

Andrews University Seminary Student Journal


Volume 2 | Number 1

Article 1

1-2016

Full Issue

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Recommended Citation

(2016) "Full Issue," *Andrews University Seminary Student Journal*: Vol. 2 : No. 1 , Article 1.

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ANDREWS UNIVERSITY SEMINARY STUDENT JOURNAL

Volume 2

Spring 2016

Number 1

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Online edition: ISSN 2376-063X

Print edition: ISSN 2376-0621

EDITORIAL

DENIS KAISER

Editor, Andrews University Seminary Student Journal

We are pleased to welcome our readers to the first issue for 2016. We are thankful for the continuing article submissions and for the reviews of faculty members and doctoral students that ensure a high quality of the published material. The journal has moved from our initial online platform to a new one. Both the articles and the entire issue are accessible now on <http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/aussj/>. As in the previous issues of the journal, this issue contains stimulating and thought provoking articles. We hope that they are beneficial to you.

The sponsoring faculty member for the present issue is Dr. John C. Peckham, Associate Professor of Theology and Christian Philosophy. He has published multiple articles and several books, among them *The Concept of Divine Love* (New York: Peter Lang, 2014) and *The Love of God: A Canonical Model* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015). His article in this issue of *AUSSJ* deals, once again, with the subject of love. Peckham points out that many scholars agree on the significance of an ethics of love but they differ on what such an ethics should entail. He discusses the weaknesses of the influential agapist conception of love and proposes “that the continued quest for a more intentionally and distinctively biblical conception of divine love is integral to a compelling and faithfully Christian ethics of love.”

A second article comes from Adriani M. Rodrigues, the former editor of *AUSSJ*. He works currently as an assistant professor of systematic theology at the Adventist University of Sao Paulo (UNASP), Brazil. In his article, he investigates the authoritative hermeneutics of Irenaeus and Tertullian. As heretical movements misused and misinterpreted the Bible, these early Christian writers advanced hermeneutical mechanisms of control to safeguard biblical interpretation in order to protect the church. Rodrigues shows the inadequacies of such authoritative hermeneutics.

The third article was written by Christopher R. Mwashinga, a Ph.D. candidate in Systematic Theology at Andrews University. Hailing from Tanzania, he is more aware of some changes that have taken place within Christianity at large and Adventism in particular over the last decades. While Christianity and Adventism are declining in the Western world (global North), it has grown drastically in Africa, Asia, and South America (global South). Mwashinga points out that this southward movement is accompanied by a number of challenges. The fact that many of the new converts are “young, poor, orphaned, uneducated, and unemployed” suggests the need “for fresh thinking and better strategizing in order to respond responsibly to the challenges and to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the global South phenomenon and its side effects.”

I hope that these contributions in the fields of theology and missiology prove beneficial to the readers of this issue and encourage other graduate students to write and submit scholarly articles as well.

ETHICS OF LOVE? MORALITY AND THE MEANING OF DIVINE LOVE¹

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Abstract

While there is wide agreement on the importance of love to Christian ethics, just what an ethics of love includes and entails differs depending upon how Christian love is understood. Toward clarifying the relationship between love and Christian ethics, this essay briefly engages the highly influential agapist conception of love and questions its sufficiency as the basis of Christian ethics. Consideration of some apparent shortcomings of the agapist conception leads to the proposal that the continued quest for a more intentionally and distinctively biblical conception of divine love is integral to a compelling and faithfully Christian ethics of love.

Keywords: Christian ethics, love, agape, eros, altruism.

Introduction

“Love is the only norm.”² This statement, when unpacked, is the basis of Christian ethics according to Joseph Fletcher’s seminal work, *Situation Ethics*. Even if one successfully addresses the numerous questions that arise surrounding the supposition that love is the foundation of Christian ethics, an enormous query remains. What is love? This is perhaps the most enduring criticism of Fletcher’s system of situation ethics.³ One might point out that perhaps the criticism, while seemingly valid in itself, is unfair to pin specifically to Fletcher, considering the notorious difficulty pertaining to various attempts to define love.⁴ However, that

¹This article is dedicated to the memory of my beloved teacher, colleague, and friend, Dr. Miroslav Kiš, to whom I will ever remain grateful.

²Joseph F. Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1966), 69.

³See David Clyde Jones, *Biblical Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994); Norman Geisler, *Ethics: Alternatives and Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971), 75.

⁴Divine love is conceived and described in various ways. As Kevin J. Vanhoozer puts it, “the problem is not *that* God loves, but rather *what* God’s love is.” “Introduction: The Love of God—Its Place, Meaning, and Function in Systematic Theology,” in *Nothing Greater, Nothing Better: Theological Essays on the Love of God*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 7.

is just the issue; it is difficult, if not impossible, to construct a system of ethics upon an idea which is, at best, imprecise. Nevertheless, while Fletcher's particular variety of love ethics differs substantially from other varieties of love ethics, he is certainly not alone in positing love as a foundational principle of normative ethics.⁵

Scripture appears to endorse the centrality of love with regard to Christian ethics. For instance, Paul presents the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love, "but the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor 13.13).⁶ Jesus located love at the heart of Christianity. When asked to identify the greatest commandment Jesus responded by restating two love commandments found in the OT, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets" (Matt 22:37–40; cf. Mark 12:30–31; Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18). Nevertheless, while biblical emphasis on love is readily apparent, what an "ethics of love" actually entails has historically been much more difficult to ascertain.

This essay is offered as a sort of prolegomena to a potential ethics of love, based on the premise that Christian ethics ought to be rooted in a distinctively Christian theology, which itself must be firmly grounded in Scripture. For this reason, I will briefly discuss issues relative to the theological conception of divine love, followed by a review of some relevant biblical-linguistic questions which point to my thesis that a more intentionally and distinctively biblical conception of divine love is integral to a Christian ethics of love.

The Agape-Eros Distinction in Theology

In the history of Christianity, there is no shortage of definitions of love. Yet, despite a richly varying history of finely nuanced theological conceptions, the broad contours of divine love have remained strikingly constant in the classical

⁵A number of ethicists and theologians have employed the concept of love as central to Christian ethics. Among many others, consider Reinhold Niebuhr, *Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr*, Library of Theological Ethics (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992); Gene H. Outka, *Agape: An Ethical Analysis*, Yale Publications in Religion (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972); Stephen G. Post, *A Theory of Agape: On the Meaning of Christian Love* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1990); Paul Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice; Ontological Analyses and Ethical Applications* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954); Edward Collins Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine: The Heart of Christian Ethics*, Moral Traditions & Moral Arguments (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1994).

⁶All biblical references are from the NASB unless otherwise noted.

theist tradition ranging from Augustine to Thomas Aquinas to Martin Luther.⁷ These three towering thinkers in the history of Christian theology agree that God's love is absolutely gratuitous, pure, and unilateral beneficence, with the object(s) of divine love providing no actual or possible enjoyment or value to God in Godself.

Augustine's view is rooted in a divine ontology which conceives of God as perfect, absolutely simple, timeless, immutable, self-sufficient, and impassible.⁸ Hence, it is not surprising that Augustine seems to struggle to describe the nature of divine love. For instance, he writes, "In what way then does He [God] love us? As objects of use or as objects of enjoyment? If He enjoys us, He must be in need of good from us, and no sane man will say that; for all the good we enjoy is either Himself, or what comes from Himself. ... He does not enjoy us then, but makes use of us. For if He neither enjoys nor uses us, I am at a loss to discover in what way He can love us."⁹ Notably, even with regard to Augustine's so-called use love (*uti*), God does not love any external goodness, but he loves only his own

⁷Since the scope of this work does not permit a survey of the vast historical theology of love, I have selected three of the most influential theologians in Christian history, from the early church (Augustine), from the medieval church (Aquinas), and from the Reformation (Martin Luther). These three suffice to show the continuity of the broad contours regarding the Christian conception of divine love. See, in this regard, John C. Peckham, *The Concept of Divine Love* (New York: Peter Lang, 2014), 31–92. For more on the historical theology of love consider Vincent Brümmer, *The Model of Love: A Study in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); John Burnaby, *Amor Dei, a Study of the Religion of St. Augustine. The Hulsean Lectures for 1938* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1960); Liz Carmichael, *Friendship: Interpreting Christian Love* (New York: Clark, 2004); Martin Cyril D'Arcy, *The Mind and Heart of Love* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954); Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans., Philip S. Watson (London: S.P.C.K., 1953); John M. Rist, *Eros and Psyche: Studies in Plato, Plotinus, and Origen* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964); Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1957); Irving Singer, *The Nature of Love*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

⁸It is widely recognized that Augustine was affected by Plato's ontology through the influence of neo-Platonism. The concepts of absolute simplicity, aseity, and others are congruent with Plato's theory of the *proton philon* (highest love). Accordingly, Augustine comments, "the perfection of His [God's] being is consummate because He is immutable, and therefore neither gains nor loses." Augustine, *Ep.* 118.3.15 (NPNF 1:877). Further, God has an "ineffably simple nature." Augustine, *Trin.* 15.19.37 (NPNF 3:424). He is the "unchangeably eternal" one. Augustine, *Conf.* 11.31.41 (NPNF 1:319). Moreover, he is the "eternal, spiritual, and unchangeable good." Augustine, *Civ.* 15.22 (NPNF 2:648).

⁹Augustine, *Doctr. chr.* 1.31.34 (NPNF, 2:1109). For Augustine, "to enjoy a thing is to rest with satisfaction in it for its own sake. To use, on the other hand, is to employ whatever means are at one's disposal to obtain what one desires." Augustine, *Doctr. chr.* 1.4.4 (NPNF, 2:1090).

goodness.¹⁰ In this way, divine love is not affected by its object and, accordingly, human love is in no way advantageous to God. Thus, Augustine, while positing that God does love humans, restricts divine love to pure beneficence.

Thomas Aquinas adopts a similar perfect being ontology, including the notion that God is utterly impassible, and thus divine love cannot be affected.¹¹ God loves, but his is a passionless love, it is an “act of the will.”¹² Divine love (*caritas*) may thus be equated with benevolence. Such love is never caused by its object but always by God alone. As such, divine love is therefore nothing more or less than a purposive, rational act of God’s will.¹³ God can neither enjoy, nor appreciate any beings; love provides no value for God who remains altogether unaffected.

Martin Luther, although providing nuance regarding the notion of impassibility in his theology of the cross (*theologia crucis*),¹⁴ nevertheless ultimately maintains that God has no passions in saying, “God is not capable of suffering.”¹⁵ He is perhaps

¹⁰In God’s “use” of humans there is “no reference to His own advantage, but to ours only; and, so far as He is concerned, has reference only to His goodness.” Augustine, *Doctr. chr.* 1.32 (NPNF, 2:1109, 1110). “But neither does He use after our fashion of using. For when we use objects, we do so with a view to the full enjoyment of the goodness of God. God, however, in His use of us, has reference to His own goodness.” Augustine, *Doctr. chr.* 1.32.35 (NPNF 2:1109).

¹¹Aquinas is clear that “in God there are no passions. Now love is a passion. Therefore love is not in God.” Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1.20.1.1. Further, “sorrow ... over the misery of others belongs not to God.” Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1.21.3. God’s virtues that relate to giving and liberality are purely products of the divine will. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1.21.1.

¹²“Therefore acts of the sensitive appetite, inasmuch as they have annexed to them some bodily change, are called passions; whereas acts of the will are not so called. Love, therefore, and joy and delight are passions; in so far as they denote acts of the intellective appetite, they are not passions. It is in this latter sense that they are in God. Hence the Philosopher says (Ethic. vii): ‘God rejoices by an operation that is one and simple,’ and for the same reason He loves without passion.” Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1.20.1.

¹³For Aquinas, “the will also should be the efficient cause of that act” of love. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 2-2.23.2.

¹⁴For instance Dennis Ngien theorizes that Luther’s theology actually requires divine passibility. Dennis Ngien, *The Suffering of God According to Martin Luther’s Theologia Crucis*, American University Studies, Series VII, Theology and Religion 181 (New York: Peter Lang, 1995). This is based on Luther’s *communicatio idiomatum*, ascribing to Christ’s divinity what happens to humanity and vice versa. Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, 55 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1999), 37:210 [hereafter *LW*]. However, it seems that for Luther, divine passibility is actually limited to God in Christ, but does not reach God in Godself. Cf. Alistair E. McGrath, *Luther’s Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther’s Theological Breakthrough* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985). See the further discussion in Peckham, *The Concept of Divine Love*, 77–86.

¹⁵*LW* 38:254. He adds, “the Deity surely cannot suffer and die.” *LW* 37:210.

even more adamant that divine love does not enjoy good but merely confers good. Even if human nature was capable of loving God, God would remain unaffected by such love in accordance with his self-sufficiency and impassibility.¹⁶ Furthermore, the gratuitous love of God (characterized thematically as *agape*) is to be sharply differentiated from all human types of love. As Luther puts it: “Rather than seeking its own good, God’s love flows forth and bestows good.”¹⁷ In this way, “sinners are attractive because they are loved; they are not loved because they are attractive.”¹⁸ God receives nothing from humans but rather liberally gives out of his extravagant goodness.¹⁹

Despite the striking agreement amongst the conceptions of divine love of Augustine, Aquinas, and Luther, sharp disagreements appear regarding the matter of *human* love. Augustine believed that humans could love God as the only true object of love. The relative quality of love as desire is dependent upon its object; desirous love for a good object is proper human love. Although this love is itself a gift of God, humans ought to desire God as the ultimate object of goodness and in this way truly love Him. “The right will is, therefore, well-directed love [*amor*], and the wrong will is ill-directed love [*amor*]. Love [*amor*], then, yearning to have what is loved, is desire [*cupiditas*]; and having and enjoying [*frui*] it, is joy; fleeing what is opposed to it, it is fear; and feeling what is opposed to it, when it has befallen it, it is sadness. Now these motions are evil if the love [*amor*] is evil; good if the love [*amor*] is good.”²⁰ The view of Aquinas has a great deal in common with Augustine, positing the possibility of true human love for God and for others,

¹⁶It should be noted that Luther at times speaks of divine love by employing passionate language. For instance, he speaks of God’s love as the “blood of love.” *LW*, 30:300, 301. He also speaks of the zeal of the Lord against the enemies of God’s people. *LW*, 16:102. In these cases, nevertheless, divine love is a willed love that remains unaffected by external influence.

¹⁷*LW* 31:57. Cf. Daniel Day Williams, *The Spirit and the Forms of Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 78.

¹⁸*LW* 31:57. Luther writes, “God’s love does not find, but creates, its lovable object; man’s love is caused by its lovable object . . . sinners are lovely because they are loved: they are not loved because they are lovely. [L]ove of the cross means . . . that which betakes itself not to where it can find something good to enjoy, but where it may confer good to the wicked and the needy.” Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 56 vols. (Weimar, Germany: Böhlau, 1883–1938), 1:36 [hereafter *WA*], quoted in Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 725, 726.

¹⁹Thus, divine love is an overflowing spring. *WA* 36:360, 8, quoted in Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 730. Cf. Singer, *The Nature of Love*, 1:328. Luther compares this to a furnace saying, “If anyone would paint and aptly portray God, then he must draw a picture of pure love, as if the Divine nature were nothing but a furnace and fire of such love, which fills heaven and earth.” *WA* 3:424, 16, quoted in Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 724.

²⁰Augustine, *Civ.* 14.7 (NPNF 2:574).

including the possibility of friendship with God. For Aquinas, love is always directed towards some good (*amor concupiscentiae*) which is willed toward someone (*amor amicitiae*) whether oneself or another.²¹ Luther, however, adamantly disagrees with both Augustine and Aquinas, positing that it is utterly impossible for humans to love God. According to Luther, because of intrinsic sinfulness, humans are ontologically incapable of love. Thus humans may only “Love God by admitting your utter and total inability to love God.”²² Luther states, “No one is able to love God from his whole heart, etc., and his neighbor as himself.”²³ For Luther, then, all true love flows downwards, there is no such thing as love that flows upwards toward God.

The general agreement about divine love and yet considerable disagreement relative to human love among these thinkers is not surprising considering the similarity of their doctrines of God on the one hand and the dissimilarity of the respective soteriologies on the other hand.²⁴ For all three theologians, God is (among other things) utterly impassible. If God is, in fact, utterly impassible, divine love could be nothing more or less than what these great thinkers have defined, in a word: beneficence. No mutuality, no reciprocity, no bilateral divine-human love relationship is possible. Divine love must be merely God’s goodness infused or otherwise bestowed upon human objects who could make no difference to the life of God in Godself. As such, divine love amounts to what has been termed in many Christian circles as (thematic) *agape*: pure giving that never receives.

Perhaps the foremost recent contributor to this notion of *agape* as distinctly Christian love is Anders Nygren. Through Nygren’s work the categories of *agape* and *eros* in thinking about divine love have become incredibly influential such that nearly every serious work on the topic of love deals with these categories.²⁵ Nygren defines divine love as *agape* by contrasting it with *eros*.²⁶ For Nygren, the

²¹Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 2-1.26.4.

²²Singer, *The Nature of Love*, 1:327.

²³LW 34:309.

²⁴The contrast is sharpest between Luther and Aquinas due to Luther’s axiomatic view of *sola gratia*. However, Luther also disagrees with Augustine’s allowance for an upward love (desire) toward God.

²⁵See Nygren, *Agape and Eros*. Gene Outka goes so far as to state, “Nygren so effectively posed issues about love that they have had a prominence in theology and ethics they never had before. ... Thus, whatever the reader may think of it, one may justifiably regard his work as the beginning of the modern treatment of the subject.” Outka, *Agape*, 1. For a contemporary advocate of Nygren’s view of *agape* see Colin Grant, “For the Love of God: *Agape*,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 24, no. 1 (1996): 3–21.

²⁶He contends that *eros* and *agape* “represent two streams that run through the whole history of religion, alternately clashing against one another and mingling with one another.

only true Christian love (*agape*) is: (1) spontaneous and unmotivated; (2) indifferent to value; (3) creative; and (4) the initiator of fellowship. Nygren's perspective is further laid out in a series of antitheses, he contends that "Eros is acquisitive desire and longing" while "Agape is sacrificial giving." "Eros is an upward movement, man's way to God" while "Agape is sacrificial giving" which "comes down ... God's way to man." "Eros is man's effort" while "Agape is God's grace." "Eros is determined by the quality, the beauty and worth, of its object, it is not spontaneous but 'evoked', 'motivated'" while "Agape is sovereign in relation to its object, and is directed to both 'the evil and the good'; it is spontaneous, 'overflowing', 'unmotivated.'"²⁷

In continuity with the classic conception of divine love, Nygren believes that God lacks nothing and, hence, desires nothing (perfection and self-sufficiency). As such, the aspects of love represented by the *eros* motif are utterly inappropriate to a Christian conception of divine love. Rather, divine love in Christianity (thematic *agape*) is not emotive, evaluative, or motivated but a purposive, willed, indifferent love totally distinct from any need or desire. Biblical expressions of divine emotion "are on this view merely crude anthropomorphisms."²⁸ All other types of love (e.g. *eros*, *philia*) are not Christian love.²⁹ *Eros* is ruled out for the aforementioned reasons while friendship love (*philia*) is considered inappropriate due to the vast inequality between God and humans. Nygren frames his study as a motif analysis, rather than a linguistic study, but nevertheless claims that *agape* was a theme specifically chosen by the NT writers to convey this *sola gratia* type of love which is "indifferent to human merit" and also to exclude all other concepts of love.³⁰ In support of this view, he contends that the NT conception of love is different from the OT conception of love.³¹ As such, for Nygren, the love between God and the world is a one-way connection that is wholly predicated on

They stand for what may be described as the egocentric and the theocentric attitude in religion." Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 205.

²⁷Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 210. In this way, *eros* stems from self-love whereas *agape* is divine love toward others.

²⁸Gary D. Badcock, "The Concept of Love: Divine and Human," in *Nothing Greater, Nothing Better: Theological Essays on the Love of God*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 40.

²⁹Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 92.

³⁰Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 57. In fact, he goes so far as to consider it a "new creation of Christianity." Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 48. However, Carmichael points out, "More objective scholarship suggests that the appearance of *agape* is to be attributed, not to theological motivation but to the natural evolution of the Greek language." Carmichael, *Friendship*, 36.

³¹Nygren, *Agape and Ero*, 62. This is in keeping with his view of discontinuity between Judaism and Christianity.

the sovereign will of God. God gains no value from this relationship. Divine love is utterly gratuitous.³²

Consequently, the only *true* agent of love is God; humans in themselves are incapable of *agape* love. Thus, a human loves God only “because God’s unmotivated love has overwhelmed him and taken control of him, so that he cannot do other than love God.”³³ Human to human *agape* love may take place, but it is not actually originated by humans. Rather, it is divine love that flows through humans.³⁴ As Nygren puts it, “What we have here is a purely theocentric love, in which all choice on man’s part is excluded.”³⁵ *Agape* love is thus unconditional love predicated on the divine will alone, which itself is in accordance with the superabundance of the divine nature of *agape*; divine love, then, could never be earned or merited.³⁶ True *agape* love is nothing else than that unilateral beneficence that flows from God to others.

Although Nygren’s view has come under a great deal of criticism, it remains an influential study, and many of his conclusions remain in significant streams of biblical and systematic theology. For instance, Nygren’s basic premise regarding the categories of need love (corresponding to *eros*) and gift love (corresponding to thematic *agape*) continues to be influential (and at times, axiomatic) in some circles.³⁷ On the other hand, numerous questions have been raised regarding his reconstruction of historical theology as well as the adequacy of a conception of divine love that rules out genuinely mutual divine-human relationships.³⁸ Indeed,

³²“God does not love in order to obtain any advantage thereby, but quite simply because it is his nature to love with a love that seeks, not to get, but to give.” Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 201.

³³Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 214. For Nygren, “[t]herein lies the profound significance of the idea of predestination: man has not selected God, but God has elected man.” Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 214.

³⁴Thus, “To the extent that man participates in the divine, and only to that extent, is it right for me to love him.” Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 215.

³⁵Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 213.

³⁶“The man who is loved by God has no value in himself; what gives him value is precisely the fact that God loves him. *Agape* is a value-creating principle.” Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 78.

³⁷For instance, these categories were adopted and popularized by C. S. Lewis in *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1988).

³⁸For some direct criticisms of Nygren’s view, see Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 137; Burnaby, *Amor Dei*; Thomas Jay Oord, “Matching Theology and Piety: An Evangelical Process Theology of Love” (Ph.D. dissertation, Claremont Graduate University, 1999), 113; Williams, *The Spirit and the Forms of Love*, 38. In this regard, according to Martin d’Arcy, “*Eros* and *Agape* are not enemies but friends.” D’Arcy, *The Mind and Heart of Love*, 304. Cf. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 1:281.

in the field of theology, Nygren's so-called *agapist* conception of divine love has endured heavy criticism from many recent theologians who believe that the exclusion of reciprocal love rules out meaningful divine-human relationships.³⁹ From the standpoint of biblical scholarship, many have pointed out the failure of Nygren's *agape* motif to cohere with the biblical data, even when investigation is restricted to the NT.⁴⁰ Indeed, perhaps the strongest criticism of Nygren, despite his claim to not be making a semantic argument, is the apparent biblical testimony which contradicts Nygren's proposed motifs, to which we now turn.⁴¹

³⁹For instance, consider Brümmer, *The Model of Love*; Burnaby, *Amor Dei*; Carmichael, *Friendship*; D'Arcy, *The Mind and Heart of Love*; Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity*, 2nd printing ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1964); Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1984); Eberhard Jüngel, *The Doctrine of the Trinity: God's Being Is in Becoming*, trans. Horton Harris (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976); Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute between Theism and Atheism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983); Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1987); Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1981); Thomas C. Oden, *The Living God* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1987); Schubert Miles Ogden, *The Reality of God and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966); Oord, "Matching Theology and Piety: An Evangelical Process Theology of Love"; Catherine Osborne, *Eros Unveiled: Plato and the God of Love* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1994); Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991); Clark H. Pinnock, "Constrained by Love: Divine Self-Restraint According to Open Theism," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 34, no. 2 (2007): 149–160; Post, *A Theory of Agape*; Richard Rice, "Process Theism and the Open View of God: The Crucial Difference," in *Searching for an Adequate God: A Dialogue between Process and Free Will Theists*, ed. David Ray Griffin, John B. Cobb, and Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 184; Mark Lloyd Taylor, *God Is Love: A Study in the Theology of Karl Rahner* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1986); Williams, *The Spirit and the Forms of Love*.

⁴⁰For instance, Reinhold Niebuhr explicitly criticizes Nygren for making the distinction between *agape* and human love too sharp. *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation*, 2 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1964), 2:84. Many others have pointed out that the distinction between *agape* and other words for love, specifically the *philia* family, is not supported by the linguistic data. For instance, Badcock contends, "The Bible itself does not actually make the rigid distinction that Nygren presupposes between Christian love, *agape*, and other forms of human love." "The Concept of Love," 37. Cf. John A. T. Robinson, "Agape and Eros," *Theology* 48, no. 299 (1945): 99; Post, *A Theory of Agape*, 88, 89.

⁴¹In this regard, William Klassen comments, "Nygren's thesis has been all but discredited." "Love in the NT and Early Jewish Literature," *ABD* 4:385. See, further, Roy F. Butler, *The Meaning of Agapao and Phileo in the Greek New Testament* (Lawrence, KS: Coronado Press, 1977), 70; Geraint Vaughan Jones, "Agape and Eros: Some Notes on Dostoevsky," *Expository Times* 66, no. 1 (1954–1955): 3; Oord, "Matching Theology and

Agape in the NT

Confusion over the precise meaning of divine love is not peculiar to the realm of systematic theology, but also appears relative to the understanding of *agape* within biblical scholarship. Numerous studies of love posit, to a greater or lesser degree, a unique type of NT love which is exemplified by the term (or theme) *agape*. In this way, remnants of Nygren's view seem to linger in some theological circles. In positing a unique and prime position for *agape* as the exclusive and inimitable Christian love, some have asserted that the *agape* root is almost totally absent in pre-biblical Greek.⁴² With that, some scholars have believed that the *agape* word group was used by NT writers to signify a new and unique concept of love. Others have claimed the use of the *agape* word group was used merely to distinguish from Greek concepts of love such as *eros* (which does not appear in the NT) and "not because the word had a particularly positive connotation."⁴³ However, the verb *agapaō* appears often in post-Homeric literature and the noun *agape* seems to come from translating the Hebrew word for love, *ahab*.⁴⁴ Accordingly, some believe the *agape* word group was already becoming prominent at the time of the biblical usage and its presence in the NT is not necessarily the result of a choice to convey some new or distinct meaning. Robert Joly makes the compelling argument, widely adopted by contemporary scholars, that the increase in usage of the *agape* word group in the NT may be accounted for exclusively on the basis of diachronic linguistic shifts rather than theological purpose(s).⁴⁵ As D.

Piety," 123; James Moffat, *Love in the New Testament* (New York: Harper, 1930); John M. Rist, "Some Interpretations of *Agape* and *Eros*," in *The Philosophy and Theology of Anders Nygren* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970), 172.

⁴²See Ethelbert Stauffer, "Ἀγαπάω, Ἀγάπη, Ἀγαπητός," in *TDNT*, eds. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 1:37. There is a striking increase in the use of the *agapaō* word group in biblical Greek relative to extra-biblical literature around the time of the LXX. Further, while *agapaō* appears relatively frequently in Greek from Homer onward, the noun *agape* is not very well represented in extra-biblical Greek literature, if at all. Whether the noun *agape* is attested at all in pre-LXX Greek has been a matter of some dispute, though an older noun, *agapesin*, is present in classical Greek literature.

⁴³Leon Morris, *Testaments of Love: A Study of Love in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 103.

⁴⁴See W. Günther and H. G. Link, "Love," in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 2:539.

⁴⁵Joly contends the preference for the *agape* word group was present in Hellenistic times and that the change took place for linguistic reasons from the fourth century BC onward; specifically, *philein* was moving from "love" to "kiss" (due to the disappearance of the older word for kiss) while *agapan* moved from conveying "be content with" to conveying "love" with some overlap with previous meanings. See *Le vocabulaire chrétien de l'amour est-il original: Philein et agapan dans le grec antique* (Brussels: Press universitaires de

A. Carson explains, “there are excellent diachronic reasons in Greek philology to explain the rise of the [*agape*] word group, so one should not rush too quickly toward theological explanations.”⁴⁶

Leon Morris nevertheless maintains the unique significance of *agape* as utilized by the NT writers. While he acknowledges that “the linguistics” do not prove the distinctive nature of the *agape* word group, he nevertheless believes that the biblical writers chose this word “because they had a new idea about the essential meaning of love.”⁴⁷ He dismisses the term *philia* as deficient to convey “the essential New Testament idea of love.”⁴⁸ For the Christian conception of love, only the term *agape* will suffice.⁴⁹

However, as Morris himself recognizes, the lexical evidence does not seem to support such an exclusive meaning. On the contrary, the evidence casts doubt on the idea that *agape* is a word that connotes merely (or even primarily) the unilateral gift love of God, distinct from other words for love. In the LXX, for instance, the *agape* word group has a broad semantic range, including referring to rapacious lust

Bruxelles, 1968), 33. So Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 51, 52; Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 96. C. C. Tarelli suggested something similar prior to Joly. See “Agape,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 1 (1950): 64–67. Cf. James Barr, “Words for Love in Biblical Greek,” in *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament*, ed. L. D. Hurst and N. T. Wright (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1987), 6, 11. Benjamin B. Warfield also saw *agape* as the word that was current at the time of writing, not as a deliberate choice by the authors. “Terminology of Love in the New Testament,” *Princeton Theological Review* 16 (1918): 184.

⁴⁶D. A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 27.

⁴⁷Morris, *Testaments of Love*, 125. Morris adopts Nygren’s “basic idea of *agape* [a]s that of self-giving love for the unworthy” while allowing that Nygren may have been too sharp in his distinctions between *agape* and *eros* and “equated it [*agape*] too narrowly with the use of particular Greek words.” Nevertheless, Morris contends, “there is such a love as he [Nygren] describes as *Agape* and that it is the Christian understanding of love seems clear. God’s love for us is evoked by God’s own inner nature, not by anything worthy in us” and divine love “evokes a corresponding love within people.” Leon Morris, *John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 293.

⁴⁸Morris, *Testaments of Love*, 119. Cf. Ceslas Spicq, “Ἀγάπη,” in *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 11.

⁴⁹Similarly, Stauffer sees *agape* as possibly conveying a colorless sense to mean something like prefer, denoting “a free and decisive act determined by its subject,” whereas *eros* “seeks in others the fulfillment of its own life’s hunger.” Stauffer, *TDNT* 1:37. Cranfield states that “Although used for euphony as a synonym for *phileō* and *eraō*, *agapaō* lacked the warmth of the former and the intensity of the latter.” Charles E. B. Cranfield, “Love,” in *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*, ed. Alan Richardson (London, UK: SCMP, 1950), 134.

as is seen in the use of the *agape* word group in the narrative of Amnon's rape of his sister, Tamar (2 Sam 13:15; see also other examples of misdirected or deficient "love" in Pss 11:5; 52:3; Amos 5:15; Hos 9:1). Further, *phileō* and *agapaō* seem to be used interchangeably on numerous occasions in the LXX (Gen 37:3–4; Lam 1:2) and show close connection in the NT, overlapping with regard to every major aspect of love such that they are often used interchangeably. Both terms are used to describe the Father's love for the Son (John 5:20; cf. John 3:35), the Father's love for the disciples because of their love for Jesus (John 16:27; cf. 14:21, 23), Jesus's love for humans (Rev 3:19; cf. 3:9), Jesus's love for individuals (John 11:36; cf. 11:5), human love for other humans (John 15:19; cf. 13:34), human love for their own life (John 12:25; cf. Rev 12:11) and both terms describe the disciple whom Jesus loves (John 20:2; cf. 21:7).⁵⁰

Such usage, especially with divine agency, demonstrates that *phileō* is not an inferior type of love but in fact may describe the very love of God, falsifying the assertions of some that *agapaō* is the only term sufficient to depict divine love and that *phileō* is a lesser, merely human, kind of love. Rather, both word groups may refer to the highest and noblest aspects of love or to inferior qualities such as misdirected love.⁵¹ As D. A. Carson states, "there is nothing intrinsic to the verb

⁵⁰Notably, the only subject-object relations of love that are not described by *phileō* are human love for the Father and Christ's love for the Father. However, the compound *philotheos* does describe "lovers of God" (2 Tim 3:4) and Jesus's love for the Father is only explicitly stated once. The absence of instances of *phileō* descriptive of Christ's love for the Father, then, is probably accidental given that explicit mention of Christ's love for the Father appears only once. Further, both the *agapaō* and *phileō* word groups are used of preferential love (Matt 10:37; John 11:5; 13:1), misdirected love (Matt 23:6; Luke 20:46; 22:15; Rev 22:15; 2 Tim 4:10; cf. Prov 21:17), conditional divine love (John 14:21, 23; 16:27), emotion and/or passion (John 11:36; 13:1; compare James 4:4), pleasure, enjoyment and/or evaluative love (Matt 3:17; 6:5; 17:5; 23:6; compare Gen 27:4, 9, 14), familial (Matt 10:37; Col 3:19; cf. Gen 37:3–4) and other insider love (John 13:1; 15:14–15), and love that includes discipline (Rev 3:19; Heb 12:6). See the extensive discussion of the various NT terms for love in Peckham, *The Concept of Divine Love*, 352–372.

⁵¹Many scholars consider the terms synonymous (or nearly synonymous) in most cases, while recognizing minor differences in the overall semantic range. See Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 51–52; Gustav Stählin, "φιλεω, καταφιλεω, φιλημα," *TDNT* 9:115, 116, 124; Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I–XII* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 498; William Hendriksen, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1953), 2:487, 494–500; Köstenberger, *John*, 596; Günther and Link, "αγαπαω," *NIDNTT* 2:543. For example, relative to personal love, the verb *phileō* is always used in the NT within an associative relationship of some commonality, i.e., "insider love," whereas *agapaō* may signify both "insider" and "outsider" love (more often the former). However, the *phileō* word group includes love for the other (including the stranger) in the compound terms *philoxenos* and *philoxenia* (1 Tim 3:2; Rom 12:13; Heb 13:2; cf. Matt 11:19; Luke 7:34). Notably, in this regard, the oft-mentioned variation of terminology in John 21:15–17 is underdeterminative. Many scholars view the variation between *agapaō* and *phileō* in John 21

ἀγαπάω (*agapao*) or the noun ἀγάπη (*agape*) to prove its real meaning or hidden meaning refers to some special kind of love.”⁵² As numerous scholars have recognized, then, the usage of the *agape* word group in Scripture does not support the view that *agape* exclusively connotes a unique type of divine or Christian love.⁵³

Nevertheless, notwithstanding the considerable evidence that stands against the view that Scripture reserves *agape* for some special kind of exclusively divine gift love, Nygren’s *agapist* conception of divine love remains in popular and scholarly works alike, including numerous theological dictionaries, encyclopedias, and biblical commentaries. As such, considerable confusion exists in both theological and biblical scholarship over the precise meaning of love generally and divine love specifically.

Agape and Ethics

The issues surveyed above are striking not only with regard to the potential implications for theology and biblical scholarship, but with respect to the viability of an intelligible, Christian, ethics of love. Despite the aforementioned theological and linguistic difficulties, the *agapist* view has wielded significant influence on the development of some lines of Christian ethics. However, others question whether the *agapist* conception of divine love as emotionally aloof, disinterested, mechanical, perfunctory and unilateral, can adequately speak to the ethical issues that Christians face, especially with regard to human relationships and suffering. Perhaps proponents of the *agapist* conception of divine love would argue that only such pure love merits the name Christian love (*agape*) and the fact that such love seems so foreign to human nature says nothing about its validity as such. Accordingly, humans would ideally be *utterly* self-abnegating, without desire, wholly beneficent individuals, lacking any self-love or regard for self.⁵⁴ However,

as merely stylistic while those who believe the variation signifies difference of meaning are divided on what difference of meaning is purported to be entailed thereby. In this regard, see the discussion in John C. Peckham, *The Love of God: A Canonical Model* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 75, 76. Cf. the discussion in Peckham, *The Concept of Divine Love*, 366, 367.

⁵²Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 32. Carson does see a special meaning for divine love, but finds no basis for such a view in the semantics but in the “sentences, paragraphs, discourses, and so forth.” *Ibid.*, 53.

⁵³In addition to Carson, consider the works of Roy F. Butler, *The Meaning of Agapao and Phileo in the Greek New Testament* (Lawrence, KS: Coronado, 1977), 70–72; Victor Paul Furnish, *The Love Command in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1972), 20, 21.

⁵⁴Some Christian ethicists, however, have long recognized valid forms of self-love while cautioning against selfish love, especially the type of self-interest advocated in ethical egoism. For example, Vacek makes a case for a positive role of self-love (Edward Collins Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine: The Heart of Christian Ethics* [Washington, DC: Georgetown

this raises the question; if the true character of love is altogether selfless and disinterested then in what way can humans actually love?⁵⁵ Unless one maintains an extremely optimistic view of human nature, it would appear that if human love is possible, it is something quite different from purely selfless altruism. On the other hand, Luther's view remains available: there is no such thing as human love (*agape*) except that which is purely the action of God bestowed on and through a passive human agent.

Notably, a number of biblical texts appear to suggest the possibility of genuine human love (*agape*). For instance, Jesus exhorted his disciples, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love [*agapaō*] one another, even as I have loved [*agapaō*] you, that you also love [*agapaō*] one another" (John 13:34). What are Christians to make of such ethical commands? Beyond the fact that this text seems to assume that humans can actually love one another,⁵⁶ this text also seems to posit some similitude between that love which Jesus had for his followers and the kind of love that he expects Christians to have for one another. Thus, divine love (modeled in the incarnate one himself) is presented as the ground for truly Christian love.⁵⁷

Furthermore, as we have seen, elsewhere Jesus also proclaims: "You shall love [*agapaō*] your neighbor as yourself" (Matt 22:39; Mark 12:31; cf. Lev 19:18, 34). This, coupled with the so-called golden rule (Luke 6:31; Cf. Matt 7:12) would seem to contradict an ethics of utter self-abnegation.⁵⁸ Rather, an ethics based on

University Press, 1994], 239–244) and also discusses the tradition that has favored self-love (Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine*, 199, 200). Cf. the discussions in Outka, *Agape*, 275; Post, *A Theory of Agape*, 17, 18.

⁵⁵Further, it seems to me that a more biblical conception of love would defeat Nietzsche's critique of "*agape*" as "resentment" and "suppression" by (among other things) showing his criticism of so-called Christian love to be a straw man that is not representative of Christian love as it is understood and depicted in Scripture. See, in this regard, Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist in The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. Oscar Levy, trans. Anthony M. Ludovici (New York: Macmillan, 1911), 16:128–135.

⁵⁶This need not mean that humans have the capacity within themselves as apart from God, but may assume the necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian.

⁵⁷Perhaps one might suggest the possibility that the love of Jesus for his followers was merely a product of his humanity. However, this cannot be the meaning if one considers the comparison in John 15:9, "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love."

⁵⁸Whereas self-sacrifice is virtuous in the appropriate circumstances, "as a universal principle, self-sacrifice is self-contradictory." Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine*, 184. Imagine a world where every individual always acts self-sacrificially. When two people arrive at the same door they would both insist on holding the door open for the other and, consequently, neither would ever enter. So Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine*, 184. That is, if everyone always gives but never receives, then there would be no one to receive what is

appropriate and unselfish self-love is suggested, which implies that at least some form of self-love is appropriate for the Christian, since it is presented as a basis of neighbor love itself. This likely refers to a proper, unselfish, regard for self which is manifested in love for others, perhaps as is modeled in the parable of the Good Samaritan.⁵⁹

Elsewhere, even some aspects of divine love appear to incorporate some motivation that is contingent upon its object.⁶⁰ For instance, consider the words of Jesus recorded in John 14:21, 23, “He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves [*agapao*] Me; and he who loves [*agapao*] Me will be loved [*agapao*] by My Father, and I will love [*agapao*] him and will disclose Myself to him. ... If anyone loves [*agapao*] Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love [*agapao*] him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him” (cf. John 10:17; 16:27).⁶¹ This indicates that humans may not only love one another, but may actually love God and that such love for God can also, at least partially, affect God’s love for human beings.

The words of Jesus in these verses seem to conflict with the agapist view that divine nature and love requires disinterest. Moreover, the presentation of love in these verses appears to depict some significant role for the object(s) of divine love. Not only is this suggestive with regard to the possibilities of human love but it also requires that divine love not be exclusive to evaluation. How could this be? What, then, is *agape*? Is it possible that both thematic *agape* and altruism are misunderstood, misapplied, or both to some degree?⁶² The answers to these and

given. As Stephen Post observes, “Self-less, purely one-way love may be an understandable exaggeration of unselfishness, but its impact is essentially negative in that it undermines the circular flow of giving and receiving in which *agape* is sustained and supported.” Post, *Theory of Agape*, 12. Further, Gene Outka warns that utter “self-sacrifice in itself would appear to provide no way of distinguishing between attention to another’s needs and submission to his exploitation and no warrant for resisting the latter.” Outka, *Agape*, 275.

⁵⁹See the discussion of other-inclusive love and unselfish self-interest (e.g., as seen in Eph 5:28–30) in Peckham, *The Love of God*, 130–138.

⁶⁰Although there is a tendency to conflate conditionality and merit, I believe and have argued elsewhere that divine love is always unmerited and, yet, foreconditional. That is, God bestows love prior to any conditions but the continued enjoyment of love relationship with God is conditional upon appropriate response. See the discussion in Peckham, *The Love of God*, 201–203.

⁶¹Jesus states, “for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came forth from the Father” (John 16:27). “For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again” (John 10:17).

⁶²The cogency of this critique of the adequacy of the agapist of divine love for ethics has been recognized elsewhere. For example, Stephen G. Post presents a sustained criticism of what he calls “the idealizations of a one-way love.” Post, *A Theory of Agape*, 10. Cf. Stephen G. Post, “The Inadequacy of Selflessness: God’s Suffering and the Theory of

other questions that flow from a renewed consideration of the canonical conception of love hold significant implications for the development of a distinctively biblical and Christian ethics of love.

Conclusion

While conclusions regarding the nature of divine love and its place in Christian ethics continue to proliferate, it seems to me that views founded upon the agapist conception of divine love do not suffice for Christian ethics. In my view, an ethical system based on utterly disinterested-love, wherein “love” gives but never receives, would (among other things): depersonalize ethics from its biblical context of relationship, remove the Christian motivation of bringing pleasure/delight to God, require total self-abnegation which seems opposed to the biblical ideal for unselfish but not self-loathing love, and lack the covenantal context of love. Moreover, it seems that the agapist conception of divine love, wherein “*agapē*” love is only attributable to God, stands at odds with Christ’s command to “love [*agapaō*] one another, even as I have loved [*agapaō*] you” (John 13:34) and thus tends to distort and reduce the nature and force of Christ’s example of love that is to be reflected by Christians.

Perhaps the way forward for an ethics of love requires a deliberate return to examine the meaning of divine love as posited in the biblical canon in order to clarify the potential meaning and function of divine love and, only then, its implications for Christian ethics. Such an investigation would take seriously the questions that continue to rise to the fore, including but not limited to: What if divine love is much more relational than the agapist conception of love allows? What if love actually involves some degree of reciprocity and give and take, as is being increasingly suggested by numerous theologians? What if the love of God is, in fact, the personal and relational love that the incarnate God modeled while he was on earth and called humans to reflect? The implications for Christian ethics could be enormous; focused attention on the canonical conception of divine love might illuminate a way forward toward a more distinctively Christian and biblical ethics of love.

Love,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 56, no. 2 (1988): 213–228; Stephen G. Post, *Altruism & Altruistic Love: Science, Philosophy, & Religion in Dialogue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Cf. Gene Outka, *Agape*, 275.

CHURCH AUTHORITY AND BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION: FORMS OF AUTHORITATIVE HERMENEUTICS IN IRENAEUS AND TERTULLIAN

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Abstract

In order to protect the church from the misuse of scripture promoted by heretical movements, early church fathers advanced hermeneutical mechanisms of control to guide biblical interpretation, which included forms of authoritative hermeneutics. The present investigation describes and briefly analyzes occurrences of these forms in Irenaeus and Tertullian, focusing on the concepts of the rule of truth/faith and church authority. The conclusion of the article highlights inadequacies of authoritative hermeneutics.

Keywords: authoritative hermeneutics, Irenaeus, Tertullian, rule of faith, church authority.

Introduction

In many cases, the Apostolic Fathers¹ interpreted the Scriptures² using what David Dockery calls a “functional hermeneutic,” meaning that “the readers

¹He defines this title “as a designation of a group of church leaders” (such as Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, and Polycarp of Smyrna) “and their writings between A.D. 90 and 150.” David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the Light of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 48.

²In his explanation of the concept of Scripture in the early church, Rowan A. Greer notes that “a Christian Bible is the product of the formative period of early Christianity (30–180 C.E.). Before Irenaeus, we find the church struggling to define its Scriptures and to come to terms with their interpretation, but . . . by the end of the second century . . . Christianity has yielded to an ecumenical unity. The emergence of a Christian Bible is a central feature of that unity.” James L. Kugel and Rowan A. Greer, *Early Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 111. For helpful information about the development of the canon of the New Testament, see F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988); Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989); Michael J. Kruger, *The Question of Canon: Challenging the Status Quo in the New Testament Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013).

applied the text to their own context and situation without attention to its original context or situation.”³ However, the emergence of heretical movements brought about the necessity of thinking seriously about the hermeneutical enterprise. Most of these heretical movements were labeled as Gnosticism.⁴ Many Gnostics “argued that salvation was achieved through access to a secret teaching” that had been orally passed down from the apostles, “and that it was to be found in a ‘veiled’ form in the Bible. Only those who knew how to read the Bible in a certain way could gain access to this knowledge.”⁵ The Gnostic challenge raised the

³Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now*, 45. This hermeneutical approach developed especially in the context of the church’s worship, since biblical interpretation in that period “was grounded in the church’s exposition, not in the theoretical analysis of the academy.” Indeed, “almost all of the church’s interpretation of Scripture and corresponding theologizing developed from the sermon.” *Ibid.*, 46, 47.

⁴Alister McGrath indicates that “there is a growing consensus that the term ‘Gnosticism’ is misleading in that it gathers together a number of quite disparate groups and presents them as if they represented a single religious belief.” Alister E. McGrath, *Heresy: A History of Defending the Truth* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 118. To Hans Jonas, Gnosticism may be understood in a narrow or a broad sense. In the first case, “the Church Father considered Gnosticism as essentially a Christian heresy and confined their reports and refutations to systems which either had sprouted already from the soil of Christianity (e.g., the Valentinian system), or had somehow added and adapted the figure of Christ to their otherwise heterogeneous teaching (e.g., that of the Phrygian Naassenes), or else through a common Jewish background were close enough to be felt as competing with and distorting the Christian message (e.g., that of Simon Magus). [Nevertheless,] modern research has progressively broadened this traditional range by arguing the existence of a *pre-Christian Jewish* and a *Hellenistic pagan* Gnosticism.” Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Beacon, 2001), 33. For further information about Gnosticism, see Robert M. Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960); Gershom Gerhard Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1960); Robert McLachlan Wilson, *The Gnostic Problem: A Study of the Relations between Hellenistic Judaism and the Gnostic Heresy* (London: Mowbray, 1958); Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism: A Survey of the Proposed Evidences* (London: Tyndale, 1973).

⁵Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 40. For the most comprehensive English publication of Gnostic writings, see James M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 4th rev. ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1996). N.T. Wright challenges the notion that Gnostic teachings were innovative and creative ideas that aimed to sweep away traditional and established orthodox Christian beliefs. Actually, “the Gnostics were the cultural conservatives sticking with the kind of religion that everyone already knew.” Conversely, “it was the orthodox Christians who were breaking new ground, and risking their neck as they did so.” Nicholas T. Wright, *Judas and the Gospel of Jesus: Have We Missed the Truth About Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 101.

question of what makes a specific interpretation of the Bible legitimate, and a functional hermeneutic approach could neither answer that question nor restrain the Gnostic interpretation of the Scriptures.

This challenge set the stage for the transition in the second century from functional hermeneutics to authoritative hermeneutics.⁶ Authoritative hermeneutics, articulated mainly by Irenaeus (c. 115–202) and Tertullian (c. 160–225), are broadly characterized by their controlled readings of Scripture. In this article, I will attempt to briefly describe and analyze the hermeneutical mechanisms of control suggested by Irenaeus and Tertullian, observing especially how church authority plays a role in their suggestions. I will start this discussion with Irenaeus.

Forms of Authoritative Hermeneutics in Irenaeus

In his anti-Gnostic theology,⁷ Irenaeus attempted to provide a hermeneutical method distinct from the allegorical approach,⁸ as the allegorical approach does not offer specific parameters to guide/control interpretation. Overall, there are two main keys in his method that could be regarded as parameters for interpretation, namely, the notion of the rule of truth/faith⁹ and the role of tradition.¹⁰

⁶This statement is not meant to imply that the early fathers originally employed only functional hermeneutics and that they then switched to only authoritative hermeneutics. Rather, the point here is that, as Dockery indicates, these approaches were sequentially influential in the early church.

⁷D. Farkasfalvy, “Theology of Scripture in St. Irenaeus,” in *The Bible in the Early Church*, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland, 1993), 48.

⁸Kugel and Greer, *Early Biblical Interpretation*, 178. McRay points out that, given the anti-Gnostic context, “it is with the question of the right interpretation of Scripture that Irenaeus is fundamentally concerned.” John McRay, “Scripture and Tradition in Irenaeus,” *Restoration Quarterly* 10, no. 1 (1967): 1. Robert Grant indicates that Irenaeus was of “great significance in his analysis of the relation between the two Testaments. Indeed, he was the first Christian theologian to take biblical history seriously, and to set forth the permanent value of the Law.” Robert M. Grant, *The Bible in the Church: A Short History of Interpretation* (New York: Macmillan 1948), 59.

⁹The expressions “rule of *faith*” and “rule of *truth*” are used interchangeably in Irenaeus and Tertullian.

¹⁰I do not intend to use the term “tradition” anachronistically, by infusing in it any contemporary meanings. Rather, this term should be read with the basic meaning of “passing down” or “that which is passed down.”

The Rule of Truth

As Kugel and Greer emphasize, Irenaeus held that the interpretation of Scripture must take place within “an organic system or framework which constitutes the shape and the meaning of God’s revelation. Without the system, God’s revelation is not intelligible. Placed within another system, that revelation is distorted and perverted.” Irenaeus referred to this correct hermeneutical framework as “the truth,” “the canon (or rule) of truth.”¹¹ Before I move to a few remarks regarding this hermeneutical framework, it must be noted that the exact relationship between the rule of truth/faith and Scripture is not always clear in Irenaeus. As Morwenna Ludlow indicates, Irenaeus “sometimes suggests that Scripture is record of the rule of faith, [but] at other times he asserts that the rule of faith is derived from, or at least founded on, Scripture.”¹² Therefore, it is not easy to

¹¹Philip Hefner, “Theological Methodology and St. Irenaeus,” *Journal of Religion* 44, no. 4 (1964): 299. Irenaeus also refers to this concept as “the body of truth,” and “the hypothesis of Faith.” See *ibid.* Even though this concept is generally used to describe outline statements of Christian belief that circulated in the second and third century, it is first found in Irenaeus, since he “created his whole theology around scripture and the *regula fidei*.” Prosper S. Grech, “The Regula Fidei as a Hermeneutical Principal in Patristic Exegesis,” in *The Interpretation of the Bible: The International Symposium in Slovenia*, ed. Joze Krašovec (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 590. See also F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, “Rule of Faith,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1434; Dietmar Wyrwa, “Rule of Faith: Early Church,” in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, eds. Geoffrey William Bromiley and Erwin Fahlbusch, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 758, 759; R. P. C. Hanson, *Tradition in the Early Church* (London: SCM, 1962), 75; J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (London: Continuum, 2006), 76–82. For further information about the concept of Rule of Faith in the second and third century, see Paul Hartog, “The ‘Rule of Faith’ and Patristic Biblical Exegesis,” *Trinity Journal* 28, no. 1 (2007): 65–86; Grech, “The Regula Fidei as a Hermeneutical Principal in Patristic Exegesis,” 590; Hanson, *Tradition in the Early Church*, 75–129.

¹²Morwenna Ludlow, “Criteria of Canonicity’ and the Early Church,” in *Die Einheit der Schrift und die Vielfalt des Kanons / The Unity of Scripture and the Diversity of the Canon*, eds. John Barton and Michael Wolter (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003), 87. An example of a statement implying that the rule of truth is not exactly found in Scripture is Irenaeus’ contention that a Christian believer will be able to recognize a wrong reading of Scripture by keeping in mind the rule of truth received by means of baptism (see *Haer.* 1.9.4). Conversely, an example of a statement implying that the rule is evident from Scripture is the suggestion that the body of truth is clearly and harmoniously evident in Scripture (see *Haer.* 2.27.1). Both statements will be mentioned below. As Jonathan M. Armstrong highlights, “It is true that the rule of faith served as hermeneutical principle for Irenaeus, and therefore it would seem incorrect to conclude that for Irenaeus the rule of faith represents the Scriptures themselves. Nevertheless, as Marksches notes, insofar as Irenaeus maintains the Scriptures to be complete and comprehensible in and of themselves, it is clear that the canon of Scripture and the rule of faith are very closely associated for Irenaeus.” Jonathan

determine whether the rule of truth/faith chronologically precedes Scripture or follows it. In the former case, the rule of truth was likely an oral summary of apostolic teaching. In the latter, the rule was likely an oral summary of apostolic teaching derived from Scripture.¹³ I will address this point later, based on Oscar Cullmann's reflection on true apostolic tradition. For now, I will elaborate on the idea that the rule of truth/faith and Scripture are closely related.

In *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus expounds his conception of the rule of truth in contrast to the hermeneutical approach adopted by the Gnostics. Since the Gnostics' interpretation includes only some parts of Scripture,¹⁴ they disregard its order and connection and, then, "dismember and destroy the truth."¹⁵ He graphically compares this approach to someone rearranging the pieces of a beautiful mosaic and transforming the image, constructed out of precious jewels by a skillful artist, from that of a king into that of a dog or a fox. In other words, they pull apart the system found in Scripture and use its pieces to create their own system.¹⁶

Nevertheless, Irenaeus emphasizes that those who previously knew the correct system of Scripture are capable of recognizing the biblical pieces without being deceived by the false mosaic. In his words, someone "who retains unchangeable in his heart the rule of the truth which he received by means of baptism, will doubtless recognize the names, the expressions, and the parables taken from the Scriptures, but will by no means acknowledge the blasphemous use which these men make of them."¹⁷ Hence, the wrong system may be properly identified, and rejected, through the previous knowledge of the right system (the rule of truth),

J. Armstrong, "From the Κανὼν Τῆς Ληθείας to the Κανὼν Τῶν Γραφῶν: The Rule of Faith and the New Testament Canon," in *Tradition and the Rule of Faith in the Early Church: Essays in Honor of Joseph T. Lienhard, S.J.*, eds. Ronnie J. Rombs and Alexander Y. Hwang (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 45.

¹³Several scholars affirm that the rule of faith was not a written text (not a creed or a formula). J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd ed. (London: Continuum, 2006), 76; Ludlow, "Criteria of Canonicity' and the Early Church," 88; Annette Yoshiko Reed, "ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ: Orality, Textuality, and the Christian 'Truth in Irenaeus' "Adversus Haereses"," *Vigiliae Christianae* 56, no. 1 (2002): 13, 14. The fact that the references to the rule of truth or faith in Irenaeus and Tertullian do not indicate a common formula seem to corroborate this affirmation.

¹⁴Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.8.1 (*ANF* 1:326).

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid., 1.9.4 (*ANF* 1:330). As Bertrand de Margerie points out, "in specifying that the rule is received with and through baptism, Irenaeus seems to suggest that, when he uses this expression, he is thinking primarily of the living doctrine of the churches which is communicated to neophytes." Bertrand de Margerie, *An Introduction to the History of Exegesis: The Greek Fathers* (Petersham, MA: Saint Bede's, 1991), 53.

which includes the main beliefs taught before baptism, such as the trinity, the creation, the incarnation, the passion and resurrection, and the judgment and salvation.¹⁸

According to this view, the rule of truth “was not a competitor with Scripture.”¹⁹ Indeed, the following quotation from Irenaeus seems to indicate that the rule is found in Scripture: “these things are such as fall [plainly] under our observation, and are clearly and unambiguously in express terms set forth in the Sacred Scriptures . . . the body of truth remains entire, with a harmonious adaptation of its members, and without any collision [of its several parts].”²⁰ In fact, Irenaeus argues that “the entire Scriptures, the prophets, and the Gospels, can be clearly, unambiguously, and harmoniously understood by all.”²¹ These

¹⁸“The Church, though dispersed through our the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith: [She believes] in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God, and the advents, and the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and His [future] manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father ‘to gather all things in one,’ and to raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race, in order that to Christ Jesus, our Lord, and God, and Saviour, and King, according to the will of the invisible Father, ‘every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess’ to Him, and that He should execute just judgment towards all; that He may send ‘spiritual wickednesses,’ and the angels who transgressed and became apostates, together with the ungodly, and unrighteous, and wicked, and profane among men, into everlasting fire; but may, in the exercise of His grace, confer immortality on the righteous, and holy, and those who have kept His commandments, and have persevered in His love, some from the beginning [of their Christian course], and others from [the date of] their repentance, and may surround them with everlasting glory.” Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.10.1 (*ANF* 1:330, 331).

¹⁹Hartog, “The ‘Rule of Faith’ and Patristic Biblical Exegesis,” 66.

²⁰Irenaeus, *Haer.* 2.27.1 (*ANF* 1:398). Mary Ann Donovan affirms a dialogical relationship between the rule of truth and the Scriptures, “the Rule of Faith governs right exegesis, and the Scriptures . . . explain the Rule of Faith.” Mary Ann Donovan, *One Right Reading? A Guide to Irenaeus* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1997), 11.

²¹Irenaeus, *Haer.* 2.27.1 (*ANF* 1:398). Irenaeus does not conceive the rule of truth merely as an intellectual method, but also as a personal disposition or orientation. Hartog, “The ‘Rule of Faith’ and Patristic Biblical Exegesis,” 68. In his view, “certain characteristics of humility, obedience, diligence in study and personal devotion, and blameless conduct mark the persons who do perceive the true faith.” Therefore, “Irenaeus’ method is inseparable from a certain kind of personal life and faith.” Hefner, “Theological Methodology and St. Irenaeus,” 300. In this way, the proper interpretation of Scripture demands devotion, “piety[,] and the love of truth.” Irenaeus, *Haer.* 2.27.1 (*ANF* 1:398).

statements seem to invalidate the notion of the rule of truth/faith being a hermeneutical grid externally imposed on Scripture. Rather, it appears that Irenaeus understood the rule to be consistent with what is found in Scripture. However, if this is the case, in what sense would the rule of truth be hermeneutically helpful to Christians as they read Scripture? Perhaps, the rule of truth would remind Christians to read Scripture according to its own logic, which was concisely expressed in the rule of truth.

The Role of Tradition

Instead of analyzing in depth the correct system of beliefs implied in the rule of truth or the specific contours of its hermeneutical role, Irenaeus appeals to the argument of the homogeneity in Christian tradition,²² as far as the rule is concerned. While I am aware that some scholars view both the rule and Scripture as part of the tradition of the early church,²³ I will use the language of tradition in this section to refer specifically to practices of the church, including the role of church leaders. One important practice to be considered here is the reference to the teaching of the early church. Irenaeus highlights the homogeneity of Christian tradition in *geographical* terms, affirming that the correct system of truth is

²²The role of tradition in Irenaeus' theology has been debated among scholars. Hefner presents four significant positions: (1) "Scripture is a strong force in the church, but it is decisively subordinated to the living tradition which preserves and interprets Scripture" (Damien van den Eynde); (2) "Irenaeus is beholden to the church as his chief authority; but inasmuch as it is the spirit of the Old and New Testament scriptures that lives in the church" (John Lawson); (3) "Faith (or truth) flows in the church in two channels which possess equal authority: Tradition and Scripture. It is Scripture, however, which dominates Irenaeus' concern . . . tradition serves as a formal norm and hermeneutical principle for interpreting Scripture, which serves as a material norm for the Irenaeian theology" (Andre Benoit); (4) Irenaeus does not subordinate "either Scripture or tradition to the other ... [and he does not employ] tradition as a hermeneutical principle for expounding Scripture ... [the] appeal to apostolic tradition and succession is a formal proof that the church's doctrine is identical with revelation, and appeal to Scripture is a material proof" (E. Flesseman-van Leer). Hefner, "Theological Methodology and St. Irenaeus," 294, 295. See also Andre Benoit, "Écriture Et Tradition Chez Saint Irénée," *Revue d'Histoire de Philosophie Religieuse* 40, no. 1 (1960): 32–44; Andre Benoit, *Saint Irénée: Introduction À L'étude De Sa Théologie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1960), 75, 76, 217–219; Damien van den Eynde, *Les normes de l'enseignement chrétien dans la littérature patristique des trois premiers siècles* (Paris: Duculot, 1933), 261–280; John Lawson, *The Biblical Theology of Saint Irenaeus* (London: Epworth, 1948), 97–118, 292, 293; E. Flesseman-van Leer, *Tradition and Scripture in the Early Church* (Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1954), 103–124.

²³See, e.g., Ludlow, "Criteria of Canonicity' and the Early Church," 88.

harmoniously taught by all churches throughout the world.²⁴ Regarding the role of church leaders, Irenaeus stresses the *historical* continuity of the rule of truth. More specifically, he points out, the teaching proclaimed by the church (of his day) was the same teaching delivered by the apostles, since the bishops in the churches had inherited, by apostolic succession, the proper understanding of the Christian truth.²⁵

Whereas the Gnostics claimed that “the truth was not delivered by means of written documents, but *viná voce*,”²⁶ Irenaeus attempts to prove that the true oral tradition belongs to the church.²⁷ In fact, he presents a successive list²⁸ of all the bishops from the days of the apostles to his own day, in order to provide historical evidence of a genuine continuity of teaching from the apostles to the

²⁴“The Churches which have been planted in Germany do not believe or hand down anything different, nor do those in Spain, nor those in Gaul, nor those in the East, nor those in Egypt, nor those in Libya, nor those which have been established in the central regions of the world.” Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.10.2 (*ANF* 1:331). He adds, “the Church, having received this preaching and this faith, although scattered throughout the whole world, yet, as if occupying but one house, carefully preserves it. She also believes these points [of doctrine] just as if she had but one soul, and one and the same heart, and she proclaims them, and teaches them, and hands them down, with perfect harmony.” *Ibid.*

²⁵“Those who were by the apostles instituted bishops in the Churches, and [to demonstrate] the succession of these men to our own times; those who neither taught nor knew of anything like what these [heretics] rave about. For if the apostles had known hidden mysteries, which they were in the habit of imparting to “the perfect” apart and privily from the rest, they would have delivered them especially to those to whom they were also committing the Churches themselves. For they were desirous that these men should be very perfect and blameless in all things, whom also they were leaving behind as their successors, delivering up their own place of government to these men.” *Ibid.*, 3.3.1 (*ANF* 1:415).

²⁶*Ibid.*, 3.2.1 (*ANF* 1:415).

²⁷Hans von Campenhausen argues that “such an appeal in confirmation of one’s own tradition corresponds exactly to the Gnostic methods of proof against which it is used, and which, as similar but far better and more trustworthy evidence, this time in favour of the true tradition, it seeks to refute.” Hans von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1969), 163.

²⁸This list was probably prepared about the year 180 by Hegesippus. According to Von Campenhausen, he attempted “to demonstrate historically the existence of a continuous tradition. He refers to the unbroken chain of bishops, which guarantees the undistorted transmission of doctrine in all orthodox churches.” It seems that, “fifteen years after Hegesippus, Irenaeus was in Rome, and became acquainted with the list of bishops which he then incorporated into his anti-gnostic work.” *Ibid.*, 163–165. Hegesippus’ work is lost excepting some fragments preserved by Eusebius. Hugh Jackson Lawlor, *Eusebiana: Essays on the Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1912), 98–107.

bishops of the second century.²⁹ As successors of the apostles, the bishops received the gift of understanding and teaching the truth. Irenaeus describes the bishops as “those who, together with the succession of the episcopate, have received the certain gift of truth, according to the good pleasure of the Father.”³⁰ According to him, “they expound the Scriptures to us without danger.”³¹

Some scholars believe Irenaeus understood this gift as a divine revelation comparable to the prophetic gift. Kugel and Greer argue that the necessity of this gift indicates that the proper order of the rule of truth, “though implicit in Scripture, is made explicit only by revelation.”³² For Farkasfalvy, the interpreter

²⁹“The blessed apostles, then, having founded and built up the Church, committed into the hands of Linus the office of the episcopate. Of this Linus, Paul makes mention in the Epistles to Timothy. To him succeeded Anacletus; and after him, in the third place from the apostles, Clement was allotted the bishopric. This man, as he had seen the blessed apostles, and had been conversant with them, might be said to have the preaching of the apostles still echoing [in his ears], and their traditions before his eyes. Nor was he alone [in this], for there were many still remaining who had received instructions from the apostles. In the time of this Clement, no small dissension having occurred among the brethren at Corinth, the Church in Rome despatched a most powerful letter to the Corinthians, exhorting them to peace, renewing their faith, and declaring the tradition which it had lately received from the apostles. ... From this document, whosoever chooses to do so, may learn that He, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, was preached by the Churches, and may also understand the apostolical tradition of the Church, since this Epistle is of older date than these men who are now propagating falsehood, and who conjure into existence another god beyond the Creator and the Maker of all existing things. To this Clement there succeeded Evaristus. Alexander followed Evaristus; then, sixth from the apostles, Sixtus was appointed; after him, Telephorus, who was gloriously martyred; then Hyginus; after him, Pius; then after him, Anicetus. Sorer having succeeded Anicetus, Eleutherius does now, in the twelfth place from the apostles, hold the inheritance of the episcopate. In this order, and by this succession, the ecclesiastical tradition from the apostles, and the preaching of the truth, have come down to us. And this is most abundant proof that there is one and the same vivifying faith, which has been preserved in the Church from the apostles until now, and handed down in truth.” Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.3.3 (*ANF* 1:416).

³⁰*Ibid.*, 4.26.2 (*ANF* 1:497). To Jerome Quinn, this is the prophetic gift possessed by those who transmit the word of God. Jerome D. Quinn, “Charisma Veritatis Certum: Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 4, 26, 2,” *Theological Studies* 39, no. 3 (1978): 521.

³¹Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.26.5 (*ANF* 1:498). “Where, therefore, the gifts of the Lord have been placed, there it behooves us to learn the truth, [namely,] from those who possess that succession of the Church which is from the apostles, and among whom exists that which is sound and blameless in conduct, as well as that which is unadulterated and incorrupt in speech. For these also preserve this faith of ours in one God who created all things; and they increase that love [which we have] for the Son of God.” *Ibid.*

³²Kugel and Greer, *Early Biblical Interpretation*, 175.

(the bishop) needs to possess the same gift that the prophets and apostles had.³³ Karlfried Froehlich, meanwhile, concludes that although the rule of truth is the key to interpreting the Scriptures, this key must be handled by gifted interpreters.³⁴ However, Irenaeus does not explain the specific contours of the gift in enough detail to warrant the interpretation of divine/prophetic revelation. At the same time, Irenaeus's understanding of the authority of the bishop with regard to biblical interpretation, as informed by a list of historical apostolic succession and the reference to a gift, does seem to at least open the door for authoritative hermeneutics, where biblical interpretation is controlled by the authority of the bishop.³⁵

Forms of Authoritative Hermeneutics in Tertullian

As with Irenaeus, Tertullian's discussion about biblical interpretation is essentially restricted to his works against Gnosticism.³⁶ And again, the most important aspect

³³Farkasfalvy, "Theology of Scripture in St. Irenaeus," 325, 333.

³⁴See Karlfried Froehlich, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 14.

³⁵I agree with McRay's point that "if tradition [in the language of this article, I would say *church authority*] were the fundamental concern of Irenaeus it is inexplicable why, having gone at such length to trace out apostolic succession in Rome and to establish the validity of it for bishops everywhere [see *Against Heresies* 3.1-4], he does not make appeal to that authority rather than the Scripture. Instead, immediately after his extended discourse on the subject he . . . reverts to the Scripture." McRay, "Scripture and Tradition in Irenaeus," 9. This perspective is evident in the following statement, "Since, therefore, the tradition from the apostles does exist in the Church, and is permanent among us, let us revert to the Scriptural proof furnished by those apostles who did also write the Gospel." See Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.5.1 (*ANF* 1:417). Thus, McRay concludes, "throughout the entire work he makes his arguments from Scripture and not from authority resident in bishops." McRay, "Scripture and Tradition in Irenaeus," 10. Likewise, Hanson stipulates that Irenaeus "never believed that the Scriptures without the authoritative exegesis of the Church are incomprehensible." Hanson, *Tradition in the Early Church*, 108. From this perspective, Irenaeus' appeal to historical apostolic succession and the idea of gift of truth does not seem to be logically necessary for the construction of his account of proper biblical interpretation. However, his appeal to this form of church authority appears to open the door to some type of authoritative hermeneutics in church history. L. W. Countryman speaks of a "growing importance of the bishops as guarantors of apostolic doctrine. By the late second century, the catholic churches everywhere seem to have been firmly committed to the monarchical episcopate." L. W. Countryman, "Tertullian and the Regula Fidei," *Second Century: A Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2, no. 4 (1982): 223.

³⁶Tertullian's *Prescription against Heretics* is one of his most important treatises concerning the interpretation of the Scriptures. Geoffrey D. Dunn, "Tertullian's Scriptural Exegesis in *De Praescriptione Haereticorum*," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 14, no. 2 (2006): 141. Generally speaking, whereas Irenaeus basically wrote in opposition to Gnosticism,

of Tertullian's hermeneutic is also related to the concepts of the rule of truth/faith and tradition.³⁷

Tertullian "had a greater number of opponents: Gnostics, Jews, and pagans." Manlio Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church: An Historical Introduction to Patristic Exegesis* (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 1994), 24. According to J. Waszink, Tertullian "was driven at once into a series of controversies which were as various as they were continuous. The debate both with the pagan authorities and with many forms of the Christian faith which he felt constrained to regard as faulty or even corrupt, remained for him throughout his life a living reality and even a necessity." J. H. Waszink, "Tertullian's Principles and Methods of Exegesis," in *The Bible in the Early Church*, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland, 1993), 271. It seems that there is no modification in his hermeneutical understanding between the Catholic and the Montanist periods. Francis Aloysius Sullivan, *From Apostles to Bishops: The Development of the Episcopacy in the Early Church* (New York: Newman, 2001), 154–160. In a broad view, the writings of Tertullian date from 196 to 220. Nevertheless, they may be divided in two parts: "his fully Catholic period (196–206) and those showing the influence of his adherence to the 'New Prophecy' or Montanism." Ibid., 154. Montanism was a movement that "began around 173 in Phrygia, Asia Minor, where a certain Montanus and two women disciples of his began to utter prophecies in a state of ecstasy. Claiming to be spokespersons for the Paraclete, they predicted an imminent end of the world and called for more rigid standards of morality than currently observed in the Christian churches of their day. In particular they declared that the Paraclete restricted the forgiveness of grave sins to God, denying to the Church or its bishops the power to absolve them." Ibid. For further information about Montanism, see Sanford Fleming, *Montanism: Its Conflicts with the Church and Its Influence Upon Orthodoxy* (Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Baptist Divinity School, 1925); John De Soyres, *Montanism and the Primitive Church: A Study in the Ecclesiastical History of the Second Century* (Charleston, SC: Nabu, 2010); William Tabbernee, *Montanist Inscriptions and Testimonia: Epigraphic Sources Illustrating the History of Montanism* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997); Christine Trevett, *Montanism: Gender, Authority and the New Prophecy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Although his later writings became more critical against the Catholic bishops, "Tertullian remained orthodox in regard to the basic Christian dogmas." Sullivan, *From Apostles to Bishops*, 154.

³⁷As Bryan Litfin indicates, "Tertullian did indeed enunciate scattered exegetical principles that seem to be vitally important to him. Yet to expect these statements, which were occasional in nature, to serve as the keys for unlocking Tertullian's interpretive system is misguided at best. Such an approach focuses undue attention on hermeneutical method, a preoccupation which did not really characterize the ancient authors. When it comes to Tertullian, we find much more emphasis on the specific content of doctrinal matters. ... It is his use of the *regula fidei* that will serve as the master key for unlocking the mystery of his biblical interpretation." Therefore, "to understand his hermeneutics, we must examine Tertullian's appropriation of the *regula fidei* as an overarching interpretative device which provide the meta-narrative to which individual scriptures must conform." Bryan M. Litfin, "Tertullian's Use of the Regula Fidei as an Interpretive Device in *Adversus Marcionem*," in *Studia Patristica: Papers Presented at the Fourteenth International Conference on*

Froehlich highlights that, for Tertullian, “the true battlefield is not interpretation but the very right to use Scriptures at all.”³⁸ According to Tertullian, only the church may interpret the Scriptures: “from what and through whom, and when, and to whom, has been handed down that rule, by which men become Christians? For wherever it shall be manifest that the true Christian rule and faith shall be, *there* will likewise be the true Scriptures and expositions thereof, and all the Christian traditions.”³⁹ In this quotation, Tertullian characterizes the rule of faith⁴⁰ in the following way: (1) it has been handed down to the church; (2) it is the instrument by which people become Christians; (3) it is the correct faith.

Indeed, the rule of faith is the guarantee for Tertullian that the church of his day is the apostolic church, and vice versa: “we demonstrate whether this doctrine of ours, of which we have now given the rule, has its origin in the tradition of the apostles, and whether all other *doctrines* do not *ipso facto* proceed from falsehood. We hold communion with the apostolic churches because our doctrine is in no respect different *from theirs*.”⁴¹ Likewise, the existence of only one rule and

Patristic Studies Held in Oxford 2003, ed. Frances M. Young, M. J. Edwards, and P. M. Parvis (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 405, 407.

³⁸Froehlich, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, 14.

³⁹Tertullian, *Praescr.* 19 (ANF 3:251, 252).

⁴⁰Tertullian portrays the rule of faith in terms of a summary of the creed, which includes (1) the Trinity; (2) the Creation; (3) the Incarnation; (4) the Passion and Resurrection; (5) The judgment and salvation. “Now, with regard to this rule of faith—that we may from this point acknowledge what it is which we defend—it is, you must know, that which prescribes the belief that there is one only God, and that He is none other than the Creator of the world, who produced all things out of nothing through His own Word, first of all sent forth; that this Word is called His Son, *and*, under the name of God, was seen “in diverse manners” by the patriarchs, heard at all times in the prophets, at last brought down by the Spirit and Power of the Father into the Virgin Mary, was made flesh in her womb, and, being born of her, went forth as Jesus Christ; thenceforth He preached the new law and the new promise of the kingdom of heaven, worked miracles; having been crucified, He rose again the third day; (then) having ascended into the heavens, He sat at the right hand of the Father; sent instead of Himself the Power of the Holy Ghost to lead such as believe; will come with glory to take the saints to the enjoyment of everlasting life and of the heavenly promises, and to condemn the wicked to everlasting fire, after the resurrection of both these classes shall have happened, together with the restoration of their flesh.” *Ibid.*, 13 (ANF 3:249). See also Tertullian, *Prax.* 2 (ANF 3:598); Tertullian, *Virg.* 1 (ANF 4:27).

⁴¹Tertullian, *Praescr.* 21 (ANF 3:252, 253). “The churches, although they are so many and so great, comprise but the one primitive church, (rounded) by the apostles, from which they all (spring). In this way all are primitive, and all are apostolic, whilst they are all proved to be one, in (unbroken) unity, by their peaceful communion, and title of brotherhood, and bond of hospitality,—privileges which no other rule directs than the one tradition of the selfsame mystery.” *Ibid.*, 20 (ANF 3:252).

tradition in the various churches throughout the world attests that they are the apostolic church.

Furthermore, the unity of the churches in terms of doctrine indicates that they are not corrupted.⁴² Thus, Tertullian concludes, “the Scriptures are the property of the church,” since “there is a unity of doctrine between the apostles and the apostolic churches which proves that the apostolic churches possess the truth.”⁴³ Conversely, the heretics do not have the right to use or to interpret the Scriptures.

At the end of his description of the rule of faith, Tertullian asserts that “this rule ... was taught by Christ, and raises amongst ourselves no other questions than those which heresies introduce, and which make men heretics.”⁴⁴ In other words, the rule of faith provides sufficient information for Christian belief, while the heretics raise questions regarding additional information. Tertullian adds that the church does not have problems interpreting Scripture, because if Christians understand the rule of faith, they do not need to know anything else.⁴⁵

This idea of the sufficiency of the rule appears elsewhere in Tertullian’s writings as part of a response to someone who had additional questions: “be quite aware that it is better for you to remain in ignorance, lest you should come to know what you ought not, because you have acquired the knowledge of what you ought to know. ‘Thy faith,’ He says, ‘hath saved thee,’ not *observe* your skill in the Scriptures. Now, faith has been deposited in the rule; it has a law, and (in the observance thereof) salvation.”⁴⁶

In summary, Tertullian affirms that proper biblical interpretation belongs to the church, which seems to be a form of authoritative hermeneutics (biblical interpretation controlled by church authority), and he appears to suggest that the rule of faith should be used to delimit the issues (and even the scope of the issues) to be interpreted.

A Brief Analysis

Before evaluating the forms of authoritative hermeneutics indicated in this article, it is necessary to provide a brief comparison between Irenaeus and Tertullian. Based on the preceding description, it could be said that both Irenaeus and Tertullian affirm the rule of truth/faith and church authority as important or even necessary keys for biblical interpretation. However, there are significant distinctions between them. First, Irenaeus focuses on the idea of apostolic

⁴²Ibid., 28 (ANF 3:256).

⁴³Grant, *The Bible in the Church*, 88.

⁴⁴Tertullian, *Praeser.* 13 (ANF 3:249).

⁴⁵“To know nothing in opposition to the rule (of faith), is to know all things.” Ibid., 14 (ANF 3:250).

⁴⁶Ibid.

succession, whereas Tertullian emphasizes “the apostolic churches themselves as bearers of the apostolic tradition.”⁴⁷ In contrast to Irenaeus, Tertullian does not mention the certain gift of truth received by the bishops in apostolic succession. Second, Irenaeus tends to discuss the rule of truth from the perspective of a systematic theologian (the rule as an organic system), whereas Tertullian appears to discuss the rule more from the perspective of a lawyer (the rule as a legal norm).⁴⁸ For Irenaeus, the preaching of the apostles is not different from the content of Scripture.⁴⁹ The system of truth is found in Scripture and is the real meaning of the Bible. This idea seems to imply that the rule of truth/faith conveyed the basic logic of Scripture. If this is the case, the rule would have had a positive hermeneutical function, as it would have guided the interpretation of Scripture on the basis of its own logic. By contrast, Tertullian runs the risk of subjugating the interpretation of the Scriptures to a legal norm, the rule of faith. As Eric Osborn points out, “in the hands of Tertullian” the rule of faith “begins as a barrier to enquiry” that “provides a basis for reasoning which limits the fantasy of heretics and unites the church universal.”⁵⁰ In this case, the rule of faith would have had a negative hermeneutical function. Instead of guiding interpretation, the rule would have limited it.

An important point to be discussed in this analysis is the plausibility of the use of the rule of faith in biblical interpretation. The question of plausibility is complex because of the lack of information available to us regarding the exact content of the rule of faith. Overall, as I have indicated above, the references to the rule of faith show that there is no fixed formulation, which may point to the fact that it was an oral teaching. Oscar Cullmann holds that the rule was “transmitted in oral form” and “accepted as a norm alongside Scripture because it was considered as having been fixed by the apostles. What matters is not whether the apostolic tradition was oral or written, but that it was fixed by the apostles.”⁵¹ While I do not necessarily reject Cullmann’s view, I am afraid that we cannot affirm it without hesitation because we do not know exactly the content of the rule. Judging from the different references to the rule in Irenaeus and Tertullian, it seems that the content of the rule was compatible with the content of the Scriptures. However, it must be reiterated that is not easy to determine with precision the content of an oral teaching. As far as the rule is considered to have

⁴⁷Sullivan, *From Apostles to Bishops*, 170.

⁴⁸See Robert L. Calhoun, *Scripture, Creed, Theology: Lectures on the History of Christian Doctrine in the First Centuries*, ed. George A. Lindbeck (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011), 156.

⁴⁹See Eric F. Osborn, “Reason and the Rule of Faith in the Second Century AD,” in *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in Honour of Henry Chadwick*, ed. Rowan Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 40.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 40, 54.

⁵¹Oscar Cullmann, “The Tradition,” in *The Bible in the Early Church*, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland, 1993), 138.

been truly apostolic, it would have been a positive hermeneutical key in Irenaean fashion for biblical interpretation. On the other hand, if the oral rule underwent modifications from the original apostolic teaching, then this modified rule would be a negative hermeneutical key subjugating Scripture to church tradition. To be sure, someone could insert the Irenaean argument of historical apostolic succession to support the idea that the rule of faith was not modified and rather represents pure apostolic teaching. Nevertheless, this argument tends to blur the difference between apostles and bishops, or between “apostolic tradition and ecclesiastical tradition,” to borrow Cullmann’s terminology.⁵²

Cullmann uses “the term ‘apostolic’ in its strict historical sense, and not in the extended sense often given to it by Catholic scholars who identify apostolic and ecclesiastical [or post-apostolic] tradition.”⁵³ His distinction between these two types of tradition is based on the notion of the uniqueness of the apostolate, which is an “office which cannot be delegated. According to Acts 1:22 the apostle is . . . unique, because [of his] direct witness of the resurrection.” Therefore, “the bishops succeed the apostles but on a completely different level.” Actually, “the apostles did not appoint other apostles, but bishops.” To be sure, “the Church also bears witness to Christ. But it cannot bear that direct witness which belongs to the apostles. Its witness is a *derived* witness, because it does not rest on the direct revelation which was the privilege of the apostle alone as an eye-witness.”⁵⁴ When this distinction between apostles and bishops is blurred, the idea of apostolic succession in the context of biblical hermeneutics tends to subjugate biblical interpretation to church authority.

Conclusion

To conclude, even if we assume that the rule of truth/faith in Irenaeus and Tertullian is indeed a pure oral summary of the apostolic teaching, its use in biblical interpretation has two main limitations: the scope of the rule and the exegetical ambiguities of this method. Understandably, the rule could be considered “a reliable guide to the correct interpretation of a given biblical text,” since it “was a summary of the overall scriptural story.”⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the richness of the Scriptural revelation cannot be reduced to a summary. The rule should provide general guidelines for interpretation, not confine it. This seems to be the problem of Tertullian, insofar as he seems to limit the significant meaning

⁵²Ibid., 129, 130.

⁵³Ibid., 109.

⁵⁴Ibid., 127, 128. See also Von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries*, 295.

⁵⁵Litfin, “Tertullian’s Use of the Regula Fidei as an Interpretive Device in *Adversus Marcionem*,” 410.

of Scripture to the rule of faith. Moreover, as a summary of the Christian belief, the rule is helpful only to judge the results (the content) of the interpretation, but it does not necessarily guide the specific method (the process) of this interpretation.⁵⁶ As a result, Irenaeus and Tertullian were quite ambiguous in their exegesis. They interpreted some passages literally, and others allegorically.⁵⁷ In Tertullian, for instance, “the Scriptures were to be interpreted in whatever way best supported the faith believed and lived by the Christian community.”⁵⁸

In summary, the forms of controlled hermeneutics found in Irenaeus and Tertullian are noteworthy in the following aspects: (1) they emphasize the church as the *locus* for the interpretation of the Bible; and (2) they highlight the summary of the apostolic belief as a guide for interpretation. However, their respective approaches have significant drawbacks: (1) Irenaeus’ apostolic succession tends to ignore the distinction between apostolic and ecclesiastical traditions; (2) Tertullian’s hermeneutic tends to restrict biblical interpretation to a summary of beliefs; and (3) neither Irenaeus’ or Tertullian’s hermeneutic provides a specific methodology for biblical interpretation, but only controls the results of the interpretation. Ultimately, these drawbacks may lead (or at least open the door) to some form of church authority in biblical interpretation.

⁵⁶As Kugel and Greer indicate, “the Rule of faith is a negative rather than a positive principle. That is, it excludes incorrect interpretations but does not require a correct one. Of a given passage there may be many interpretations that are valid because they do not contradict the Rule of faith, but we cannot be sure of its true meaning.” Kugel and Greer, *Early Biblical Interpretation*, 178.

⁵⁷For further information about allegorical interpretation in Irenaeus and Tertullian, see Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, 21–24; Kugel and Greer, *Early Biblical Interpretation*, 178; R. P. C. Hanson, “Notes on Tertullian’s Interpretation of Scripture,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 12, no. 2 (1961): 273–279.

⁵⁸Dunn, “Tertullian’s Scriptural Exegesis in *De Praescriptione Haereticorum*,” 155. According to Grant, for Tertullian, “the only way, ultimately, for him to determine whether to interpret a passage literally or to allegorize it was to see whether or not its plain meaning was in accordance with the teaching of the church.” Grant, *The Bible in the Church*, 90.

GLOBAL SOUTH CHRISTIANITY AND ADVENTISM: TRENDS AND IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract

In recent decades, Christianity has experienced two major phenomena as a religion: its decline in the global North (Europe and North America) and its rise in the global South (Africa, Asia, and South America). The Seventh-day Adventist Church as a denomination has experienced similar trends. The global South has become the home to the majority of Adventists in the world and the global North is now home to only a minority. Studies show that this southward movement in Christian and Adventist demographics may continue for several decades. Studies also indicate a steady growth of other world religions on the continent of Africa, including Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. This development poses several challenges to Christianity in general and Adventism in particular, especially the challenge of how to cope with the influx of new converts, most of whom are young, poor, orphaned, uneducated, and unemployed. The conclusion of this study suggests that there is need for fresh thinking and better strategizing in order to respond responsibly to the challenges and to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the global South phenomenon and its side effects.

Keywords: Global South Christianity, Global North Christianity, world religions, Brandt report, Non-Aligned Movement, Global South Adventism, Global North Adventism.

Introduction

As we stand in the middle of the second decade of the twenty-first century, the world is witnessing a decline of Christianity in Europe and America. These regions that were Christianity's stronghold for many centuries are now becoming less and less Christian. On the other hand, the world is witnessing an increase in the prevalence of Christianity in Africa, Asia, and South America—regions which used to be considered non-Christian, pagan, or heathen. In the past few decades, these regions have registered Christians in record numbers—enough to earn these continents the reputation of being the next Christendom.¹

¹Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Though these trends are true of Christianity generally, similar trends and patterns characterize the Seventh-day Adventist denomination in particular. For the first century of Adventism's growth, America and Europe were the regions with the largest number of Adventists in the world. However, statistics show that this is no longer the case. These two northern regions, comparatively speaking, are now home to only a minority of Adventists.² Instead, countries in Africa, Asia, and South America, which used to have a small Adventist presence, now have the most Adventists in the world. The center of Christianity in general and Adventism in particular has shifted to Africa, Asia, and South America, and it is likely that these regions will remain the new strongholds of the Christian religion for decades or even centuries to come.

In this article, I seek to explore these demographic trends in detail. I first examine the situation in Christianity generally, tracing its decline in Europe and North America and its simultaneous rise in Africa, Asia, and South America.³ Then I examine the parallel development in Seventh-day Adventism in particular. Regarding Seventh-day Adventism, I demonstrate that Africa has become the new center of the denomination, numerically speaking. Finally, I explore some of the implications of this phenomenon for the Seventh-day Adventist Church on the African continent, detailing both the challenges and the opportunities it presents.

First, I must provide definitions of three related concepts that are used throughout this article: *global North*, *global South*, and *global South Christianity*. *Global North* is a term used to describe the richest northern regions of the world, which include North America, Western Europe, and developed parts of East Asia such as Japan, China, and South Korea.⁴ On the other hand, the term *global South* is used to describe the developing countries of the world, most of which are found in Africa, South America, and developing Asia, including the Middle East. The term *global South Christianity* refers to the presence of Christianity in the global South as the result of the massive Christian demographics moving from the global

²According to G. T. Ng, Executive Secretary of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, the global North claimed only 8 percent of the world membership in 2014. <https://www.adventistarchives.org/transcript-20150703am.pdf> (accessed March 18, 2016).

³The phrases "new center of Christianity" and "new center of Adventism" as used in this article simply as an acknowledgement that the global South is now the region with the largest number of Christians in the world, as opposed to the global North, which used to be home to the largest number of Christians for many centuries. The phrase as used here has nothing to do with economic prowess or authority.

⁴This article leaves Australia out of the discussion even though it displays characteristics similar to Europe and America. The reason for this exclusion is that in this work the author is not trying to compare global trends in the northern hemisphere and southern hemisphere, but rather in the global North and global South. For an elaborate definition of the terms *global North* and *global South*, please see their definitions and descriptions as presented in this essay.

North (Europe and America) to the global South (Africa, Asia, and South America). With these definitions in mind, let us now look at where Christianity stands among major world religions.

Christianity among the World Religions

Given the wars, police brutality, genocides, xenophobic acts, international terrorism, and other atrocities that innocent people experience in the world today, we might be tempted to conclude that the world is becoming less and less religious. Statistics, however, point in the opposite direction.⁵ In 1970, religious people represented 82 percent of the general world population. Forty years later, in 2010, this number had gone up to 88 percent, with a projected increase to almost 90 percent by 2020.⁶ Evidently, then, the people of the world today are more inclined to embrace religiosity, not less.

As the global inclination toward religiosity increases, Christianity is just one of the many religions that work to satisfy the demand. Christianity is currently still the largest religion in the world today, but it has many rivals. Traditionally, Islam has been its closest rival, and Christianity is currently being outpaced by Islam when it comes to general growth trends. For example, in 1970 Christians made up 33.2 percent of the global population. Muslims represented 15.6 percent, while other groups such as Hindus, Buddhists, atheists, agnostics, adherents of Chinese folk religions, ethno-religionists, and others represented 42.8 percent of the world population. By 2020, the percentage of Christians is expected to go up by at least 1 percentage point, but the percentage of Muslims is expected to increase by 8.3 percentage points.⁷ This shows that while the world may be becoming more and more religious, that does not necessarily mean it is becoming more and more Christian. If anything, these statistics suggest that Islam has been making more gains than Christianity and may continue to do so for a number of years to come.

⁵Generally, religion is associated with peace, love, honesty, and justice, which stand in opposition to brutality, genocide, terrorism, etc. The increase in violent acts in the world may give the impression that the world is facing such unfortunate acts because it is not religious enough.

⁶For a detailed treatment of this subject, see “Christianity in its Global Context, 1970–2020: Society, Religion, and Mission,” <http://www.gordonconwell.com/netcommunity/CSGCResources/ChristianityinitsGlobalContext.pdf> (accessed April 30, 2015). I have found this report by the Center for the Study of Global Christianity based at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary a useful resource in this study. Their report was released in June 2013.

⁷Ibid.

However, on the whole, with 33.4 percent of the world population currently, Christianity still has the most followers among world religions.⁸ This general picture of where Christianity stands as a religion brings us to the discussion of the concepts of global South and global South Christianity.

*The Decline of Christianity in the Global North and
Its Rise in the Global South*

In the past two decades or so, experts in world Christianity have been using the concepts of “global South” and “global South Christianity” to describe the demographic trends that have been taking place in the Christian world.⁹ I find these concepts useful in discussing the two phenomena that are happening in Christianity currently—the decline of Christianity in Europe and North America, and its rise in Africa, Asia, and South America. Although the world has traditionally been divided between east and west, dividing between north and south is more applicable in a study of this nature. Before I show how this works, I wish to provide the context within which the concept of the global North / global South division emerged.

Global South and the Politics of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Even though the concepts of the global North and global South are widely used in religious circles today, especially in Christianity, “global South” as a rallying concept for the developing countries was born in a secular, politico-economic environment, and it took several decades before it found its relevance in religious discourse. The term originated in the politico-economic environment of the 1950s, when emerging African and Asian nations decided to form a protective united front against the ideological influences of the most developed countries of the world at the time. These nations wanted to distinguish themselves from what then seemed the unbending ideological separation between the capitalist West and communist East. This divide ended up splitting the world into two blocs, which in turn put a lot of pressure on the developing countries of Africa, Asia, and South America.

⁸The annual “Status of Global Christianity” survey published by the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, vol. 39, no. 1, indicates that in 2015 there were over 2.3 billion Christians in the world, which is about 33.4 percent of the world population.

⁹Christian writers have been using the terms *global South*, *global Christianity*, and *global church* for the last two decades or so. See, e.g., Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*; Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Mark A. Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009).

In order to free themselves from the ideological and political bondage of the time, leaders of some African and Asian countries met for a conference in Bandung, Indonesia, April 18–24, 1955—about a decade after the Second World War—and proclaimed their membership in the Non-Aligned Movement.¹⁰ The formation of the Non-Aligned Movement created a common platform on which the developing countries would stand together and speak to the countries of the Western and Eastern blocs in one voice.¹¹

Although the Non-Aligned Movement was a first attempt at moving beyond the bilateral division of the world between East and West, the Independent Commission on International Development Issues, first chaired by Willy Brandt (former chancellor of Germany) in 1980, soon provided another formula for how the world should be divided. The first report of this commission, *North-South: A Programme for Survival*, also famously known as the Brandt report, depicted the international community as split not between the capitalist West and communist East, as was the case before, but rather between the rich North and the developing South.¹² When the report was published in 1980, it brought into common use the idea of the global North and global South.

As has been suggested previously, the global North is generally understood to include regions such as North America, Western Europe, and developed parts of East Asia such as Japan, China, and South Korea. On the other hand, the global South is made up of Africa, South America, and developing Asia, including the Middle East. The economic disparities that the Brandt report originally sought to describe remain today: Even though there has been some progress in terms of economic growth and poverty reduction in the global South, generally, the North remains rich and the South poor. In addition to reflecting economic disparities, the division between North and South also reflects realities of world politics and power balancing.¹³

¹⁰For a concise description and history of the Non-Aligned Movement, see “The Non-Aligned Movement: Description and History,” <http://www.nam.gov.za/background/history.htm> (accessed April 12, 2015). See also Dietmar Rothermund, “The era of non-alignment,” in *The Non-Aligned Movement and the Cold War: Delhi-Bandung-Belgrade*, eds. Natasha Miskovic, Harald Fischer-Tine, and Nada Boskovska (London: Routledge, 2014), 19–34.

¹¹Guy Arnold, *The A to Z of the Non-Aligned Movement and Third World* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 38.

¹²See *North-South: A Programme for Survival* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1980).

¹³It is important to mention here that the North is home to four of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council: France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The South is represented by only one country, China.

Global South Christianity

Although the concept of the global South was first coined in the corridors of political power and economics, Christian thinkers found the concept helpful in describing the shift in the demographic center of Christianity from the North to the South. In Christianity, the terms *global South* and *global South Christianity* have been popularized by a number of Christian writers and thinkers from Africa, Europe, and America.¹⁴ Through their works, these writers have brought this concept to the level of almost regular use in Christian discourse.

In the language of the Brandt report, global South Christianity, geographically speaking, is found in those regions of the world that are considered least developed.¹⁵ These nations share a number of factors that distinguish them from the North. Not only are they generally poor, but they also tend to have the highest population growth rates in the world¹⁶ and the highest maternal and child mortality rates in the world.¹⁷ Religiously speaking, they are also nations in which Christianity is spreading rapidly.

The Decline of Christianity in the Global North

A number of indicators show that Christianity as a religion is in decline in the global North, where it was the strongest for many centuries. Even though from 1900 on the number of Christians grew significantly in these regions, there are indications that that trend has changed. For example, the number of Christians in Europe grew from 381 million in 1900 to 492 million in 1970, and then to 588 million in 2010, but it is projected to plummet to 530 million by 2050. This means that there will be 58 million fewer Christians in Europe come 2050 than they were in 2010; a decrease of about 10 percent.

¹⁴These writers and thinkers include Philip Jenkins, Kwame Bediako, Lamin Sanneh, and Mark A. Noll. See Sanneh's *Whose Religion Is Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); Jenkins's *New Faces of Christianity*, or Noll's *New Shape of World Christianity*.

¹⁵Generally, the Brandt Report seems to cover the same countries considered as Global South in this study. The so-called Brandt Line was carefully done as to avoid including Australia as part of this understanding.

¹⁶"The 20 Countries with the Highest Population Growth Rate in 2014 (Compared to the Previous Year)," <http://www.statista.com/statistics/264687/countries-with-the-highest-population-growth-rate/> (accessed April 21, 2015).

¹⁷"Maternal Mortality Rate," *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2223rank.html> (accessed April 18, 2015).

The declining membership in Christian churches in Europe can be partly attributed to the fact that Europe's general population is shrinking.¹⁸ But even taking into account a decline in the general population, Europeans are increasingly unlikely to embrace Christianity. For example, the United Kingdom, a nation that has been explicitly Christian for more than a millennium, has recently witnessed the number of people who consider themselves Christian falling at an alarming speed. According to the 2011 census, there were 4.1 million fewer people identifying as Christians in UK in 2011 than in 2001 despite the overall population growth.¹⁹ While this decrease affects both genders and all age groups, it seems a particular male age group is affected the most: the male 35 to 39 age group decreased the most, with 47 percent reporting as Christian in 2011 compared to 66 percent in 2001.²⁰

The 2011 UK census reveals one more reality about religious dynamics in the country: the number of people with no religion is growing. Indeed, the number of individuals who claim no religion has increased across all age groups, particularly for those in their early twenties and early forties. Nearly 44.7 percent of the people of England do not belong to any religion at all. The result is that people do not see the point of becoming Christian. This reality raises concerns about the future of Christianity in the UK in particular and Europe in general.

Evidence shows that other European countries are seeing a similar decline in the influence of Christianity, a religion that has shaped much of Europe's way of life for centuries. Take, for example, the current situation in the Netherlands. In the next decade alone, it is projected that the Netherlands will close more than two-thirds of its Roman Catholic churches. The report also shows that Protestant denominations in this country are planning to close more than 700 of their churches.²¹ It seems that the decline is not happening along the Catholic-Protestant divide, but rather affects Christianity as a whole regardless of historical

¹⁸“Population of Europe 2014,” <http://www.worldpopulationstatistics.com/population-of-europe-2014/>. While the population of the so-called EU25 is expected to increase from 456.8 in 2004 to 470.1 million in 2025, the projection shows that the population of these countries will decrease to 449.8 million in 2050—a decrease of 20 million inhabitants from 2025.

¹⁹Projections show that the population of Europe was expected to grow between 2005 and 2025.

²⁰See Office of National Statistics, “What Does the Census Tell Us about Religion in 2011?” http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_310454.pdf.

²¹See “Europe's Empty Churches Go on Sale.” <http://www.wsj.com/articles/europes-empty-churches-go-on-sale-1420245359>.

labels. The decline of Christianity in the Netherlands and the UK represents the reality on the European continent as a whole.²²

North America is following the same general pattern. In North America, the number of Christians grew from 79 million in 1900 to 211 million in 1970, and then to 286 million in 2010; here, the number of Christians is projected to reach 333 million by 2050.²³ Although that growth may sound strong, Christianity's status is more precarious than it may first appear. The general population of North America, unlike that of Europe, is projected to continue growing beyond the 2025 mark.²⁴ And although the number of Christians is expected to increase by 47 million in the four-decade period from 2010–2050, this is as compared to the increase of 75 million in the previous four decades, 1970–2010. So, while the general population will have increased by 28.5 percent, the number of Christians will have increased by only 16.4 percent within the same time period.

Like Europe, North America is also becoming less and less Christian and more increasingly without religion. Recent studies and reports have consistently shown this to be the case. For instance, in 1990, 86 percent of Americans called themselves Christian. Twenty years later, the number of people in North America who identify as Christian has fallen to 75 percent. As is the case with Europe, the decrease in Christians in North America seems to give way to an increase in individuals who belong to no religion.²⁵ Considering these prevailing trends in both Europe and North America, it seems unlikely that these two regions will be able to reclaim their reputation as the regions of the world with the largest number of Christians—the reputation they enjoyed for a long time.

²²Pew Research Center data, presented by the Wall Street Journal, highlights the degree to which the European population reports no religious affiliation: France (28%), Germany (24.7%), Italy (12.4%), Netherlands (42.1%), and the United Kingdom (21.3%).

²³World Christian Database, <http://www.worldchristiandata-base.org/wcd> (accessed May 14, 2015).

²⁴The projections show that the population of North America will increase to 401 million in 2050, an increase of about 50 million inhabitants from 2025. See “10 Projections for the Global Population in 2050,” <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/02/03/10-projections-for-the-global-population-in-2050/> (accessed May 14, 2015); “United States of America 2025,” <http://populationpyramid.net/united-states-of-america/2025/> (accessed May 14, 2015).

²⁵“Christianity Faces Sharp Decline as Americans Are Becoming Even Less Affiliated with Religion,” <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/05/12/christianity-faces-sharp-decline-as-americans-are-becoming-even-less-affiliated-with-religion/> (accessed May 14, 2015).

The Rise of Christianity in the Global South

While Christianity is declining in the global North, it is on the rise in the global South, and this region is becoming the center of the Christian religion for the first time since Christianity's inception in the first century AD. The regions of the world that were on the receiving end of Christian missionary activities until very recently are quickly becoming Christianity's stronghold, at least demographically. At the beginning of the twentieth century, about 83 percent of all Christians in the world lived in Europe and North America. By all standards, this was a significant number of Christians to live in only two northern regions. However, somewhere the tide changed, and now experts project that by the year 2050, more than 72 percent of all Christians will live in the global South.²⁶ This scenario is made possible by the fact that while the number of Christians in the global North has been consistently decreasing and is projected to continue to do so for decades, the number of Christians in the global South has been consistently increasing and is projected to continue to do so for decades to come.

The demographic shift in Christianity toward the global South can be traced as far back as the first decade of the twentieth century. In 1900, the population of Africa was 108 million people, 10 million of whom were Christian. As the population of Africa grew from 108 million in 1900 to 357 million in 1970, the number of Christians grew from 10 million to 143 million in the same period. Thus, while the general population increased by about 231 percent, the number of Christians increased by 1,330 percent within the same time period. Asia also saw the number of Christians soar. The general population of Asia grew from 956 million in 1900 to 2.1 billion people in 1970, an increase of about 120 percent. In that same time, the number of Christians grew from 22 million in 1900 to 96 million in 1970, an increase of 336 percent. South America experienced a tremendous increase as well. The general population grew from 65 million people in 1900 to 285 million in 1970, an increase of about 338 percent. In the same time, the number of Christians grew from 62 million in 1900 to 270 in 1970, an increase of about 335 percent.²⁷

This trend has continued on all three continents since 1970. By the year 2010, Africa, Asia, and South America had 1.4 billion Christians, compared to 874 million Christians in Europe and North America.²⁸ In other words, in just one

²⁶Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, xi.

²⁷See David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1:13, 14.

²⁸Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 2, 3. It is important to note here that this set of statistics is not trying to compare the ratios of Christians to the general population in the

century, the global North lost its place as the region with the largest number of Christians in the world. This shift also means that of the 2.3 billion Christians alive in the world in 2010, Africa, Asia, and South America claimed over 60 percent, leaving Europe and North America sharing only 38 percent. For the first time in the history of Christianity, there are more Christians living in these southern regions than in the other regions of the world. Judging from this reality and the demographic projections given, we cannot help but conclude that the center of Christianity has already shifted to the global South.

Our study so far has revealed that Christianity as a whole has been impacted by unprecedented demographic trends. However, it must be noted here that Christianity as a religion is no longer a single, unified body, as it used to be before the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation. Today, there are said to be more than 33,000 Christian denominations in the world, which function under varied models of church governance and use different methods and strategies to reach the inhabitants of the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.²⁹ This also means that the global South phenomenon presented above impacts these denominations differently, and consequently these individual Christian denominations have to respond to the multiple challenges posed by the global South phenomenon. In the next section of this article, I attempt to demonstrate how individual denominations are impacted by the reality of global South Christianity. To do so, I have selected one Christian denomination—the Seventh-day Adventist Church—for the simple reason that as a Protestant denomination the Adventist Church is considered one of the fastest-growing churches in the world.³⁰ It also has an established presence in more than two hundred countries and territories globally.³¹ For these reasons, I think the Adventist Church can be a good example of how individual Christian denominations manifest the characteristics of global South Christianity already discussed and how this phenomenon may impact the way churches carry out their missions. With this in mind, let us now turn to the Adventist Church and see how the global South dynamics have impacted it as a denomination.

global South and global North, but rather to state a general fact that the number of Christians currently living in the global South is bigger than that in the global North.

²⁹See Barrett, Kurian, and Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 1:10.

³⁰Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra, “The Season of Adventists,” *Christianity Today*, January/February 2015, 18.

³¹See G. T. Ng, “To Every Nation.” <http://www.adventistreview.org/1515-18> (accessed August 1, 2016).

Global South Adventism: Africa as the New Center of Adventism

Seventh-day Adventism as a Christian denomination has experienced its share of the global South Christianity phenomenon. The number of Adventists living in the global South regions of Africa, Asia, and South America is growing by leaps and bounds, and the former Adventist stronghold regions of North America and Europe have become the minority.

The Rise of Global South Adventism

The Adventist Church was founded in the United States of America in the middle of the nineteenth century and subsequently extended its presence to Europe, Australia, and the rest of the world. In the first fifty years, most Adventist activities were centered in the United States.³² By the turn of the century, Europe had become a second center of the denomination. In 1902, the church still had more organized institutions and administrative entities in North America and Europe than it had in the rest of the world combined. For instance, there were a total of sixty-six local conferences and mission fields³³ in North America and Europe (fifty-four in the former and twelve in the latter), while Africa, Asia, and South America combined had only eleven.³⁴ In 1903, when the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists was in the process of moving its headquarters from Battle Creek, Michigan, to Washington, DC, 88 percent of all Adventists in the world lived in North America and Europe; Africa and Asia claimed only 2.9 percent of the world membership.³⁵

By the very beginning of the twentieth century, however, the rise of global South Adventism was already in the making. During the last decade of the nineteenth century and first decade of the twentieth century, Adventists in North America and Europe sent a significant number of missionaries to work in countries in Africa, Asia, and South America.³⁶ This initiative propelled the

³²For about half a century, the headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church was at Battle Creek, Michigan, in the United States.

³³Some European countries had mission fields in other countries; however, this does not include those territories.

³⁴From the years 1895–1903, there were no yearbooks, but the vital information appeared in quarterly issues of the General Conference Bulletin. For the information about local conferences and mission fields that were organized by 1902, see *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1904), 7.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶See Bruce Lee Bauer, “Congregational and Mission Structures and How The Seventh-day Adventist Church Has Related To Them” (D.Miss. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1983). Between 1890 and 1937, Adventists entered 110 countries worldwide.

growth of the Adventist church in the global South. Adventist membership in these regions grew rapidly, so that by 1970, the distribution of church membership worldwide had changed significantly: the percentage of Adventists in Africa, Asia, and South America had grown to 50.4 percent of the world membership (up from 2.9 percent in 1903). At the same time, the percentage of Adventist members in North America and Europe had shrunk from 88 percent in 1903 to just 29.3 percent. Fifteen years later, in 1985, the number of Adventists in the southern regions made up 58 percent of the world membership, while North America and Europe claimed only 18.4 percent. In 1985, for the first time, Africa surpassed North America in membership by at least 1,000 members. Since then, the southward movement has not been reversed.

The first decade of the third millennium continued to see Africa, Asia, and South America recording more and more gains, so that by 2010, global South Adventism claimed just over two-thirds (68.2 percent) of all Adventists worldwide. At this point, Africa had consolidated its place as the continent with the largest number of Adventists in the world, claiming more than 6.3 million members, or 37 percent of the sixteen million members worldwide. Asia took second place, with more than 3.3 million members, or 19.4 percent. On the other hand, North America and Europe combined had only 9 percent of the world membership.³⁷ By the year 2013, global South Adventism claimed about 70 percent of the world membership, and Africa alone reported more than seven million members, which was about 39 percent of the world membership of about 18 million.³⁸

It is also insightful to note that by 2013, the three East African countries of Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda, with a combined population of about 133 million people, had 1.5 million Adventists; this was more than all Adventists living in the United States of America, with a population of over 318 million people.³⁹ Early in 2015, Zambia became the first country in Africa, and only the fourth in the world, to celebrate its first one-million-member harvest. The other three countries that have reached that milestone are the United States of America, Brazil, and India.

About 50 percent of these countries were in the global South. For example, the Adventist Church in Germany sent two missionaries to start Adventist missions in Tanzania (then German East Africa) in 1903, and the British Union Conference sent two missionaries to start Adventist work in Kenya (British East Africa) in 1906.

³⁷Information about the demographics of individual Adventist Church entities can be found in the Seventh-day Adventist Yearbooks online at <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/Forms/AllItems.aspx>.

³⁸*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2015).

³⁹Information about the demographics of individual countries of East Africa plus the North American Division, can be found in the 2014 *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* online at <http://www.adventistyearbook.org/default.aspx?page=ViewAdmFieldSubEntities&EntityType=A&AdmFieldID=EAKU> (accessed January 31, 2015).

Of these four countries, all but the United States are from the global South.⁴⁰ It is also insightful to mention here that it took the worldwide Adventist denomination about a hundred years to reach one million members (hitting that mark in 1957).⁴¹ It has taken Zambia about the same amount of time to reach the mark of one million Adventist members within its borders.⁴²

While Africa is the continent with the largest number of Adventists in the world, in 2010 Adventists still represented only 1.3 percent of all Christians on the continent, and as of 2015 Adventists made up only 0.63 percent of all Africans on the continent. Looking at it this way, it is obvious that Adventists make up a small part of the entire African population. It also means that Africa being the continent with the largest number of Adventists in the world does not necessarily mean Adventists are the largest Christian group in Africa.

As we discuss the dynamics of membership growth in the global North and global South within the Adventist Church, one more observation must be made, which has to do with the role of immigrants in this process. Studies have consistently shown that global North Adventism has always benefited from Adventists who have moved to the North from other regions of the world, usually countries with weaker economies and typically in search of advanced education or a better life.⁴³ This means that if the many Adventist churches that are primarily for immigrants were to be excluded when computing Adventist membership in the global North, most likely, the percentage of North America and Europe would have been much lower.⁴⁴

So, what do all these numbers mean? The statistics above show at least three things, all of which are significant to our analysis of global South Adventism: (1) The Adventist Church worldwide is growing fast. There were at least five million

⁴⁰See “Zambia’s President Celebrates Milestone of 1 Million Adventists.” <http://www.adventistreview.org/church-news/story2579-zambia%E2%80%99s-president-celebrates-milestone-of-1-million-adventists> (accessed May 14, 2015).

⁴¹See *Year Book of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1959), 4.

⁴²The Adventist denominational work in Zambia began in 1903. See *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 1996 ed., s.v. “Zambia.”

⁴³According to Ng, the modest growth taking place in North America and Europe was largely coming from immigrants from the global South. See <http://news.adventist.org/en/all-news/news/go/2014-10-12/church-membership-reaches-181-million/> (accessed May 5, 2015). There are also reports of people moving from Eastern Europe into the richer countries of Western Europe within the global North.

⁴⁴For example, it was reported in 2007 that “more than 80 percent of the Adventist Church’s membership in England comes from other countries.” See “Immigrants Sustaining Adventist Church Membership in Some Regions,” <http://news.adventist.org/en/all-news/news/go/2007-08-05/immigrants-sustaining-adventist-church-membership-in-some-regions/> (accessed May 5, 2015).

more Seventh-day Adventists living in the world in 2015 than there were in 2010. (2) Although about a century ago, Africa, Asia, and South America represented less than 10 percent of all Adventists in the world, today these continents represent the majority of Adventists in the world. In other words, the global North and global South have switched places in terms of demographic dominance. (3) Africa as a continent has become the new stronghold of Adventism, numerically speaking.

Now that we have demonstrated the dominance of the global South in terms of membership, we must now ask another question: what are the implications of such a phenomenal development? In order to correctly determine the implications of such massive demographic shifts, one needs to pay attention to the general trends present in the global South relative to the work of Seventh-day Adventism. Here the focus is placed on Africa, since among the three global Southern continents, it is the continent with the largest number of Adventists. Looking at the general trends currently in operation on the African continent, a number of consequential implications for the work of the Adventist Church in Africa loom large on the horizon. But before we look at the potential implications of these trends, we first need to briefly describe and analyze the trends themselves.

Adventism and General Trends in Africa

Currently, Africa is witnessing a number of megatrends that are likely to impact the work of the Adventist Church on the continent in a significant way. These trends include high population growth rate, socioeconomic development, and religious growth, among others. So, how do these trends affect the church's work and capacity for future growth and prosperity on the African continent? In an attempt to explore this question, I will first describe these trends and then point to their potential implications for Seventh-day Adventism in Africa.

Population and Socioeconomic Trends

Africa has one of the highest general population growth rates in the world. As has been indicated in this study, in 1900 Africa had around 120 million people, or 7 percent of the global population at the time. In 2005, the number of Africans reached one billion. There is no sign that this pace will slow down any time soon. Judging from the current trend, it is estimated that by 2050 the population of Africa will be between two and two and a quarter billion people⁴⁵—a tremendous growth over just four decades.

Narrowing the focus to some small regional blocks, the demographic statistics are still more revealing. Take for example, the three East African nations of Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda. In 1900, these countries had about seven or eight

⁴⁵Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 104, 105.

million people. By the year 2000, the population had risen to about 90 million. In 2015, their population is estimated at 133 million people, and projections point to 260 million people by 2050.⁴⁶ This population explosion is directly related to another noteworthy characteristic of most African nations—namely, their youthfulness. In countries like Uganda, Niger, and the Congo, for example, the median age of the population is sixteen.⁴⁷ Tanzania, with a median age of 17.4, follows the same general trend.⁴⁸ Other African countries, comparatively speaking, are younger than most European nations, where the general median age of the population is said to be forty.⁴⁹

But what are the factors that contribute to Africa's population explosion? Experts give a number of reasons for the high population growth rates in Africa. One of the factors is the average age of marriage for women. In East Africa, Central Africa, and West Africa, the average of marriage for women is 18.8 years. Even though fertility rates per woman have relatively declined in certain regions of Africa over the years, with North and South Africa recording three children per woman, the three regions above retain much higher fertility, between five and six children per woman.⁵⁰

As would be expected, the higher population growth rates and fertility rates in Africa have a bearing on the quality of life and general development of the people, especially when these growth rates do not match up with the economic growth rate. According to the United Nations Human Development Index, most of the African countries are in the category known as "low human development,"⁵¹ signifying low quality of life. Because most of these countries have small and weak economies, they lack the financial capacity to meet the ever increasing basic needs of their citizens, including food, clean and pure water, decent housing, health care, and education, among others. This and other realities have contributed to high maternal and child mortality rates on the continent.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid., 106.

⁴⁸Information about the demographics of individual countries can be found in the CIA World Factbook, online at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html> (accessed April 19, 2015).

⁴⁹Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 106.

⁵⁰This report which was prepared by Elizabeth Leahy Madsen who is a consultant on political demography for the Wilson Center's Environmental Change, is very telling indeed. "What's Behind West and Central Africa's Youthful Demographics? High Desired Family Size," <http://www.newsecuritybeat.org/2015/05/whats-west-central-africas-youthful-demographics-high-desired-family-size/> (accessed November 11, 2015). The average marriage ages for women in these regions are as follows: 18.5 years for West Africa, 18.9 for Central Africa, and 19.0 for East Africa.

⁵¹"Human Development Index," <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr14-report-en-1.pdf> (accessed April 24, 2015).

Religious Trends

While the general population explosion and slow economic growth in Africa are attention grabbing in themselves, religious trends are also of great interest. As has been demonstrated in this study, Christianity is on the rise in Africa. It is estimated that from 493 million Christians in 2010, the number of Christians in Africa might reach more than a billion by 2050.⁵² This number will include adherents of mission churches such as the Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, and Seventh-day Adventist Churches, as well as other Christian traditions such as Pentecostalism and hundreds of African Independent Churches.⁵³

While Christianity is growing rapidly, Islam is also growing rapidly in Africa.⁵⁴ Some African nations that had a modest number of Muslims at the beginning of the twentieth century now have more than ten times that. Take, for example, the West African country of Nigeria. In 1900, Nigeria had 4 million Muslims; today, a little more than a century later, the number has grown to over 70 million strong, and Nigerian Muslims now represent about 5 percent of the total Muslim population worldwide.⁵⁵ Islam is booming in East Africa as well. In Tanzania alone, Muslims make up about 35 percent of the general population. Although in Kenya and Uganda the percentages are lower, Islam remains Christianity's closest rival religion in the region.

The presence of other world religions, including Buddhism and Hinduism, is becoming more and more noticeable in Africa as the number of their adherents grows slowly but surely. According to 2010 estimates, the percentage of Hindus in South Africa stands at 2.4 percent, while Buddhists have increased from 0.2 to 0.3 percent in recent years.⁵⁶ South Africa has the largest number of Buddhist

⁵²Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 3.

⁵³Some of the African Independent Churches have been growing by leaps and bounds. A good example is the Christ Holy Church International in Nigeria. This Independent church has grown "from 12 members in 1947 to over a million baptized members in 2002." Thomas Oduro, *Christ Holy Church International: The Story of an African Independent Church* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2007), 13.

⁵⁴Islam as a religion is making great gains in some quarters in Africa. See World Christian Database, <http://www.worldchristiandatabase.org/wcd> (accessed November 13, 2015).

⁵⁵Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 204, 205.

⁵⁶"Religious Adherents, 2010 – South Africa," World Christian Database, http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_207_2.asp (accessed November 13, 2015).

adherents on the continent.⁵⁷ However, it should be observed that in Tanzania, Christianity has become a minority religion, claiming only 30 percent of the general population, compared with Islam and African Traditional Religions, each of which enjoys about 35 percent. Of the three East African countries, Tanzania has the smallest Christian presence; in both Kenya and Uganda, Christians represent more than 80 percent of the general population.⁵⁸

Possible Implications for the Adventist Church in Africa

The massive southward movement of Adventism calls for focused attention and a creative response. The demographic trends I have described above and the fast growth of world religions in Africa, have tremendous implications for the Adventist Church. On the one hand they pose challenges; on the other they provide opportunities. Here I would like to analyze some of the possible implications of these trends for the Adventist Church in Africa.

The first challenge for the Adventist Church is the challenge of meeting the basic physical needs of new converts. When the general population of a country is growing at a fast rate while the economy of that country is still limping, as is the case in much of Africa, this often translates into poor communities that lack access to health care, education, and nutrition, among other things. When the population is young, as is also the case in many African countries, it adds to the challenges and increases the need for sufficient schools, better social services, food security, and availability of employment for the millions of energetic young people. This means that new converts to the Adventist Church are likely to be young, poor, uneducated, hungry, and orphaned. To deal with these social challenges, the church on the African continent will have to have relevant programs in place in anticipation of the coming of the new members. These programs will have to be not only relevant but also sustainable, since the work of feeding the hungry, ministering to the poor, instructing the less educated, and supporting the orphaned may not be a sprint but a marathon.

A second challenge the Adventist Church is likely to face is the challenge of training more pastors to keep up with the phenomenal increase of believers. The increase of new converts will demand the increase of pastors to ensure proper spiritual care, which is crucial for the growth of the new believers and their integration into the church. Without proper and timely spiritual support, the new converts may feel like sheep without a shepherd in a world that is not always

⁵⁷See “Global Religious Landscape - Religious Composition by Country,” <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/table-religious-composition-by-country-in-percentages/> (accessed November 13, 2015).

⁵⁸Religious information about individual countries can be found in the World Factbook at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ug.html> (accessed November 13, 2015).

friendly to those who convert to Christianity in general and Seventh-day Adventism in particular.⁵⁹

The presence of world religions in Africa poses another challenge to the Adventist Church. The fast growth of Islam and the increased presence of other world religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism challenges the mission of the Adventist church in a direct way. Adventists both old and new will have to learn not only to co-exist with but also to share the gospel message with followers of these rival religions. This means that the church in Africa will need to train its clergy, evangelists, and church members how to effectively implement its mission to reach all people with the message of the soon return of Christ in a new religious environment. The church will have to reach the adherents of these world religions while feeding and keeping an eye on its own members lest they wander outside of the fold and end up in non-Christian folds.

While the Adventist church faces key challenges in Africa, the African setting also presents a variety of opportunities. First, by taking advantage of the thousands of young people who already fill the churches every week and the thousands more who convert to Seventh-day Adventism every year, the church could solve the problem of shortage of denominational workers, at least in part. The church could train these young men and women and send some of them as missionaries to other parts of the continent and to the rest of the world to preach the everlasting gospel of Jesus Christ. From the pool of these young people, many future pastors and evangelists could be obtained which in due time it could reduce the shortage of trained pastors in some territories. Equipped with skills and encouragement, the young people could start income generating projects under the supervision of the church so that they might become as self-sufficient as humanly possible in their environments. In turn, through their tithes and offerings, they could support the mission of the church and fund projects that are geared to supporting the millions who flock into the church through the ongoing process of global South movement.

The increasing presence of world religions such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and African Traditional Religions, among others, affords the church the opportunity to share with the followers of these religions a Christian perspective of religious life—showing them Christ, as it were. This also provides Adventist Christians with the opportunity to practice religious tolerance while living next door with people of other religions. In the process, the faith of Christians may grow and their love for the followers of other faiths may mature. In a very real sense, they will have the opportunity to become the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt 5:13–16).

Being aware of these implications and taking some steps toward formulating a creative response to the challenges is important for the relevance of the Adventist

⁵⁹See my conversion story in Christopher R. Mwashinga, Jr., *Moments of My Christian Experience* (Berrien Springs, MI: Maximum Hope Books, 2016), 59–64.

Church and its message on the continent. Taking advantage of the possible opportunities provided by the general trends is important for the strength and future prosperity of the church in the region.

Conclusion

In this article, I have used the concept of global South Christianity to show and evaluate some trends in Christianity in general and Seventh-day Adventism in particular. I have demonstrated that Christianity is in decline in the global North and that it is on the rise in the global South. These global trends in Christianity have turned the global South into the new center of Christianity and the African continent into the new center of Seventh-day Adventism, numerically. I have also noted that even though Africa is the continent with the largest number of Adventists (over seven million members representing 39 percent of the worldwide Adventist membership), Adventism in Africa makes up about 1.3 percent of the entire African Christian population and only 0.6 percent of the general African population. While the gains the Adventist church has made in Africa in the last hundred years are phenomenal, looking at it against the backdrop of the enormous general population growth and the growth of other religions, the numbers only call for better strategies to reach more Africans with the message of the soon return of Jesus.

The shift of the center of Adventism to the global South calls for an urgent response. On the one hand, there must be fresh thinking about the challenges the church in Africa is facing as the result of these developments. On the other hand, there is need to be intentional and launch a strategic exploration of the opportunities the global South phenomenon provides for the fulfilment of the mission of the Adventist church. It may be necessary for individual territories/countries to conduct their own research to determine the best course of action in their respective countries, since it is likely that each country is being impacted by the global South phenomenon in a unique way. The church must boldly face up to the challenge and bring the message of hope and salvation to more millions of sons and daughters of God, not only in the global South, but in all the regions of the world.

ANDREWS UNIVERSITY SEMINARY STUDENT JOURNAL

The Journal of the Doctoral Student Club
of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary of Andrews University
4145 East Campus Circle Drive, Berrien Springs, Michigan 49104-1550, U.S.A.

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Abbreviation

chap(s).	chapter(s)
col(s).	column(s)
frg(s).	fragment(s)
n(n).	note(s)
pl(s).	plate(s)
v(v).	verse(s)

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