Testamentum Graecum: Editio Critica Maior* (ECM).⁸⁹

As Von Soden’s edition was one of their main sources, the readings that Soden classified as **K** (bold **K**), become the main text of this edition (Robinson-Pierpont); that is, **K** = Κολνη = Byzantine Textform. However, where Soden’s main text or apparatus are confirmed to be error, other pertinent sources are used for correction.⁹⁰

Unlike other TR related editions, Robinson-Pierpont edition has uniqueness. Though the Byzantine texts are plenty, comprising about 80% of the mss., the editors manifest that the primary basis of textual determination does not depend on numerical quantity

(not strictly based on the quantity of the Byzantine mss). Hence, the mss. of the 12th and later centuries are considered irrelevant to establish primary Byzantine readings, and at best serve only a confirmatory purpose. Even for evaluating the variant readings, quantity alone cannot be determinative. So, they examined and evaluated the external, internal, transcriptional and transmissional evidences.⁹¹

The title of this edition deliberately parallels Wescott and Hort's "*The New Testament in the Original Greek*," claiming that more than Wescott and Hort's text, their text "is considered to reflect the canonical autographs in a highly accurate manner."⁹² The order of the canonical books follows (as they claim) various early papyri and mss. and the fourth century Festal Letter of Athanasius (367 CE), as well as according to the canon of Laodicean Council (360/363 CE) such as: Gospels, Acts and General Epistles, Pauline Epistles, and Revelation.

As this edition is called a Byzantine textform, it is as pure as possible a Byzantine text. Where Byzantine mss. are strongly united, the main text stands without marginal notes. The system of "marginal apparatus" of this edition cannot be explained adequately in this short work.

The copyright issue of this edition is extremely remarkable as they demonstrate:⁹³

Anyone is permitted to copy and distribute this text or any portion of this text. It may be incorporated in a larger work, and/or quoted from, stored in a database retrieval system, photocopied, reprinted, or otherwise duplicated by anyone without prior notification, permission, compensation to the holder, or any other restrictions. All rights to this text are released to everyone and no one can reduce these rights at any time. Copyright is not claimed nor asserted for the new and revised form of the Greek NT text of this edition,

nor for the original form of such as initially released into the public domain by the editors.

Conclusion

Fifteen Gk critical editions are studied in this article. We consider this stream of Gk text as one of the two streams, representing the Byzantine and Alexandrian text-types. The supporters of the Byzantine text-type boast of the large quantity of the mss. This text is smooth, longer and the mss. are consistent. Therefore, it is more loveable. Since this text-type comprises of more than 80% of all the extant mss., many critics are contented as if it is closest to autographs. Therefore, the authority of the TR and its consequent English version, that is, the King James Version are considered as the reigning text.

Whatever it is, early scholars and their comprehensive works contributed a lot in the field of NT textual studies. Since the counterpart article, that is, Alexandrian text-type and the consequent Gk NT editions are yet to be studied, it must be put into consideration that everything cannot be wrapped-up now.

End Notes

- 1 Cf. Robert B. Waltz, "The Autograph," *The Encyclopedia of New Testament Textual Criticism*, 29; cf. <https://archive.org/details/the-encyclopedia-of-new-testament-textual-criticism/mode/2up> (accessed on September 30, 2023).
- 2 J. K. Elliot, *New Testament Textual Criticism: The Application of Thoroughgoing Principles; Essays on Manuscripts and Textual Variation* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 14.
- 3 As we have intimated, the INTF is a body of the University of Münster (Germany) that immensely deals with NT mss. studies. Its task is to comprehensively document and analyse the history of the textual tradition of the New Testament in its Greek original language. NA²⁸ and UBS⁵ are also based on this to a great extent. Its contribution towards the textual studies of the NT is beyond imagination.
- 4 Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung, <https://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de/catalog> (accessed on September 30, 2023).

- 5 Cf. Is The *Original* New Testament Lost?: A Dialogue with Dr. Bart Ehrman & Dr. Daniel Wallace on Feb 13, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kg-dJA3SnTA>.
- 6 Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 276f.
- 7 Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, 278.
- 8 Eldon Jay Epp, *Perspectives on New Testament Textual Criticism: Collected Essays* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 491.
- 9 Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, 279.
- 10 Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, 279.
- 11 Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism*, 2nd ed., trans. Erroll F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, [1987] 1995), 128.
- 12 Bruce M. Metzger, "History of Editing the Greek New Testament," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 131, no. 2 (June 1987): 148-158.
- 13 Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament* (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1854), 2.
- 14 Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, 20.
- 15 Metzger, "History of Editing the Greek New Testament," 154.
- 16 Aland and Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 4.
- 17 Metzger, "History of Editing the Greek New Testament," 154.
- 18 Philip Schaff, "Introduction: American Edition," in Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (Cambridge and London, Macmillan & Co.; New York, Harper & Brothers, 1881), lxxvii.
- 19 Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, 21.
- 20 Metzger, "History of Editing the Greek New Testament," 154; Aland and Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 4.
- 21 Schaff, "Introduction: American Edition," lxxvii.
- 22 Schaff, "Introduction: American Edition," lxxviii.
- 23 Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, 25.
- 24 Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, 25.
- 25 Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, 26.
- 26 Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, 28.
- 27 Metzger, "History of Editing the Greek New Testament," 154.
- 28 Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, 3.
- 29 Metzger, "History of Editing the Greek New Testament," 154.
- 30 Schaff, "Introduction: American Edition," lxxix.
- 31 Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, 4-6.
- 32 Cf. Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, 8.
- 33 Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, 26.
- 34 <https://sammlungen.ulb.uni-muenster.de/hd/content/titleinfo/5374967> (accessed on September 29, 2023).
- 35 Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, 30.
- 36 Schaff, "Introduction: American Edition," lxxx.
- 37 Metzger, "History of Editing the Greek New Testament," 154.
- 38 Robert F. Hull Jr., *The Story of the New Testament Text Movers, Materials, Motives, Methods, and Models* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 40.
- 39 Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, 33.
- 40 Schaff, "Introduction: American Edition," lxxxi; Metzger, "History of Editing the Greek New Testament," 155.
- 41 Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, 35.
- 42 Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, 35; Metzger, "History of Editing the Greek New Testament," 155; Hull Jr. *The Story of the New Testament Text Movers, Materials, Motives, Methods, and Models*, 41.
- 43 Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, 35.
- 44 Cf. Hull Jr. *The Story of the New Testament Text: Movers, Materials, Motives, Methods, and Models*, 44.
- 45 Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, 40.
- 46 Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, 43.
- 47 Hull, *The Story of the New Testament Text*, 44f. Scrivener reported that he used 85 mss. Cf. Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament for the Use of Biblical Students* (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, and Col, 1874), 398.
- 48 Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, 48.
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- 50 Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, 69.
- 51 Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, 69.
- 52 Schaff, "Introduction: American Edition," lxxvi.

- 53 Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, 70.
- 54 Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, 70.
- 55 Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, 70.
- 56 Eldon Jay Epp, "The Eclectic Method in New Testament Textual Criticism: Solution or Symptom?" *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism*, ed. Eldon Jay Epp and Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, [1993] 2000), 147.
- 57 Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, 71.
- 58 Lake, *The Text of the New Testament*, 61.
- 59 Hull, *The Story of the New Testament Text*, 49f.
- 60 Schaff, "Introduction: American Edition," lxxvii.
- 61 Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, 75.
- 62 Johann Jakob Wettstein, *Novum Testamentum Graecum* (Amstelaedami: Ex Officina Dommeriana, 1751), 220, 221.
- 63 Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, 74.
- 64 Hull, *The Story of the New Testament Text*, 49.
- 65 Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, 72.
- 66 Epp, "The Eclectic Method in New Testament Textual Criticism: Solution or Symptom?" 149.
- 67 Epp, "The Eclectic Method in New Testament Textual Criticism: Solution or Symptom?" 150.
- 68 Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, 85f.; Schaff, "Introduction: American Edition," lxxx.
- 69 Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, 93f.
- 70 Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, 93.
- 71 Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, 92f.; Schaff, "Introduction: American Edition," lxxx.
- 72 Eldon Jay Epp, "The Late Constantin Tischendorf and Codex Sinaiticus: New Testament Textual Criticism without Them—An Exercise in Erasure History," in *Studies on the Text of the New Testament and Early Christianity: Essays in Honor of Michael W. Holmes On the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. Daniel M. Gurtner, Juan Hernández Jr. and Paul Foster (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 45.
- 73 Epp, "The Late Constantin Tischendorf and Codex Sinaiticus," 34.
- 74 F. H. A. Scrivener, *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1894), ix. The list of his 190 deviation from Beza 1598 edition can be seen in his appendix at pages 648-657.
- 75 Aland and Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 22.
- 76 Leon Vaganay, *An Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, 2nd ed., ed. Christian-Bernard Amphoux, transl. Jenny Heimerdinge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1986] 1991), 155-157.
- 77 Vaganay, *An Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, 107.
- 78 Metzger, "History of Editing the Greek New Testament," 157.
- 79 Aland and Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 40f.
- 80 Aland and Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 22-23.
- 81 Kirsopp Lake, *The text of the New Testament*, 6th ed. 12th impression (London: Rivingstons, 1953), 78, 82.
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- 83 Lake, *The text of the New Testament*, 6th ed, 78f.
- 84 Cf. J. K. Elliot, *A Bibliography of Greek New Testament Manuscripts*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), i.
- 85 Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont, *The New Testament in the Original Greek: Byzantine Textform* (Southborough: Chilton Book Publishing, 2005), i.
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- 90 Robinson and Pierpont, *The New Testament in the Original Greek Byzantine text Form*, x.
- 91 Robinson and Pierpont, *The New Testament in the Original Greek Byzantine text Form*, xiv.
- 92 Robinson and Pierpont, *The New Testament in the Original Greek Byzantine text Form*, xvi.
- 93 Robinson and Pierpont, *The New Testament in the Original Greek Byzantine text Form*, copyright page.

Indian Journal of Theology 65:2, 2023, pp. 30-42

To Parade or Not to: Resistance and Reclaiming Queen Vashti in the Book of Esther

*Nokcharenla**

Introduction

Paradoxical enough, patriarchy without the female counterpart would be non-existent. Yet, women's body continues to be dictated, her chastity defined, her honour and shame classified and for her to exist or not to is still determined by patriarchy. This is done by systematic disciplining of female bodies and internalizing societal norms, morals, roles and behaviours that women are subjected to. The ideal and the loathed female image is the only vision that is constructed for her to dream or to keep herself away from. Such a toxic and dictatorial environment is found in the Book of Esther because of the presence of hegemonic oppressive structure in the narration itself. In any given tyrannical system of oppression, people at the margins/vulnerable are forced to take actions. The end to the action might be for survival or rebellion for justice and liberation. Further the action is intertwined with risk and danger. Such a character is Queen Vashti in the book of Esther. She is a woman not to be compared to Queen Esther as the "bad and disobedient Queen" but rather an "audacious woman" rising against all odds in the context of hegemonic masculinity, though she was a Queen. Her action made her to be annihilated from the narrative even by the author, yet she gives the suffering bodies hope. The essay takes the cue from the question raised by Sarojini Nadar: *How is it that we find suffering bodies of used and*

*abused women right from Biblical times into our very own century in the midst of people that claim to be religious, in the midst of people who engage in religious discourse?*¹

1. Parading as a Cultural Construct

India, a country to many religions, a country known for plethora of inter-faith discourses, yet, gender-based violence continues, or intensified rather. Saumya Uma in her book *Violence, Gender and the State: Not just a Legal Analysis* on India and Gender based Violence sharply opined:

*Despite a constitutional guarantee of gender equality and non-discrimination, women continue to be killed in their homes, and attacked and harassed in public places, institutions, workplaces, and in the cyberspace. This is the 'incredible' India, filled with power and privilege, and the looming gaps between the written law and the lived experiences of women.*²

Uma's remarks speak of all the spaces from home to the public where gender-based violence is exerted by not acknowledging woman as part of God's creation. Given the diverse religiosity and democratic nature of our country (India), the act of stripping and parading women naked is generic and has become an institutional weapon of patriarchy to bring shame to the community she belongs to. This is because of a deep chasm between religiosity as pietism and ritual, and not a way of life in the ordinary. Women's being has never been fully claimed as God's wonderful creation because she is still the evil that needs to be tamed. Women parading naked or forced nudity is an exhibition of patriarchal power dynamics, hence a social-patriarchal construct. It is so because, mutilation of women's autonomy is used as an organized weapon to reinforce control and dominance. Again, women belonging to Dalit, Tribal and Adivasi communities experience this intensely given their social standing which is, nowhere.

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“Age is just a number” is true to this naked parading. Of the multiple incidents in India, in September 2021 several news headlines read “*In Madhya Pradesh, little girls paraded naked to please rain gods in Damoh.*”³ From a video that emerged, it involved at least six bare-bodied girls of about ‘five years’ of age walking with a wooden shaft on their shoulders with a frog tied to it. A group of women were seen singing devotional songs and following the minors. The parents of the minors were also involved in this incident. The goal of the ritual was: Rain. This atrocious act is a systematic oppression in different layers. *Firstly*, it opens the readers to a disturbing reality where traditional practices are used to exploit and degrade vulnerable individuals, particularly minor girls. *Secondly*, such incidents are deeply concerning because it shows the ways in which toxic patriarchal norms function and exploit the vulnerable. *Thirdly*, it shows how patriarchal norms use rituals or cultural practices to legitimize and justify the brutalizing of women and children, perpetuating life-threatening scars and trauma. This practice therefore, reflects the power dynamics and gender inequalities inherent in societal structure marked by Patriarchy.

The most recent 2023 naked women parade shook the world with similar headlines, “Women paraded naked in Manipur were forcibly taken away from police custody by mob” (*The Indian Express*); “Manipur: India police face scrutiny after women paraded naked” (*BBC News, Delhi*); “Don’t Be Fooled... Violence Against Kuki Women in Manipur Was Allowed to Happen” (*The Quint*). In the midst of ethnic clash between two tribes, majority Meitei and Kuki tribal communities in Manipur (North East India) a heinous crime was allowed to happen on 4th May, 2023. The crime surfaced in a video where two Kuki-Zo women were forced to parade naked and their body touched by bloody thirsty group of Meitei men. This was allowed to happen in the state of Manipur under the watch of both the Central and the State government. The women being paraded naked is already a living corpse in

itself. The ultimate defeat from this heinous incident can inflict two messages: (a) *The bodies of women can inflict defeat and pollution on the enemy through collective rape/shame*, and (b) *a male defeat, that the men were too feeble to protect their property*. The question is, by doing so were these men who committed this crime able to attain victory over the rival community? The answer is a simple ‘NO.’ In the name of weaponizing women’s body, these men showed their urge for sexual desire over and above anyone else. And yet, again proved that to manifest toxic-hyper masculinity, the women’s body is answer.

All these gender-based violence is to remind women of her position in the society irrespective of age i.e., if she violates the ‘modesty’ norms she will not be protected or she can be used as the object to fulfil religious practices or be a weapon against any male rivalry. This creates a psychological fear, followed by the physical fear restricting women to think and act freely. Her mind, voice and body are restrained beyond recognition. The quest is therefore to find the intricate relationship between law and patriarchy, which becomes imperative in identifying power and dominance.

2. Law and Patriarchy: Identifying Power and Dominance

Laws and customs are essential mechanisms of any society, serving as regulatory frameworks that help establish norms, resolve disputes, and maintain order. At the same time, law and custom play crucial roles in shaping societal expectations and reinforcing traditional gender roles. Synonymous power to law is patriarchy which is consistent throughout the book of Esther. The context of Esther is the Persian Empire with King Artaxerxes as the monarch. The empire is marked with luxury and extravagance, yet the notion of male dominated state requires male dominated household is the focus all throughout the narrative. In the narrative, the monarch establishes a particular societal-gendered structure wherein a single male, namely the king himself, occupies the highest position. Laws are then made to reinforce patriarchy to show absolute hegemony of King, King Artaxerxes of Persia.

Meredith J Stone in her book *Empire and Gender in LXX Esther* calls King Artaxerxes as the “hegemonic masculinity, the ultimate authority in the social system.”⁴ Sarojini Nadar also rightly said, “the Persian king is presented as lord of times and lord of the bodies.”⁵ He is the law, to live or to die was decided by the king. The king and the obsession with law in the text, indicates how law is used as a state tool to legitimize any form of oppression. The king is the state and the state exists to protect and govern her citizens. However, when this state becomes the central power house for displaying hegemonic masculinity, the citizens, in particular vulnerable citizens experience a stateless society.

In the case of Queen Vashti’s refusal to comply to the King’s demand in Esther 1:12 for her to parade or act as the king’s gem to be displayed for his male audience, a law is made. The prelude to the first law is found in Esther 1:13-14 where the king summons seven ‘male’ lawyers. The *first law* is found in Esther 1:19, proposed by the king’s ‘male lawyers/advisers’ and imposed by the king himself. This law banished Queen Vashti from the kingdom and send a public message: (a) to the women to be submissive and (b) to the male audience to held authority over the women and the household. The reason for the first law is aptly described by Timothy K Beal: “Like a pebble dropped in a puddle, the queen’s offence is first against the king. But moves out ‘against all the chiefs’ reverberating through every concentric ring of power, ultimately threatening the entire sexual-political order.”⁶ Beal’s observation strengthens the intricate connection between law and patriarchy. When a woman threatens the male-centred political environment, law/power is used to protect that very existing dominating power.

The *second law* is found in Esther 2:1-4. This law is made in the search for a new Queen where ‘young virgins’ were to be sought for the king from all his provinces. The second law according to Meredith Stone was a law ‘seeking to stabilize the hegemonic masculinity by and through a beauty contest’⁷ which

was disturbed and challenged by Queen Vashti. The law again sets up the beauty standards and the ‘type’ of young girls, i.e., young virgin. Esther chapter 2 spends an excessive amount of time describing how the contest will work: how each of the contestants is brought to the palace for one year for the makeover with oils and cosmetics before being presented to the king. The story reads like an infomercial for beauty products. Male obsession with female “beauty” is evident throughout the story. In this reading, Vashti stands out as the protest against such objectification of women by men.⁸

Moreover, the obsession with ‘virgin girls’ reverberates even till today in Indian society, a society that holds the modesty of women in a pedestal.⁹ Yet, this very society allows for women and minor girls to be paraded naked/ forced nudity if they do not comply to the modest behaviour. Considering the colonial India and women, Geraldine Forbes in her book, *Women in Modern India*, gives her argument that women’s education in colonial India begun as an attempt to make women “presentable” wives and mothers rather than seeking employment.¹⁰ India in 2023 is no less different than the colonial era. Power is still described as ‘chaos,’ a game of fire and water not fit for women to play with. In similar tone, Fazila Farouk, a South African Activist, on media not reporting uncomfortable truths about South Africa remarked:

*Why should we disguise the uncomfortable truths about our country with a more positive outlook?... How are the public supposed to react when they learn that a young woman was disembowelled and left for dead by her rapist... Civilized societies protect their women and their children. But with each passing year of South Africa’s democracy, the violence against our most vulnerable has gotten worse.*¹¹

Farouk’s deep lament, echoes Saumya Uma on ‘Incredible India’ the largest democracy, where women are still targeted for heinous forms of violence in the context of mass crimes. In such

‘civilized’ society, the action of resistance displayed by Queen Vashti becomes imperative. The empire/state marked by hyper-masculinity though seem to be impenetrable, the call to action either for survival or rebellion for justice and liberation must be accomplished. This however, again calls for risk and danger.

3. Resistance and Risk: Queen Vashti’s Action

The Bible is in many ways alien and antagonistic to modern women’s identity; yet, in other ways, it inspires and compels that identity.¹² Vashti’s refusal and resistance means more today than ever before, given the work in the later half of the twentieth century towards the recovery of women’s voices and women’s ways of knowing and interpreting the world. From a literary reading, Queen Vashti is considered as a flat character,¹³ a mere plot functionary, a necessary evil that must be eliminated so that we can get on with the main story. It is so, because Vashti is not even given a voice of her own in the text. We only know of her through the male characters who speak of her, and via the narrator, and the information that is given by the narrator is sparse, hence her story is not taken to be significant for the narrative as a whole.

Speaking from social status per se, Queen Vashti was an insider to the Persian imperial context since she was the Persian Queen. Yet, Vashti mostly on account of her gender, could not shine effectively on her own territory. Her resident alien status persisted despite her royal and socio-economic status within the Persian community. M. Masenya in a post-colonial feminist context comments on Queen Vashti, ‘like an exile in a foreign country, Vashti cannot be allowed to possess her own will. Vashti is a stranger in what is supposed to be her own territory.’¹⁴ Vashti could have been made to feel at home by her ethnicity, queenly and socio-economic statuses, yet her gender dictated that she would be exiled on her own territory. As a queen, she was deposed at once by a drunken king. As a wife, she was divorced unilaterally and immediately.

However, in her voicelessness, in her foreignness, her action of resistance stands out and through her we are able to identify and see that there are structural problems that go beyond individual actions. Through her voiceless-action, the readers are redirected to the foundations and constructs of society which must also be challenged and, if found wanting for justice, changed. A society that, despite legislation, operates on the basis of patriarchy cannot be called a just society. With the character of Queen Vashti, the book of Esther can be viewed from a non-conventional way to unpack androcentric ideologies. In the book *Vashti’s Victory and Other Biblical Women Resisting Injustice*, Gill sees Vashti as a model of resisting injustice – a model that can help women to overcome their perception of victimhood. From her story, women can find strength in their personal struggles. In Gill’s view, Vashti’s story is one that says to women who have made a mistake or who have lost their self-esteem, who have been beaten up or beaten down, that they can change the direction of their lives by saying “No” to past oppressive situations.¹⁵

It is evident that there is a deep contrast between the fear of the power-holder and the courage of the powerless. The objectification of power refers to the uses of authority, law, and force that legitimize the maintenance of power that benefits the powerful. Consequently, the powerless remain marginalized by law and thus have no access to justice. Thus, the powerless cannot but be suspicious of the law if they have been subject to its injustice. We can see this in the anger of the king who first sought council from experts “*who knew the laws*” (Esther 1:13). “*According to the law, what is to be done to Queen Vashti?*” asked the king (Esther 1:15). From the king and his male lawyer’s reactions, one can see the impact of the queen’s defiance. Particularly notice in Esther 1:17 that the king’s lawyers feared that the queen’s resistance would become contagious. In fear of the ripple effect of Vashti’s action, the king and his male council put their heads together, utilizing all the resources available from legal resources (Esther 1:13). They legislated a royal decree, essentially a women’s code

of conduct. The thorough measures taken to prevent the ripple effect of Vashti's behaviour on all the women of the land testifies to the power of one woman's courage and conviction, sending shock waves through the establishment. Michael V. Fox applauds Queen Vashti as "a women of dignity, too proud to allow herself for display alongside other piece of royal property before a bunch of bibulous males."¹⁶

Thus, the Vashti model can inspire women to resist their vulnerability by voicing out irrespective of the consequences. She is an example to oppressed women whose autonomy is also suppressed; hence, "Vashti is a woman of true courage and valour." Vashti acted against her culture's emphasis on women's duty of marital and filial obedience. She acted to defy the *status quo* in order to defend her dignity as a person and as a woman. Vashti offers a powerful source of strength and courage to act with integrity in the face of injustice. She has demonstrated that in the face of marginalization and the silencing culture, we can still choose to say "No." Vashti's act of speaking the truth to power as she challenged the notion of female subordination without fear of losing her position as queen, makes her a model for all women and men who are encouraged to say "No".

4. Reclaiming the Suffering Bodies

Traditionally women have been taught for the sake of survival, that women have to allow themselves to be assimilated by patriarchy, operate according to its rules and get what they want. However, those who choose to take cue from Queen Vashti must be willing to suffer the consequences of the daring act to shine on in one's own territory. If Vashti was not a woman in a patriarchal context, a context in which beauty and obedience (female subservience to men) were true determinants of ideal womanhood, a context in which women as men's properties had to ensure that male honour and prestige were preserved at all costs, she would most probably not have met the fate which she had met. If she had acted according to the communal and family mentalities that was fed

upon her to be submissive at all times, and obeyed the voice of the patriarch of the Persian Empire, she would definitely not have experienced the so-called disaster. Yet, she chooses to act the other way round by challenging the gender bias society. No wonder, the Vashti character has been linked with disobedience and defiance, qualities which cannot be helpful in shaping the characters of Christian women towards empowerment.

To reclaim suffering bodies, the pertinent questions asked are: Can Vashti's courage which caused her to pay a high price, be used in the affirmation of women's identities in today's postmodern society which is similar to that of Vashti's? In societies where academic success or promotion in the workplace is not based only on the ability of a young girl or woman but on whether she grants the teacher or the boss access to her body, can Vashti speak? Can Vashti resist, in societies where women, though being the breadwinner in the household are but still looked down by the men? Can Vashti act as a role model for our children as we teach them to say "No" to adults who try to molest or harm them? In societies still marked by war, ethnic and communal riots where women's naked bodies are still used as a tool of psychological warfare, intended to traumatize and intimidate the targeted population, can Vashti resist? The answer to the questions asked is "Yes" because all the situations in which these women are in, are social construct. Internalization of these situations over a long period of time has made these gendered-social norms eternal and never to be challenged or changed.

To reclaim suffering bodies, the specific gendered society created by King Artaxerxes in conjunction with spirituality, where a male God dictates demands critical evaluation. As long as humans interpret God as a male dictator, whose characters are deemed to be emulated by men, hegemonic masculinity will endure from everlasting to everlasting. The question asked by Sarojini Nadar in the introduction, how can women's body continue to be mutilated amidst people that claim to be religious and people

who engage in religious discourse, is the point of departure. This question becomes the paradigm because a person can be the most religious person but the same person is extremely indifferent to situations outside the rituals of religion.

To reclaim any suffering bodies is to rectify how religious laws and social customs in any given society is formulated. Interpretation of the Bible or any religious texts, must lead to transformation and not reinforce hegemonic masculinity. In many faith communities, concepts like marital intimacy between a husband and a wife is defined as private because it has to do with the chastity of marriage. Hence, many women tend to avoid discussing issues of abuse within the marriage, as they perceive culture or religion prohibits to discuss private issues. Selective reading of Biblical texts influenced by a culture of male dominance has also created little to no space for women to express their experience. Maluleke and Sarojini Nadar identify religion, culture and gender socialisation as an “unholy trinity”¹⁷ that continues to sustain gender-based violence and patriarchy. The role of the Prophetic Community thus, is not to teach women how to make themselves less vulnerable in a patriarchal society but to create safe spaces where women can have the confidence that her experience will be heard and accepted. Rehabilitation of women’s body as part of God’s divine creation becomes imperative in reclaiming. Home and religious institutions should stop acting as an exile space for women. To see women like Vashti in any given society should not be considered as a threat to power, but rather must be seen as a natural process in the ordinary. Unless fear is removed from the male crown i.e., power, women will continue to be tamed and structured according to the whims and fancies of hyper-masculinity.

Conclusion

The female body is not just any piece of object at the disposal of anyone or society’s gaze on her naked body. She is not the evil or alien other. Rather the essay has given utmost importance

on how these notions attributed to women are social and cultural constructs. Queen Vashti’s act of resistance to power to have her own life and identity without submitting to any authority challenges women to think and act alternatively. She is the hope for suffering bodies and her act of resistance must be strengthened by the Prophetic Community. The task to eradicate Biblical interpretations that sustains the unholy trinity of religion, culture and gender socialization should be the primary locus of theological engagements. Queen Vashti should be the paradigm – a paradigm model for women to say no to — gender indoctrination; educational deprivation; the denial to women of the knowledge of their history; the dividing of women one from the other and alike and to take up the spirituality of courage and resistance towards creating a society where everyone is treated duly and not poorly.

End Notes

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The House of EL

*Revelation E. Velunta**

Introduction

While doing his rounds Jesus finds St. Peter, at the pearly gates, looking worn out and very, very tired. "Rocky," he says to his friend, "why don't you take a break. I'll handle the processing for you." "Thanks, Jesse," Peter replies with glee and leaves with his rooster. Jesus takes over and as he looked down the long line of people being processed, he noticed an old man who looked very, very familiar. Jesus felt he knew the old man. Eventually, he was face to face with the old man. Jesus asks, "Sir, what did you do when you were back on earth?" "I was a carpenter," the old man

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replied. The reply got Jesus very excited. “What made your life very special then?” he continued. “I had a very special son,” was the reply. A carpenter who had a special son? This got Jesus more excited! “What can you tell me about your son?” Jesus drew closer as he asked. “Nails and wood!” the carpenter answered. Nails and wood? Jesus was beyond ecstatic. He blurts out, “Father?” The old man responds, very surprised, “Pinocchio?”

Diversity is a gift. Difference is a fundamental fact of life. God created everyone and everything different. No two people are exactly alike. No two fingerprints are exactly alike. No two readers of this essay. The same goes with experiences. Plurality is God’s gift.

Father and son, nails, and wood do not always point to Jesus. They can also point to Pinocchio.

All our relationships are founded on our differences. Unity is grounded on difference! Love comes alive because we care for people different from us! If we thought, spoke, prayed, did everything the same way, we would not be here today. Ian, my younger son, when he was 6, agreeing with my point about the gift of diversity, quipped: “You’re right, Tatay! Because if everyone looked like you, the world will be a creepy place.”

There is always more than one way of doing anything. There is always more than one way of reading any text. Actually, there is legion. Interpretation is always particular and perspectival. Good news is always relative. When David killed Goliath, it was good news to Israelites, bad news to Philistines, and tragic news to Goliath’s mother!

Forcing a Single Truth upon a Plural World

Difference has never been the world’s problem. Our collective problems, woes, and pains arise when we force a single truth upon a plural world. We have a name for this: imperialism. The World Communion of Reformed Churches (formerly the World Alliance) in its 2006 Manila Declaration pronounced:

The first one thousand years of Christianity was one millennium of war and destruction in the name of Jesus Christ. And those “civilizing missions” have not stopped. Even today, the most oppressive and dehumanizing societies are led by “Christian” centurions who have no qualms maiming and destroying those who are not “one of them.”

Western Christianity has been closely related to empire since the Roman days. Since then, it has spread throughout the world, and now it is being used to provide ideological legitimization for today’s empire. Globalized Christendom and the ‘crusades’ it embarks upon today are symbiotically intertwined with global capital and the power of the global empire. In its triumphalistic pursuits, it discounts if not condemns all other religious faiths and cultures. The indigenous religions of many communities are destroyed and Islam is vilified. The convergence of Christian religion with Western modernity has destroyed the religious and cultural life of peoples and their communities throughout the world. The powers and principalities of the global market and empire are being baptized by these theological distortions of ‘Christianity’, which promote religious conflicts and bigotry globally.

The Christian religion of empire treats others as ‘gentiles’ to be conquered; as the ‘evil empire’ to be destroyed; or as the ‘axis of evil’ to be eradicated from the earth. The empire claims that the ‘goodness’ of the empire must overcome these ‘evils.’ Its false messianic spirit (or messianic complex) is imbued with the demonic. These false claims destroy the integrity of faiths, and radically erode the identity of Christian faith in Jesus Christ. As the spirit of empire penetrates souls, the power of global empire possesses the bodies of all living beings. Lord of its domain, it builds temples for the global market to serve Profit (Mammon).

The empire uses ‘democracy’ as an umbrella term for the kind of political regime that it would like to see installed all over the world. Bringing ‘democracy’ to countries that do not yet have

it is claimed as the defining purpose of US foreign policy. For the US, democracies abroad are regimes that support or follow its dictates.¹ Imperialism is forcing a single truth upon a plural world. And it is primarily a textual project. The Bible remains imperialism's most effective text. Biblical interpretation in many Asian countries continues to privilege the centers of power within, behind, and in front of the text. Biblical studies, particularly in the Philippines, remain a stronghold of colonial scholarship especially among churches and their formation centers. Denominations refuse to become autonomous and continue to depend on their mother institutions in the United States, Europe, or elsewhere in the First World. Church buildings and institutions are named after benevolent foreign church leaders and missionaries. Many seminaries continue to depend heavily on foreign teachers (who are usually paid in US dollars or Euros by foreign boards) than natives (who are usually paid in the local currency and, oftentimes, significantly below the living wage). Libraries are filled with books written by European and American scholars and continue to receive donations of old throw-away books from the First World. Traditional historical-critical methods remain the key reading paradigm. Establishing what the Bible meant in the past is the required, the correct, and the first step toward discerning what it means for today.

Fr. Carlos Abesamis, one of the founders of EATWOT (Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians) remarked that nothing is the matter with foreigners doing foreign theology (for themselves). The issue is that Filipino theology is a photocopy of Euro-American theology.² It is not uncommon to hear the work of many Third World and minority scholars described as "interesting" while the work of a lot of European-American, mostly male, scholars described as "scholarly." Kwok Pui-lan in many of our conversations have repeatedly asked: "Why do we accept the work of less than 1% of the one-third of the male population, the European-American third, as normative for all?"

But the reality is this: no two interpretations are exactly alike. Those of us here who are students of biblical writings know that, right now, there are over 5,700 manuscripts of the New Testament in Greek. No two are exactly alike. There are over 24,000 manuscripts of the New Testament in other ancient languages. And no two are exactly alike. Hermeneutics is plural.

The wealth of diverse interpretations in the former colonies in Asia can be summarized into three categories: those that locate meaning "behind texts," those that locate meaning "in the texts," and those that locate meaning "in front of the texts." Those interpretations that fall under the first category presuppose that scripture serves a referential function, the text is a "window" to a privileged past—to Israel, to the historical Jesus, to the Gospel writers and their intentions, to the early Christian communities, etc.—that could be recovered. Interpretation is therefore aimed at first establishing what the text meant in order to arrive at what it means for today. The task of the interpreter is to recover meaning from behind the text to the historical setting from which it came. Traditional historical critical methods like Form,³ Source,⁴ and Redaction Criticism⁵ would fall under this category.

The second category of interpretations employ "closed reading" focused on plot, characters, setting, discourse, structure, implied authors and implied readers in order to get at "what is in the text." If the first category privileged the past that the text referred to as the source of meaning, the second category privileges the text itself. This category would include most literary methods like Narrative,⁶ Structural,⁷ and Rhetorical Criticism.⁸ In such cases interpreters presuppose scripture as "story," a text that "has life all its own." And this "living" text is able to create or conjure up communities of readers/hearers.

The third category would include readings that privilege social location. Meaning, in this category, is not located in the past or in the text, but in parts of the text that point "beyond the text" or "in front of the text": its rhetorical features as well as all the

signs of ideological tensions, whether these are socio-economic, political, cultural, religious tensions that are recognizable, despite the fact that the text seeks to suppress them, for instance by *marginalizing* characters, institutions, or events that would manifest these tensions. These rhetorical features and ideological tensions are textual features that point “beyond the text,” in the sense that they are recognizable by the ways in which they powerfully affect readers in situations similar to those suppressed by the text. Thus, these “in front of the text” textual features are most directly recognizable when they are activated by present-day readers.

After all, interpretations are, as Mark Taylor puts it, “constructs of socially located flesh-and-blood readers.”⁹ Scripture then serves as a “mirror” that helps inform *not define* concrete life settings. Most advocacy approaches—Feminist (like the Women’s Bible Commentary¹⁰, *Searching the Scriptures*¹¹, and the *Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible*¹²), Liberationist¹³, Womanist¹⁴, Reader-response Criticism¹⁵, Cultural¹⁶, Post-colonial studies,¹⁶ and Queer¹⁷—would fall under this category.

My proposal, as an example of a “reading in front of texts” takes into account the primary role of culture and socio-political context in interpretations of the Bible, and in the process elucidates dimensions of the text that otherwise would remain hidden. Simply put, I am a Filipino and this project is one Filipino’s reading of the Bible. It is akin to Dolores Williams’s argument, in *Sisters in the Wilderness* (Orbis, 1995), that her construction of Christian theology or god-talk is informed by the statement: “I am a black WOMAN.” More specifically my proposal shows how Filipino perspectives generated in resistance to imperialism and colonialism highlight certain aspects of the biblical texts and of their historical contexts that remain hidden when they are read from European-American perspectives.

What I am proposing is another “Canaanite” reading¹⁸ that I am offering as a contribution to the developing archive

of resistance and liberation discourses from the Third World and Fourth World, a reading aimed to disrupt and challenge the hegemony of Western discourses, especially in plural Asia. These discourses are so normative and pervasive that most people, including Filipinos, do not know that the American occupation of the Philippines sent over one million Filipinos to heaven.¹⁹ Most people, including Filipinos, do not know that the occupation forces called the natives niggers, *injuns*, heathens, pagans, tail-less brown monkeys, and Canaanites.²⁰

R. S. Sugirtharajah rightly argues that historical critical methods were not only colonial in the sense that they displaced the norms and practices of our indigenous reading methods, but in that they were used to justify the superiority of Christian texts and to undermine the sacred writings of others. These methods are colonial because they insist that correct readings are mediated through the “proper” use of historical-critical tools alone. He laments, “Look at the opening of George Strecker’s ‘The Sermon on the Mount: An Exegetical Commentary’ (1988): ‘No proper exegesis of the Sermon on the Mount can ignore the research of more than two hundred years of historical-critical research into the New Testament.’”²¹

Kwok Pui-lan in another conversation has argued that in theological education, a large part of the curriculum has been the study of the lives and thoughts of white, male, EuroAmerican theologians, to the exclusion of many other voices. More importantly, the theologies done by these people are considered normative, which set the standards and parameters of what “theology” should be.

Musa Dube reminds us that when it comes to the connection of the Bible, its readers, and its institutions to Western imperialism, there is no call for special pleading.²² Laura Donaldson asks: “What civilization invented the most brutal system of conquest and exploitation the world has ever known? *Christian*. Who made slavery the basis for capitalist expansion? *Christians*. What religion has been the most responsible for the genocide of

aboriginal peoples? *Christianity*. In my view, the Christian church has a much more substantial record of pure evil than any final good.”²³

Canaan Banana posits that the Bible is an important book of the church and that it includes liberating messages; nevertheless, there remains the sense in which, unless one embraces the Christian concept of God, one is not fully a person of God.²⁴ Mary John Mananzan in many of her lectures has pointed out that the Bible in spite of all the reinterpretations, remains a book written from a patriarchal, dominator, imperial perspective and thus must be used to inform and not define life and its struggles.

Robert Allen Warrior’s essay, “Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians,”²⁵ argues that the liberationist picture of Yahweh is incomplete. In the conquest narratives, Yahweh the liberator becomes Yahweh the conqueror. Warrior rightly points out that the obvious characters in the Exodus and Conquest narratives for Native Americans to identify with are the Canaanites, the people who already lived in the Promise Land. He also argues that the Canaanites should be the center of theological reflection and political action. They are the last remaining ignored voice in the text, except perhaps for the land itself. The conquest stories, for Warrior, with all their violence and injustice must be taken seriously by those who believe in the God of the Old Testament. Unfortunately, biblical critics rarely mention these texts and when they do, Warrior points out, they express little concern for the indigenes and their rights as human beings and as nations. Especially ignored are the passages where Yahweh tells the Israelites to mercilessly annihilate the indigenous population. He then notes that oppressive narratives of conquest, anti-Semitism, sexism, heterosexism, imperialism, and racism remain in the canonized text.

Reading the Bible as Canaanites

Warrior, who turned Hebrew Bible scholarship on its ear, argues that there might be something wrong with the Christian god,

something requiring conversion and repentance. He notes that in the Matthean narrative,²⁶ the “little bitch” does not become a follower of Jesus. She seeks him out because he has something she needs. She receives what she came for and walks away, never to be mentioned again. She changes Jesus. Maybe she went back to her people and fought against the colonizing Romans in her own way with her own gods. The importance of her story is not whether she followed Jesus but that, without her, Jesus would have remained a narrow-minded bigot who viewed indigenous people as inhuman.

Warrior is part of the Osage Nation, a people constructed as “Canaanite.” As a member of a colonized and occupied people, so am I. This Canaanite reading presupposes the following statements of fact:

The Bible is an ancient Palestinian library which was written over two thousand years ago in Ancient Hebrew and Koine Greek.

Like many ancient libraries, the Bible reflects the theologies, ideologies, and biases of the ruling classes.

It was not written for you or for me or for anyone who believes it was written for them.

It has been co-opted by empire for over 1700 years to colonize, occupy, subjugate, and erase peoples, nations, and cultures.²⁷

It has been translated and continues to be translated to read like the text is talking to us.

It remains, to this day, the primary source of the empire’s dominant “software” that perpetuate a monotheism that is essentially patriarchal and frequently misogynistic.²⁸

Historians tell us that the Bible was put together or compiled over one thousand years. Its latest materials are about two thousand years old; its oldest over three thousand. Take Paul’s Letter to

Philemon. It is a personal letter from Paul to Philemon. Paul and Philemon are both dead. What we have is a copy of a copy of a copy of a copy of a two-thousand-year-old letter in *Koine* Greek. Paul did not write that letter to us. Take Paul's letter to the Ephesians where he says, "wives submit to your husbands." Paul was talking to wives in the church in Ephesus 2000 years ago. He is not talking to any other wives. Then nor now.

We do love reading texts that were not written for us! We do this all the time. Our spouse's cellphone messages, or our children's. Literary classics. And, yes, Scriptures. I have argued that most people read Scripture as windows to the past (historical methods), as story (literary methods), and as mirrors (cultural studies).

When texts are read as windows to the past, we are basically listening to the dead; hearing echoes.²⁹ We might not admit it, but most of our cherished values come from the dead, from departed loved ones. The works of favorite authors and composers who died before we were even born. Then there's tradition. The narratives, beliefs, behavior of a particular family, community, people that have been handed down from one generation to the next.

When we read texts as a story, we assume that the story "always happens." That the text has a life all its own. That there is meaning in how the story elements of plot, characters, and setting interact. This is why we name our children after characters in books, in movies, in songs. This is also probably why so many celebrities win in our elections. We vote for the "characters" they play instead of the real, flesh and blood, people behind these characters.

Finally, when we read texts as mirrors, we presuppose resonance. What we read strikes a chord deep inside us: as individuals, as a community, as a people. Thus, these are "readings as." As people of color, as LGBT, as children, as Indigenous Community, etc.

Mitri Raheb calls scripture "the primary software" of the dominant Christian imperial culture.³⁰ The Biblical "past," "story,"

and "mirror" become privileged locations, for eternity. There is no past more important. No story more salvific. No mirror more reflective.

500 years of colonial Christianity (beginning with the Spaniards for 3 centuries starting on March 16, 1521, and then with the Americans since 1898) serve as proof of the pervasiveness of this "software." Research has shown that up to 80% of Christians believe that the Bible is God's literal word. Research has also shown that majority of these Christians do not read the Bible!³¹ Filipinos during the Spanish Occupation were not given access to the Bible. What they received was the Spanish Friars' interpretations and the *Pasyon*. The *Pasyon* was an epic poem in Tagalog on the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ written by Gaspar Aquino de Belen in 1704. It was publicly read and recited during the Lenten Season. Although the American Occupation introduced the Bible to the Filipinos in their native languages, translation theories privileged the source text over the receptor texts and "correct" interpretations of the text were reflective of the "White Man's Burden" and Benevolent Assimilation policies.

Fred Atkinson, the first American General Superintendent of Education in the Philippines, inaugurated more than a century of racist public education in the islands when he remarked that "the Filipino people, taken as a body, are children and childlike, do not know what is best for them.... By the very fact of our superiority of civilization and our greater capacity for industrial activity we are bound to exercise over them a profound social influence."³²

How many theologies and ideologies are grounded on the "Exodus" and "Christ" events? And the theology of chosen-ness? Even biblical archeology is constructed to fit the biblical narrative: age of the patriarchs, exodus/conquest, the united kingdom, the divided kingdom, etc. Sunday sermons need to follow the lectionary reading for that day and homilies that do not have the proper exegesis are not considered proper sermons. Unfortunately,

those privileged locations (past, story, and mirror) also identify the enemy, the excluded, the not-chosen, the Canaanites. The missions, whether Spanish or American, Roman Catholic or Protestant, were designed to civilize the native “Canaanites.”³³

Mindanao was constructed as “The Land of Promise” echoing “The Promised Land” because “Israel” (the Colonizers) as God’s Chosen People was ordained to wipe out the “Canaanites” (the Colonized) in the land. And wipe out the Canaanites they did. This was tragically true in the Americas, in Africa, in many parts of Asia, and other occupied territories (including Palestine today).³⁴ The linchpin of the imperial “software” is monotheism. More specifically, the male, white, Christian God of Western imperialism. We were introduced early to this God with the capital “G” who looked a lot like Santa Claus with a frown, and his equally male, white, blue-eyed “Christian” representative, Jesus Christ, in Sunday School. This 500-year-old “software” continues to dominate our liturgies, our theologies, our hermeneutics, our pedagogy, our life as churches in the Philippines. This 500-year-old “software” continues to define “God,” “truth,” “right,” and most everything of value for most of us. To this day, when people say “the Bible says” it usually means monotheistic, monologic, and monolithic affirmations which the Bible does not really say. The Bible, since it is a library from Antiquity, is polytheistic, dialogical, and diverse. Maybe it is time we stop using the Bible and, actually, start reading it!

THE HOUSE OF EL

*“When the Most High [Elyon] gave to the nations their inheritance, when he separated humankind, he fixed the bounds of the peoples according to the number of the gods [sons of Elohim]. For the LORD’s [YAHWEH] PORTION IS HIS PEOPLE, Jacob his allotted heritage” (Deuteronomy 32:8-9).*³⁵

When Ian was around 4 or 5, he started doing his own Bible verses. Ian’s collection was borrowed by my father-in-law when he was pastor at the Church Among the Palms. Unfortunately, the collection has been misplaced. One of Ian’s verses went, “God sent the flood to wash away bad people so that the bad people can go to heaven where God will teach them how to be good.” I want to believe that Ian got that from me. Coming up with apocryphal verses, my father said, when I was about the same age, I had my own version of Genesis 1:1 “In the beginning, God and Mama Mary created the heavens and the earth.”

We are animists. Like the Ancient Canaanites, the Ancient Israelites, the Greeks, the Egyptians, the Sumerians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Incas, the Aztecs, the Native American Nations, the Igorots, the Lumads, and other IPs, and everyone who believes that the world breathes. Animism is a term coined in 1871 by British anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor. He used it to describe belief among the earliest peoples and communities that all things, both living and inanimate, are inhabited by breath or spirit (or ruach, pneuma, or anima).³⁶ This is why we talk to our dearly departed; to flowers and plants; to cats and dogs; to trees and rocks; to rivers and oceans; and to Mother Earth. This is also why we say “*tabi, tabi po*” to respectfully request passage when we explore shared places and sacred spaces.

We are also polytheists. Like the Ancient Canaanites, the Ancient Israelites, the Greeks, the Egyptians, the Sumerians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Incas, the Aztecs, the Native American Nations, the Igorots, the Lumads, and other IPs, and everyone who believed that the gods and ancestors were family.³⁷ This is why the gods of the Egyptians were Egyptian. And the gods of the Israelites were Israelite (who rest on the Sabbath and who forbid shellfish but not slavery). This is why we love to talk about Greek gods and goddesses; why we pray to Bathala, to Kabunian, to Mebuyan, and to Lakapati; why we affirm Sophia, the Goddess of Wisdom; and Barbelo, the Mother-Father deity of the Gnostics.

This is why we get headaches trying to explain how a male God can create everyone and everything in the midst of all the diversity and plurality we experience and celebrate every single day. How one is three and three is one. And when our rationalizations run out, we tell everyone it's a divine mystery.

Scholarship in Hebrew Bible, New Testament, allied social sciences, and archeology³⁸ in the past 50 years provide building blocks to the alternative software we badly need. Contrary to the imperial discourse that monotheism is the highest form of religion and that the Ancient Israelites "invented" it, there is no evidence in the Bible for monotheism. Polytheism? Yes. Henotheism? Yes. Monolatry? Yes. No evidence in recent archeology as well. In other words, the Ancient Israelites and Ancient Judahites were like everybody else. Pluralists. Polytheists. Don't forget that the early Christian communities, the Marcionites, the Gnostics, and even Paul, believed in the existence of other gods. Moreover, those foundational myths that we have privileged for millennia as proof of "God's action in human history" are exactly that: foundational myths of particular tribes and peoples. They are not historical events. The Patriarchs. Moses. The Exodus. The Conquest of Canaan. The United Kingdom of David and Solomon. All these are myths. Like the creation and flood myths of other ancient peoples and civilizations. Like the resurrection myths of Early Christianity.

Studies of the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age have shown that the Ancient Israelites were descendants of the Ancient Canaanites. They are not the "Israelites" and the "Canaanites" who are narrative characters in the biblical text. What does this mean for us? We need to realize that the Bible is literature. Pluri-form. Multi-vocal. The Bible is fiction. It is not history. It is an archeological tel.

Finally, and we all know this already. The suffix "im" in Hebrew makes a singular noun into a plural one. Cherubim. Seraphim. Nevi'im. Ketuvim. Genesis 1:1 should read, "In the

beginning, the gods (*elohim*) created the heavens and the earth." Thus, the subsequent verses where the gods say, "let us" and "one of us" make sense (1:26, 3:22).

"El" is the god in the Priestly and Elohist traditions. "Yahweh" is the god in the Yahwist and Deuteronomistic traditions. The Moses and Elijah traditions show us the later, post-exilic conflation of these two divinities. Elijah has been traditionally translated as "God is Yahweh." It is actually, "El is Yahweh." In Deuteronomy 32:8-9, Yahweh is one of El's 70 children.³⁹ In Exodus 6:2-3, Yahweh tells Moses that he appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El. Students of the Bible who can read Hebrew can discover right away how monotheistic translators and interpreters have dealt with the polytheistic texts:

El Shaddai: Literally, "El, the one of the mountain" but the common English translation is "God Almighty." In Canaanite myth, El is said to live on a mountain. El Shaddai occurs in Gen 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; 49:25; Ex 6:2-3.

El Elyon: Literally, "El, most high" but translated as "God most High." Mentioned only in Gen 14:18-22 and Ps 78:35, but Elyon alone occurs frequently.

El Olam: "The Everlasting El" but translated as "The Everlasting God" (Gen 21:33). This title can be compared to the Ugaritic titles for El as "El, the Eternal One."

El Ro'i: "El who sees" translated as "A God of Seeing" (Gen 16:13).

El Bethel: "El, of the House of El" translated as "The God of the House of God" (Gen 31:13, 35:7).

El, the god of: Abraham/Isaac/Israel or Jacob/my father Abraham, etc. Gen 26:24; 28:13; 32:9; 33:20; 43:23; 46:1, 3; Ex 3:15 as noted earlier.

Yahweh as “Baal”: Although identified explicitly as El (e.g., in Ex 6:3), Yahweh also has a number of traits in common with Baal. Like Baal he is called “rider on the clouds” (Ps 68:4) and there are allusions to a battle with sea/river in Ex 15, Ps 114 and Isa 51:9-11. Thus, Yahweh is a composite of features of El and Baal. This new deity required a new name and it was fitting that the new God be introduced at the time of the Exodus, which sees the formation of a new people about to make the transition from the semi-nomadic tent dwelling existence of the patriarchs (whose God El also dwelled in a tent) to the settled urban way of life in Canaan (the Canaanite Baal lived in a house).⁴⁰ El was the head of the Ancient Canaanite pantheon. One of the descendants of the Canaanites, after the collapse of the Bronze Age, worshipped El. And they were called ISRAEL. Meaning, El rules. And El always ruled with Asherah.

In 1967, Raphael Patai was the first historian to mention that the ancient Israelites worshiped both Yahweh and Asherah. The theory has gained new prominence due primarily to the research of Francesca Stavrakopoulou, who started her work at Oxford and is now a senior lecturer in the department of Theology and Religion at the University of Exeter.⁴¹ Archeological work in the Levant led by Israel Finkelstein (explored in his 2001 book, *The Bible Unearthed*) support the work of Patai and Stavrakopoulou: Yahweh and Asherah were worshipped as a pair. The Temple in Tel Arad, West of the Dead Sea, discovered by Yohanan Aharoni in 1962, has altars for Yahweh and Asherah in the Holy of Holies. Moreover, several thousand figurines of Asherah have been found in Israelite and Judahite homes. Gravesites include engraved prayers dedicated to the divine pair. There are, of course, 40 references to Asherah in the Hebrew Bible! One of these is in 1 Kings 18:18-19 where Elijah faces 450 prophets of Baal. Most of

us know this story. But we have been taught not to see the part where it reads... “400 prophets of Asherah.”

I was onto something when I was five.

The Bible has been used as a sword for centuries. Maybe it is time we realize that it is a ploughshare from antiquity: not a spear but a pruning hook, life giving instead of death dealing.

End Notes

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- 27 Joel Baden, Professor of Hebrew Bible, has his one semester course on Hebrew Bible (at Yale Divinity School) on YouTube. The course focuses on how people use and misuse the text. For a very short summary, refer to this video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XS7LgbMr1m4>.
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Indian Journal of Theology 65:2, 2023, pp. 62-86

Indigenous Philosophies in Folklore: Re-Storying Its Essence through Reoralizing Hermeneutics in North East India

*Supongmayang Longkumer**

Inception

Indigenous societies have sustained for centuries due to well-defined roles in oral lore¹ that are rooted in their philosophies. Philosophies are understood as an organized form of human activities for humanity and other relational realms of life which have been practiced for a long time. Whilst philosophies are within the oral lore that provide the core values and principles of being indigenous peoples, on the other, folklore within oral lore is often used to refer to both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication where folk storytelling is an art of communication. Storytelling can be in many forms – myths, legends, proverbs, poetry, songs, dance, music, chanting, and rituals, among others. Those stories have been emerged and transmitted among the indigenous communities for generations. It carries the oral history and meaning that are closely knitted to Human-God-Nature relationships and interdependence. These modes of communication carry the indigenous philosophies (IP) that transmit the knowledge of indigeneity. Nonetheless, over time, various dominant agents have come along the paths of the indigenous communities and have become influencers and even pushed offside indigeneity as well. As a result, the ancient traditional understanding and practices of folklore were sidelined

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leading to the diminishing of many essential rudiments. These treasures are a byproduct of several generations with philosophies that have been the guardians of our indigenous knowledge in North East India (NEI).² However, can those diminishing folklore find its path back and strengthen resilience among the indigenous communities? Would re-storying IP lead to the sustenance and survival of indigenous people's relationality and interdependence? Therefore, this essay applies reoralizing hermeneutics to re-story folklore and recognize indigenous resources, values, and principles.

Understanding Indigenous Philosophies

Philosophy is a branch of study that deals with wisdom, truth, ideas, concepts, knowledge, and reality which are conveyed through language. As such, IP refers to the ideas and knowledge of indigenous peoples relating to the world's existence, human existence, creatures and nature's existence, spiritual realm, ethical knowledge, myths, oracles, traditional wisdom, proverbs, and others. In the ancient past, resources (IP) were communicated through the medium of orality. Oral forms can be considered as oral text apart from the other forms existing, i.e. written texts. The oral text is conveyed through language (spoken or unspoken) and in this case, it applies to written text with oral expression in nature.

Language is a crucial element in the comprehension of philosophy. It serves as a vital tool in facilitating the process of reasoning. In the context of the indigenous communities, language both verbal and nonverbal remains crucial to convey or deliver the meaning. Language is a tool that can reveal the thinking patterns of individuals. It is fundamental in language that when one presents reality in a more authentic form, then one must return to the IP for concepts on reality. This is where IP becomes the determining factor in bringing to light the reality of the subject matter. Emmanuel Basseyy Eyo and Diana-Abasi Ibanga observe, "language is a system of words

that communicate certain meaning. Language and meaning are intrinsically interrelated; there cannot be language without associative meaning.³ In this sense, language can even be used to spread misinformation or to convey accurate information effectively. People around the world have been using language to write or record to express the meaning of their culture, society, polity, culture, knowledge, and others rooted with strings of philosophies. This does not mean that the philosophies have to be written or recorded, then only it becomes a philosophy of the community. However, in this essay, I would like to emphasize the language in oral forms which has been the driving vehicle to pass on the traditional philosophies amongst the indigenous communities for generations have significant values.

The indigenous people cannot do away with their philosophy of the supernatural realm. Among the indigenous communities in the region, there has been a primal belief system which has been one of the central aspects of community existence. There was a strong belief in the spiritual realm (gods and deities) of life that has brought blessings or otherwise purpose as well. At times, these gods and deities appeared in physical forms as well among the indigenous communities. Nonetheless, there has been communication between humans and gods that somehow unveils the mystery of the spiritual realm. This is when interrelationships and interdependence between individual and integrated whole takes place. The belief in a supernatural realm does not just take place but the thinking and feeling capacity of an indigenous being builds the sense of it.

Consequently, there is also a close-knit relationship between humans and nature. The interconnectedness represents the idea of deliberate treatment of each other without exploitative motifs. For indigenous people, the spiritual realm is not separated from nature as well. This is where the communication of humans with the spirit of nature is initiated. The ancestors believed in the existence of spirits and deities for each specific location like rivers, forests,

hills, plains, valleys, and so on. When any act of resources is to be collected or engaged with/from nature, indigenous people would utter or chant (conversation mode through the humans) in seeking blessing. This is how the Human-God-Nature worked closely. The indigenous character of co-participatory role with the nature around and at the same time involving the spiritual realm or gods and deities to experience a dynamic continuum.

Upon discussing the subject matter, it is important to highlight the key components of IP that are practiced in NEI. These components are rooted in one's indigenous "whole of life" realities reflecting the creative and transforming knowledge the communities possess. It's the 'whole of life' because the indigenous communities do not believe in the existence of independent bodies but all are interdependent and relational as well.

- Indigenous communities rely on oral language to communicate their unique philosophical ideas.
- The IP that is communicated relies on the reality experiences and original narrative.
- Intellectual property is characterized by its moral principles and ethical values within IP.
- The knowledge of an indigenous being emphasizes relationality as the primary aspect in both ontological and cosmological contexts.
- When discussing IP, it is important to emphasize its meaning and strive for understanding.
- Indigenous communities view IP as sacred principles to be practiced and upheld.
- The transfer of IP concepts to folklore results in their conversion to storytelling.

Diminishing Factors of Indigenous Philosophies

Various waves of outside influences have impacted IP which have become a concern for the sustenance and survival of indigeneity. These are termed here in this essay as the dominant agents. The

following are some of the dominant agents that have directly and indirectly worked towards the IP to diminish in the NEI region.

First, the colonial context in the NEI region has been one of the major reasons for the degrading of the IP of the indigenous peoples. For instance, western (colonial) philosophy usually ignores the discussion on land and race, since the discussion only leads to distraction with only abstract discussions.⁴ All of these segments question the colonial context where it becomes difficult to explore philosophies that discuss land belonging to the indigenous peoples which they have colonized, and how race and racial hierarchies are structured only to devalue the non-western peoples and resources. Further, the colonial mission has more hidden agendas with the western ego of subjecting the indigeneity to existence. There is a similar notion on colonial activities around the world where “A not insignificant part of the colonial project was/is the denigration and repudiation of Indigenous philosophy, political structures, epistemologies and ontologies.”⁵ As such, the region is conscious of knowledge that can be classified with obscure historical context though analytical objectives will emphasize either ideological or practical, and even both. Here, the ideological knowledge would mean the intellectual products and on the other hand, the practical knowledge would mean the performance or habitus expressions.⁶ Consequently, this assumption has created havoc by branding indigenous peoples as unintelligent. Well, the philosophies that lie in the very “whole of life” expressions of indigenous peoples were undermined and disrespected, which can be critiqued as a sign of manipulation and degraded other knowledge and philosophies in existence. In other words, the IP is rooted more in the pragmatic rather than written materials because indigenous peoples possessed oral lore as sacred, which has been misinterpreted by the colonists. Further, it has to be noted that, the oral lore which transmits the IP of the indigenous peoples loses its meaning and purposes including its sacredness when it is transferred to written forms. Temsula Ao

and Werner H. Kelber⁷ agree, “. . . the oral can never be fully expressed in the written, experience cannot be duplicated into the text”⁸; in another sense, “The written version of an oral tale always freezes the message, the form, the style and the language-format.”⁹ However, the impression provided that the dominant knowledge was better than the IP, and indeed, with time, IP were/are fading away.

Second, the western Christian missionaries have brought a new religion which in the history of the indigenous peoples has abandoned our primal faith and adopted/embraced the new faith. This has also further devalued the traditional ceremonial and ritual practices because of being taught that they were evil and insignificant. Instead of condemning and drawing negative attitudes towards the indigenous religious life, if they were able, could have transformed the indigenous religious elements into a new faith, i.e. indigenous Christianity. This is one of the reasons why Christianity in the region is still not rooted in the indigenous way of life. In unpublished material by Christopher King as cited by Takatemjen Ao, it observes that the missionaries “saw little of values to be preserved” in the Naga culture.¹⁰ Such was the savage mindset of colonial western missionaries towards indigenous culture. Moreover, there are also pieces of evidence of the British Raj working along with western Christian missionary agencies in the region which they deny their involvement. Yangkahao Vashum highlights two activities, “first, the British administration justified their encouragement and funding of the Christian missions on the grounds that the hill people did not have any religion . . . Secondly, they agreed that the Christian mission schools were providing ‘secular’ services rather than religious instructions.”¹¹ Quite it is evident, indeed, the colonizer’s involvement in the indigenous religious affairs. In this sense, “the missionaries could not understand the culture and society and the religious practices of the tribal [indigenous] communities which led to degrading the tribals’ existence further.”¹² The question of what the indigenous

belief system was all about was ignored completely by the missionaries, which would mean their lack of fundamental nature of knowledge (philosophy) to understand the other knowledge and reality expressions (IP) that had existed for ages. This makes it obvious that colonial missionaries were not sensitive to indigenous belief systems and practices but were interested only in imposing their ways of faith system.

Third, modernization has been another challenging aspect that has helped with the process of diminishing IP. The thinking patterns of the indigenous people were hijacked in the name of modern education and modernization. The indigenous knowledge, philosophies, and skills we own included – oral lore, farming, fishing, hunting, herbs and spices medicine, mentoring, handloom, handicraft, architecture, house building, reading nature, preserving and sustaining crop rotation, protecting natural resources, festivals and celebrations, rituals and ceremonies, proverbs, totems, survival, games, and so many others. The “whole of life” experiences of indigenous beings are the signs of resources that guided the communities to survive and sustain in the NEI region. Unfortunately, today, much of this indigeneity is long forgotten or not even taught to sustain through the so-called modern education systems in indigenous land. This suggests that the modern education system has failed in this major area to protect the legacy of our indigenous knowledge, philosophies, skills, and ways of being. Modernization has further created socio-economic exploitation, political oppression, and ecological crises. This raises an important question about whether future generations will uphold the values and principles of IP revived and preserved by the current generation. After all, modernity seeks trends of ideas and philosophies that can modernize further.

Fourth, with the arrival of colonizers and foreign missionaries in the region, westernization was automatically obligatory upon the colonized peoples and culture. Their entry was made loud which led to most of the indigenous institutions being forsaken.

For instance, in the context of Ao Nagas, *Aruju* (men’s dormitory) and *Tsüki* (women’s dormitory) system of institutions existed and they were the centers of learning. Learning in this context would mean the “whole of life” as an indigenous being. *Morung* is a term used to describe inclusively for these centers. *Morung* served as a place for community service, stood for security for their village, and a place to talk and discuss all matters from ancestors to their generations. As a whole, it was a center for holistic development for a member of indigenous communities. Joseph S. Thong describes *Morung* that has served as a center for “learning, spiritual, and moral training, singing, and folk dancing etc. for young generations,”¹³ and not only these, but it also has focused on the political, social, and cultural, religious, economic, and psychological well-being of the indigenous communities. As a result of colonialization, westernization, Christianization, and modernization in the lands of the indigenous peoples, the sacred institution system in the form of the *Morung* was banned and abandoned, both politically and religiously by the colonizers. Today, it has just become a relic of bygone history.

Further, the church buildings, liturgies, Hymns and related elements in worship are all imported practices of western Christianity. There is nothing about indigeneity that was encouraged or approved of to be used in the indigenous church context. Starting from the church architecture to worship patterns are not indigenous in any form and nature. This could mean that the Christianity we have in our region can be termed as westernized Christianity. Otherwise, there should be a retrieval of indigenous resources that are supported by IP and knowledge to maintain its distinctive indigenous Christianity as a whole. On the other hand, the moral conduct in indigenous life was diluted and much of the identity crisis has become more visible. Favouring western system of lifestyle that has influenced people through media and information technologies is another issue added to the same problem of being westernized. This is how

westernization is prompted to promote their culture rather than indigenization. Moreover, the dominant influencers have manipulated the indigenous people to believe that westernization and modernization are the saviour and better and on the other that the indigenous people and their means of life are inferior without values. Westernization has projected that IP are worthless. Such manipulation and assumptions have become a reality to many indigenous communities which has caused the IP to diminish at large and adopt western philosophies which do not truly fit into the communities in reality.

Beyond the era of colonialism and modernism, the indigenous peoples in the region remain subalterns, who are sustaining to revive from the hangover kicks of savage colonial activities.

At the same time, the above discussion does not negate completely the activities of the dominant influences. There were a few things that need to be acknowledged. For instance, the socio-cultural practice of 'headhunting' which was quite active in the pre-colonial era has been abandoned for good; a new faith was introduced and it was embraced because the primal religion also had similar belief systems on the existence of the Supreme Being, which ultimately was well connected by the indigenous people; modern education system has paved the way to grow in parallel with indigenous knowledge and philosophies (including the language that expresses in this essay); sorcery and sacrifices to deities have been abandoned with the advent of new faith system and others.

Much of the realities expressed above expose that the indigenous communities were vulnerable while the dominant agents were projected to be superior. The rejection of indigenous elements and way of life were anticipated to be unintelligent and insignificant. In the process, the dominant culture and practices began to override the mindset of indigenous peoples replacing with their philosophies and knowledge. Even the identity as an indigenous has been challenged undermining the deep-rooted IP that continues to exist, though not loud enough to be distinct.

Ao-Naga Folk Tale: "Return from the Dead"

To uncover the presence of IP in folktales, it is necessary to consider narrating a folktale in "story mode" through this written form. (I acknowledge that the oral communication within the indigenous communities would have sensed differently). According to the ancient indigenous folklore, there is a story about life after death or "return from the dead." There are human and natural features with its IP within the narrative and not ignore the nonvisible spiritual realm. Thus, the following indigenous folktale (Ao Naga) is considered an ample tool towards re-storying the essence of IP. According to one of the indigenous folktales, folklorist Guru A. Mar Jamir in his book *Tar Shilu (Tejen Otsü Penzü)*¹⁴ narrates:

Once upon a time when our foreparents were settled in Jungliyimti, there was a certain family who had lovable two young boys who were growing up gracefully. The family lived happily and the two boys understood how much their parents loved them. As such, the family was exemplary to many for being pleasant and peaceful. As time passed by, they met with an unfortunate fate when their father passed away and only their mother was responsible for looking after them. Subsequently, the ones without luck are also unluckier, as such, their mother also passed away before long leaving the nine- and ten-year-old children.

With much misfortune and hardships in this world, the two orphans grew up. As they lived and time went by, they met with many life's difficulties in their lives. Whether they could do it or not, with what strength was left, they would work in the field and take up their struggles by themselves to provide themselves with food to survive. With much melancholic scene, they cultivated in a small corner place to others' field. Their field was located in a place where villagers would pass

by every day while they went to work in their fields. The boys went to their field in the early morning to work. Upon their return, they collected bamboo and reed sticks since firewood was too heavy to carry home. They would use those to cook their food for livelihood. Likewise, their lives were sustained.

During a time when unusual events were happening, something remarkable occurred in the field. On multiple occasions, the boys found that the unfinished work they had left the day before had been completed when they come in the morning. This continued to happen for several days, leaving the boys bewildered and searching for an explanation. So, one day they decided that they would hide inside a bamboo basket and wait to watch and see who comes to work. Therefore, one evening they waited under a basket after all the villagers left for their homes; when people could not be recognised properly since it became dark. Then they saw their mother and father coming to the field with sufficient equipment to work without stepping on the earth but floating in mid-air. They were singing a song which goes like this:

*Ya shir lu ko, kazüpong lu ko,
Kompong lu ko, Amo junger ai remjangni
Yarangjungba lu.
(Whose field is this? Our young men's field!*

*Our young men's field, let the grain be filled and
remove the weed
Our gentlemen, our young men's field)*

The boys also caught a glimpse of their parents in the field, where they were labouring and giving their blessings. While the mother and father were still working, the two brothers suddenly jumped into the

place where they were working. The elder one clung to his father. The father managed to break free from the son's grip and fled from the scene. The younger son also wrapped his hands around his mother's waist. But it is said that since women have more love, which is why she loved her son and carried her and went crossing the river of death.

Though it was mortal flesh, his mother carried him (the younger son) by crossing the river and reaching the world of death. During his stay, he witnessed many wondrous events. While living there for a while, one night the son heard many people singing and feasting. He then asked his mother to explain the matter to him. That time the mother told him that it is 'the feast of merit' (süchir) where men and women sing and dance and make merry. Therefore, he went towards that place to see closely how it was. However, he didn't see anyone but heard and saw only some insects making noise 'teri-teri-teri.' Another night, he heard singing 'wok-wok' which was a wonder! He went to investigate what was happening. Yet to his surprise, he saw that it was again other insects and some night birds making noises. Then one day, the deceased in the world of death planned to go out to trap deer (traditional hunting). At that time, he told his mother that he would also join them. It was like a dream, or perhaps a moment not quite real. The villagers rushed out shouting and encircled a bunch of weeds. (Since he was still in the flesh, the bunch of weeds appeared small to him. However, to those who were deceased, it was like a wild forest). When he looked into it, he saw Mayflies which we called by its name 'asür pongzö' ('wild boar of the death', though in the world of the death, it is just a tiny insect). He told them there was no wild boar in sight. However,

they said that wild boar is in the place where he stood. Consequently, seeing the Mayflies (asür pongzü), he caught it with his hands saying that there is no wild boar. From that day onwards, he received the title 'akümliba'.

During that time, the deceased were all rejoicing and proclaiming that the person who was still living (akümliba) had successfully hunted a large wild boar. They were eagerly anticipating the feast they would have upon returning to the village. The deceased individuals were transporting the animal and arrived at the residence of the boy. Upon seeing them returning from a distance, the mother exclaimed happily, "Oh, they have killed such a big wild boar!" They entered her house and placed a cane mat on their porch for the meat to be chopped. While chopping the meat, the boy's mother happily received the large portion he was given (akümliba). The meat was distributed among all members, starting with the eldest. They each took their portion and returned home.

During that period on Earth, the elder brother was living a disheartened life. His parents had passed away too soon and he had no idea where his younger brother had disappeared. While in the realm of the dead, the mother spoke to her younger son, "You still belong to the world of the living since you have not yet transformed from earthly flesh to the realm of the dead. Therefore, it will not be possible for you to stay here any longer. Your elder brother is also living alone on earth with a heavy heart. Therefore, go meet him and stay there with him for a while. It won't be long before your father and I come to take you." As she bid him farewell, she handed him a tiffin and instructed him to wash his hands and eat its contents before crossing over the

longritsü, a bitter drink that separates the world of the living from that of the dead. He opened the tiffin only after crossing the river and towards the earthly world, without considering his mother's instructions about the food. To his surprise, he saw only pig and solid poop, so he remembered his mother's words and crossed over the river. There he began to wash his legs and hands, but then he saw that his palms were filled with holes just like a bamboo basket with a lot of holes in it. At that moment, he thought that he was dead already. As he opened his tiffin, he was pleased to see clear white rice cooked along with delicious pork meat in his meal. He savoured the food with satisfaction, and when he was done, he crossed over the longritsü and returned to the earthly world. During that time, he noticed that the world had brightened and the livelihood was different. Likewise, he realized that the world of the living and the dead have huge differences.

After the younger brother returned to Earth, he met his elder brother and they lived in complete harmony and contentment. He narrated all the stories he encountered while he was with his parents describing the way of life in the world of the dead. The experience of finding a cucumber for the dead (known as "asür züngi") on earth is typically found in paddy fields where the vines are small, sour and not commonly eaten due to their size. However, in the world of the dead, these cucumbers are considered a delicacy and are consumed. Again, another "asür züngi" by its name with its crippers and bear fruits that taste sour and smell like cucumber grows in the paddy field during summer after cleaning the field is even considered a real cucumber and is eaten there. Further, a flower that is quite mesmerizing in its looks though small and weak is reddish and has

its leaves green; for when we look at this flower, we are enchanted by it. These flowers are found and bloom mostly during the times of harvest. When this flower is blooming, it is said that the dead people come to see the grains. These flowers and cucumbers are grown in Ludi's 1st year, Maipu 2nd year and pendong (the year field is abandoned) and where there are fewer weeds field is found. When such Asülepla (resurrection) flowers and asüzüangi (cucumber for the death) are seen in full bloom and bearing fruits, then this moment is considered a sign that the dead people's spirits have already visited the grains and have also separated the spirits.

As time went by, it happened that the younger brother one day was trying to hunt a small bird with his spear; his hurt himself with his tool which left a mark on his body. As a result of the cut mark, it added further problems to his health and that was not curable. He died and went to live with his parents in the world of the dead. However, his elder brother was left all alone and is said to have lived in despair in this world.

Furthermore, according to the younger brother's experiences, when a person dies their spirit becomes like that of short-lived insects and animals, and eventually fades away. The Mayflies insect has the shortest lifespan in the world. This serves as an example for humans to seek ways to live a long life. Our foreparents have always stressed the importance of asking the Creator for blessings and a long lifespan.

The Need for Reoralizing the Indigenous Philosophies in North East India

Within the indigenous communities, as stated above, the folklore carries great IP that is crucial for indigenous peoples

for sustenance and survival amid the challenges and influences of various dominant agents. The IP that is rooted in the heart of indigenous communities requires resilience to see that prospective philosophies continue to revive and apply. In this case, the folklorist Jamir applied indigenous resilience to recover the folktale that has been passed on through generations in oral form and has now been documented in written text (recorded before the folktales are completely lost from the community). No doubt the IP has undergone levels of changes in the past generations as a result of various agents they have encountered. The indigenous communities who have historically owned the IP have the right to reclaim and transfer its ownership to the younger generation. It is important to impart the values and principles of indigeneity to maintain its authenticity.

Moreover, with the indigenous communities encountering various dominant agents in terms of colonialism, westernization, modernism, and so on, the peoples have become hybrid in identity and nature of life. The rich IP that has been the guiding principles and values-driven features has been challenged. Due to its vulnerability in the hands of dominant powers and cultures, indigeneity began to shred the practices of oral lore. Anything that belonged to the indigenous peoples was looked down at and this is how the indigenous communities shifted towards the practices and cultures of the dominant agents and influencers. Unfortunately, many essential rudiments of IP in the form of oral lore have faded away from the communities. When such dominant culture, knowledge, ideologies, and practices continue, the indigenous indigeneity would be lost completely.

Consequently, reoralizing hermeneutics emerges as an indigenous tool to restore the whole of life issues encountered by the indigenous peoples. Two purposes are emphasized in this indigenous hermeneutics – social justice and transforming the communities by delivering equal respect and recognition of IP values for the well-being of communities. At the same time, the

relationship and interdependence between God-Nature-Human which are expressed in the existential realities remain crucial to making sense of IP. This indigenous hermeneutics does not undermine existing western hermeneutics that has emerged on various forms of higher criticism. Just as this world is diverse in life and contexts, it is also appropriate to use more local tools to revive the IP. This is to make the IP to be the center of the re-storying process. There are five dimensions considered with internal (originating from the indigenous mind) and external (originating from nature and the rest of humanity) elements in considering indigenous hermeneutics of reoralizing:

- i) the thought patterns of tribal people
- ii) land and identity
- iii) role of collectivity
- iv) socio-cultural process
- v) fitting description and application.¹⁵

These five theoretical features can be understood in a nutshell: first is about the mindset of the people who produce the philosophies. Second, for indigenous people, land is life and this creates an identity for the community as a whole. The third aspect unveils that human is not alone but there is both a visible and non-visible realm of life in the form of natural creatures and spirit world. All co-relate with each other to experience life. Fourth, for life to take place, there is a process which is in the form of socio-cultural processes, which makes humans accountable for their natural existence. The fifth aspect describes the appropriate portrayal of an indigenous being which requires one to be indigenous in practicum. These features of reoralizing hermeneutics would undertake the role of re-storying the IP that has been detached from the lives of the indigenous communities.

Re-Storying the Essence of Indigenous Philosophies

Due to IP stance, the indigenous communities could endure amid influences for generations. In light of this thought and applying the reoralizing theories and principles, the following IP are highlighted to strengthen the process of re-storying folktales.

Indigenous Self

One of the components of IP is the indigenous self.¹⁶ Regardless of an individual or a group, an indigenous being in the ancient past has always lived a life guided by the values of principles of IP. In other words, the identity and whole of life have been posed in each individual's life which made indigeneity distinct from those dominant agents. Whether the person/s is/are in the field outside a village or is positioned in the village, the IP always goes with the person. In other words, even though a person moves around to a different landscape, yet he/she takes the knowledge and philosophy of his/her community along. This makes the indigeneity to be vibrant which is closely knitted to the community as a whole. Like the family narrative in the folktale before the unfortunate incident took place, they were closely knitted as a family (this can be understood as a community figuratively as well). They shared oneness and expressed love for each other. This can be interpreted as a time of learning the philosophies and morality that each indigenous member of a community is expected to be. Though it is unwritten in the narrative, it is usually the role of the parents in each indigenous family to teach the children about the way of life, which is the foundation of their existence as community members. Further, when the parents are deceased, the little boys continue to work hard for their survival despite their limitations as orphans. This shows that they have acquired the life existence philosophies through their IP of survival sense. Therefore, this IP of the indigenous self plays a vital role which needs to be revived as this value of being indigeneity is sacred to every indigenous member. After all, the close-knit family is an example of how closely the

community exists through relationships and interdependence with each other.

Spirit Always Lives

The indigenous communities not only believe in the physical form of life but also believe in the supernatural beings which in this narrative (folktale) were the spirits of the children's parents. Though the parents were deceased quite early, the bond that they shared continued to be experienced in the lives of the children. The indigenous communities believe in the spirits of ancestors that continue to live and exist in the world of the dead. As per the oral tradition, when the need arises, the ancestors would communicate with the living beings. This is true to the folktale that has been narrated in this essay. When the children were too young to complete the task of cleaning the weeds of their field (farm), the spirits of the parents appeared and worked for them. The story states that they did not touch the ground with their feet which is a sign that they were not in physical form. At the same time, they could clean the weeds, which is mystical but not impossible in the belief system of the indigenous peoples. Likewise, this narrative unveils the IP of the spirit world where the spirit of the deceased continues to exist. The spirits continued to assist in the mortal world as well as provide the knowledge of life after death. The IP on life after death does not exist in a vacuum, but through the relationality and interdependence between the two worlds, it is evident that the idea of spirit is of reality. The idea of spirit is not a mystery to the indigenous peoples because the spirit world and the physical world co-existed. Moreover, understanding the Christian concept of the spirit realm is not a foreign knowledge or philosophy for the indigenous peoples' worldview because, in the IP, this spirit realm was well known to the communities.

Living and Dead Worlds

There is a philosophy of the indigenous people that the two worlds are independent in themselves and at the same time interdependent. This would mean that the physical world (the living world) is a temporal world which would qualify for the role and status in the spirit world (the world of the dead). It is believed that all the happenings of the whole of life for the indigenous people will continue in the next world. This is not just a belief but the life after death rationality is significant as we have seen in the folktale mentioned above. Based on this knowledge, the indigenous peoples are guided by the moral and ethical values of being an indigenous being. For the indigenous people, the world that is beyond this physical world has a river to cross (the river of death) which sets apart the two worlds. This river can be understood as the gateway to enter into the spirit world when one dies (the philosophy of physical death and spirit departs from the body). The youngest son witnessed in the world of death that there existed the family system, festivity, community hunting, socio-cultural life, and others. This would mean that the two worlds are quite different though interrelated. Like the son who was sent back by his mother to the mortal world since he was still possessing a physical body (mortal cannot live in the spirit world and vice versa), this implies that there can be communication, which the ancestors have practiced through rituals and ceremonies. Nonetheless, the IP is distinct to provide this knowledge and reality that can continue to work for the restoration of the ideas of dual worldviews by doing away with external influences that stand as distractions to the sacredness of IP.

Restore Identity through Nature

The oral lore is the foundation of IP and its functions as the medium of communicating it. The indigenous community lives their lives closely related to the nature around them and nature is considered to be alive. This is one of the IP of why the indigenous

peoples consider land, forest, water, animals, and all nature as life. As the song goes in the narrative, the parents were singing for the blessing of the field and the weeds to be removed. This would mean that to sustain and survive, one needs to filter the weeds in life so that the distraction for the growth of the grain plant is free to live and also give life. The song also mentions whose field? This would reflect the identity of the indigenous peoples. The indigenous peoples ought to live in peace and grow gracefully in the land that belongs to them without the weeds. The parents (metaphorically understood as IP) cleared the weeds from the field, deriving the meaning that indigeneity as distinct communities ought to be restored through re-storying the oral lore. Further, as the child crossed the river of death, the images of food and hands changed. This also suggests that nature takes its course which makes nature to be respected and not exploited. Nature is life, and it requires relationship and interdependence just as how humans co-relate with other human beings, because nature provides an identity to indigenous peoples.

Prospects of Re-Storying Folktales

Some of the prospects that can be further looked into for a wider discussion on the subject matter arising from this essay can be highlighted:

Raise Awareness of Its Values

Providing awareness about the values of IP to the communities is a need now. The re-storying of folklore in the form of storytelling, songs, drama, art, poetry, and other or even modern communication means can be adopted to impart the knowledge of IP. The philosophies can become a daily matter where it can be applied through different modes of communication. Sensitization of the issue from the perspective of intellectual property notion and grassroots practicum awareness is required.

Physical and Digital Documentation

The philosophical history of the community needs to be written by the community itself. There should be due recognition and empowerment of knowledge within the community so that the local contents are preserved in the form of various documentation records like – books, videos, online digital platforms, and others. This would enhance the community to impart the IP to other communities and individuals for their pursuit of knowledge. This does not mean that the IP are safely stored but the actual purpose of documentation is to educate the younger generations through different means of learning models. At the same time, it can be accessible to scientific research and available for community-based development. Of course, nothing like verbal communication (oral tradition) with practicum.

Moving beyond Assumed Intellectuals

There are challenges on the issues of intellectuals which have been assumed by anthropologists or historians where ‘intellectual’ has been attributed to those only who could write. In other words, the assumption of where the written words are evident is to reflect the evidence of intellectual. However, when we pay attention to the practical action or performance of the indigenous people through oral lore or in particular the folklore in the discussion, it is quite evident of their intellectual works in them. Undermining the intellectual banks of IP through various dominant agents has been one of the means of uncivilized knowledge of the other. Therefore, indigenous communities ought to move beyond the assumed intellectuals of the others.

Postscript

The idea that has been sparked from the mindset of an indigenous being has formulated the basic values and principles of indigeneity and has become indigenous knowledge today needs to be acknowledged first. Because of our ancestors’ original ideas of setting up a family, community, and the whole of life features

within and beyond the communities which has been transferred in the form of oral lore – in specific here is a folktale. Apart from this one example that has been considered in this essay, there are still hundreds of oral lore that need to be considered for re-storying. This suggests that the indigenous people in the NEI region require a careful study on IP which ought to become a movement not only in the form of research papers and publications but also in practicum should begin a movement to restore our indigenous identity and philosophy.

The above discussions on the folktale that has engaged with reoralizing hermeneutics have prompted re-storying as of necessity towards restoring the diminishing IP in the NEI region. The realization process of IP that lays the foundation of the very existence of indigenous communities should engage in re-storying the many IP that are being negated and sidelined. This does not mean that our society should negate the modern philosophies or other aspects of knowledge, but we should be able to empower our philosophies that can become our guiding principles and values as indigenous communities in the region. Reviving and restoring here does not mean bringing back every rudiment that has been abandoned, but this essay proposes a re-storying of those elements that are sacred and can rebuild our communities with both relationality and interdependent philosophies.

End Notes

- 1 I am using the term ‘oral lore’ with a meaning of transmitting oral tradition, folklore, and oral history. The term is interchangeably used in this essay, though there are specific meanings for these terms. For instance, ‘folklore’ is often used to refer to both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication and ‘oral history’ may be used to refer to a specific qualitative research methodology. This essay will emphasize folklore where a story is highlighted to seek meaning towards re-storying indigenous oral lore.
- 2 Indigenous people in India have unique characteristics and behaviours that distinguish them from dominant societies. The Indian Constitution recognizes her ethnic communities as Scheduled Tribes, who are also the indigenous people of the land. This work focuses on the indigenous

communities in NEI in general and specific to the Ao Naga communities of Nagaland.

- 3 Emmanuel Bassey Eyo and Diana-Abasi Ibanga, “African Indigenous Languages and the Advancement of African Philosophy,” *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 12/5 (Nov. 2018): 210.
- 4 Brian Burkhart, *Indigenizing Philosophy through the Land: A Trickster Methodology for Decolonizing Environmental Ethics and Indigenous Futures* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2019), 4.
- 5 Christen J. Winter, *Subjects of Intergenerational Justice: Indigenous Philosophy, the Environment and Relationships* (London: Routledge, 2022), 2.
- 6 Gabriela Ramos and Yanna Yannakakis, “Introduction,” in *Indigenous Intellectuals: Knowledge, Power, and Colonial Culture in Mexico and the Andes*, edited by Gabriela Ramos and Yanna Yannakakis (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 1.
- 7 Werner H. Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul, and Q* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), xv.
- 8 Temsula Ao, “From Antiquity to Modern,” *Indian Folklife* 33 (July 2009): 3.
- 9 Komal Kothari, “Tales: Oral and Written,” in *Narrative: A Seminar*, ed. Amiya Das (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1994), 187.
- 10 Christopher King, “The Emergence of Nagaland: A Social and Political Study of Imperial Administration, Missionary Influences,” in Unpublished M.S. Thesis (University of Wisconsin, 1968), 66, cited by Takatemjen Ao, *Studies in Theology and Naga Culture* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1989), 12.
- 11 Yangkahao Vashum, “Colonialism, Missionaries, and Indigenous: A Critical Appraisal,” *Journal of Tribal Studies*, 12/2 (2007): 6.
- 12 Supongmayang Longkumer, *The Apocalypse of John and Its Subalterns: Implications for a Postcolonial Tribal Context* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2019), 231.
- 13 Joseph S. Thong, *Glimpses of Naga Legacy and Culture* (Kottayam, Kerala: Society for Naga Students’ Welfare, Kerala, 2011), 231-232.
- 14 A. Mar Jamir, *Tar Shilu: Tejen Otsü Penzü* (Mokokchung: By the Author, 2016). The writer has translated the folktale from his book, which was originally published in the Ao Naga language.
- 15 See for details, Supongmayang Longkumer, “Tribal Biblical Hermeneutics: Exploring Theories and Principles,” *Tribal Hermeneutics: Biblical Reflections from North East India*, edited by B. Lalnunzira and A. Abeni Patton (New Delhi: Christian World Imprints, 2023).

16 One of the profound philosophies of an indigenous individual is that an indigenous being carries one's indigenous self with all things. In other words, when an individual acts upon himself/herself individually it accompanies the indigenous self and this makes the person respond to situations in life with the indigenous worldviews in totality. This makes the indigenous people unique which is driven by the IP. The indigenous self is capable of thinking and is capable of immersion into the indigenous world. This assures that the indigenous self is also in the maintenance of relationships not only with fellow community members (humans) but also with God and nature.

Religious Iconoclasm: Bible Engagement and Contextualization

*Joel Patrick**

Introduction

Today, we live in a world of mediated images. They fill newspapers, magazines, books, clothing, billboards, computer monitors and television screens as never before in the history of mass communications. We are becoming a visually mediated society. In this mediated society, Images play a vital role in religion and religious life. Let us take an example in the Indian context. India is full of classic beautiful images. The temple in India is an image, which is an object of a work of art, where symbols like flowers, and oil lamps are expressions of worship.

The Bible is a gallery of icons of God and his People. For example, Solomon's Temple had its golden cherubim, which is a concrete image, guarding the symbolic dwelling place of God; Christ's teaching always was centred on images like the lamp and the lamp-stand, the bushel and the bed, tile mustard seed, the fig tree and the little lump of unleavened bread. The terms "image"

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and “icon” will be used accordingly in this essay, as the term image is the English translation of the Greek word *eikon* meaning “likeness.” Within the Biblical context both words mean the same.

Historically, the Protestant Christians have a great hesitation to use any form of arts, including paintings, pictures, sculptures and images in the Churches. Icons were perceived to be associated with paganism and idolatry and as such seen to contradict the second commandment of the OT (Exodus 20: 4-6). This attitude has been inherited largely from the Reformation. In contrast the Roman Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox Christians tend to use the icons in their Churches.

Bhedaghat near Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh, India is an excursion to a gleaming marble fantasy. The whole stretch of rocks, called *Bhedaghat*, resembles a *bhed* (sheep) and hence the name. *Bhedaghat* is not only renowned for its natural beauty but also for its historical importance as a destination for religion, culture and education. It is a small, sleepy town without much of activity, except for a few artisans chiselling on marble and limestone. Here however, you can be amazed to see a variety of soapstone artefacts, sculptures, paintings, pictures, and carved arts as well as arts containing religious mode and other arts which these artists (comprising of a small community) sell and thus earn their livelihood.

Christians too in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh buy these sculptures and use them for different purposes in their houses, gardens, and schools alongside with pictures, paintings, arts of nature, and religion. While they use these sculptures as icons in their homes, many do not feel comfortable to use them for religious purposes, particularly in their churches.

My query in this essay is to find out what are the reasons behind the dichotomous views of Christians, toward the use of sculptures in their houses and churches. This article will explore the biblical perspective on icons and its role in Christian Faith. It

will bring out the strategies of ‘Bible Engagement’¹ in support of the use of icons in the churches.

1. Two Biblical Perspectives on Icons

1.1. Image Opposers: The arguments for and against icons are steeped in the Old and New Testament scriptures. Image opposers, such as Ulrich Zwingli and Andreas Karlstadt, cite the second Commandment with its argument at the forefront.² Those who argue against images in the church cite scripture that supports the second commandment as a separate commandment, and one that condemns the worship of any image. Exodus 20:4-6 reads, *You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.*³ If one makes an idol in any shape or form, one is breaking the second commandment. Additionally, one who makes an image is moving further and further away from God.

God rejects being confined to a two- or three-dimensional visual image because God is more than an image. God is emotive, and hears, feels, thinks, and sees. An image implies God is unemotive and lacks keen senses that allow God to make connections with humans. Worshipping an image creates a false theology.⁴ How can one study and learn about God if one is only viewing an emotionless aspect of God? One is not experiencing the true emotive God if one worships an image of God. They are only experiencing part of who God is. Wanting to encounter God, people turned to scripture and verbal images to describe God. Scripture that indicates how God does reveal Godself to us is cited as the proper means of learning from and about God. We are to

listen for God's voice and learn from God's words and not from images.⁵

1.2. Image Supporters: For image supporters such as Johann Eck and Hieronymus Emser, the Ten Commandments do not oppose images in the church. Exodus 20:4-6 are a continuation of verse three and is not a separate commandment. Verses four to six reinforce the first commandment discouraging one from worshipping foreign gods. Because Christ was made in the image of God and revealed to us through the virgin birth, images do not break the commandments.⁶ Those in favour of images in the church argue that God sent Jesus as an image of Godself, therefore, creating an image of who God is. Since God has sent an image, then that image, Jesus, can be used in the church to aid worship.

The theology of the icon is based upon the Incarnation as formally pronounced by the 7th Ecumenical Council held in Nicaea in 787 CE. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us..." (John 1:14) – God takes on human flesh in the person of his Son, Jesus, and so, Jesus truly God, becomes truly human and is truly God.

2. Religious Icons: Witness to Faith in a Pluralistic and Secular Society

The term "religious icon" is a slippery one. Most people assume that it is content, for example, biblical content, that distinguishes religious icon from other types of icon. But this criterion, while useful, ignores the many other ways in which icons can witness to faith in a pluralistic, technological and secular society.⁷ I believe we need to consider some different ways of thinking about religious icon. To clarify this point, we must distinguish between a broad and a narrow concept of the term "religion."⁸ H. Richard Niebuhr reminds us that faith can mean human confidence in a centre and conserver of value" and that it can also mean loyalty to a cause. To Niebuhr, faith seems to "manifest itself almost as directly in politics, science, and other cultural activities as it does in religion." Religion in this sense means an overarching, integrative principle

of order. This kind of religion is less concerned with "What must I do to be saved?" than with "What is real to me and others?" and "What do we value?" Answering these questions helps us to identify ourselves and our world. Sociologists of religion like Max Weber and Émile Durkheim have observed that being religious in this broad sense refers not to a matter of personal choice but to a fundamental human drive to make sense out of reality.⁹

This essentially metaphysical order of the world which humans look for is perceived and understood largely through concrete, accessible public symbols. The manifold forms through which society's most essential values are communicated are not, therefore, of secondary importance. They are necessary for expressing, legitimating and maintaining the metaphysical and the social order.¹⁰ The Jabalpur Christians express themselves through secular icons.

The most revolutionary alteration in religious art came with the sweeping changes in sacrament and liturgy brought about by the 16th century Reformers, especially Calvin and Zwingli. These two, much more than Luther, narrowed the forms of religious communication almost entirely to the Word as expressed through Scripture and sermon. (Luther, for his part, remarked that in his devotions he was "aided by the sight of the crucifix, the sound of the anthems, and the partaking of the body of Christ upon the altar."¹¹ Thus, he maintained a sacramental view of the unity and mystery of the relationship between flesh and spirit, between the visible and invisible). The visual arts, which had for centuries witnessed to Christian faith in a liturgical context, were now systematically excluded from the worship setting.

2.1. Invisible Faith through Visible Forms: As a result of the diminution of the role of the icons in the religious communication, the sacramental impulse – the *need to encounter invisible faith through visible forms* – embarked on a new, vital life outside of institutional Christianity. Artists themselves took up the search for sacramental forms – images that could testify to spiritual

experience. Nineteenth-century painters such as Washington Allston and Thomas Cole found little or no demand from churches for religious art. Nevertheless, they continued to conceive of the artist's role in religious terms. Under the influence of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and New England transcendentalist James Marsh, Allston regarded the artist as a kind of seer for the community.¹² Some painters gave a religious interpretation to the secular world and its images. Asher B. Durand, writing in *The Crayon*, described landscape as the "representation of the work of God in visible creation." For painters like Durand, religious symbolism in landscape painting did not depend upon the use of biblical narratives. Late in the 19th century, George Inness, who was immersed in the theology of Swedenborg, spoke of the artist's need to contemplate the invisible in the visible. In Europe one finds similar religious interpretations of ordinary reality, for instance, in the work of Vincent Van Gogh (whose letters powerfully reveal the religious basis of his art).¹³

In the atmosphere of 19th century Protestant piety, it was still possible for both artists and the public to find religious meanings in the images of everyday life – in landscape or still life. But what happened in the 20th century, when the religious imagination – in its individual and corporate dimensions – become fragmented under the assault of modern materialism?¹⁴ How do we interpret and manipulate images of the ordinary world? Is it possible that the imagistic revolution of the information age is also a *sacramental revolution* in which the visual forms we identify as "secular" are themselves embodiments of faiths and values that compel our deepest loyalties? Perhaps sacramental images are no longer confined to religious institutions or to particular subjects. The power of images to objectify invisible values and meanings has been appropriated by secular institutions. To the degree that traditional religious groups in Protestant culture have emphasized the word and de-emphasized images, they have

deprived themselves of an effective force for transmitting their own symbols.

3. Theological Analysis

To think theologically about icons, we need to ask two questions: *What do icons reveal about God?* and *What are icons based on?* Icons reveal three characteristics of who God is. God is accessible via icons. While God is traditionally and culturally available in the church, God can be found in other locations. Icons are located in the houses. Icons reveal that God is present everywhere and God can be found and accessed not only in church and home but in all points of life. God can be accessed by anyone, in anywhere, and by any means. God becomes more physical via icons.

Icons are made by humans as an artful representation of God. Icons reveal a creative and alternative means in knowing God. In a religion focused on words and scriptural texts, icons offer a different expression of faith, a visual medium. It becomes *see-able* religion. Icons suggest that there is more than one way to express and have a relationship with God. God can be expressed through an entire palette of arts. God is not limited to black ink ordered into words in two columns on a page. God is not limited to twenty minutes of the spoken word on a Sunday morning. Icons suggest that God can be revealed in more than one way. One of those ways is through visual images.

Icons are based on two components: *Doctrine* and *Experience*. *Doctrine* is what the church teaches and believes to be true. Scripture and the apostolic tradition hold the teachings and practices of the church, which have been provided by God and Jesus Christ. God is creator of heaven and earth and sent Jesus Christ to die for our sins. Icons are also based on *experience*, which is either in *engagement* or *disengagement*. When one encounters an icon as decoration in a house or on a pedestal at church, she/he reacts to the icon. The reaction might be to walk past the icon. The experience was one of disengagement. If the reaction is to step in front of the icon and pray, the experience is one of engagement.

One received the icon physically by studying it and praying before it. Re-occurring engagement might cause one to choose an icon and either go to it or bring it home. One can form a special connection to a specific scene or depiction, which calls one.

4. The Role of Icons in Christian Faith

Icons serve a number of purposes.

4.1. Icons serve as windows to heaven: Kallistos Ware, while evaluating on Icons says that the icons serve as “windows to Heaven” to help call to mind that as we worship here on earth, the departed saints are worshiping with us in Heaven. They remind us that the church is not just an earthly institution, but exists eternally in Heaven. They remind us that we are encompassed by a “great cloud of witnesses,” as we are told in Hebrews 12:1. We never worship alone, even in our most private devotionals, but are always surrounded by this great cloud of saints and martyrs. The icons remind us of their presence. Through the eyes of faith, we see not merely wood and paint but these holy witnesses surrounding us.¹⁵

4.2. Icons enhance the beauty of a church: Attention to this fact is called by the following hymn from the *Triodion* that is chanted on the eve of the Sunday of Orthodoxy, when the victory over Iconoclasm is commemorated:

*The Church of Christ is now embellished like a bride, having been adorned with icons of holy form; and it calls all together spiritually; let us come and celebrate together joyfully with concord and faith, magnifying the Lord.*¹⁶

The idea that icons are a means of enhancing the beauty of churches appears in many writings of the Fathers. To give one example, Niketas Stethatos, the most famous disciple of St. Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022), says that upon becoming abbot of the Monastery of St. Mamas, Symeon “adorned its church with

beautiful marbles on the pavement, with holy icons, and other wonderful offerings.”¹⁷

4.3. Icons instruct us in matters pertaining to the Christian faith: The icons serve *to instruct the faithful* is a point which is duly emphasized by the Greek Church Fathers. Thus, St. John Damascene remarks that since not everyone is literate, nor has leisure for reading, the Fathers agreed that such things as the Incarnation of our Lord, His association with men, His miracles, His Crucifixion, His Resurrection, and so on, should be represented on icons.¹⁸ St. Photios, Patriarch of Constantinople, says: “Just as speech is transmitted by hearing, so a form through sight is imprinted upon the tablets of the soul, giving to those whose apprehension is not soiled by wicked doctrines a representation of knowledge consonant with piety.”¹⁹

4.4. Icons remind us of faith: We have a tendency to forget, to forget even things that are of vital importance to us, to fall asleep spiritually. So even though we may *know* many things about the Christian faith, such as the commandment of love, the teaching about the spiritual realm, the exemplary character and noble deeds of many holy personages, we tend to *forget* them, as we become preoccupied with everyday worldly matters and pursuits. Icons serve to *remind* us of these things, to *awaken* us with respect to them. The vivacity of icons, which St. Photios points out, renders icons very effective in this regard. John Damascene sums up this function when he calls them concise memorials (*hypomneseis*),²⁰ that is, concise means of remembering. He gives the following example: “Many times, doubtless, when we do not have in mind the Passion of our Lord, upon seeing the icon of Christ’s Crucifixion, we recall His saving suffering.”²¹

4.5. Icons lift us up to the prototypes which they symbolize, to a higher level of thought and feeling: This is the *anagogic* function of icons. The prototypes of the icons, i.e. Christ, the *Theotokos*, the Prophets, Apostles, Martyrs, Saints in general, enjoy a higher level of being than we do in our ordinary, distracted

everyday life. When we see their icons, we recall their superior character and deeds; and as we recall them, we think about pure, sublime thoughts, and experience higher feelings. Thus, for a while we live on a higher plane of being. As St. John Damascene remarks, “We are led by perceptible icons to the contemplation of the divine and spiritual.”²²

In this function of the icon, its essentially symbolic nature is manifested. An icon is not an end in itself; it is not merely an aesthetic object to be enjoyed for whatever artistic merits it possesses, but is essentially a symbol, carrying us beyond itself. It is designed to lead us from the physical and psychophysical to the spiritual realm. And hence it is, as St. John Damascene says, a pattern (*typos*) of something heavenly.²³

4.6. Icons arouse us to imitate the virtues of the holy personages depicted on them: By instructing us in the Christian religion, reminding us of its truths, aims and values, and lifting us up to the prototypes, to holy personages, icons serve another important purpose: *they stir us up to imitate the virtues of such personages*. Thus, one of decrees of the Seventh Ecumenical Synod – the Synod that was convoked specially to settle the dispute between the iconoclasts and those who defended the veneration of holy icons says: “The more continually holy personages are seen in icons, the more are the beholders lifted up to the memory of the prototypes and to an aspiration after them.”²⁴

4.7. Icons help to transform us, to sanctify us: An additional function served by holy icons is *to help transform our character, our whole being, to help sanctify us*. They affect this by instructing us, reminding us, uplifting us, and stirring us up morally and spiritually. The function of the icon in this regard is based on the principle that we become like that which we habitually contemplate. True icons focus the distracted, dispersed soul of man on spiritual perfection, on the divine. By dwelling steadily and lovingly on such perfection, we come to partake of it more and more.

4.8. Icons serve as a means of worship and veneration: This is one of its primary functions. Like sacred hymns and music, the icon is used as a means of worshipping God and venerating His saints. As such, it is *essentially symbolic*, leading the soul from the visible to the invisible, from the material to the spiritual, from the symbol to the prototype or original which it represents. Thus, religious art becomes an expression of faith.

5. Analysis of the Role of Icons in Jabalpur Christian Homes

A social survey was conducted at Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh among six Pastors, and members of ten Christian families of the Jabalpur Diocese of CNI to know their attitudes, opinions and perceptions towards icons. Two qualitative methods namely “participant observation”²⁵ and “in-depth interviews”²⁶ were used to find out the attitude of ten families of JC of CNI, who use icons in their houses. The researcher planned to observe action, expression and gestures of these members of ten families while they are tested through the possible responses given to them during conversations and interviews towards using arts in their houses but not in their churches. In the research, in-depth interviews were conducted to know the attitude of six Pastors of the local Church in Jabalpur of the Church of North India (CNI) towards icons. The interviews were conducted in Hindi.

5.1. Interpretation of Findings: Two cultures exist among the CNI Jabalpur Christians. First, to have secular icons in the houses. Secondly, not to have icons (even the religious icons) in the church. There is a dichotomy that exists within the practice of these Jabalpur Christians of CNI, on whom this study is based. These Christians keep these arts as decoration in their houses which become the culture of Jabalpurians and so also the Jabalpur Christians. Almost all the ten families including the six Pastors of CNI disagree in keeping the arts in the Churches. They seem to have negative attitude towards these arts when asked to use the

same arts kept in the houses to be used in the churches. They said that if these arts are kept in the churches, it becomes the idol, for then it will be worshiped. The Bible forbids using any kinds of images in the church. This understanding has passed down through the tradition especially in the Protestant tradition as nearly all the Protestant churches forbid the use of any images in the worship. This is based on the Second Commandment forbidding graven images (Exodus 20:4).

The artefacts, brought from Bhedaghat, which are used in decoration is a secular icon for them. It is merely a piece of material culture. They are willing to use these icons in their houses but when it comes to use the same icons in their church, they have a problem. These same icons become the religious icons when it comes to using them in the churches. There comes a dichotomy between the practices of these Christians. The religious tradition and culture come in contrast in the life of these Christians.

5.2. Analyses: I believe that the current fascination with the sculptures, arts, images among these ten Christians families is a reflection of their valuable and spiritual needs and aspirations. The images revealed a longing for finding meaning in life and a desire for life to have a purpose. I also observed a need to create an identity, to answer the question, “Who am I?” And finally, the strong attachment to religious ethos showed me a deep desire for belonging. As I talked to them about their interests and favourite arts, I felt as though I was talking to them about their religious beliefs.

Historically, icons and images are seen by many Protestants as being the antithesis of each other. But I believe that understanding the centuries old function of icons in particular context and culture will help researchers to understand the current use of icons/images among Protestant Christians in this region. I am convinced that these contemporary images as secular icons used in their houses are an attempt to grasp a vision of the transcendent, and reflect Protestant Christians’ spiritual quest.

There is a tension between a religious tradition and culture among the JPC, regarding the perception and the use of icons. Generally, the Protestant Christians have adopted different views concerning the tension between religious tradition and culture. Some hold the view that culture and historical circumstances have priority over the gospel (I say here – the religious tradition). Others will compromise a balance of influences between the religious tradition and culture, some emphasizing more, others less.

5.3. Suggestions

I am suggesting contextualization as a theory to fill the gap between living in two cultures of the religious practice and the socio-cultural practice within a community of CNI Jabalpur Christians towards their perception of icons. Missiologists created terms such as “accommodation” and “contextualization” to describe the interaction between religious tradition and culture. A major difficulty is that groups having different philosophies of mission use the same terms, thus creating confusion.

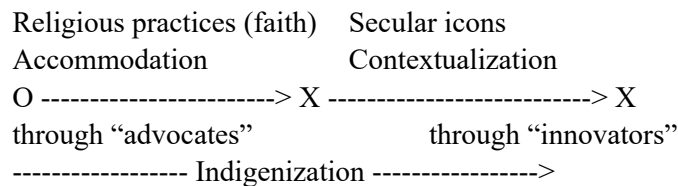
Contextualization

It is with the term “contextualization” that many Christians have problems because it has been used with different meanings. For many, the concepts of “accommodation” and “contextualization” may be used as equivalent to “indigenization.” Contextualization could be described as the presentation of the gospel using the forms of the local culture in such a way that it will be easily understood and relevant to the hearers. In this case we could speak of contextualization as a mission strategy. Thus, I am making an attempt to contextualize the arts used in the houses to also be used in the churches, or in other words, to make an attempt to “accommodate” these icons used in the houses to also be accommodated in the churches

Accommodation

In this study “accommodation” is the presentation of the religious tradition using local forms in order to produce the greatest impact on a given society. Sometimes “accommodation” and “contextualization” are called “indigenization.” However, I prefer to see indigenization as the whole process by which the religious faith and so also the faith become relevant to a local culture. One major difference between accommodation and contextualization is that accommodation is done by outsiders (also called “advocates”), while contextualization is done by insiders (also called “innovators”).

Accommodation in this case is indispensable as the first step, while contextualization will be a further development. The following graphic may help the reader to understand these concepts [“O” stands for “religious practices (faith)” and “X” for “secular icons, images, arts”]:



In order to accommodate the secular and the religious Icons in the houses and the churches, I suggest that the proper understanding and the treatment of the icon in the light of the historical, philosophical, theological and biblical issues to be given to the leaders, Pastors and the congregation of the Protestant Churches.

Different Christians Traditions in the Church history usually mention the role images once played in splitting the Church. Catholic and Eastern Orthodox practice relied on practical considerations backed by holy tradition, and Protestants relied on Scriptures which were fundamentally hostile to the very idea of depicting God graphically. Christianity has grown in Third World contexts, issues of contextualization in cultures in which symbol

and image play important but (to outsiders) ambiguous roles have resurfaced.

6. Rule Theory for Ecumenical Universality in Accommodating the Icons

I agree with Lindbeck, who seeks a better understanding of images by developing a rule theory of images inductively from Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant theological history. The question that can be asked here is, how can one find commonality in traditions which have mutually exclusive theologies of images, as Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant Christianity do? Can one ever arrive at a truly ecumenical theology of images? Rule theory looks promising, for it offers not merely more iconology, but “iconomy,” a law governing the Christian practice of images. Furthermore, rules straddle the contexts that divide cultures and historical epochs. While rules are never without concrete contexts, their commonality across distinct contexts can bridge communities whose practices appear incommensurable from other analytical perspectives. So Lindbeck recommends rule theory as an aid to ecumenical discussion among Christian traditions. He suggests the following ecumenical rule, on which Orthodox, Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, Wesleyan, and Zwinglian traditions agree:

A particular image or group of images is appropriate in a particular context in the life of the Church when the following conditions are satisfied:

- i) It communicates truth to its observers
- ii) It neither discourages worship of God nor misdirects worship away from God

This ecumenical rule represents common ground among the major Christian traditions, and provides a hermeneutical key to understanding the history of images in the Church and resolving issues concerning their present use. It incompletely, but helpfully

orders the many aspects of Christian practices and thoughts on images, even those which are invisible to the ones doing the practicing and the thinking. Such a rule could find various uses in Church practice. Explicitly referring to the rule and the issues it raises might be a fruitful exercise for local churches trying to solve iconological issues as they arise. And when representatives of divergent traditions come together to understand each other and reconcile, the rule offers a good starting point for dialogue. It can train the discussion away from simply concentrating on conflicts and lead enquirers in an orderly way through issues that invariably arise, such as the nature of the transcendent reality “behind” an image, the status of the observers and the forces that lead them to perceive and misperceive, and so on. Yet it should be obvious that the framework our ecumenical rule provides is insufficient, for it is unable by itself to describe, let alone explain, the theology and behaviour of particular Christian traditions. It can help traditions clarify their own thinking and find common ground. Before long, however, the traditions would want to go beyond its affirmations, and in dialogue they would likely begin to talk past each other.

Conclusion

An icon is a sacred image, an image by which holiness is not only portrayed through wood arts, sculptures, pictures and paintings, but also is experienced by the actual presence of God. The icon is a manifestation of God to us, in a sense it is a “window to heaven,” a real presence of God, a real presence of the Holy in our midst. It is an appearance of God; it is God using human means to express himself. The icon is a reflection of God and all that he is; it is holy because God is holy, sacred because God is sacred.

The background paints the information of the Jabalpur Christians of the Church of North India. The Protestant Christians buy the arts from Bhedaghat and keep them in their houses as decoration but the same arts they do not keep in their churches. There comes the contrast in their attitude towards these arts when used in the houses and in the churches. The sculptures, artefacts,

brought from Bhedaghat, are a secular icon for the Jabalpur Christians. It is merely a piece of material culture. Secular icons are artefacts that give people the opportunity to interact with a culture. Secular icons teach about the culture, offering a physical object in which one can experience the past. The goal of secular icons is to remember an experience and ideal. In contrast, the goal of religious icons is to commune with God.

Different Christian traditions have their own understanding to look at icons. Some of the Church groups are critical about it. The Protestants that include Protestant Churches in India, by and large, have a great hesitation to use any forms of art, especially images. Protestantism traditionally distanced itself from images. At best, they are an illustration of a written text; at worst they are something approaching idolatry. This attitude has been inherited largely from the Reformation. This conflicting attitude towards icons fit into Christ against culture of H. Richard Niebuhr’s approach and so Christianity against icons. This approach proposes an agreement between Church values and society. The Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians speak in favour of icons. The approaches of H. Richard Niebuhr have been taken to understand the views of different Christian groups towards icons.

According to the analysis and the interpretation of the data collection done through “participant observation” and “in-depth interviews” on ten Christian families of the Jabalpur Diocese of Church of North India, it is found out that two cultures exist in the practice of Jabalpur Christians of the CNI. First, to have secular icons in the houses, and secondly, not to have these icons, even the religious icons, in the churches. These Christians keep these arts as decoration in the houses which becomes the culture of Jabalpurians and so also the Jabalpur Christians of India. There comes a dichotomy between the practices of these Christians between their religious tradition and culture. “Contextualization” as a theory is suggested to fill the gap between two cultures of

the religious practice and the socio-cultural practice within a community of CNI Jabalpur Christians towards their perception of icons. “Rule Theory” of Lindbeck’s is suggested for Ecumenical Universality in accommodating the icons, among the different Christian Traditions. “Contextualization” and “Rule theory” help one to conclude: *Firstly*, both the religious and secular icons held certain importance. A secular icon invites one to commune with an experience. It does not act as an avenue in which one encounters God, rather acts as an avenue in which one encounters an emotion or experience. These artefacts evoke such a response from the Church of North India, Jabalpur Christians. An experience or feeling is recalled and this icon allows people to interact with the culture. Through these icons, they can commune with the past and with a specific experience. A religious icon is an image that is venerated, invites prayer and contemplation. *Secondly*, the icon represents the sacred art which testifies to historical truth and God’s revelation in the person of Jesus Christ. It has its own place within Christian heritage and as such represents a valuable, visible aid to the gospel proclaimed by word which has a priority and represents the main tool of the proclamation of God’s revelation. *Thirdly*, the icon ought to be seen as an object which reminds about the events of the sacred history of the Church whether they are related to the gospel or to the lives of certain individuals who represent good examples of Christian living. Any suggestion of the icon having the real presence or being used as a channel of grace leads inevitably to the danger of idolatry and superstition. *Lastly*, the role and value of the icon ought to be reconsidered by those churches especially in the Protestant tradition which were affected by the theology of Reformation or by their own prejudice and suspicion. This will allow the icon to become a part of Christian worship and heritage within the Protestant tradition and to appreciate its role and contribution towards the expression of one’s faith in all its multifaceted forms.

This research took Jabalpur Christians of Madhya Pradesh, India as a paintbrush and dipped it into both religious and secular paint. New landscapes are waiting to be painted. Further analysis, interpretation and conversations await.

End Notes

- 1 To be engaged with Bible, they are determined to allow all spheres of a person’s life to be heavily and positively influenced by the Word of God. Barna identified these spheres of influence by grouping them into three: practical, emotional, and missional.
- 2 Alejandro Zorzin, “Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt,” in Carter Lindberg (ed.), *The Reformation Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Early Modern Period* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 327-337.
- 3 The Holy Bible.
- 4 Leech Kenneth, “Spirituality and Liberation,” in *Companion Encyclopedia of Theology*, Peter Byrne and Leslie Houlden, (eds.), (1995), 25ff.
- 5 Ibid, 30.
- 6 Johann Eck’s article *On Not Removing Images of Christ and the Saints* was addressed to the Bishop of Bixen and dated March 1522 from Ingolstadt, Germany.
- 7 Gregor Goethals, “TV Faith: Rituals of Secular Life”, in *Christian Century*, April 23, (1986), 414.
- 8 Reinhold Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 16.
- 9 Ibid, 414.
- 10 Ibid, 414.
- 11 Ibid, 414.
- 12 Ibid, 414.
- 13 Ibid, 414.
- 14 Ibid, 414.
- 15 www.craton.net/journey/notes.htm (accessed on 24th February, 2004).
- 16 Constantine Cavarnos, “The function of icons” in http://www.orthodoxinfo.com/general/icon_function.aspx (accessed on 24th February, 2005).
- 17 The Extant Works of Saint Symeon the New Theologian, trans. by Dionysios Zagoraios, Syros, 1886, 6.
- 18 St. John Damascene, *Orthodox Iconography* (Belmont, MA: Institute for Modern Greek and Byzantine Studies, 1992 [1977]), 30-35.

- 19 Cyril Mango, *The Homilies of Photius*, 294. Cf. St. Basil: “What the spoken account presents through the sense of hearing, the painting silently shows by representations” (P.G., Vol. 94, col. 1401a).
- 20 St. John Damascene, *Orthodox Iconography*, 30-35.
- 21 *Ibid*, 30-35.
- 22 Cyril Mango, 294.
- 23 St. John Damascene, *Orthodox Iconography*, 30-35.
- 24 *Ibid*, 294.
- 25 Participant observation is “a method in which the investigator becomes a part of the situation he/she is studying. They involve themselves in the setting and group life of the research subjects. He/she shares the activities of the community observing what is going on around him/her, supplementing this by conversations and interview” in Ram Ahuja, *Research Methods* (New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2001), 245.
- 26 The in-depth Interview is an extended conversation concluded to draw out hidden feeling, attitudes and beliefs about a particular issue; hence these interviews are highly focussed in Arthur Asa Berger, *Media Research Techniques* (New Delhi: Sage Publication, 1988), 35.

Indian Journal of Theology 64:2, 2022, pp. 107-123

Unsung Heroines

*A Historical Appraisal of the Role and Contribution
of the Mizo Bible Women in building Mizo Society
and Upliftment of Mizo Women*

P. C. Vanlalhrauaia*

Introduction

Historical writings on Christianity in Mizoram started as early as the inception of Christianity itself in Mizoram. The first written book, *The Lushai Hills: The Story of the Lushai Pioneer Mission* by Grace R. Lewis was published in 1907.¹ The first books of history of Christianity in Mizoram were the works of the western missionaries written from their own perspectives and emphasized the role of the Western missionaries. The tremendous roles played by Mizo Christians had been buried in obscurity. Even when mention was made of the role and contribution of Mizo Christians, all emphasized the activities of men and ignore the significant role women played. This essay attempts to assess the role and contribution of the Mizo Bible Women in building up Mizo society and upliftment of Mizo Women. Attempt is made to critically evaluate and assess how the historical writings ignored the ministry of the Bible Women from a subaltern and feminist historical perspective.

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1. Mizo Bible Women

Altogether there were twenty-one Mizo Bible Women appointed during the period between 1915 and 1923. In order to understand the role and contribution of the Bible women there are several aspects of their lives that need to be explored.

1.1. Beginning of Bible Women Ministry: The first record of Mizo Bible Woman is found in the report of Rev. D. E. Jones in 1904-05.² But the report is very vague; it did not mention the name of the Bible Woman. She might possibly be a Khasi woman as Lloyd recorded that a Khasi woman, named Siniboni was acting as a Bible Woman several years before 1906.³ Mrs. Catherine Ellen Williams, one of the missionaries, suggested that some of the women be trained for working on a full-time basis in the Church for evangelism and for the upliftment of the Mizo Women.⁴ According to Rev. Dr. Lalchhuanliana, it was because of Williams' proposal that the Presbytery meeting in 1915 officially appointed the Bible Women.⁵

1.2. The Training: In the initial stage, the course was the Bible lessons first and foremost, with lessons on health and home-making and some simple handicrafts which were improved as time passed. Williams and other two Khasi women were responsible for the training.⁶ Mrs. Sandy, another missionary, was dissatisfied with the meagre training and wanted them to learn the elements of midwifery and laws of hygiene and cleanliness. She managed to get the permission from the Civil Surgeon for the training of two Bible Women under the Government midwife.⁷ J. M. Lloyd, one of the most prominent missionaries, said that they were given religious instruction from Mrs. Sandy and in the Evangelists' classes, for their primary work will be religious and spiritual.⁸ Lalchhuanliana also said that the Bible Women trainee used to join the Evangelists' training class.⁹ They were also trained with simple child delivery techniques and the principles of hygiene and cleanliness. Maternity and childcare were also taught. These were very important and relevant for the context of their ministry.

1.3. Salary: The Mizo Bible women were not volunteer lay workers. They were salaried employees, supported by the sale proceeds of Handful of Rice Collection. Their salary was very low in comparison to the services they rendered. Their salary was generally less than that of their male evangelist counterparts. It was assumed that their services were no less indispensable than those of the male evangelists or pastors.¹⁰

2. An Appraisal of the Role and Contribution of Mizo Bible Women

2.1. Evangelism: The primary task of the Bible Women was evangelism. Evangelistic tours were certainly a significant part of the ministry for Bible women.¹¹ They were expected to visit all the villages in areas assigned to them and to give an annual report of their works.¹² In those days there were no proper roads in between the villages. They had to travel on foot in the pathways through the wild forests. There were many dangers of wild animals; even leeches, which are in plenty, can be a great danger for women. In spite of these dangers, they went from village to village, teaching women and preaching the gospel among them.¹³ As the districts or area they were assigned to usually covered a large area, it often took 2 or 3 weeks in one tour.¹⁴

2.2. Formation of Women's Fellowship: Mizo society being a patriarchal and patrilineal society, the status of women was a degraded one. They were denied of leadership in political, social and religious life. Prejudice against women was very strong in the public and religious life of the Mizos. In those days, says Rev. Dr. Zairema, "The pulpit was barred for women and even lady missionaries dared not to presume its freedom of use to avoid scandalizing the men."¹⁵ Women were not allowed to face the altar/pulpit and were instructed to face the side walls. It was felt that women's look was deceptive and devilish, it could distract the preacher.¹⁶

The establishment of a separate Women Fellowship was one of the most valuable instruments in that matter. They were entrusted to organize women's meeting in different villages in their area. They invited their fellow women and conducted a separate women fellowship after the main Church worship services. Some men did not understand this and forbade their wives to attend such fellowships. In spite of these oppositions and hardships, the Bible Women succeeded in setting up a well-organized Women Fellowship.

The ministry of the Presbyterian Women Fellowship has been flourishing. Their talented fund-raising activities, charitable ministry for the orphans, collection of Handful of Rice for getting regular income for the main church, and constant effort for establishing and nurturing Christian family have become an indispensable ministry.

2.3. Handful of Rice Collection (Buhfaitham): It was the Bible Women who promoted the handful of rice collection. They took up the task of promoting the practice of handful of rice for which they often found themselves in embarrassing situations.¹⁷ In spite of oppositions, they taught the significance of the handful of rice and the custom caught on with great enthusiasm. A quick look at the recorded fund raised from the handful of rice in 1914 which was Rs. 80/- alongside Rs. 19,35,24,083/- in 2021 reveals the growth and development of the handful of rice collection.¹⁸

Though humble and insignificant the handful of rice collection was in the beginning, it has now become one of the main sources of income for the Mizoram Presbyterian Church. It is indeed, "...an activity rendered both by the poor and the rich, the young and the old alike, keeping one in touch with God on a daily basis, inspiring one spiritually and physically, and at the same time help spread the gospel to others."¹⁹

2.4. Formal and Informal Education: In the past, in Mizo society women generally were discriminated simply on the ground of sex.

Girl child was often not allowed to go to school just because, she after marriage, would go to her husband's home. All the expenses incurred in her education would not bring worthwhile return to the parents who sent her to school.²⁰ It was very difficult to induce parents to let their daughters go to schools, for they were required to do many household duties.

The Bible Women were deeply involved in teaching their fellow women. Teaching was an aspect of the Bible Women's ministry that cannot easily be separated from the ministry of evangelism. They are a mighty force in disseminating knowledge among their sisters. They had been touring the villages teaching ignorant women and children wherever they went.²¹ They taught their fellow women different kinds of practical arts like sewing, knitting, stitching, cooking, hygiene, singing, etc.²² A popular saying "when you educate man you educate only an individual but when you educate woman you educate the whole household" is quite significant in the context of Mizoram. With the coming of Christianity and its sister Education, the life style of the Mizos, especially of women have undergone drastic changes.

2.5. Healing and Health Education: There was a great deal of unrelieved suffering among the Mizos. Malaria was endemic everywhere. There were also dropsy, internal parasites, hookworm, dysentery, tuberculosis and other dire diseases. More than 50% of the children died before reaching adolescence. Many mothers died at childbirth due to lack of care and superstitious beliefs and practices. Before Christianity, all sickness and misfortunes were thought to be caused by malignant evil spirits. When they fell sick appropriate sacrifices had to be offered to the evil spirit and it was only some skilled priests who could prescribe correct and proper sacrifices.²³ Cleanliness was another problem among the Mizos.²⁴

In a society where people associated sickness with evil spirits, the need to have workers who could act as evangelists as well as to instruct people, especially women, in matters of sanitation and maternity care was very high. Therefore, the Bible Women were

trained and appointed to serve the purpose. Their main activity, besides evangelism, was visiting and attending the sick. In spite of the limited medical knowledge they had, the Bible Women were often called to attend various kinds of illnesses. They healed many sick people with very simple medicine and knowledge they had.²⁵ Being trained in midwifery, they saved the lives of many women and babies. Besides, they taught the ignorant mothers how to look after their babies. They taught them how to bath and prepare food for the babies. They were also instrumental in bringing awareness to the people the importance of cleanliness and hygiene. They encouraged them to have separate latrines and separate cabin for their flocks and fowls. It was their untiring and selfless healing and health education ministry that helped in enlightening and transforming the attitudes of the Mizos to evil spirits and this played a vital role in converting them to Christianity.

3. Bible Women and Emancipation of Mizo Women

The formation of a separate Women's Fellowship provided an enormous opportunity for women to develop their leadership qualities. This certainly contributed towards the improvement of women's status. However, the improved status of women and new roles were limited within the purview of male dominated Church, and equal partnership is still far from realization. While women's development of status and their role is no doubt evident and remarkable in the secular aspects of life, it is not so in the religious or Church circle, and in many respects their present condition in the Church seems to be worse than before, the early period of Christianity, at least in the leadership responsibility.²⁶ The effect of patriarchy is felt till today which is much worse in the Church than secular organization. The traditional concept of patriarchy still remains unchanged even after Christianity had emerged in Mizoram.

4. Bible Women and the Methodological Issue of the History of Christianity in Mizoram

The prevailing historical writings on Christianity in Mizoram were mainly the product of male writers written from a patriarchal perspective. All emphasize the men and ignore the significant role women played. One of the reasons for the lack of recognition of women are the lowly status they generally were accorded. Too often their own culture degraded the role of womanhood, and this status was compounded further by the foreign missionary force, dominated by male missionaries who had difficulty accepting their female missionary colleagues as equals. The indispensable contributions made by the Bible Women were neglected/ignored by the prevailing historians. The reason behind this should only be the gender bias of the historians as well as their understanding of the proper subject of historical study, i.e., what kinds of people are important.

Critically examining the way how patriarchal historiography represents the role and contribution of the Bible Women in the prevailing history, the biased view of the writers is clearly evident. It is interesting that they were often mentioned in passing in the annals of historical literature, but rarely dealt with in any detail. J.M. Lloyd's *History of Christianity in Mizoram* (1991) is 361 pages, but it gave only two pages for dealing with the role and contribution of the Bible Women.²⁷ Rev. Saiaithanga's *Mizo Kohhran Chanchin* speaks of the Bible Women in only two pages out of 200 pages.²⁸ Rev. Zairema's *God's Miracle in Mizoram* (1978) deals with the Bible Women only in two pages out of 45 pages.²⁹ Rev. Chhuanliana's *Mizoram Presbyterian Kohhran Chanchin* (2007) having 492 pages, also deals with the Bible Women in almost five pages only. Among the secular historians, J. V. Hluna could devote almost three pages for the role and contribution of the Mizo women evangelists in his *Education and Missionaries in Mizoram* which has 236 pages.³⁰

Thus, the interpreted record of the past about Christianity in Mizoram is only a partial record because it leaves out half of its members. It is distorted, because it tells the story from men's perspective alone. History of Christianity in Mizoram has continually been viewed as the history of men and this approach gives a twisted interpretation of history. Even the socio-cultural and religious transformation is very often ascribed to the work of men and thus, history of Christianity in Mizoram remains incomplete.

5. Bible Women and Male Chauvinistic Hierarchy in the Structure of the Church

As stated earlier, the Welsh missionaries also brought along with them the 19th and early 20th century Western Patriarchal structure in the society and in the Church. The women missionaries worked along with the male missionaries, with the same level of responsibility, but were entirely under the control of the male missionaries. They never were given high status and top leadership position. Mizo Christians were nurtured and brought up with the patriarchal ideology, which the Welsh missionaries brought along with them. As such, the Bible Women, working alongside the male evangelists were denied of the leadership position within the structure of the Church, enjoyed by their male evangelist counterparts. The Bible Women were trained, appointed and posted at different villages with the same responsibility. They were the female equivalent of the male evangelists in the nature of their work. Meanwhile, the status given to them in the administrative set-up of the Church was much lower than that of their male evangelist counterparts. The Bible Women, in spite of the variety of roles they have rendered, including that of "evangelist, teacher, public health educator and social worker," were ignored by the male dominated patriarchal church. They were totally deprived of leadership role in the Church and denied of position in the decision-making bodies.

While the rigid patriarchy of Mizo socio-cultural setting is responsible for this, it is the Welsh missionaries who imparted or intensified the patriarchal ideologies to their new converts. The church polity which was handed over by them to the Mizos fitted well with their patriarchal social structure. The structure of the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram is truly patriarchal. All the leadership roles are meant for men. Women may constitute half of the membership of the church but the leadership roles are denied to them totally. The patriarchal structure of the church excludes women from all leadership roles. This may be a serious sin committed by the church. It is a sin because it excludes and ignores women who represent half of its members in all matters in which important decisions are made concerning its life.³¹ This further plays the main factor for the exclusion of women from ordained ministry.

6. Bible Women and the Issue of Women Ordination in Mizoram Presbyterian Church

As stated earlier, the Bible Women were given training together with the male evangelists.³² Both were then appointed and posted in their respective areas/districts. The evangelists were authorized to perform all pastoral ministries such as solemnizing marriage, preaching, etc., except the ministry of the Sacraments. Then after four or five years of service, they were ordained for pastors.³³ Besides, they were sent for further studies or training. There was no such intention of upgrading the Bible Women and their ministry. Instead, the ministry of Bible Women was abruptly terminated. This is an undeniable clear sign of subordination of women in the Church.³⁴

Mizoram Presbyterian Church seems to be most orthodox and unopened as far as the full participation of women in the ministry of the Church is concerned. Women are devoid of equal status and opportunity in the Church. The separation of women's ministry from men's work did not give an autonomy or independence for women away from male authority. They were under the male

dominated structure and under men's authority. Thus, the issue of ordination was a forlorn dream never sought after.

The agenda demanding women's ordination has twice been brought in the General meeting of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram.³⁵ In 1949, in response to the demand of the General Assembly of the PCI, the Mizoram Synod resolved that it had no objection towards those countries where women's ordination was accorded to deserving women. But in ours we do not see the need of it.³⁶ The demand for women's ordination was raised for the second time in the Synod, in 1989. After a long deliberation, the Synod but decided to keep up the existing tradition of the Church.³⁷ Moreover, a related issue regarding the utility of theologically trained women was discussed in 2002 Synod meeting. There was no progress to be seen as the meeting decided to hold on to the existing Church tradition.³⁸ One instance for this was when a very active, dedicated and committed lady named Mrs. Saptawni was unanimously elected to be a lifetime Church Elder by the Mission Veng Presbyterian Church. This led to the question of women ordination for Church Elder in different Presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram. The agenda of ordination of women for Church Elder was brought in the Synod in 1978 and it was resolved that the Church is not yet ready to ordain women for Church Elder.³⁹ This is indeed, a painful discrimination for women who are also entering into full time ministry.⁴⁰

7. Challenges Emerging while Assessing the Role and Contribution of the Bible Women

7.1. Reconstructing Biblical Hermeneutics: Since the Bible is used to keep the women in a controlled or submissive position, it is imperative that we become the correct interpreters of the Scriptures. It is important to develop a new way of reading and interpreting the Bible in order to recover women's biblical heritage as religious empowerment for the present and the future. The Bible must be correctly understood in its own context

and its relevancy for the churches in the 21st century must be brought out. Seldom do we discern that the Bible is the product of patriarchal society. It was written down by males in a male dominated society.⁴¹ Monica Melancthon asserts, "In simple terms, traditional biblical interpretation has promoted the idea of women's subordination to men. The patriarchal nature of the Bible and that of the society and the church have aided each other in perpetuating female subservience."⁴² We must recognize the historical conditionedness of the writers of the Bible. The literal interpretation and application should be avoided so that we may read and understand the author's intention in writing such a specific view. Re-reading the Bible from the eyes of women is prerequisite in today's Mizoram context.

7.2. Reconceptualising Christian Ministry: Analysing the unjust and indiscriminating situation in which the Bible Women and other women who are entering into a full-time ministry after them, we need to re-conceptualize ordained ministry in our times. The present order of ordained ministry which we have inherited from the Reformation tradition is tending to be outdated, inadequate and oligarchical within a democratic set-up. Christian ministry is a ministry for all people irrespective of caste, gender, class, or tribes. If people are neglected, then it is not a holistic ministry. Therefore, the church needs to look afresh at its understanding of ordained Christian ministry in the present twenty first century context. Change of attitude towards women and accepting them to ordained ministry must be given greater emphasis. The Reformation slogan, "Priesthood of all believers" needs to be appropriated a fresh in our times.⁴³

7.3. Restructuring Church Polity: In spite of the emancipation of women through education, the traditional concept of patriarchy still remains unchanged even more in the Church. We need to search for new models of leadership, which will give more space for inclusive participation. The structure of the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram which was inherited from the Welsh Mission

is truly patriarchal. It excludes women from all leadership roles and decision-making bodies. The structure of ordained pastors and elders in the church matched the socio-cultural and political structure of chiefs and the council of elders. It was they who made decisions and executed them. While this structure might have been relevant for the early Mizo Christian context, their relevance in the present twenty first century context is very much questionable.

The questions arise before us now are: What does it mean to say that the Church is a community of believers irrespective of caste, race, sex, etc., when it treats half of its membership as subordinate and inferior? What does the Protestant doctrine of the priesthood of all believers mean when half of the members of the Church are deemed ineligible for appointment as pastors/elders? We have to fight against male dominated structures in Church and society and this also implies that we have to abolish hierarchical structures in Church and society and the oppressive ideology and organizational pattern of the patriarchal family.⁴⁴ Are theologians courageous enough to raise their voices in supporting equal opportunity for male and female at the levels of leadership and administration for building inclusive Church community?

7.4. Paradigm Shift in the Mizo Christian historiography:

Gerda Lerner, a pioneer in the field of women's history strongly asserts, "We have a history; Women are in history... As long as androcentric male assumptions dominated our interpretations, we read sex-gender arrangements prevailing in the present, back-ward in the past."⁴⁵ Analysing the existing literature concerning the history of Christianity in Mizoram, the ways in which the history of Christianity in Mizoram has been written may be identified as the Colonial Mission historiography and the Institutional historiography. They are mainly the products of male writers, written from a patriarchal perspective. Thus, the interpreted record of the past about Christianity in Mizoram is only a partial record because it leaves out half of its members. It is distorted, because it tells the story from men's perspective alone.

What is, then, very much imperative is a paradigm shift in the historiography of Mizo Christianity. To bring into light the role and contributions of the Mizo Bible Women, institutional patriarchal history needs to be reinterpreted inclusively rather than that of the traditional way of interpretation. The existing institutional history needs to be reinterpreted or rewritten, or at least supplemented by Feminist historiography.

8. Conclusion

The significant role and contributions rendered by the Mizo Bible Women were often ignored. In fact, it may be that the often forgotten and unrecognized Bible Women have contributed more than any other group of Christian workers. In spite of the prejudices against women prevailing in those times, they played variety of roles, including that of evangelist, teacher, public health educator and social worker, and many have embraced Christianity through their ministry. Their untiring zeal and efforts contributed tremendously to the emancipation of Mizo women. The Women's Fellowship and the handful of rice have now become the backbone of the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram. Their selfless services in healing the sick and attending deliveries saved the lives of many women and babies. Their contribution in matters of hygiene and sanitation was indispensable. Therefore, a well-deserved recognition must be paid to the role and contribution of the Mizo Bible Women.

End Notes

- 1 The book was published by the Baptist Missionary Society, London. There is a Mizo translation by K. Lallungmuana, with the title *Lalpa Zawnychhuah Ram* (Sêrkâwn: Literature Committee, Baptist Church of Mizoram, 1988). V.L. Hruaia Khiangte, "Perspectives in the Historiography of Christianity in Mizoram" (M.Th. Thesis, United Theological College, 2004), 54. Hereafter cited as Hruaia Khiangte, *Perspectives in the Historiography of Christianity in Mizoram*.
- 2 K. Thanzauva, *Reports of the Foreign Mission of the Presbyterian Church of Wales on Mizoram 1894-1957*, 21. "Three evangelists and a Bible Woman

- are supported by the native church. They visited a large number of villages in the north...”
- 3 J. Meirion Lloyd, *History of the Church in Mizoram (Harvest in the Hills)* (Aizawl: Synod Publication Board, 1991), 110. Hereafter cited as Lloyd, *History*.
 - 4 Mrs. Catherine Ellen Williams was the wife of Rev. D. E. Jones. She had been working as a lady missionary in the Zenana in Sylhet (presently in Bangladesh) since 1894. She got married by the end of 1903. Mrs. Catherine Jones moved to Aizawl, Mizoram to join her husband in January 1904 and got involved in mission work particularly with women’s concerns.
 - 5 Lalchhuanliana, *Mizoram Presbyterian Kohhran Chanchin* (Aizawl: SL & PB, 2007), 85. Hereafter cited as Lalchhuanliana, *Mizoram*.
 - 6 Lalrinawmi Ralte, *Bible Women-te Nghilhlohnna* (Bangalore: Shalom Publications, 2004), 36. Hereafter cited as Lalrinawmi, *Bible Women-te*. One was Siniboni and the other was Edward Roy’s mother (name not mentioned).
 - 7 Pawngi was one of Edwin Rowland’s proteges, a girl who had been once a serf (*Bawi*) in a chief’s house, but who had been released through Rowlands, and done well in school. She eventually became the first Mizo midwife to work under the Government. Mrs. Sandy expressed, “by which we hope in future years the country will be greatly helped, the infant death-rate lowered, and the great suffering and pain among the poor Lushai women relieved.” Mrs. Sandy’s letter on 14th March, 1919 as quoted in Lloyd, *History*, 185.
 - 8 Lloyd, *History*, 186. Mrs Margareth Sandy was the wife of Rev. Frederick Joseph Sandy. They got married on 31st October, 1914 in Calcutta. After her husband died in January, 1926 at Durtlang, she left Mizoram in January, 1927 and settled in Swansea, U.K. where she died on 17th June, 1958.
 - 9 Lalchhuanliana, *Mizoram*, 86. My interviews with Rev. Lalsawma on 8.6.2010 and Rev. Z.T. Sangkhuma on 11.6.2010 also confirmed that the Bible Women were given lectures together with the Evangelist trainees. The Mission Veng Church Record in the year 1922 also stated “Evangelist class is organized; Bible Women and Evangelists attend it.” *Lungphum*, 39.
 - 10 There was no proper fixation for their salary in the early years. The October, 1916 Presbytery meeting fixed the salary of Chhingteii, whose post was in Aizawl for Rs. 7/- while that of Dochhungi at Saitual village was Rs. 3/- which was increased to Rs. 6/- in the next year’s Presbytery meeting. The Presbytery meeting of March, 1920 made a kind of simple fixation on the ground of their stations, “The Bible Women who were posted in Aizawl will get Rs. 10/- and those in the villages will get Rs. 8/-” It was not uncommon for Bible women to be paid an amount so small that it was barely enough to cover their expenses. The Presbytery meeting in June, 1919 granted Rs. 8/- each to both Chhingteii of Aizawl and Durtlang, because of unmanageable family financial condition. During World War II all the workers employed by the Welsh Mission received 1/5th of their salary in terms of rice which affected the Bible Women too. Resolutions No.17 of the 1916(October) Presbytery & No. 18 of 1916(October) Presbytery & No. 16 of 1917(March) Presbytery, Resolution No.12 of the 1920(October) Presbyter, Resolution No.17 of the 1919(June) Presbytery, Resolution No.6 of the 1939 Assembly in H. Remthanga, comp., Synod Thurel Lakkhawm, Vol. I (1910-1950) (Aizawl: SL & PB, 1997), 116-117. Hereafter cited as Remthanga, *Synod Thurel Lakkhawm*, Vol. I.
 - 11 Lalchhuanliana, *Mizoram*, 86.
 - 12 *Resolution No. 15 of the 1925 (June) Presbytery* in Remthanga, *Synod Thurel Lakkhawm*, Vol. I., 120.
 - 13 Interview with Rev. L.B. Pachau on 5.6.2010 at his residence in Bungkawn, Aizawl and Rev. Lalhmingthanga (s/o Chawngchhungi, one of the Bible Women) on 2.6.2010 at his residence in Republic Veng, Aizawl.
 - 14 One of the Bible Women, Aichhungi named her daughter Zokalkhumi which means ‘one who walks across Mizoram’; on the ground that she travelled up to Arakan (southern part of Bangladesh) and Zampui Hills (Tripura). Gwen Rees Roberts also recorded that one Bible Woman was assigned with 26 villages, and her son was named Bialzauva meaning ‘one who covers a large area.’ See Gwen Rees Roberts, *Memories of Mizoram: Recollections and Reflections* (Persarn: Mission Board, Presbyterian Church of Wales, 2001), 121.
 - 15 Zairema, *God’s Miracle in Mizoram: A Glimpse of Christian Work among Headhunters* (Aizawl: SL&PB, 1978), 30. Hereafter cited as Zairema, *God’s Miracle*.
 - 16 Lianzela, “Position of Mizo Women - Past and Present” in *Changing Status of Women in North East States*, edited by Lalneihzovi (Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2009), 52. Hereafter cited as Lianzela, “*Position*.”
 - 17 Kawli, one of the Bible Women said that she was often depreciated by the people in many villages, shouting to her, “the one who ate up our handful of rice offering.” Interview with P.C. Lalthanmawia s/o Kawli on 25.5.2010 at his residence in Electric Veng, Aizawl.
 - 18 Mizoram Presbyterian Kohhran, *2021 Synod Bu*, Appendix- xxxiii, 408

- 19 Lalthansangi Fanai, "Mizoram Presbyterian Church and Rice Collection" in *Buhfaitham Centenary Souvenir* (Aizawl: Presbyterian Kohhran Hmeichhia, Central Committee, 2010), 115.
- 20 Lianzela, *Position*, 51.
- 21 Hluna, *Education and Missionaries*, 175-176.
- 22 Rev. Lalhmingthanga interviewed on 2.6.2010. Rev. C. Lalrampara interviewed on 27.10.2010. See also Lalchhuanliana, *Mizoram*, 87-88; Lalrinawmi, *Bible Women-te*, 34.
- 23 J. M. Lloyd, *On Every High Hill*, 41.
- 24 "None of them were remarkable for their cleanliness, either the children or adults. As a rule, a baby was not washed after its birth until it was about 3 years old, and a middle-aged person after forty often bids goodbye to water for the remaining years of his life." - J.V. Hluna, *Church and Political Upheaval in Mizoram: A Study of Impacts of Christianity on the Political Development in Mizoram* (Aizawl: Mizo History Association, 1985), 5.
- 25 Nemthangi was said to have frequently used the technique of enema by which she healed many sick people - J.V. Hluna, *Biography of Mizo Hmeichhe Tirkoh Nemthangi*, unpublished article, 1973, 5.
- 26 R.L. Hnuni, "Women in the Context of the Bible and Mizoram," in *Towards a Tribal Theology: The Mizo Perspective*, edited by K. Thanauva (Aizawl: Mizo Theological Conference, 1989), 87. Hereafter cited as Hnuni, *Women*.
- 27 Lloyd, *History*, 185-186.
- 28 Saiaithanga, *Mizo Kohhran Chanchin* (Aizawl: The Mizo Theological Literature Committee, 1993), 39-40.
- 29 Zairema, *Miracle in Mizoram: A Glimpse of Christian Work among Headhunters* (Aizawl: SL&PB, 1978), 30-31.
- 30 Hluna, *Education and Missionaries*, 74-176.
- 31 Dr. R.L. Hnuni boldly states that this type of exclusion is 'structural sin'. R.L. Hnuni, "The Role of Women in the Church" in *Transforming Theology for Empowering Women: A Theological and Hermeneutical Reflection in the Context of North East India*, edited by R. L. Hnuni (Jorhat: Eastern Theological College, 1999), 68. Hereafter cited as R.L. Hnuni, "The Role."
- 32 *Lungphum*, 39; Zomuani, *Kum Za*, 138-139. "Evangelist class is organized; Bible Women and Evangelists attend it."
- 33 Lalchhuanliana, *Mizoram*, p. 76; Saiaithanga, *Mizo Kohhran*, 38.
- 34 Dr. R.L. Hnuni has rightly asserted that 'within the church there has been a backward rather than a forward movement' in so far as the role of women in the church is concerned. R.L. Hnuni, "The Role," 64.
- 35 The Synod meeting constitutes the highest decision-making body of the Church
- 36 *Resolution No. (Gen)18 of the 1949 Assembly* in Remthanga, comp., *Synod Thurel Lakkhawm*, Vol. II (1951-1970) (Aizawl: SL & PB, 1998), 120.
- 37 Mizoram Presbyterian Kohhran, *1989 Synod Bu* (Aizawl: SL&PB, 1989), 17.
- 38 Mizoram Presbyterian, *2002 Synod Bu* (Aizawl: SL&PB, 2002), 32.
- 39 *Resolution No. 13 (General) of the 1978 Synod* in Mizoram Presbyterian Kohhran, *1978 Synod Bu* (Aizawl: SL&PB, 1978), 13. See also IX General Assembly Handbook, Association of Theologically Trained Women of India, May 3-5, 2006, Serampore College, 81.
- 40 Prof. T. Vanlaltlani, who also applied for ordination for two times, but was rejected saying that the Synod has no provision for women ordination. She is the first Mizo woman to hold the D. Th. degree in the field of Religions. She served as Professor in the department of Religions at the Aizawl Theological College since 1983. Interview with T. Vanlaltlani on 10.5.2010 at her residence.
- 41 Gabriele Dietrich, "The Origins of the Bible Revisited- Reconstructing Women's History," in *Towards a Theology of Humanhood: Women's Perspectives*, edited by Aruna Gnanadason (Delhi: ISPCK, 1986), 36.
- 42 Monica Melanchthon and George Zachariah, eds., *Witnessing in Context: Essays in Honour of Eardley Mendis* (Tiruvalla: Christava Sahitiya Samithy, 2007), 115.
- 43 Rev. Dr. Roger Gaikwad, "Re-Conceptualizing Christian Ministry in the Twenty-First Century" in *Mizoram Journal of Theology Vol. I No. 2 July-December, 2009*, 7.
- 44 Gabriele Dietrich, *A New Thing on Earth* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2001), 46-47.
- 45 Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), 15.

The Statement of the 58th North India Theology Students' Conference

Bishop's College, Kolkata, West Bengal
October 26 - 30, 2023

We, the 75 delegates representing 21 theological colleges and seminaries belonging to various churches, came together for the 58th North India Theology Students' Conference (NITSC) from 26 - 30 October, 2023. It was hosted by Bishop's College and held at Seva Kendra, Kolkata. We deliberated on the theme: **“Justice, Peace and Reconciliation in India: Reimagining Ecclesia Towards Praxis of Reign of God.”** The outcome of our paper presentations, responses, and discussions is articulated in the following statement:

In the post-COVID world, the entire humanity, especially the marginalized groups like Dalits, Adivasis and women, along with the Mother Earth, are experiencing modern day slavery and are crying for Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation. The Hindutva ideology with its divisive agenda is adversely affecting India's socio-political fabric and is seriously threatening secular and democratic principles. The ethnic violence in Manipur is seeking an urgent response from the ecclesia. India is also facing significant economic inequalities and issues related to justice to diverse gender groups. The crony capitalism is exasperating the degradation of ecology. Although the all-pervasive Artificial Intelligence (AI), is positively contributing to various fields such as criminal justice, healthcare, environment, entertainment, it is also causing innumerable ethical challenges such as denial of proximity, effacement of the face, and reduction to traits.

Post-COVID theologizing needs to address the problems of economy, digital education, gender and racial discrimination, ecological crisis for effective ministry. Our theological enterprise

invites us to critically analyse historical, socio-political, cultural, religious, and economic aspects present in the conflict-torn parts of our country and the world, and scrutinize the tacit role played by the judiciary, government, and religions. We are increasingly becoming convinced that we can no longer neglect interfaith engagement; we need to embrace it to foster social harmony and shalom of the reign of God. It is also paramount that we address human rights violations faced by sexual minority and diverse gender groups. We need to approach the ecological concerns by deliberating on various ecological perspectives such as deep ecology, eco-feminism, social ecology, population ecology, shallow ecology, human ecology, etc.

The concepts of 'Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation' are grounded in Micah 6:8; Isaiah 9:6; 2 Corinthians 5:18-19. The understanding and appropriation of '*imago dei*,' incarnation, kenosis, and eschatological hope will help the humanity to attain these ideals. Biblical models of justice such as the Jubilee Year, the Reign of God principles, and early Christian communal sharing enlighten us. Biblical Justice is deeply grounded in moral principles such as fairness, equality, love, and compassion.

We the students of theology reimagine an ecclesia, a harbinger of the reign of God, which needs a sustained and multipronged theological praxis to respond to manifold challenges in our Indian context.

1. Building up the body of Christ through promoting communities which are sharing, witnessing, fellowshiping, inclusive, serving, empowering, and salvific.
2. Strengthening Indian Secularism which respects all religions equally and thus becomes an antidote to communalism, majoritarianism, and fascism.
3. Creating awareness regarding the secular nature of our Indian Constitution and reinforcing the principles of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity enshrined within it.

4. Calling for collective efforts and committing ourselves through dialogue, alliances, and advocacy for human rights and dignity of all individuals. Collaborating with governmental and non-governmental agencies, civil society organizations, and faith-based groups.
5. Despite the challenges to interfaith engagements such as fears of syncretism, relativism, and apostasy, engaging in interreligious prayer meetings, interfaith celebrations, and constructive ventures to establish justice and peace such as non-violent protests, relief work, advocacy, etc.
6. Forming the members of ecclesia to be stewards, trustees, companions, priests of sustainable ecology.
7. Becoming aware of the opportunities as well as threats of AI and lobbying for its ethical usage.

Book Reviews

Human Sexuality in the Song of Songs: A Study on the Sensual Lyrics of the Songs by Wungtei Buchem, Delhi: Christian World Imprints, 2022, pp. xix+156, Rs. 795/-

*Jeviholi Swu**

After completing his BD in Eastern Theological College, Jorhat, Assam, India, the author of this monograph, Wungtei Buchem, pursued his Master's degree with a specialization in the Old Testament (OT) from The United Theological College, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India. Following this, he gained a doctoral degree from the University of Sheffield, UK. Presently, he works as Associate Professor in the Department of Biblical Studies (OT) at Trinity Theological College, Dimapur, Nagaland, India.

Buchem is an emerging biblical scholar and a teacher who deserves the attention of biblical researchers. In this monograph, he attempts to interpret the Song of Songs (Canticles) literally, by analyzing its lyrics contributing to contemporary Indian biblical studies with special reference to human sexuality. Human sexuality, especially in the Christian/Church circles, is considered as something that is too embarrassing or shameful to be discussed or studied. Adding to such embarrassment, the Song of Songs in the Bible (where human sexuality is the dominant theme) is

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explored and studied allegorically and seldom interpreted in its literal sense. However, Buchem has taken this bold step in taking up this discourse and in bringing out this significant contribution to the topic of human sexuality and eroticism.

The book begins with a forward by Rev. P. David Solomon Raju, Hebrew Language Consultant, University of Holy Land, Jerusalem who writes proudly of the author and his enthusiasm as a biblical scholar. After this, there is a preface from the author himself briefly sketching out the structure of the book followed by list of abbreviations. The book consists of six chapters which will be described here. The first chapter expounds on the methodological framework of the discourse, its questions and method of the study. The author presents his task precisely in writing this book making it clear to the reader that he intends to employ the method of socio-cultural anthropology to bring out the literal interpretation of the lyrics which have been blurred by the allegorical interpretation. In this chapter, he points out how the early interpreters of the text in the Canticles have overshadowed the actual meaning of human sexuality with the allegory of God's love for Israel, or Jesus for the Church. Therefore, socio-cultural anthropology as a method helps the reading to analyze the literal word study of the text in the Songs to really look into what the actual intention of the lyrics is.

The second chapter dwells on the poetry in the Ancient West Asian (AWA) literatures like Mesopotamian, Babylonian, Egyptian, Sumerian and Akkadian love poetry and love songs. As the OT is known to be highly influenced by the ancient contemporary societies, so also Buchem rightly investigates the literature of the AWA, especially the love lyrics. Studying these ancient poems and songs, the author boldly states, "lyrical love poems, epics, and myths in both the AWA and the contemporary society are the standing evidence to the realms of sexuality merging with socio-cultural arena" (p. 40).

The third chapter draws out the historical survey of the book of Song of Songs: its title, authorship, date, canonicity, genre and structure. Buchem resourcefully brings out the history of interpretation of the book with different hermeneutical approaches through the periods from before the time of Akiba ben Yosef (a Jewish sage) to modern interpretation, from typological interpretation to *wasf* (Arabic term for description of body). Studying the different approaches of interpretation, the author observes that interpreters, preachers and scholars of the Canticles "have spiritualized the lyrics" (p. 60). For this reason, the literal interpretation of the lyrics is a necessity to understand the text and its meaning.

The fourth chapter focuses on the exegetical study on the selected texts of the Song of Songs (1:2, 4, 7-8; 1:9-11, 13-15; 2:1-4, 16; 3:1-4; 4:10-16; 5:1; 7:2-4, 10-11; 8:1, 6). In his exegetical study, Buchem intensively deals with the interpretation of the word meanings and symbolism of human eroticism in the texts by interpreting the metaphors of nature and jewellery. As the author attempts to portray human eroticism and sexuality in the texts, he points out, "human virtue of love and desire for intimacy is deliberately seen in this pericope" (p. 74). His findings show that the Canticles is not just a book expressing human sexuality and eroticism but that it also demonstrates the freedom of a woman's sexual expressions "she is open to her feelings and is not bounded by any fears" (p. 98). The author concludes the exegetical section by pointing out that human beings love without domination, since the spirit and body ought to love equally.

The fifth chapter brings out the implication of human sexuality in the Church, worldview, socio-cultural anthropology and sexuality. The author discusses as to how human spirituality and sexuality are relational and that the balance between the two are a necessity for the holistic growth of humans. He summarizes his point by stating that the "Canticles is God's way of giving the message and lesson about human sexuality in its holistic ways"

(p. 122). Therefore, he asserts that the Church and contemporary interpreters should aim to appropriately teach the positivity of both sexuality and spirituality because to ignore either one cripples humanhood.

The author gives his concluding remarks in the sixth chapter as he reminds us that human sexuality and eroticism is pointed out in the texts itself, and thus shows God's way of creating humans. He, thus, emphasizes sexuality and spirituality as entities that complete the life of humans through which "one could possibly attempt to live a life of fullness before God and the world" (p. 124). Buchem continues to stress accepting the body and soul (sexuality and spirituality) as one, and not different entities and urges the Church and society to add sex education to the curriculum so that it would not be seen as an embarrassment or a shameful discussion or a taboo. By openly educating people about human sexuality (just as openly discussing and teaching spirituality), the societal construct of sexual stigma and misuse may be avoided because "it is a very human-way and God is not indifferent about it" (p. 127).

The book has an appendix of an open-ended questionnaire, circulated and collected from pastors, preachers, interpreters and theological students from different denominations. Buchem brings out the chart of the responses and evaluates it basing on percentages. The book ends with a substantial bibliography categorized into primary sources, monographs, articles/journals, dictionary/commentary/encyclopedia and review.

It cannot be even imagined that an assessment of the entire book can be attempted, however, a few positive and negative observations which challenges the reader will be pointed out. To begin with, it was a delight to read this insightful book which has answered a few of my own queries when it comes to human sexuality and eroticism. Buchem has comprehensively and meticulously written this monograph for the present generation and many more generations of curious readers to come. This monograph does not just probe into the interpretation of the biblical text but also goes another mile to educate the secular

arena, elevating the study. There are many who are curious about human sexuality and eroticism but may never be able to openly or freely discuss or inquire about it but this book clearly educates the readers with fresh insights of literal interpretation by investigating the ancient resources of human love lyrics which were blurred by allegorical interpretation. The book does justice to the methodological approaches and the exegetical study is extensively dealt with which is appreciated. Having pointed out that, an elaborate evaluation and thoughts of the author in all the sections and chapters would allow the reader to be intrigued enough to venture deeper into the book. Although there are evaluations in between chapters and at the end, an elaborate evaluation after each section would have been more fascinating to read. Another minor observation is that there are a few technical/grammatical errors in some pages which do not impede comprehension.

This reviewer wholeheartedly recommends all pastors, preachers, interpreters, biblical researchers as well as anyone who is curious about what the Bible says about sexuality and spirituality to read this monograph. In doing so, the fear, taboo, embarrassment, shame and misuse attached with human sexuality and eroticism can be done away. Hopefully forever.

Homiletics: Handbook for Teachers and Learners of Preaching
by Alfred Stephen, Mokokchung: TDCC and ECHO - FOREST,
2017, pp. 224, Rs. 300/- Paperback.

Wapangyingla Ao*

Introduction

The book *Homiletics: Handbook for Teachers and Learners of Preaching*, written by Alfred Stephen, a distinguished Professor of Homiletics with a Doctor of Theology from the University of Basel, Switzerland, offers a comprehensive guide for those engaged in teaching, preaching, and studying the science and art of Homiletics. Stephen's rich pastoral experience as an ordained pastor of the Church of South India, Diocese of Madurai and Ramnad, and his role as one of India's leading Homileticians contributed unique credibility to this book, which has made a significant mark in both the national and international scale of Homiletics.

The book's genesis lies in the author's growing awareness of the challenges that besets contemporary preaching. He felt a compelling need for instructional material in the area of preaching, leading to the writing of this resource book for educators of Homiletics and an essential learning tool for aspiring preachers. The book serves as a roadmap, helping individuals grasp the complexness of effective preaching while nurturing an organized approach to answering their calling within the ministry of preaching.

* Wapangyingla Ao is from Nagaland who had been always fascinated by powerful preachers and wished to become one. She understood that preaching is a unique combination of complex elements and to preach the transformative Word of God, one needs to have passion as well as enhanced skills. With sincere commitment to preaching and educating aspiring preachers, she currently pursues Doctor of Theology in the Department of Homiletics under SATHRI, Serampore.

Summary and Analysis

The author embarks on a meaningful exploration of the interpretation of scripture, the preached word, and life itself. In an ever-evolving world, the book addresses various realities that preachers and preaching instructors must be mindful of when teaching, learning, and delivering sermons. This book is a guide that focuses on the importance of more structured and effective approaches in sermon development and delivery. It is methodically arranged, covering a range of topics essential to the practice of preaching, which includes; problems with preaching today, definition and meaning of homiletics, theology of preaching, preparing to preach, major steps in preparing a sermon, commandments to be followed in preparing a sermon, types of sermon, biblical sermon, topical sermon, contextual sermon, preaching ecology, narrative preaching, perspectives in preaching, form of the sermon, sermon analysis, and homiletic development.

The topics are well defined and explained out of the author's professional experience as well as through scholarly resources. Among these, some points are worth note-taking. The author expresses that the central challenge in contemporary preaching is not the act of preaching itself, but rather the assumption that anyone can preach effectively without proper training. In other fields, expertise is mostly sought, but when it comes to preaching, many believe that they possess an innate ability. However, it is not a conclusive fact that preaching is the birthright of the only selected few. This book emphasises that preaching requires a set of principles and a clear grammar for effective preaching, and it is important to respect these principles in sermon preparation. The author acknowledges the role of the Holy Spirit in guiding the preacher and the importance of adhering to specific guidelines. While the Holy Spirit reveals the truth in scripture, it also operates in an orderly manner. Preachers are encouraged to collaborate with the Holy Spirit to avoid confusion and deliver a coherent, relevant and accurate messages.

Stephen also stressed on the importance of understanding the scientific and artistic discipline of preaching to enable effective and methodological sermon delivery. He introduces a dynamic definition, highlighting the interactive nature of preaching and delves into the importance of dialogue, interpreting the gospel's message in the context of human experiences to make it relevant and meaningful. The book poses that a sermon's completeness is not measured solely by its delivery but by its relevance and the congregation's response. It asserts that the transformative power of preaching lies in its ability to lead listeners toward redemption and liberation from societal oppression.

The book's strength lies in its approach to sermon preparation, breaking it down into three distinct stages of "preparation of one's own self, preparation on the text, and the preparation about the hearers." It marks the need for comprehensive knowledge development within these three stages, involving in-depth study and analysis. It emphasises that this preparatory journey encompasses perception, understanding, interpretation, experience, and people. Furthermore, Stephen also highlights the importance of a skilful preparation process, focusing on three major steps: exegesis, theological reflection, and sermonizing. He provides a detailed account of each step and how they interrelate. Exegesis involves a thorough exploration of the text and its literary and historical context. Theological reflection requires the preacher to engage with various theological perspectives to enrich their understanding. And sermonizing entails crafting the sermon by applying hermeneutic principles, ensuring that theologically interpreted content reaches the listeners effectively. Additionally, the book also provides thirteen commandments as guidelines for sermon preparation.

Evaluation and Relevance of the Book

This book is a testament to Alfred Stephen's personal experience and expertise in the field of preaching. It is firmly grounded in biblical references, infusing the discussions with scriptural insights.

Stephen's reader-friendly approach ensures that readers can engage with the content easily. The book adopts a conversational style, enhancing its accessibility and it is also notable that the book includes epigraphs, infusing wit and humour into the scholarly discourse, making it a lively and engaging resource.

The book is highly relevant in the context of today's preaching and the study of Homiletics for various reasons. It tackles the issues faced by modern preaching, stressing the need for a structured and principled approach to preaching. It is a valuable resource for preachers, both new and experienced, offering a systematic framework for creating and delivering impactful sermons. It is also essential for educators and students of Homiletics, equipping instructors with teaching materials and promoting a deeper understanding. Beyond that, it appeals to a broader audience interested in spiritual growth and a more profound connection with their faith, encouraging critical thinking.

Conclusion

The book, *Homiletics: Handbook for Teachers and Learners of Preaching*, is a remarkable contribution to the field of Homiletics, offering a comprehensive guide for both educators and learners of preaching, providing a solid foundation for aspiring preachers and a valuable reference for teachers of Homiletics. Stephen's wealth of experience and theological insights enrich the book, making it a valuable resource for anyone interested in the art of effective sermon delivery. This work undoubtedly stands as a significant addition to the study of Homiletics, both in India and on the international stage.

Eco-concerns in Indian Religious Traditions by T. Swami Raju, New Delhi: Christian World Imprints, 2018, pp. xxiv+231, Rs. 990/- Hardcover.

Sandhya Kiran Sanga*

Prof. Rev. Dr. T. Swami Raju, an Andhra Pradesh-based Professor in Religion at Andhra Christian Theological College, has written numerous works on religion. His book, *Eco-Concerns in Indian Religious Traditions* explores environmental issues, major ecological movements, and interreligious cooperation for ecological balance.

Chapter One discusses the global ecological crisis and degradation, highlighting causes such as changes in factors and overpopulation. It introduces eco-spirituality as a non-violent spirituality, emphasizing the importance of respecting the environment as a creation of God. The chapter also questions issues of corruption and pollution, advocating for a reorientation of approaches.

Chapter Two explores environmental issues in India, attributing the degraded state to human irresponsibility, greed, and government policies against eco-friendliness. It emphasizes challenges such as global warming, increased temperatures, natural calamities, and health hazards. The need for sincere implementation of eco-friendly policies, active public participation, inter-faith cooperation, and environmental awareness programs is stressed.

Chapter Three delves into Eco-Sophy and Eco-Spirituality, highlighting the importance of a philosophical approach to ecology. Eco-sophy advocates for a just relationship with nature, promoting liberation for all life, including women and the underprivileged. Eco-spirituality, on the other hand, promotes a spiritual connection with the universe and the earth, emphasizing the need to address environmental issues.

Chapter Four discusses the importance of Primal religious tradition in addressing ecological concerns and promoting a harmonious relationship between God, humans and the land. It advocates for understanding *Oikos*, the household of creation, to alleviate ecological disasters caused by land exploitation. The chapter suggests revisiting the primal religious tradition to recognize Earth's natural rhythm and proposes the development of "eco-spirituality" to safeguard and enhance environmental health.

Chapter Five explores the connection between Hindu religious traditions and ecological concerns, tracing back to the Indus Valley Civilization. Hindus revere natural elements and incorporate sustainable practices into their communities. The ancient Indus Valley people practiced fertility symbolism, yoga, meditation, and magical rituals. They developed eco-friendly irrigation systems for farming, highlighting the profound influence of the environment on their survival strategies and religious beliefs.

Chapter Six explores the eco-spirituality of Jainism and Buddhism, focusing on their environmental concerns. Jainism adopts a relativistic approach, promoting social equality and non-violence. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of all life forms and the duty to protect them. Jainism also values natural resources and non-violence, promoting a caste system based on deeds. It shapes attitudes towards nature through humane and nonviolent approaches. Buddhism, on the other hand, focuses on spiritual development, meditation, and a holistic worldview, centring on universal suffering and compassion for all forms of life.

Chapter Seven delves into the ecological concerns within Sikhism, a religion based on the teachings of ten Gurus, particularly the Guru Granth Sahib. With 23-25 million followers worldwide, Sikhism is the fifth-largest organized religion. The chapter explores the Sikh tradition's ecological wisdom and its potential to promote ecological consciousness. The central theme is the world as a manifestation of God, emphasizing love, compassion,

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and justice. The chapter encourages a holistic approach to life and nature.

Chapter Eight explores the Christian perspective on environmentalism, focusing on the varying views among different denominations. Major Christian groups generally endorse stewardship over God's creation and the responsibility for its care. Green Christianity, a concept that incorporates liturgical and spiritual practices, is a shared concern for the environment. The chapter emphasizes that caring for the environment is an integral part of Biblical faith, rooted in the belief that God is the creator and owner of the universe. It draws on biblical verses to support eco-spirituality within the Christian community.

Chapters Nine explore the link between Islam and environmental concerns, focusing on the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad and Shariah principles. Hadith emphasizes water conservation, prohibition of prodigality, compassion, animal rights, and environmental stewardship, while Shariah aims for universal common good and human responsibility.

Chapter Ten explores ecological movements in India, a part of the global environmental movement involving various stakeholders. It highlights the importance of environmental protection and the misuse of resources, emphasizing the lack of a unified discourse and the existence of various environmental ideologies.

Chapter Eleven discusses prominent ecological movements in India, featuring Raman Sukumar, an Indian ecologist; Mylamma, an anti-coke crusader in Kerala; and Arundhati Roy's literary contributions. Sukumar is renowned for his work on Asian elephants, wildlife-human conflict, and tropical forest ecology. Mylamma confronted issues such as unfulfilled job promises, water resource depletion, and health and agriculture impacts resulting from a Coca-Cola bottling plant. Roy's semi-autobiographical novel, "The God of Small Things" garnered international acclaim but faced criticism for its depiction of sexuality.

Chapter Twelve discusses inter-religious cooperation for a healthy environment, highlighting various initiatives and organizations. These include the Interfaith Partnership for the Environment (IPE), Geneva Interfaith Forum, World Council of Churches Assembly at Busan, Interreligious Concern for Eco-Crisis, Green Faith, Interfaith Rainforest Initiative, and Interreligious Eco-theology. IPE, founded in 1986, informs congregations about environmental issues and organizes seminars, conferences, and materials. The Geneva Interfaith Forum emphasizes the responsibility of each faith tradition to care for the environment and human rights. The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative in Oslo aims to combat deforestation. The chapter also underscores the need for diversification in interreligious eco-theology.

Some of the concerns to be noted are: The book lacks depth of analysis, critiques religious perspectives, and explores the intersectionality of ecological issues with social aspects. It also lacks a comprehensive analysis of the diversity of environmental movements in India, a global perspective, and potential criticisms of eco-spirituality.

There are numerous reasons to recommend this book. This book explores the intersection of religion, ecology, and environmentalism in the Indian context, offering an interdisciplinary approach that combines religious studies, philosophy, and ecology. It focuses on Indian religious traditions, offering a unique perspective on environmental issues. The book delves into specific religious traditions, such as Primal religion, Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Christianity, and Islam, and discusses contemporary global ecological crises and their impact on India. It also discusses modern ecological movements and initiatives, providing practical insights into how religious communities and individuals are actively addressing environmental concerns.

Garbage Theology by Caleb Cray Haynes, Tennessee: McGahan Publishing House, 2021, pp. 11-303, ISBN: 978-1-951252-16-8.

*Nilav Kolay**

Introduction

Caleb Cray Haynes is an ordained Elder in the Church of the Nazarene in Tennessee (USA). He is also the co-founder of Nazarenes for Creation Care, a grassroots organisation working toward Christian environmental justice. As an active member of the Evangelical Environmental Network, Haynes spends considerable time writing and speaking on the intersection of faith and ecology. He also runs a business focussing on garbage hauling and waste management.

In this book Haynes delves deep into his experience with garbage and waste and brings forth the spiritual ramifications of the unseen world of trash and what it means for the salvation of every person, place and thing. His nuggets of information and need for responsibility are presented in a simple way that makes this book an easy read.

Summary

Haynes begins his book by sharing a personal experience of being a garbage hauler and an ordained minister. This uniqueness of being bi-vocational, according to Haynes, gives him a vantage point in dealing with trash and relating it with our salvation. Right at the start of the book Haynes includes some outrageous

statistics to give context to the problem of waste and garbage that we are dealing with. He also alludes to the fact that several times in the Bible, hell (when referred to as *gehena*) is described using languages that were similar to a garbage dump.

Haynes is of the opinion that the problem of trash is a byproduct of a flawed mindset. This, according to him is sin. Capitalism is largely to be blamed for it. The manufacturing industry produces things with a limited shelf life thus, resulting in more waste and more purchases. Dualism also plays a significant role in creating this mindset. Good and bad, clean and dirty, us and them are just narratives that rely on a common theme of self-centeredness and selfishness. We are willing to use every element for our gain and then discard and mistreat that which is not needed. This mentality results in waste, racism and exploitation. Changing this one mindset will have a positive impact on several aspects of our life.

The author also drives home the point that we have become so self-centred that as long as waste is out of our sight we really don't care where or how it has been disposed. We keep hoarding things that eventually get discarded. We don't care about the consequences of our lifestyle as long as our trash is not visible to us. This has led to tons of clothes being transported from the United States and dumped in countries like Africa. Some think this is charity when in reality this is brutality against the environment. Many of these clothes end up in dump yards and as landfills. A viable answer to this problem is striving to lead a zero-waste lifestyle. Recycling, repurposing and reclaiming used items has a significant impact on reducing waste. Using leftover food as compost results in organic fertilisers that are good for plants and environment. Using artificial fertilisers has accelerated soil erosion to our doom.

Haynes suggests a few practical steps to help us in taking care of the environment. One such example is the *Green Funeral*. In the US, the coffin and the grave are made with fibre and cement

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respectively. This slows down decomposition of the body. The green funeral involves using a coffin that will quickly disintegrate and placing it directly under the soil without creating a concrete chamber. This accelerates decomposition which in turn makes the soil fertile. He shares several tips from his experiences and has also generously shared about websites and resources that will help us in being responsible with our waste and care for the environment.

Critical Evaluation

Caleb Cray Haynes has done a commendable job in expounding his convictions about the world of garbage and has effectively used his experience and expertise to address a crucial issue of waste management. His mix of information, statistics and details sprinkled with the right amount of humour and wit have made this read both compelling and relatable.

One thing that truly stands out throughout the book is Haynes' personal experiences as a garbage hauler. He is not simply sitting on the fence as an observer but is actively involved in getting his hands "dirty" as he deals with the everyday trash and waste from people's homes. This trash, amusingly, seems to be a reflection of society and the people who live in it. Haynes uses his experiences to highlight the toxic psychology that goes behind creating waste. He has impressively dealt with the mindset that results in producing trash. Garbage does not begin with dumping, it rather begins with hoarding and accumulating. Connecting garbage with psychology gives a fresh approach to this issue.

Haynes has also efficiently connected ecology with capitalism, racism and exploitation. The perspectives that create unnecessary waste are the same that lead to racism, capitalism, exploitation and ecological worries. In other words, since everything is inter-related, controlling this one mindset can lead to positive changes in several aspects of society. This in turn will benefit ecology, humanity and society.

Haynes has also effectively suggested ways in which we can suitably assess and implement responses to this humongous issue.

Suggesting websites and resources at the end of every chapter inspires the reader for personal responsibility and implementation. It begins with us and every small step does matter.

His exposition of several biblical passages from the perspective of ecology and waste management gives fresh insights to seemingly common passages. This in turn helps us to understand the biblical narrative concerning environment.

There are, however, certain areas of improvement that need to be mentioned in order to formulate a robust critique of this book. To start with, Haynes has built his arguments primarily based on his local context in Tennessee. Mentions of global scientific data are sparse and are only used as illustrations to justify his views. He has also been very selective in the use of data and, for the most part, ignored the plight of the global south. The little mentions of Indonesia and China only seem like a formality.

Sections on the *Green Funeral*, as an answer to environmental crisis, highlights his ignorance of the standard funeral process in countries like India. There doesn't seem to be any significant impact of green funeral on the environment here. Haynes' suggestion seems to be based on his feelings rather than empirical data.

Conclusion

Haynes has tried his best to include biblical interpretation, general information and personal experience to bring out a compelling and distinct voice on the spiritual implications of garbage in our lives. This has given me a fresh perspective on waste management and has also helped me to understand the spiritual implications of garbage and trash in my life and in the world.