# JOURNAL OF THE
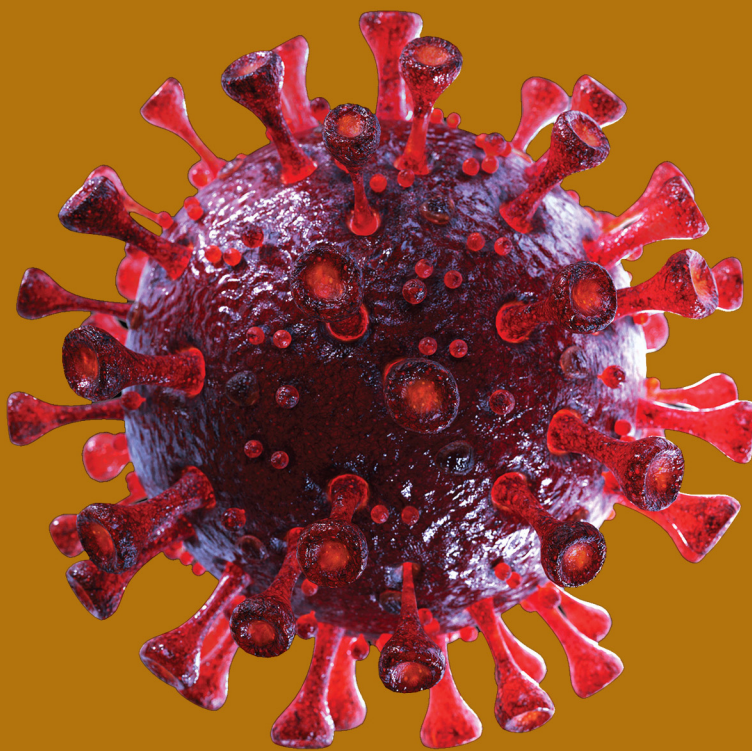# COLOMBO THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

## Volume XVI

### 2020

# JOURNAL OF THE
# COLOMBO THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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## EDITORIAL

### Doing theology in a pandemic

C. S. Lewis' 1939 sermon 'Learning During War-Time'[1] has been widely used in Christian circles to help us regain a proper perspective of 'normal life' in the midst of all the 'abnormal' precautions and adjustments that are necessary to survive the coronavirus pandemic.  For those engaged and interested in theological studies, there is a nugget of Lewis' down-to-earth wisdom that is particularly humbling.

> The learned life then is, for some, a duty. At the moment it looks as if it were your duty. I am well aware that there may seem to be an almost comic discrepancy between the high issues we have been considering and the immediate task you may be set down to, such as Anglo-Saxon sound laws or chemical formulae [we may substitute Hebrew grammar or Trinitarian doctrinal formulae]. But there is a similar shock awaiting us in every vocation -- a young priest finds himself involved in choir treats and a young subaltern in accounting for pots of jam [or, coordinating online services with home-bound worshippers and special deliveries to needy parishioners under lockdown]. It is well that it should be so. It weeds out the vain, windy people and keeps in those who are both humble and tough. On that kind of difficulty we need waste no sympathy.

The articles in this volume of JCTS reflect the two-fold vocation of the church's theological mission consisting of

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1.    The sermon preached at St. Mary the Virgin Church, Oxford, on Sunday, 22 October 1939, was originally titled "None Other Gods: Culture in War-Time." It was circulated among the Student Christian Movement as "Christian in Danger" and given the title "Learning in War-Time," in collections of Lewis' essays, now most accessibly in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*.

those "high issues" and "immediate tasks" to which Lewis refers. First, we are called to contribute to the continuous work of biblical scholarship and theological reflection. Second, we are to draw on that accumulated deposit of scholarship and reflection to respond relevantly to the urgent needs of the moment. Both these tasks are necessary and inseparably connected.

On one hand, the experience of new existential threats (such as the COVID-19 pandemic) and ideological challenges (such as political tussles between 'ethno-nationalists' and 'pluralists') forces the church to mine and recover almost-forgotten truths from its store of historical and theological memory, and ponder them anew in new situations. This process often results in fresh insights, refined interpretations, and more transformational applications that contribute new materials of biblical knowledge and theological wisdom with which to build on the church's once-entrusted foundation of life-giving truth. The temporal, when done in love, validates the eternal.

On the other hand, the constant work of biblical scholarship and theological articulation provides the church with the means to stand steadfast in the midst of the storms and tempests that take their turns to rise and rage around us. We are the pilgrim church, we keep moving steadily onward, living in the here and now with our eyes fixed on what is yet to come. The quiet confidence of the revealed mystery we live by in the midst of propaganda and conspiracy theories, enables us to witness to the gospel of Christ: the judgment of the world has already begun, but so has our redemption. Be mindful, be faithful, be at our entrusted tasks, and the Holy Spirit enables us to overcome. The eternal, when received in obedience, validates the temporal.

In the area of biblical studies, my own article examines the reference to "India" in the Book of Esther (1:1 and 8:9) and the OT context of the Persian Empire. It is the third instalment in a series of articles in which I explore the significance of 'South Asia in the World of the Bible'. While it contributes relevant findings of recent historical research

to biblical studies, it is prompted by pervasive ideological biases both Euro-centric and Indo-centric that fail to recognize the scope of God's salvation history.

Dr. Ivor Poobalan's article on the Second Epistle to Timothy highlights the uniqueness of the work among Paul's writings, which is his concern that Timothy takes on the unpleasant and thankless yet vital ministry of combatting false teachings. Again, while this exploration contributes to our understanding of this epistle for its own sake, it is consciously motivated by the crisis of heterodox teaching in the Sri Lankan church. As we recognized at the CTS-organized 'Faith Entrusted' theology conference (28 and 29 February 2020), safeguarding orthodox Christian teaching in the age of the Internet with its maverick 'prophets' and their die-hard followers takes a great deal of care and courage.

In the area of theology, Nathanael Somanathan questions the framing of the 'theodicy' problem ('If God is all-good and all-powerful, why is there so much suffering in the world?'). He argues that conventional Christian responses are too anthropocentric, rationalistic, and individualistic. He calls instead for an 'embodied theodicy' which the church can live out as modelled by the Trinity; a call made acutely relevant in the context of the pandemic.

Dr. Mano Emmanuel reflects on how the Sri Lankan church has responded to the pandemic and what those responses reveal about our spiritual health. She draws on a wide range of insights from the church worldwide as lockdowns and social distancing have forced congregations to interact online. We are very grateful to Dr. Emmanuel for taking this current challenge head-on and sharing her distilled wisdom with us in this article.

In the area of our discipleship and ministry, Asiri Fernando shows us how the limitations imposed on our independence by the pandemic  must enable us to recover mutual dependence as an empowering Christian virtue. Asiri's article exemplifies the sort of theologically reflective ministry practice we need more of in the Sri Lankan church.

I am grateful to each of our contributors for their diligent and sensitive work. I am also grateful to our (hitherto anonymous) peer-reviewers Prof. Lawson Younger, Prof. Robert Yarbrough, Dr. Dora Bernhardt, Dr. Jonas Kurlberg, and Mr. Yohan Abeynaike for generously enriching us with their constructively critical feedback.

Prabo Mihindukulasuriya
*Editor*

# "INDIA" (ESTHER 1:1 AND 8:9) IN THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE PERSIAN EMPIRE

## PRABODITH MIHINDUKULASURIYA

*Abstract: This third installment in the series 'South Asia in the World of the Bible' explores the historical context of the references to "India" in the Book of Esther (1:1 and 8:9). Using Persian royal inscriptions and pictographic depictions of tributary nations, and Greek literary sources, the article identifies Hinduš (lower Indus Valley) among eight eastern satrapies in the Achaemenid Empire (550 - 330 BC) that were located in today's South Asia. Collections of commercial and administrative records from the Achaemenid era supplement contemporary Greek accounts to provide glimpses, for the first time, of encounters and interactions between diverse subject peoples, including Jews and South Asians, made possible by the conquests and connectivity of the Achaemenid Empire. These included lasting linguistic, botanical and material influences. How the expansion of their ethno-geographic understanding may have influenced the theological vision of the Jewish people in the latter books of the Bible is also discussed.*

*Keywords: Esther 1:1 and 8:9, Hoddu, India, Achaemenid Empire.*

## 1. The Book of Esther and the Persian Empire

When the last books of the Old Testament were being written, the Persian Empire dominated the world of the Bible.[1] This is especially evident in the *Book of Esther*. Not only was the heroic drama of Mordecai and Esther staged in

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1. These books include Haggai, Zechariah (1–8), I and II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, and Daniel. For an historical overview of the Achaemenid Persian Empire in relation to the Bible, see Pierre Briant, "Persia and the Persians," in *The World around the Old Testament: The People and Places of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Bill T. Arnold and Brent A. Strawn (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 379-416. See also Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990).

Susa, the capital of the Achaemenid Persian Empire during the reign of Xerxes I, but the Hebrew text itself was marked by the dominant Persian culture around it.[2] The Hebrew vocabulary of this highly literary composition is infused with Persian loanwords and idiomatic expressions.[3]

As it happened, the Persians never invaded Israel. Even before the Persians had an empire, their neighbours the Assyrians had conquered and deported the northern Israelites in 722/1 BC. The Assyrians, in turn, had been defeated by the Babylonians in 609 BC. The Babylonians invaded the southern Judahites (or Jews) in 587/6 BC and deported them from their homeland. When the Persian Empire emerged under Cyrus II (the Great), they conquered both Assyria (549 BC) and Babylonia (539 BC), and acquired the territory and population of the exiled Jews, along with the lands and people of similarly subjugated nations. Cyrus permitted the Jews to return to their homeland and rebuild Jerusalem and its temple, as narrated in *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*. However, many Jewish families chose to stay behind in their allotted settlements in different parts of the empire. Five centuries later, the *Acts of the Apostles* (written around AD 80-90) would report that there were Jews in Jerusalem from the Persian provinces of Babylonia, Parthia, Medea and Elam whose mother tongues were the dialects of those provinces (Acts 2:9).

Because the Assyrians and Babylonians had forcibly

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2. For arguments presented by conservative scholarship in favour of a historical core to Esther, see for example, Robert Gordis, "Religion, Wisdom and History in the Book of Esther – A New Solution to an Ancient Crux," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 100, no. 3 (1981): 359-388. Accessible online: https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/jbl/1981_gordis.pdf; Forrest S. Weiland, "Historicity, Genre, and Narrative Design in the Book of Esther," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159, no. 634 (April 2002): 151–65; and Jill Middlemas, "Dating Esther: Historicity and the Provenance of Masoretic Esther," in *On Dating Biblical Texts*, edited by Richard J. Bautch and Mark Lackowski (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 149-168.

3. Robert D. Holmstedt and John Screnock, "Whither Esther? A Linguistic Profile of the Book of Esther" in*Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew, Annual SBL Conference, Baltimore 2013*; Aren Wilson-Wright, "From Persepolis to Jerusalem: A Reevaluation of Old Persian-Hebrew Contact in the Achaemenid Period," *VetusTestamentum* 65 (2015): 152-167.

relocated the Jews to other parts of their empires, the Jews were already a 'diaspora' (dispersed) community when the Persian Empire took control of the Ancient Near East. Because of their geographical dispersal, the Jews encountered ethnic groups from regions farther East, about whom they had previously known very little or nothing at all. One of those regions was 'India'.

As biblical scholar Richard Bauckham explains,

> In the sixth century the Persian Empire opened up the previously scarcely known east for Israel as it did also at the same time for the Greeks. Most dramatically, the narrative of the book of Esther takes place in the Persian imperial capital, Susa, located in Elam on the far eastern limit of the world in Gen. 10. But Susa was the capital and centre of an empire that stretched as far east – to India – as it did west – to Egypt and Ethiopia (Esther 1:1; 8:9).[4]

In both occurrences, "India" is named as a frontier marker to highlight the vastness of the Persian Empire. In the OT, more than one Persian ruler is given the name *ʾAḥašwērōwōš* or *ʾAḥašwērōš* (Ezra 4:6; Dan 9:1). In *Esther*, scholars generally assume it refers to Xerxes I (Old Persian *Xšaya-ṛšā*).

> Now it took place in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India (Heb. *Hōddū*) to Ethiopia (*Kūsh*) over 127 provinces... (1:1 NASB)

> So the king's scribes were called...and it was written according to all that Mordecai commanded to the Jews, the satraps, the governors and the princes of the provinces which extended from India (Heb. *Hōddū*) to Ethiopia (*Kūsh*), 127 provinces, to every province according to its script, and to every people according to their language as well as to the Jews according to their script and their language. (8:9 NASB)

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4. Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (London, Atlanta, Hyderabad: Paternoster/Baker Academic, 2003), 56-57.

These verses mimic the grandiloquence of the Persian court, and not without justification. Achaemenid Persia had become the first truly 'global' empire in history, ruling territories in all three continents of the 'old world'. An inscription from Darius I (the father of Xerxes I) proclaimed, "This is the kingdom that I hold, from the Scythians who are beyond Sogdiana, thence to Ethiopia (Old Persian *Kūsha*); from India (OP. *Hidauv*) thence to Sardis."[5]

Xerxes I was the fifth ruler of the Achaemenid Dynasty. It had been founded around 550 BC by Cyrus II (the Great) who had also begun conquering other lands to build an empire. Cyrus was succeeded by his son Cambyses II (OP. *Kambūjiya*, reigned 530-522 BC) who added Egypt, Cyrenaica and Nubia (OP. *Kūshiyā*, Heb. *Kūsh*, translated "Ethiopia" in some English Bibles). The Achaemenid Empire reached its greatest extent under Xerxes' father Darius I (OP. *Dārayauš*, reigned 522-486 BC), who spent the first ten years of his reign subjugating revolts and further expanding its borders. He first expanded westwards into Egypt, Greece and Scythia. He then came east to reinforce his eastern border along the Indus Valley. This is when "*Hōddū*" became the south-eastern-most outpost of the Persian Empire.

## 2. Locating Hōddū

Old Testament scholar Lawson Younger explains the etymology of *Hōddū* as follows:

Clearly, the Hebrew is based on the Old Persian or Elamite. In Old Persian, it is written as *Hidūš* (with the cuneiform signs: *H-i-du-u-š*). It is transliterated as *Hiⁿdu(š)*, since the nasal /n/ before consonants was omitted in the Old Persian script, yet was most certainly sounded.[6]  Elamite renders the toponym

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5.   Persepolis H (DPh), 2.3-10; Hamdan (DH) 108.
6.   Roland G. Kent, *Old Persian. Grammar, Texts, Lexicon* (2nd Edition; New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1953), 17 (§39); 214.

with the cuneiform signs *ḫi-in-du-iš*.[7] Importantly, the word does not technically occur in Aramaic (Old or Imperial Aramaic), but in Syriac (which is later), where one finds: *Hendū*.

The Hebrew rendering *hōddū* (הֹדּוּ) can be analyzed as follows: The Hebrew consonants *hdw* (הדו) with the second consonant doubled (*hddw*) render the assimilation of the /n/ (*hndw* > *hddw*). The vocalization of the second syllable is correct /ū/; but the vocalization of the first syllable must be *i/e*. The vocalization with just a straight *hōlem* /ō/ must be the result of Masoretic scribal misunderstanding;[8] perhaps through an erroneous association of ודה (*hōddū*) with דוה (*hōd*), "splendor, majesty."[9]

*Hiⁿduš* appears on several inscriptions which list the *dahyu* (people-lands) ruled by Darius I and Xerxes I (see chart below). There are six monumental inscriptions from the reign of Darius I and one from Xerxes I which list the *dahyu* of the Empire. None of them are identical in number or sequence. *Hinduš* is derived from the Sanskrit *Sindhu*, the River Indus and the region around it. *Sindhu* occurs in the *Rg Veda* (c. 1500 BC) as *Sapta-Sindhava*,[10] the territory of the 'seven rivers' which make up the Punjab region in modern Pakistan.[11] In the *Vendidad* collection (c. 5th cent BC) of the *Zend-Avesta*, the *Sapta-Sindhava* of the Sanskrit Vedas is named *Hapta-Hindava*. It is the fifteenth of sixteen 'best

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7.  Elamite, *Hi-in-du-iš*. DNa 19-20; DPh 5; DSf 38-39; DSz 41; XPh 21.
8.  Giovanni Rinaldi, "hdw (hōddû) 'India,'" *Bibbia e Oriente* 8 (1966): 36.
9.  K. Lawson Younger, Jr., personal email correspondence, 29 October 2020.
10.  E.g. *Rig Veda* 8.24, 27.
11.  These were the Sindhu (Indus) River and its tributaries Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi and Sutlej (Beas); and the now dried-up rivers Sarasvati and Drasadvati.

| Darius' Bīsotūn inscription (DB), c. 520 – 518 BC | Darius' Susa inscription over glazed bricks (DSm), [12] c. 520-486 BC | Darius' Persepolis inscription (DPe), c. 520-486 BC | Darius' Susa inscription (DSe), c. 520-486 BC | Darius' Susa foundation charter (DSaa), c. 520-486 BC | Darius' Susa marble slab fragment (DSv), c. 520-486 BC | Xerxes' Daiva inscription (XPh), c. 480 BC |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Persia | Persia | Elam | Media | Persia | Media | Media |
| Elam | Elam | Media | Elam | Elam | Cappadocia | Elam |
| Babylonia | Babylonia | Babylonia | Parthia | Media | **India** | **Arachosia** |
| Assyria | Assyria | Arabia | **Aria** | Babylonia | Assyria | Armenia |
| Arabia | Arabia | Assyria | **Bactria** | Assyria | Chorasmia | **Drangiana** |
| Egypt | Egypt | Egypt | Sogdiana | Arabia | | Parthia |
| Countries of the sea (=Greeks overseas) | Lydia | Armenia | Chorasmia | Egypt | | **Aria** |
| Sardis | Greece | Cappadocia | **Drangiana** | Countries of the sea (=Greeks overseas) | | **Bactria** |
| Ionia | Media | Sardis | **Arachosia** | Sardis | | Sogdiana |
| Media | Armenia | Ionia | **Sattagydia** | Ionia | | Chorasmia |
| Armenia | Cappadocia | Ionians of the plain and the sea and the land beyond the sea | **Gandara** | Armenia | | Babylonia |
| Cappadocia | Parthia | Sagartia | **India** | Cappadocia | | Assyria |
| Parthia | **Drangiana** | Parthia | Haoma-drinking Saka | Parthia | | **Sattagydia** |

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12. AviBachenheimer, *Old Persian: Dictionary, Glossary and Concordance* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2018), 64. Accessible at: https://www.livius.org/sources/content/achaemenid-royal-inscriptions/dsm/.

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Drangiana** | **Aria** | **Drangiana** | Pointed-hat Saka | **Drangiana** | | Sardis |
| **Aria** | Chorasmia | **Aria** | Babylonia | **Aria** | | Egypt |
| Chorasmia | **Bactria** | **Bactria** | Assyria | Chorasmia | | Ionians |
| **Bactria** | Sogdiana | Sogdiana | Arabia | Bactria | | Countries of the sea (=Greeks overseas) |
| Sogdiana | **Gandara** | Chorasmia | Egypt | Sogdiana | | Across the sea |
| **Gandara** | **Sattagydia** | **Sattagydia** | Armenia | **Gandara** | | **Makans** |
| Saka | **Arachosia** | **Arachosia** | Cappado-cia | Saka | | Arabia |
| **Sattagydia** | **India** | **India** | Sardis | **Sattagydia** | | **Gandara** |
| **Arachosia** | **Thrace** | **Gandara** | Ionia | **Arachosia** | | **India** |
| **Maka** | Macedonia | Saka | European Saka | Maka | | Cappado-cia |
| | | **Maka** | Thrace | | | Dahae |
| | | | Petatus hat-wearing Ionians | | | Haoma-drinking Saka |
| | | | Libya | | | Pointed-hat Saka |
| | | | Ethiopia | | | Skudra |
| | | | **Maka** | | | Akaufak-ans |
| | | | Carians | | | Libyans |
| | | | | | | Carians |
| | | | | | | Ethiopians |

*Fig. 1.* Achaemenid 'empire lists' (not including the legends accompanying visual depictions representatives from constituent satrapies).

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lands' created by the Zoroastrian supreme god but, as with the rest, it was stricken by his malevolent adversary: "I who am Ahura Mazdā sharpened the fifteenth one, the best one among the places and the lands, *Hapta.həṇdu*. But, Aŋra Mainiiu (being) very mortiferous fashioned its calamity, irregular menses [in women] and abnormal heat."[13] Indologist Paul Thieme observed that in the ancient literary sources of both India and Persia, *Hinduš/Sindhu* represented the natural geographic 'frontier' between the two major civilizational spheres.[14]

Ancient Indians used the names *Bhārat*, *Madhyadēsha*, *Aryavarta* or *Jambudvīpa* when referring to the entire subcontinent. *Sindhu* and *Sindhava* are never used with that meaning. Therefore, it must be understood that the "India" (*Hōddū*) of the Bible refers to the particular geographic territory of the Indus Valley (*Hinduš/Sindhu*), which constituted the southeastern-most satrapy of the Achaemenid Empire. However, *Hōddū/Hinduš* was not the only Persian satrapy belonging to the region of South Asia, as it is demarcated today.

## 3. The Achaemenid Satrapies of South Asia

According to the Greek geographers, the Persians referred to their eastern satrapies by the collective name *Arianē* (OP. *Āryana*).[15] These satrapies were Karmania, Gedrōsia, Drangiāne, Arakhōsia, Areia, Gandara, Baktrianē, and Sattagydia. With the exclusion of Karmania (which is roughly the modern Kermanshah Province in Iran) and

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13. *Vendidad* 1, 18. Quoted in Antonio Panaino, "Additional Considerations about Ved. Síndhu-, Av. Hiṇdu-/Həṇdu-," in *Borders: Itineraries on the Edges of Iran (Eurasiatica vol. 5)*, edited by Stefano Pellò (Venice: EdizioniCa'Foscari, 2016), 41-52. Accessible online: https://edizionicafoscari.unive.it/en/edizioni4/libri/978-88-6969-101-0/additional-considerations-about-ved-sindhu-av-hind/.

14. Paul Thieme, "Sanskrit sindhu-/Sindhu- and Old Iranian hindu-/Hindu-," in *W. B. Henning Memorial Volume*, eds. Mary Boyce and Ilya Gershevitch (London: Lund Humphreys, 1970), 447-50.

15. For the sources, see R. Schmitt, "Aria," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. Accessible online: http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/aria-region-in-the-eastern-part-of-the-persian-empire

the addition of India, eight of the 27 'Main Satrapies' of the Achaemenid Empire were located, entirely or partially, in South Asia.

Persian and Greek sources indicate that the Achaemenid Empire was divided into seven 'Great Satrapies' which were subdivided into smaller 'Main Satrapies,' and further subdivided into even smaller 'Minor Satrapies'.[16] The two eastern-most 'Great Satrapies' were Baktrianē (OP. *Bāxtriš*) and Arakhōsia (OP. *Harauvatiš*). These contained the following 'Main Satrapies' which were entirely or partially located in today's South Asia.

3.1. *Bāxtriš* (prob. from Sansk. *bhag-* 'to divide';[17] Gk. *Bactria*) came under the 'Great Satrapy' also named Bactria, and was considered a central core region of the empire. It occupied the northernmost part of Pakistan and the northeastern half of Afghanistan. Its capital was Bactra (also known as Zariaspa), modern Balkh, in Afghanistan. As historian Manel García Sánchez explains,

> Bactria was a prominent assignment to the ruled out Princes in the inheritance struggle and in any case the fact that several brothers of Great Kings ruled in this satrapy shows its great importance for their political career and for the security of the Empire too, among other things to defend the Eastern frontier and to stem the raids of the warlike Scythian nomads, Bactriana was always a buffer between the sedentary and the nomadic world (Strabo 11.11.3)....[18]

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16. The list of satrapies (Gk. *satrapēiē*; from OP. title *xsaçapāvan*, lit. 'protector of the empire') in the Greek sources and the names of countries (OP. *dahyava*) in the Persian inscriptions do not match precisely. This listing follows the reconstruction of Bruno Jacobs in "Achaemenid Satrapies," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, online edition, 2011. Accessible online: http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/achaemenid-satrapies.

17. J. Tavernier, *Iranica in the Achaemenid Period (ca. 550-330 B.C.): lexicon of Old Iranian proper names and loanwords, attested in non-Iranian texts* (Leuven/Paris/Dudley, MA: Peeters Publishers & Department of Oriental Studies, 2007), 25.

18. Manel García Sánchez, "The Second after the King and Achaemenid Bactria on Classical Sources," in *Central Asia in Antiquity:*

3.2. *Gadāra* (Sansk. *Gandhāra*; Gk. *Gandara*) was in the Peshawar basin with the Indus to the east, the Hindu Kush range to the north, the Kabul River to the south, and the Kunar River to the west. It consisted of the two 'Minor Satrapies' of Gandāra on the west; and Paropamisus (OP *Paraupārisainā*)[19] on the east. The capital of Gandāra was Kapiša-kaniš (Gk. *Kapisa*), modern Begram. Paropamisus stretched from Kabul to the Hindu Kush, and its capital was Pushkalavati (Gk. *Peucelaotis*), modern Charsadda in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan.

3.3. *Haraiva* (Gk. *Aria*) was administered under the 'Great Satrapy' of Bactria and was situated in what is today western Afghanistan. It encompassed the fertile Hari (or Herat) River valley, then famous for its vineyards. According to Arrian, its capital was Artacoana (probably modern Herat).[20]

3.4. *Harauvatiš* (prob. from Sansk. *Sarasvatī*;[21] Gk. *Arakhōsia*) was a 'Main Satrapy' within the 'Great Satrapy' of that same name. It constituted the Arghandab valley, in present-day southern Afghanistan. Its capital was also named Harauvatiš (Gk. *Arakhōtos*), modern Kandahār.

3.5. *Zranka* (Gk. *Drangiāne*) belonged to the 'Great Satrapy' of Arakhōsia, and probably covered the region of Sīstān, which straddles the border of modern eastern Iran and southwestern Afghanistan. It was subdivided into the 'minor satrapies' of Zranka which was also the name of the capital, and Ariaspai.

3.6. *Maka (Gk. Gedrōsia)* belonged to the 'Great Satrapy' of Arakhōsia. It appears to have spanned the south-eastern seaboard of Arabia, some islands on the Persian Gulf and the coastal region west of the Indus (in present-

*Interdisciplinary Approaches*, eds. B. Antela-Bernárdez and J. Vidal (Oxford: BAR International Series, 2014), (56-63) 61. References removed.

19. In the Bisōtun inscription, OP.*Gadāra* is replaced in the Akkadian version as *pa-ar-ú-pa-ra-e-sa-an-na*; and in the Elamite as *[par-ru-ba-ra-e]-sa-na*).

20. Arrian, *Anabasis* 3.25.5.

21. Tavernier, *Iranica in the Achaemenid Period*, 26.

day southern Balochistan province of Pakistan).[22] The latter region alone is named 'Gedrosia' in the Greek sources. The satrapies of Harauvatiš and Zranka formed its northern border. Arrian informs us that its capital was Pura.[23] The Persepolis Fortification Tablets refer to a satrap there named Irdumašda (c. 505 BC), and another named Zamašba.[24]

3.7. *Thataguš* (Gk. *Sattagydia*) belonged to the 'Great Satrapy' of Arachosia. It occupied the region of the Punjab with its famous capital in Taxila. By the time of Alexander, Thataguš was further subdivided into the minor satrapies of the kingdom of Taxilēs, the kingdom of Abisarēs, and the kingdom of Pōros.

3.8. *Hinduš* (Sank. *Sindu*, Gk. *Indikē*) was the eastern-most 'Main Satrapy' of the empire. It was situated on both banksof the Indus River, from which it derived its name. Its borders were Arachosia and Sattygidia to the north, Gedrosia to the west, and the Thar Desert to the east. According to Arrian its capital was Sindimana.[25] By the time of Alexander, Hinduš was further subdivided into the minor satrapies of the kingdom of Sambos, the kingdom of Mousikanos, and the kingdom of Portikanos.

## 4. Achaemenid Dynasty and Their 'Arya' Origins

The Persians believed that their ethnic ancestors had sprung from the idyllic mountainous lands that lay to the east of their empire. Both Darius I and Xerxes I asserted their 'Aryan' ancestry as a legitimation of their royal power, claiming, "I am...an Achaemenid, a Persian, son of a Persian,

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22. Willem J. Vogelsang, "Gedrosia," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. Accessible on: https://iranicaonline.org/articles/gedrosia; Daniel Potts, "The Islands of the XIV Satrapy," in *New Perspectives in Seleucid History, Archaeology and Numismatics, Studies in Honor of Getzel M. Cohen, BeiträgezurAltertumskunde 355*, ed. Roland Oetjen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 375-396.
23. Arrian, *Anabasis* 6.24.1.
24. PF 679-80; Richard T. Hallock, *Persepolis Fortification Tablets* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 211.
25. Arrian, *Anabasis* 6.16.4; also Strabo, *Geography* 15.1.33.

SKYTHAI

Tanaïs

Istros

Pantikapaion

Khersōnē

Black Sea

Pella
Aigai
Eiōn
THRAKĒ
3.1.5.
Doriskos
Byzantion
Sinōpē
Trapezous
2.2.3.
Tyras

Daskyleion
3.1.2.
3.2.3.
2.2.2.
ARMENIA
KAPPADOKIA
3.1.1.
Araxes
2.2.1.
2.1.2.
PHRYGIA
Delphoi
Korinthos
Eretria
3.1.c
Athēnai
Sardeis
LYDIA
3.1.1.
Gordion
3.1.4.
Pteria?
Halys
Mazaka
Komana
3.2.2.
Melitēnē
Thōspia
KAL
Sparta
Dēlos
Magnēsia
3.1.1.
Kelainai
3.2.3.
2.2.1.
Milētos
KARIA
Halikarnassos
3.1.3.
KILIKIA
Karrai
Gazaka
2.1.2.
Xanthos
3.1.b
Tarsos
Halab
4.2.1.
4.1.3.
Arbēla
MĒ
2.1.

Paphos
4.2.a
Salamis
4.2.2.
Thapsakos
ASSYRIA
4.2.1.
KOSSAIOI
2.1.

Barkē
Kyrēnē
Mediterranean Sea
Sidōn
Tyros
SYRIA
Damaskos
Euphratēs
Ōpis
4.1.1.
1.2.

LIBYĒ
5.2.
Samareia
Gaza
Hierosolyma
Babylōn
4.1.1.
Sousa
BABYLŌNIA
SOU
1.2.
Saïs
Pēlousion
5.1.1.
Orkhoē

Ammōnion
Memphis
Doumaitha
AIGYPTOS
5.1.2.
ARABIA
5.4.

Nilos
Temā

Thēbai

Elephantinē
Yatribu

AITHIOPIA
5.3.
Red Sea

Achaemenid inscriptions and Greek sources leave a...
reconciled by Bruno Jacobs, as reflecting a three-ti...
reflects the reconstruction by B. Jacobs, *Die Satrap*...
Greek sources cover the details most thoroughly, th...
below (including Persian names, where known). "(...

# ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS OF THE ACHAEMENID EMPIRE, 490 BC

© Ian Mladjov

Caspian Sea

Iaxartēs

MASSAGETAI
7.6.

AMYRGIOI
7.7.

DAOI
7.5.

Oxos

• Kyroupolis

Marakanda •
Nautaka •

KHORASMIA
2.4.

SOGDIANĒ
7.2.1.

7.2.2.
Drapsaka •

Margos
• MARGIANĒ
7.1.2.

Zariaspa •

BAKTRIANĒ
7.1.1.

GANDARA

7.3.1.

6.4.2.

...OUSIOI

HYRKANIA
Zadrakarta • 2.3.2.

Sousia •

Kapisa •
7.3.2.
Ortospana •

Peukela •
• Taxila

MARDOI

• Hekatompylos

AREIA
7.4.

• Artakoana

6.4.1.

SATTAGYDIA
6.4.3.

DIA
Ragai •

...Ekbatana

PARTHIA
2.3.1.

ARAKHŌSIA

• Arakhōtoi 6.1.

Phrada •

DRANGIANĒ
6.2.1.

Gabai •
• Artakana

2.1.3.

Zranka • 6.2.2.

...IANĒ
OUXIOI

• Pasargadai

Persepolis •

6.5.1.    6.5.2.

Indos

INDIA

Karmana •

KARMANIA
1.1.2.

PERSIS
1.1.1.

GEDRŌSIA
6.3.1.

• Sindomana?

Rambakia?
6.3.2.

6.5.3.

• Poura

Persian Gulf

• Harmozeia

• Pattala?

Indian Ocean

...n incomplete and sometimes seemingly contradictory picture of the administrative make-up of the Achaemenid Empire. The evidence has been
... organization of seven "Great Satrapies," each subdivided into "Main Satrapies," most of these subdivided into "Minor Satrapies." The map
...ienverwaltung im Perserreich zur Zeit Darius' III., Wiesbaden 1994, and "Achaemenid Satrapies," in Encyclopaedia Iranica (2006). Since the
...e nomenclature is given in Greek forms. For the full listing of administrative divisions and subdivisions (not all labeled on the map), see the Key
...Great Satrapies" are bounded by thick borders, "Minor Satrapies" by thin borders; "Main Satrapies" are indicated through the color scheme.

Map 1. Satrapies of the Achaemenid Empire, c. 490 BC, according to Bruno Jacobs.
© Ian Mladjov.

an Aryan, having Aryan lineage."[26] The Elamite version of Darius' Bisotun (also Bihistun or Behistun) inscription twice described Ahura-Mazda, the Zoroastrian high-god, as "the god of the Aryans."[27]

The *Avesta*, the Zoroastrian scriptures (which emerged from about 1000 BC), states that Zarathustra lived in *Airiiana-Vaējah* (Avestan "[the lands] of the Aryan springs/rapids").[28] Although various scholars have tried to match the descriptions of this "holy land" with observable topographical features and historical clues, no agreement has been reached, but cites in Seistan and Afghanistan are strong contenders.[29]

However, as we shall see, special status was accorded Harauvatiš and Bāxtriš as satrapies in the empire's eastern sphere to which members of the royal family were appointed. Although remote from the centre of administration, control of these regions may have bolstered the prestige of the Achaemenid royal line because of their presumed connection with the homeland of Zarathustra.

## 5. Historical Encounters between Achaemenid Persia and "India"

Information about Persian rule in "India" is relatively sparse in comparison to what we know about how the empire occupied and operated in Egypt, Asia Minor and Greece. As one historian observed, "Nowhere were the Achaemenids more unobtrusive than in India."[30] This is

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26. *"Haxâmanishiya Pârsa Pârsahyâpuça Ariya Ariyaciçathâtiy."* Darius I, Naqsh-i-Rustam A. (Dna) 2.8-15; Susa E (DSe) 2.12-14; Xerxes I, Persepolis H (XPh) 2.12-13.

27. DB. Elam. 62-63.

28. Yašt 5.104; 9.14, 25; 17:45 (place where Zarathuštra was "famed therein" and sacrificed to AredvīSūrā and other divinities).

29. M.A. Dandamayev (trans. W. J. Vogelsang), *A Political History of the Achaemenid Empire* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989), 36-38.MichaelWitzel, "The Home of the Aryans," in *Anusantatyi: Festschrift fuer Johanna Nartenzum 70. GeburtstagMünchenerStudienzurSprachwissenschaft, Beihefte NF 19*, eds. A. Hinze and E. Tichy (Dettelbach: J. H. Roell 2000), (283-338) 336-338. Accessible online: http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~witzel/AryanHome.pdf.

30. David Fleming, "Where was Achaemenid India?" *Bulletin of the*

because there is very little archaeological evidence that can be identified unambiguously as Achaemenid, even in coin finds. As numismatist Osmund Bopearachchi states, "While the whole empire accepted Achaemenid [gold] *darics* and [silver] *sigloi* as the legal tender, Indian satraps issued their own coinage consisting of curved and punch-marked bars" called 'bent bars'.[31]

Also, the narrative histories about the Achaemenids that have come down to us are from the classical Greek historian Herodotus who wrote around 440-430 BC (quoting the earlier writers Hecataeus of Miletus and Scylax of Caryanda, both late 6th - early 5th century BC); fragments from the works of Ctesias of Cnidus who was in Persia around 415-398/7 BC, serving as a physician in the court of Artaxerxes II, and who wrote about Assyria, Persia and India (in the lost works *Persika* and *Indika*, respectively); and the partly historical writings of the Athenian soldier-philosopher Xenophon (360s BC).[32] All the descriptions about India documented by these Greek writers before Alexander were mediated through Persia. Ctesias, for example, never visited India "but as a resident of the Persian court he had the unique opportunity, especially for a Greek, to encounter many travellers from India and the eastern edges of the known world."[33] Therefore, we can be quite certain that Jewish officials in the Persian court and administration would have had the same acquaintance with travellers from India and knowledge about India as did the Greeks.

Unfortunately, no comparable histories written

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*Asia Institute, Iranian Studies in Honor of A. D. H. Bivar* NS 7 (1993): 98.

31. Osmund Bopearachchi, "Achaemenids and Mauryans: Emergence of Coins and Plastic Art in India," in Alka Patel and TourajDaryaee, eds., *India and Iran in the Longue Durée*, Ancient Iran Series, Vol. 3 (Irvine, CA: University of California, Jordan Centre for Persian Studies, 2017), (15-47) 16.

32. For a helpful summary of these sources, see Fernando Tola and Carmen Dragonetti, "India and Greece before Alexander," *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 67, no. 1 (1986): 159-194.

33. Andrew G. Nichols, *Ctesias on India: Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (London/NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), 18.

by Persian chroniclers from their own perspective have survived. The only surviving Persian sources which refer to its "Indian" territories are inscriptions and images on imperial monuments, a cache of administrative records (Persepolis Fortification 'Q' texts), a collection of business transaction records (Murašû archive), both preserved on clay tablets, and a collection of Aramaic documents from Bactria written on wooden sticks and leather scrolls dating from the tail-end of the dynasty.

When all these rather scanty and uneven sources are read together, what we can learn about Achaemenid rule in "India" may be summarized as follows:

5.1. Pre-Achaemenid conditions

- To begin, it is very likely that the coastal trading systems originating from the time of the Harappan Civilization between communities in the Indus Valley, Persian Gulf, Southern Arabia, and Red Sea routes persisted, in one form or another, through the centuries. Changes in the region's political formations would have impacted the conditions under which these local networks operated, favouring one segment or community over another, occasionally allowing access to new entrants into established routes and markets. In their turn, the Achaemenids would be naturally motivated to leverage commercial advantages by establishing administrative outposts on their eastern border to secure a land-river-sea route from South Central Asia to the Indian Ocean. Having secured access to the Indian Ocean, they could dominate the sea routes connecting the southern extremities of their empire which were accessible through the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea.[34]

  According to Ctesias, after her successful military campaigns in Egypt and Ethiopia, the

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34. Jean-François Salles, "Achaemenid and Hellenistic Trade in the Indian Ocean," in *The Indian Ocean in Antiquity*, edited by Julian Reade (London/NY: Routledge, 2009), 253-257.

Assyrian queen Semiramis (probably Sammu-ramat, mother and co-regent with Adad-nirari III, c. 811 – 78 BC) attempted to invade Indian territory across the Indus from her base in Bactria.[35] Ctesias claims that she was forced to retreat after suffering heavy losses at the hands of the India king Stabrobates. Although there is no archaeological evidence for an attempted Assyrian conquest of India, later Greek writers were certain that 'Indian' kingdoms west of the Indus had long been subjects of the Assyrians, Babylonians and Persians.

## 5.2. Reign of Cyrus II

• An unnamed Indian king is reported by Xenophon to have aided Cyrus II, the founder of the Achaemenid Empire, with his campaign against Babylonia in 539 BC. Whatever the factuality of this alliance, it is interesting that Xenophon remarks how "the king of the Indians" pledged that "when he had enquired into the justice of the case, will uphold the cause of him who has been wronged."[36] But why would the king of a distant land feel obligated to commit troops to a conflict far away? There are two possibilities. Firstly, if Xenophon is identifying the nations correctly, it could be that rulers in northern India wanted Persian intervention against Neo-Babylonian pressure because, as he reports, they were "holding the Bactrians in siege."[37] Secondly, if Xenophon is mistaken, it is probable that the original Assyrian account which he tried to relay may not have referred to 'India' at all, but to Andia, an important buffer state between Assyria, Urartu (Armenia) and Media.[38] Nevertheless, we gain from Xenophon's

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35. Ctesias, *Persica*, Fr. 1 = Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica* 2.16-19.
36. Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 2.4.7.
37. Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 1.5.2
38. Simo Parpola, "Sacas, India, Gobryas, and the Median Royal

story that the Greeks had a high opinion of Indian rulers and their policy about foreign conflicts.

• Whether Cyrus' military campaigns in Central Asia also extended farther south is unclear. Relying heavily on the Alexander historians, Arrian states that

> All the territory that lies west of the river Indus up to the river Cophen is inhabited by Astacenians and Assacenians, Indian tribes. But they are not, like the Indians dwelling within the river Indus, tall of stature, nor similarly brave in spirit, nor as black as the greater part of the Indians. These long ago were subject to the Assyrians; then to the Medes, and so they became subject to the Persians; and they paid tribute to Cyrus son of Cambyses from their territory, as Cyrus commanded [...] Among the Assacenians is Massaca, a great city, where resides the chief authority of the Assacian land; and another city Peucela, this also a great city, not far from the Indus. These places then are inhabited on this side of the Indus towards the west, as far as the river Cophen.[39]

> Referring to Alexander, Nearchus is cited as stating how "no one else ever invaded India, not even Cyrus son of Cambyses, though he made an expedition against the Scythians, and in all other ways was the most energetic of the kings in Asia."[40] But this had not been for the lack

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Court: Xenophon's Cyropaedia through the Eyes of an Assyriologist," in *Continuity of Empire(?): Assyria, Media, Persia*, eds. G. B. Lanfranchi, M. Roaf and R. Rollinger (Padua: S.a.r.g.o.n. Editrice e Libreria, 2003), 343-349 (339-350).

39. Cited by Arrian, *Indica* 1.1-3, 8.

40. Arrian, *Indica* 9.10. Echoing Xenophon, he added, "But no Indian ever went outside his own country on a warlike expedition, so

of trying. Reportedly, "Cyrus came [to Gedrosia] with the intention of invading India, but found the going so bad and the country so wild and barren that he lost nearly all his men before he could do so."[41]

- Cyrus died of injuries sustained in battle in Central Asia in 530 BC. In one version of his death, Ctesias of Cnidas (late 5th cent. BC) recounts that Cyrus was mortally wounded by a soldier from the Indian contingent who were fighting for the rebel Derbici tribe of Central Asia:

> Cyrus marched against the Derbices, whose king was Amoraeus. The Derbices suddenly brought up some elephants which had been kept in ambush, and put Cyrus' cavalry to flight. Cyrus himself fell from his horse, and an Indian wounded him mortally with a javelin under the thigh. The Indians fought on the side of the Derbices and supplied them with elephants. Cyrus' friends took him up while he was still alive and returned to camp. Many Persians and Derbices were slain, to the number of 10,000 on each side.[42]

## 5.3. Reign of Darius I

- Following the short reign of Cambyses II, Darius I had to put down several rebellions in Central Asia to secure his accession to the throne in 522/521 BC. His relative Dâdaeši the satrap of Bactria, gave him critical support.[43] So did Vivāna the satrap of Arachosia.[44] But the very reason that members of

righteous were they."

41. Cited by Arrian, *Anabasis* 6.24.3.
42. Ctesias, *Persica*, Fr. 9 = Photius, *Biblioteca* 72.7.
43. DB III:10-21.
44. DBbab: 45-49.

the royal family ruled Bactria also made it a source of political anxiety. Following Darius' death in 486 BC, Xerxes' succession was challenged by his brother Ariaramnes, who "came out of Bactria as a rival for the kingdom."[45] A few years later, another brother Masistes revolted against him in Bactria in 479 BC.[46] Artaxerxes I also faced a rebellion upon his accession in 465 BC by the Bactrian satrap Artabanus.[47] Finally, in 330 BC, it was the Bactrian satrap Bessus (OP. *Bayasa*?) who treacherously assassinated Darius III as he fled from Alexander, and proclaimed himself king.[48]

• It appears that Persian rule had already been formally established over Gandara and Sattagydia on the west bank of the Indus. Darius I's Bīsotūn[49] inscription (begun in 520 BC), mentions Bactria, Gandara, Sattagydia, and Arachosia as *dahyu* under his rule, but "India" (*Hinduš*) is conspicuously absent. However, not long after, Darius' inscriptions in Persepolis and Hamadan written around 518-513 BC does include "India".

> Darius the Great King, king of kings, king of countries, son of Hystaspes, an Achaemenid. King Darius says: This is the kingdom which I hold, from the Scythians who are beyond Sogdiana, thence to Ethiopia (OP. *Kūsha*); from India (OP. *Hidauv*) thence to Sardis — which Ahuramazda the greatest of the gods bestowed upon me. May Ahuramazda

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45. Plutarch, *Moralia* 488d-f.
46. Herodotus, *Histories* 9.108-13.
47. Ctesias, *Persica*, Fr. 14 = Photius, *Bibliotheca* 40a5 – 41b37 (§34-46): 35.
48. Arrian, *Anabasis* 3.21.6ff.
49. Also spelled Behistun, Bisitun, etc. Bīsotūn follows the spelling of the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*; accessible at: https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/bisotun-index

protect me, and my royal house.[50]

- It is quite certain, therefore, that Darius I conquered *Hinduš* in a campaign between 520 and 518 BC, with assistance from his loyal satraps in Bactria and Arachosia.

- According to Herodotus, Darius employed the Ionian sea-captain Scylax of Caryanda to explore the course of the Indus River down to the sea, and from there to survey the maritime route along the southern coast of Arabia and up the Red Sea to Suez in Egypt, sometime between 512 – 519 BC:

> But as to Asia, most of it was discovered by Darius. There is a river, Indus, second of all rivers in the production of crocodiles. Darius, desiring to know where this Indus empties into the sea, sent ships manned by Scylax, a man of Caryanda, and others whose word he trusted; these set out from the city of Caspatyrus and the Pactyic country, and sailed down the river toward the east and the sunrise until they came to the sea; and voyaging over the sea west, they came in the thirtieth month to that place from which the Egyptian king sent the above-mentioned Phoenicians to sail around Libya. After this circumnavigation, Darius subjugated the Indians and made use of this sea.[51]

- In another passage Herodotus locates the as-yet unidentified Caspatyrus and Pactyic country "north of the rest of India" whose inhabitants "live like the Bactrians [and] are of all Indians the most warlike."[52] This indicates that Scylax's reconnoitering expedition originated from one of the northern

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50. Darius, Persepolis H (DPh), 2.3-10; Hamdan (DH) 108.
51. Herodotus, *Histories* 4.44.
52. Herodotus, *Histories* 3.102.

tributaries of the Indus River which flows due east such as the Kabul River (in modern Afghanistan), and which explains why they initially "sailed down the river toward the east and the sunrise." They would then have connected with the Indus at Attock (in modern Pakistan) from where the rest of the journey would have followed the seaward course of the river due west.

Darius apparently acted on the success of Scylax's mission. He started work on a canal (previously begun and abandoned by Pharaohs Necho II and Sesostris) connecting the Nile to the Red Sea.[53] Though unrealized, Darius' 'Canal Inscription' records his intention of creating a seamless maritime trading passage as a task already accomplished; "Therefore, when this canal had been dug as I had ordered, ships went from Egypt through this canal to Persia, as I had intended."[54]

Ancient Near Eastern kings such as Sargon, Assurbanipal, Nebuchadnezzar, and Cyrus all claimed to have ruled "from the upper sea [i.e. Mediterranean Sea] to the lower sea [i.e. the Indian Ocean]."[55] However, Darius was probably the first to establish a port beyond the Persian Gulf.

• The late addition of "India" to Darius' 'empire lists' is also supported by the fact that Herodotus names Gandara, Sattagydia, Dadicae and Aparytae as the seventh revenue province (Gk. *nomos*) of the empire, whereas "Indos," quite separately, constituted the twentieth and richest of all provinces.

The Indians made up the twentieth province. These are more in number

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53. Herodotus, *Histories* 2.158 ff.
54. Darius' Canal Inscription (DZc). For a historical survey see Carol A. Redmount, "The Wadi Tumilat and the 'Canal of the Pharaohs'," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 54 (Apr. 1995):127-135.
55. Johannes Haubold, "The Achaemenids and the sea," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 27, no. 1 (June 2012): 5-24.

than any nation of which we know, and they paid a greater tribute than any other province, namely three hundred and sixty talents of gold dust.[56]

This quantum of tribute from the Indian satrapy constituted 32% of the empire's revenue, in comparison to 3.2% from the other 'Indian' satrapies combined. Herodotus gives a hearsay account of how the gold dust was collected by giant gold-digging ants.[57] He also states that the gold dust was not extracted within India itself but from the previously mentioned expanse of desert in the Pactyic country.[58] Undoubtedly the Persians were transmitting the account of the gold-digging ants from Indian sources. The *Mahabharatha* narrates that "the kings who live by the river Śailodā between Mount Meru and Mount Mandara and enjoy the pleasing shade of bamboo and cane, the Khasas, Ekāśanas, Jyohas, Pradaras, Dīrghavenus, Paśupas, Kunindas, Tanganas, and Further Tanganas, they brought the gold called Pipīlaka, which is granted as a boon by the pipīlaka ants, and they brought it by bucketful and piles."[59] Based on a careful comparison of Indian and Greek geographic references to this region, historian Moti Chandra concludes that the Śailodā river was in Central Asia.[60]

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56. Herodotus, *Histories* 3.94.
57. Herodotus, *Histories* 3.102-105.
58. Herodotus, *Histories* 3.102. Vogelsang argues for Dardistan (in today's eastern Pakistan) as the source of the gold. Willem Vogelsang, "Gold from Dardistan: Some comparative remarks on the tribute system in the extreme Northwest of the Indian subcontinent," in *Le tribut dans l'empire Perse*, edited by P. Briant and C. Herrenschmidt (Paris: Travaux de l'Instituted'EtudesIraniennes de l'Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle 13, 1989), 157-71.
59. *Mahabharata* 2.27.48. Trans. and ed., J. A. B. van Buitenen, *The Mahabharata Vol. 2* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 118.
60. Moti Chandra, *Trade and trade Routes in Ancient India* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 2011), 135-136.

- • Darius I's Susa foundation tablet describe the precious materials obtained from different parts of the empire to build his palace at Susa. It includes the following details of materials obtained from the South Asian satrapies of Gandara, Bactria, India and Arachosia:

  > The cedar timber, this was brought from a mountain named Lebanon. The Assyrian people brought it to Babylon; from Babylon the Carians and the Ionians brought it to Susa. *The yakâ-timber was brought from Gandara* and from Carmania.
  >
  > *The gold was brought* from Lydia and *from Bactria*, which here was wrought. The precious stone lapis lazuli and carnelian which was wrought here, this was brought from Sogdia. The precious stone turquoise, this was brought from Chorasmia, which was wrought here.
  >
  > The silver and the ebony were brought from Egypt. The ornamentation with which the wall was adorned, that from Ionians was brought. *The ivory which was wrought here, was brought* from Kush and *from India* [*Hidauv*] and from Arachosia.[61]

The timber from Gandara named *yakā* in Old Persian is rendered in the Elamite version as [GIŠ] *še-iš-šá-ba-ut*, and the Akkadian as *musukkannu*. It is widely attested as a valuable timber used for fine furniture in Ancient Near Eastern texts and is identified as North Indian rosewood (*Dalbergia sissoo Roxburgh*).[62] This identification has significance for interpreting Isaiah 40:20, where a long

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61. Darius I, DSf: 31-45. The Babylonian abbreviation (DSaa) mentions ivory, but does not mention Hinduš.

62. K. R. Maxwell-Hyslop, "Dalbergia sissoo Roxburgh," *Anatolian Studies* 33 (1983): 67-72.

line of commentators opted to vocalize the Hebrew word וכסמה (*hmśkn*) as *ha-mesukkan* ('the mesukkannu') rather than *hamsukkān* ('whoever [is] too poor').[63]  The preference for *ha-mesukkan* is strengthened by the existence of the Akkadian variant *mesukkannu*;[64] and even more so by the parallel phrase "a tree that will not rot," which is echoed by the Akkadian *iṣṣu dārû*, 'everlasting wood'.

### 5.4. Reign of Xerxes I

• There were Arians, Bactrians, Gandarians, and Indians in Xerxes' army. Herodotus mentions that "The Indians wore garments of tree-wool [i.e. cotton] and carried reed bows and iron-tipped reed arrows."[65] Likewise, the Indian cavalry "were armed in the same manner as their infantry; they rode swift horses and drove chariots drawn by horses and wild asses."[66] Xerxes even had "Indian dogs which accompanied the army."[67] The entire Indian contingent was chosen by Xerxes' general Mardonius from among the constituent country units along with the Persian 'Immortals' and cavalry, and the Medes, Scythians and Bactrians.[68]

### 5.5. Reign of Darius III

• Indian units fought in the Persian army against the Greeks at the decisive Battle of Gaugamela in October 331 BC when Darius III was defeated, ending the Achaemenid dynasty. Arrian recounts that the combined Bactrian, Sogdian, and Saka contingent along with tribal warriors from the Bactrian border were all commanded by Bessus, the

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63.  Simon Sherwin, "*Hamsukkān* in Isaiah 40:20: Some Reflections," *Tyndale Bulletin* 56, no. 1 (2005) 145-149.

64.  This wood is known from much earlier (Sumerian) times. See *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* (*CAD*) M 2: 237–239.

65.  Herodotus, *Histories* 7.65.

66.  Herodotus, *Histories* 7.86.

67.  Herodotus, *Histories* 7.187.

68.  Herodotus, *Histories* 8.113.

royal prince and satrap of Bactria.[69]

• When Alexander crossed the Indus into the Punjab in 327 BC, he did not encounter a Persian army or even a Persian administration. Instead he was confronted by local Indian kings with large armies. The most formidable of these kings was Poros "the good" (to be distinguished from another king Poros, "the bad"). He was possibly the ruler of the Pauruva or Puru clans on the banks of the Sarasvati River.[70] Even though Alexander defeated Poros at the Battle of the Hydaspes in the spring of 326 BC, he was so impressed by the Indian king's courage and dignity that he "granted Poros sovereignty over the very Indians he had been ruling and added another territory even more extensive than his former domain...and thereafter enjoyed the man's unswerving loyalty."[71]

From that point onwards, successive formal interactions between India's Mauryan Emperors and Greek ambassadors representing Alexander's successors resulted in the exponential increase of knowledge about India by people in the Hellenistic world, including the Jews.

## 6. South Asians in the Persian heartland: slaves, labourers, soldiers, and traders

Sadly, the earliest evidence for the presence of persons of South Asian origin within the Achaemenid Empire involves slavery. A document dated 511 BC, registers the sale of Nana-Silim "a female inhabitant of Bactria" (URU *ba-aḫ-tar-ú-ʾi-i-ti*) in Sippar.[72] A few years later, in 508 BC,

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69. Arrian, *Anabasis* 3.8.3.

70. *Rg Veda* 7.96.2.

71. Arrian,*Anabasis 5*.19.2-3. Trans. Pamela Mensch, *The Landmark Arrian: The Campaigns of Alexander*, ed. James Romm (NY: Pantheon Books, 2010), 221.

72. Muhammad A. Dandamaev, *Slavery in Babylonia: From Nabopolassar to Alexander the Great (626-331 BC)*, (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1984, 2009), 108.

another document shows that the Egibi family of Babylon owned a slave who also bore the common Akkadian name Nana-Silim. She was "a female inhabitant of Gandara" (URU *a-an-da-ru-i-tum*). We do not know how these women were enslaved and transported from Bactria and Gandara.

Under slightly happier circumstances, the Persepolis Fortification 'Q' texts record food rations issued to authorized travellers journeying across the empire between the years 509 – 496 BC, during the reign of Darius I. Most of the traffic was between Bactria and Susa. Sometimes these caravans involved as many as 50 people led by official guides, and they were authorized by the local satrap.[73] There groups consisted of "*kurtaš*" or labourers assigned for specific construction projects throughout the Empire. According to Magee et al.,

> The most regularly appearing toponyms from the eastern empire are Harauvatish (Arachosia) and Hindush, while Gandara is listed twice and Thatagus is completely absent. The one documented journey from Gandara to Susa (PF1358) was made via Harauvatish under the authority of an official there named Bakabadush who also authorized journeys from other areas. This has led to the suggestion that a route from Gandara to southwest Iran via the oasis of modern Kandahar was in common use. Although there are 16 separate documents that mention Hindush and/or Indians, only one relating to travel originating in Hindush was authorized by an official who may have resided there (PF1552). Significantly, none of the journeys to or from Hindush appears to have been authorized in Harauvatish, suggesting that thy may have been made via another route, possibly east through Baluchistan to Carmania.[74]

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73. Eg. PF 1287, 1555. Wouter F. M. Henkelman, "Bactrians in Persepolis – Persians in Bactria," in *A Millennium of History: The Iron Age in southern Central Asia (2ⁿᵈ and 1ˢᵗ Millennia BC)*, edited by Johanna Lhuillier and Nikolaus Boroffka (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 2018), 223-256.

74. Peter Magee, Cameron Petrie, Robert Knox, Farid Khan and Ken Thomas, "The Achaemenid Empire in South Asia and recent

Henkelman and Stolper give further summaries of travellers from Bactria, Gandara and Hinduš.

*Bactrians*: Bactrians occur at least seven times in the archive: five times as ᴴᴬᴸba-ak-ši-ia-ip, and once as ᴴᴬᴸba-ak-ti-ia-ip. In addition, the letter-order NN 1507 mentions *kurtaš* "who have come from Bactria," and who were presumably also Bactrians, as recipients of 46 sheep/goats.[75]

*Gandharians*: Zakarna the ᴬˢkán-da-ra in PF 1139 is … a "Gandharian." Zakarna receives fruit for 290 *kurtaš*; his group recurs in NN 0431, where Zakurra the ᴴᴬᴸkán-da-ra (obviously the same man) receives travel rations for himself and 290 men (and 12 camels and 31 mules) and is said to have come from Gandhāra. A third text, NN 0457:20-1, mentions Ramakšara the Gandharian (ᴬˢkán-dari-ia). Gandhāra occurs as destination and origin of travellers as well, as does ᴬˢba-ra-ú-bara-e-za-na, "Paropamisus" in NN 0944.[76]

*Hinduš*: Indians are a frequent phenomenon in the Fortification archive; they mostly occur en route to or from India. Among prominent Indian travellers Abbatema (PF 0785, 1317 and PF 1558), Karabba (PF 1397), Hapiziš (PF 1437), and Apmama (NN 2195:8-9) may be mentioned. The last one was coming from Kurmana/Kermān and was travelling from Persia to Media; he received a rather high wine ration of 60 qts. Indian *kurtaš* are rare (NN 0939, with Bactrians).[77]

The Murašû archive covering a fifty-year period (454-

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Excavations in Akra in Northwest Pakistan," *American Journal of Archaeology* 109 (2005): 713.

75.  WouterHenkelman and Matthew Stolper, "Ethnic Identity and Ethnic Labelling at Persepolis: The Case of the Skudrians," in *Organisations des pouvoirs et contacts culturels dans les pays de l'empireachéménide*, eds. P. Briant and P. Chauveau (Paris: De Boccard, 2009), 301.

76.  Henkelman and Stolper, "Ethnic Identity," 303.

77.  Henkelman and Stolper, "Ethnic Identity," 304.

404 BC) spanning the reigns of Artaxerxes I, Xerxes II and Darius II, contain records of individuals who conducted business with the Murašû family firm in the Nippur region of Achaemenid Babylonia. Nebuchadnezzar had resettled Judahites in Nippur on the Chebar Canal (Ezek. 1:1, 3; 3:15;10:15, 20,22). The Murašû archive includes 64 documents with the names of 61 Judean individuals.[78] The archive also contains records of transactions witnessed by officials bearing the title "foreman of the Indians" (*šaknu ša Indumāja*).

> "Bagazuštu, the foreman (*šaknu*) of the Indians" (LÚ *Indumāja*), son of Bagapāta, witnessed a document in Nippur in 417 B.C. The same "foreman of the Indians" appears…in the same year as one of the witnesses to a rent payment by the Murašû house for bow fiefs belonging to some military colonists from the country of Harāiva… According to another document, an Iranian, Bagaina by name, rented out his field near Nippur in 425 B.C. and Bagazuštu, son of Parurē, "the foreman of the Indians," was a witness. These documents show that a colony of Indians existed in the Nippur region. To judge from their names, their foremen could have been Iranians or Indians. Some other Indians who held bow fiefs had Babylonian names. These "Indians" may actually have been colonists from Gandhara.[79]

Exile and military service sometimes brought Jews and South Asians into direct contact with each other in different parts of the Achaemenid Empire. In the satrapy of Egypt, for instance, Bactrian soldiers were garrisoned

78. TeroAlstola, *Judeans in Babylonia: a study of deportees in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE* (Leiden/Boston: Brill Academic, 2020), 167. Accessible online:https://helda.helsinki.fi//bitstream/handle/10138/311881/2020_Alstola_Judeans_in_Babylonia.pdf?sequence=1.

79. Muhammad A. Dandamayev, *Iranians in Achaemenid Babylonia* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 1992), 165-166.

at Elephantine fortress, alongside Jewish, Median and Babylonian troops.[80] One document from 403 BC even records a transaction between a Bactrian and a Jew.

> [In] the [m]onth of Payni, year 2 of Artaxerxes the king, said [Ba]rzharava son of Artabarzana, that is Patou, a Bactrian whose [p]lace is made in Elephantine the fortress of the detachment of Marya, 1, to Jedaniah [son of Na]than, a J[e]w wh[o] is hereditary-property-holder in Elephantine the fortress of the detachment of [...][81]

Herodotus informs us that in Darius' invasion force, there were individual military units from the South Asian satrapies of Aria, Bactria, Gandara and India. "The Bactrians in the army wore a headgear very similar to the Median, carrying their native reed bows and short spears;" and were commanded by Darius' son Hystaspes.[82] The Arians and Gandarians were similarly equipped, except that the Arians were given Median bows.[83] The Indians were especially noticed for wearing cotton ("tree-wool") garments.[84]

In a few instances, subject peoples from the western regions of the Persian Empire were forcibly resettled in the South Asian satrapies. Darius had deported the 'Branchidae' (priests and families from the temple of Apollo in Didyma) to Bactria, where Alexander found their descendants.[85] Captives from Libyan Barca were also sent to a village

80. Bezalel Porten, *Archives from Elephantine: the life of an ancient Jewish military colony* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), 29; Bezalel Porten and Ada Yardeni, eds., *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt, Vol. 4: Ostraca and Assorted Inscriptions* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 71.

81. TAD D2.12; Porten and Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents*, 70. Jacob Hoftijzer, "An unpublished Aramaic fragment from Elephantine," *Oudheidkundige Mededelingenuit het Rijksmuseum van Oudhedente Leiden* 68 (1988): 45–48.

82. Herodotus, *Histories* 7.64.

83. Herodotus, *Histories* 7.66.

84. Herodotus, *Histories* 7.65.

85. Strabo 11.11.4; Quintus Curtius Rufus 7.5.28-35.

in Bactria.[86] The Persians also threatened to deport the daughters of their Ionian subjects to Bactria.[87]

## 7. Visual Portrayals of South Asians

The earliest visual representations of South Asians in the Ancient Near East appear on Achaemenid imperial monuments. They are portrayed individually or in groups along with other representative peoples of the Empire's subject nations.

### 7.1. Royal tombs

One soldier apiece from the eight South Asian satrapies are depicted among the thirty military 'dais-bearers' on each of the six imperial tombs at Naqš-e Rostam (Darius I [c. 486 BC], Xerxes I [c. 500 BC], Artaxerxes I [c. 424 BC], Darius II [c. 305 BC]) and Persepolis (Artaxerxes II [c. 358 BC], Artaxerxes III [c. 340 BC]). The two-tiered depictions on all six tombs follow the same pattern with no significant variation in details. Of these, the reliefs on the tomb of Xerxes I are the best preserved. On two tombs (I and V) the nationalities of the 'dais-bearers' are inscribed in Old Persian, Elamite and Akkadian legends, such as "This [is an] Indian."[88] .

Vogelsang notes that the 'dais-bearers' from the four eastern-most satrapies Gandâra, Thataguš, Hinduš and Maka, are attired very differently to their more westerly neighbours. The former "wear a loin cloth; they are bare-chested and they wear sandals. They carry a long sword on a string which hangs down their shoulders."[89] He proposes that this variation was intended to mark the people of those four satrapies as a distinct cultural grouping though they belonged to separate administrative zones. The

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86. Herodotus, *Histories* 4.204.
87. Herodotus, *Histories* 6.9.
88. Eg.PO. *i-ya-ma/ha-i-du-u-ya*; Elam. *hi/hi-in-du-iš*; Akkad. [*a-ga-a*[amēl]]*in-du-u.* Erich F. Schmidt, *Persepolis III: The Royal Tombs and Other Monuments* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 109.
89. Willem Vogelsang, "The Achaemenids and India," in *Achaemenid History IV*, eds. A. Kuhrt and H. Sancisi-Weedenburg, (Leiden: Nederlands Instituutvoor het Nabije Oosten, 1990), 98.

more westerly representatives from Haraiva, Zranka and Harauvatiš are outfitted in a "belted Median coat; short baggy trousers; high boots; short sword of median type at side."[90] The soldier from Bākstriš alone is attired in full Median style with "belted Median coat; long trousers; short Median sword at side."

## 7.2. Statue of Darius at Susa

The base of the statue of Darius at Susa (c. 494 BC) depicts 24 kneeling suppliants with arms outstretched.[91] The names of their respective satrapies are inscribed under each figure in hieroglyphic 'fortress cartouches'. They include Maka (*m'g*), Hinduš (*hndw3y*), Haraiva (*hlw3*), Bāxtriš (*s3htjl*), Harauvatiš (*hlhdy*), Zranka (*slng*), and Thataguš (*sdgw3?*); but not Gandāra.[92]

These figures appear to be officials, not soldiers, as they bear no weapons. In this series, their attire does not conform to the same cultural grouping suggested by Vogelsang above. The representatives of Haraiva, Maka and Hinduš cover their torso, whereas those from Bāxtriš, Harauvatiš and Thataguš are bare-bodied.

## 7.3. Apadāna stairways at Persepolis

The most detailed and informative depictions of South Asians in Achaemenid art are found among the tribute-bearers carved into the north and east stairways of the Apadāna (Audience Hall of Darius I) of Persepolis around 500 BC.[93] Each stairway depicts 23 delegations of subject peoples being led by a Persian guide into the presence of the emperor. Historians have sought to identify these groups mainly by the animals and objects they bring to offer as tribute.

According to Schmidt, three South Asian delegations

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90. Erich F. Schmidt, *Persepolis I: Structures, reliefs, inscriptions* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 117.
91. Michael Roaf, "The Subject Peoples on the Base of the Statue of Darius," in *Cahiers de la Délégation Archéologique Françaiseen Iran 4.* 73-160.
92. Peter Magee, et al., "The Achaemenid Empire in South Asia": 713, fn. 17.
93. Schmidt, *Persepolis III*, 143-158.

(from Haraiva, Harauvatiš, and Bāxtriš) bring two-humped Bactrian camels. The Gandārians and Drangians offer bulls, along with spears and a shield. The Indians bring a donkey. About the Indians, Schmidt particularly notes that

> The jar-shaped objects, or perhaps bags tied with strings, most probably depict receptacles for gold dust and may reflect Herodotus' remark that the Indians had to pay a greater tribute than any other province, namely 360 talents of gold dust. None of the other delegations offer similar receptacles. The donkey too appears as tribute solely with [this] delegation. Although we have been informed that the animal here pictured is not an onager, it may have bearing on Herodotus' statement that the Indians in Xerxes' army drove chariots drawn by horses and wild asses.[94]
>
> In contrast to the rather stereotyped profiles of most delegates depicted on the Apadana, the facial outline of the members of [the Indian] delegation shows a distinct racial type characterized mainly by the shape of the nose.[95]

In comparison to the aquiline nose of the Gandarians, Schmidt observes, the Indian delegates have noses resembling those of the Ethiopian delegation.

> Our Indian and Ethiopian delegations quite strikingly reflect Herodotus' description of the eastern and western Ethiopians. The bearded Indian has slightly wavy or straight hair, with a single curl at the tip of the mustache, in contrast to the beardless Ethiopian, whose hair shows an allover pattern of evidently natural curves, but their profiles are almost alike.[96]

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94. Herodotus, *Histories* 7.86.
95. Schmidt, *Persepolis III*, 152.
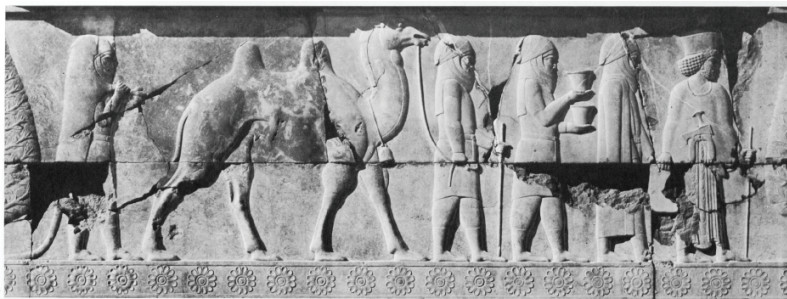96. Schmidt, *Persepolis III*, 152. See Herodotus, *Histories* 7.70.

Fig. 1. Arians from *Haraiva* (Source: Schmidt, *Persepolis I,* Plate 30)


Fig. 2. Arachosians from *Harauvatiš.* (Source: Schmidt, *Persepolis I,* Plate 33)


Fig. 3. Bactrians from *Bāxtriš.* (Source: Schmidt, *Persepolis I,* Plate 41)

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Fig. 4. Gandarians from *Gandāra.* (Source: Schmidt, Persepolis I, Plate 40)



Fig. 5. Indians from *Hinduš.* (Source: Schmidt, *Persepolis I,* Plate 44)



Fig. 6. Drangians from *Zranka.* (Source: Schmidt, *Persepolis I,* Plate 47)

7.4. Audience Hall and Throne Hall at Persepolis

Three tiers of 'throne-bearers' are depicted on either side of the entrance to the Apadāna Audience Hall and Throne Hall (or 'Hall of One Hundred Columns' completed by Artaxerxes I) of the Persepolis palace complex.[97] Although the nationality of each 'throne-bearer' is not identified by an inscription, archaeologists have been guided by the virtually identical resemblances to delegates on the Apadāna stairway friezes. All the South Asian satrapies except Maka appear to be represented.[98]

## 8. What Did the Jews in Achaemenid Persia Know about "India" and "Indians"?

Whatever the Greeks knew about "India" and "Indians" they learned from visiting Persia or interacting in some way with Persians. Since the Jews had closer contact with Persia, we can reasonably assume that they knew at least as much as the Greeks did about "India" and "Indians".

8.1. Herodotus

If Herodotus (and his earlier Greek sources) can be relied upon as a register of Greek knowledge about India in the 5th cent BC, Book III of his *Histories* would arguably be a summary of that knowledge. In it we see that Indians were the most populous nation in the world. Herodotus states that "These are more in number than any nation of which we know."[99] India also formed the easternmost edge of the known world. "Of all the people of Asia whom we know - even those about whom something is said with precision," Herodotus concluded, "the Indians dwell nearest to the dawn and the rising sun; for on the eastern side of India all is desolate because of the sand."[100]

In terms of ethnography, he understood that "There

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97. Schmidt, *Persepolis I*, 107-128 (Apadāna Audience Hall); 129-137 (Throne Hall).

98. Schmidt, *Persepolis I*, 118-120 (Apadāna Audience Hall); 135-136 (Throne Hall).

99. Herodotus, *Histories* 3.94.

100. Herodotus, *Histories* 3.98.

are many Indian nations, none speaking the same language." He loosely categorized these innumerable "Indian nations" into two broad groups: "Some of them are nomads, some not."

Of the settled nations, he described two further groupings. Firstly, the 'central' nations who "dwell in the river marshes" (presumably along the Indus basin) and relied on fishing for their food and reeds for their clothing and watercrafts. Secondly, the 'southern' nations who lived without houses, but cultivated rice, and were strictly vegetarian.[101] These, he says, were "black-skinned, like the Ethiopians."[102] Herodotus made it a point to state that, politically, "these Indians dwell far away from the Persians southwards, and were not subjects of King Darius."

The nomadic nations were also subdivided into two groupings. Firstly, the 'eastern' nations lived to the east of the river marsh-dwellers, and they practiced cannibalism.[103] Among all the "Indian nations" they alone are named, here as "Padaei" and elsewhere as "Callatiae".[104] Secondly, the 'northern' nations lived "near the town of Caspatyrus and the Pactyic country, north of the rest of India;"[105] presumably in relation to the Indus River basin as a natural north-west/south-east boundary-marker. Herodotus noted that "these live like the Bactrians;" and that "they are of all Indians the most warlike." It was these nomadic tribes that were "sent for the gold [collected from the mounds made by the marvellous gold-digging ants]; for in these parts all is desolate because of the sand."

## 8.2. Ctesias

Unlike Herodotus, his younger contemporary Ctesias of Cnidus lived in Persia for seventeen years (415-398/7

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101. Herodotus, *Histories* 3.100.
102. Herodotus, *Histories* 3.101. In 7.70, Herodotus describes the "Ethiopians of Asia" who served with Xerxes' Indian contingent and were armed like them. They were dark-skinned like the African Ethiopians but were distinguishable by their straight hair.
103. Herodotus, *Histories* 3.99.
104. Herodotus, *Histories* 3.38.
105. Herodotus, *Histories* 3.102.

BC) serving as a physician in the court of Artaxerxes II. There, he met visitors from India from whom he obtained first-hand information preserved in his *Indika*. As Andrew Nichols summarizes,

> [Ctesias] mentions on several occasions the Indians he encountered during his residency at the various capitals of the Persian Empire. In Babylon, he obtained a viewing of an elephant in the care of an Indian mahout (F45bα) and his assertion that the parrot speaks Indian suggests that he saw one in the custody of an Indian handler. His accurate account on the practise of falconry (F45g) may have resulted from witnessing a demonstration by an Indian (or perhaps Bactrian) falconer. Elsewhere in an effort to refute Herodotus' arguments regarding the skin colour of the Indians, he claims to have encountered seven light-skinned Indians (F45 §19). There is no reason to doubt his assertions since we know from Achaemenid reliefs that there were Indian visitors to the Persian court usually bringing gifts.
>
> In addition to Indian travellers, Bactrian merchants visiting the Persian palaces who were readily involved in trade with the Indians, proved to be a major source for Ctesias' conception of India. Bacteria formed a crossroads between India and the Middle East becoming an important trading centre in exotic goods along the Silk Road which passed from China and north India through Bactria and into the Iranian plateau.[106]

According to Ctesias, Queen Semiramis was determined to conquer India for the Assyrian Empire because of the

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106. Andrew Nichols, *Ctesias on India and fragments of his minor works: Introduction, translation and commentary* (London/NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), 19, 23-24. Also see Stavros Solomou, "The Indica of Ctesias of Cnidus: Text (incl. MSS. Monacensis gr. 287 and Oxoniensis, Holkham gr. 110), Translation and Commentary," Unpublished PhD thesis, University College London, 2007.

One fragment that may go back to Ctesias states,

extraordinary resources of that country. Regardless of the historicity of Semiramis and her purported campaign, the description of India that Ctesias gives definitely reflects how its western neighbours, including Jews in the Persian court, imagined India.

> And when she was informed that the Indian nation was the largest one in the world and likewise possessed both the most extensive and the fairest country, she purposed to make a campaign into India. Stabrobates at that time was king of the country and had a multitude of soldiers without number; and many elephants were also at his disposal, fitted out in an exceedingly splendid fashion with such things as would strike terror in war. For India is a land of unusual beauty, and since it is traversed by many rivers it is supplied with water over its whole area and yields two harvests each year; consequently it has such an abundance of the necessities of life that at all times it favours its inhabitants with a bounteous enjoyment of them. And it is said that because of the favourable climate in those parts the country has never experienced a famine or a destruction of crops. It also has an unbelievable number of elephants, which both in courage and in strength of body far surpass those of Libya, and likewise gold, silver, iron, and copper; furthermore, within its borders are to be found great quantities of precious stones of every kind and of practically all other things which contribute to luxury and wealth.[107]

One item of Indian exotica that piqued the curiosity of

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The Bactrian merchants and others involved in trade in India take these [camel-hair] rugs to Persia on their camels, and they sell the aforementioned rugs very dearly. And the Persians hold them in high esteem. And the Indian king sends these rugs as a gift to the Persian king. Constantius Porphyrogenetus VII, *De Natura Animalium* 2.474; quoted in Solomou, *Indica of Ctesias*, 193-194, 137. See also Henkelman, "Bactrians in Persepolis," 247.

107. Ctesias, *Persika* F1b = Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica* 2.16-19.

Ctesias the court physician were the droppings of the *dikairon* bird. It was offered exclusively for the emperor's use. In a court culture obsessed with intrigues of poisonings, the value given to this substance was understandably high.

> If someone should swallow a speck of its dung placed in a drink, he would die by the evening. The death is like sleep – very agreeable and free of pain – the sort the poets like to call 'limb-relaxing' and 'easy'. This death would bring freedom from pain and therefore is most pleasing for those in need of it. The Indians go to enormous lengths to get it, for they think of it as the source of forgetfulness of all our troubles. The Indians also include this substance among their most precious tribute for the Persian king who receives it as a gift revered above all others; he hoards it as a remedy and antidote for incurable illness – should he contract one. No one else in Persia owns this substance except the king himself and his mother.[108]

Ctesias also mentions Indian garments stained vermillion by applying a dye extracted from a particular insect which are "even brought to the Persian king, and their beauty excites the admiration of the Persians, and indeed when set against their native garments far surpasses the and amazes people...because the colour is even stronger and more brilliant than the much-vaunted wares of Sardis."[109]

One aspect of the writings of Scylax, Herodotus and Ctesias on India that has baffled historians is the inclusion of 'fabulous' accounts of humans with strange bodies (eg. Sciapodes, Cynocephaloi, Enotokoitai, Satyrs, etc.) and animals which are unrecognizable to modern zoology (eg. martichora, griffins, giant cockerels, Bitticus talking birds, etc.). Some oddities may have materialized

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108. Ctesias, *Indika* F45m = Aelian, *History of Animals* 4:41. For a discussion on the details see Solomou, "The Indica of Ctesias of Cnidus," 282-283.

109. Ctesias, *Indika* F45p.γ (FgrHist 688) = Aelian, *History of Animals* 4.46.

from hearing Indian visitors narrate mythological stories that were mistakenly assumed to contain ethnographic details. The one-footed 'Sciapodes' (Gk. shadow-feet) may have their origin in the fictitious *Ēkapāda* (Sansk. [people who are] one-footed) who make their appearance in the *Mahābhāratha* (2.28.47S; 2.47.16) and *Rāmāyana* (4.39.25E).[110] Others like the 'Cynocephaloi' (Gk. dog-heads), and 'Enotokoitai' ([people who] cover themselves with their ears) may have arisen from overly literal interpretations of tribal names such as *Śunāmukha* and *Karnaprāvarana*, which are amply attested in ancient Indian literature.[111]

Remarkably, these physical abnormalities did not entail barbarity. Ctesias repeatedly notes that the Indian were "extremely just."[112] While the Indian Pygmies are "very just and have the same laws as the [other] Indians,"[113] the Dog-heads were "extremely just, like the rest of the Indians with whom they associate."[114] About their spiritual beliefs, Ctesias mentions their worship of the sun and moon, which to the Jews would not have been surprising (Deuteronomy 4:19). Ctesias was most struck by the Indian's fearlessness of death; a feature that would evoke abiding fascination among Greeks and Jews alike in succeeding centuries.

Ctesias also wrote a book, now lost, on the communication network that connected the far-flung territories of the Achaemenid Empire. It apparently spanned an itinerary "*apou Ephesou mekhri Baktrōn kai Indikēs*, from Ephesus to Bactria and India."[115]

## 9. What Did the "Indians" Know about the Achaemenid Persians?

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110. Scylax, F7a (Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* 3.47); F7b (Tzetzes, *Chiliades* 7.629-30). Ctesias, F51a (Pliny, *Natural History* 7.23); F51b (Tzetzes, *Chiliades* 7.621-641). See Klaus Karttunen, *India in Early Greek Literature* (Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society, 1989), 132, 140.

111. Nichols, *Ctesias on India*, 139-140.

112. Ctesias, F23 (46a=F45.16) (Photius, *Bibliotheca* 72; *FGrHist* 688).

113. Ctesias, F35 (46a-46b=F45.21-23) (Photius, *Bibliotheca* 72; *FGrHist* 688).

114. Ctesias, F52 (Photius, *Bibliotheca* 72; *FGrHist* 688).

115. Ctesias, FGrH 688 F33.

The paucity of documentary and archaeological evidence for Achaemenid influence in India reflects the nature of its political administration in the region. As Witzel states,

> Apparently, Persian rule had only superficially overlaid local cultures, and much of the older structures survived. The satrapy of Gandhāra was perhaps administered by native princes (as seen in the reports of Alexander's campaign), governing under a nominal Persian *satrap*, while in nearby Bactria things may have been very different… Such local chieftains were called *rāja* by Pāṇini and "kings" by the Greeks.[116]

Therefore, it is difficult to ascertain what contemporary Indians knew about the Persians and their empire. Even the few possible mentions of them in the earliest Sanskrit and Pāli sources cannot be dated with same degree of accuracy as the Persian inscriptions.

In the *Rg Veda*, a hymn to Indra refers to a hundred thousand sacrificial horses obtained from *Parśu* and *Tirindira* (VIII.6.46). Apart from the likelihood that both these personal names are of Persian derivation, nothing further can be reliably adduced.[117] The *Mahābhārata* refers to *Parshva* (VI.10.54) in a long list of kingdoms but, again, we cannot speculate further, as no more geographical or historical clues are given. However, we have slightly more information about Kamboja.

> The horses which the people of Kamboja brought as presentation to Yudhiṣṭhira (M.B. II, 47, 4) numbered three hundred, they were variegated, spotted or speckled with black or of Tittira breed (Tittira is the name of a country as well, M.B. VI,

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116. Michael Witzel, "Brahmanical Reactions to Foreign Influences and to Social and Religious Change," in *Between the Empires: Society in India 300 BCE to 400 CE*, ed. Patrick Olivelle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 458 (457-499).

117. *s.v.* "4. Parśu" (504-505) and "Tirindira" (310-311) in A. A. Macdonell and A. B. Keith, *Vedic Index of Names and Subjects, Vol. I* (London: John Murray, 1912).

2084, 3975) which were fattened on the fruits of Salvadora Persica (*pīlu*) and the nuts of Terminala Catappa (*Ingudaiḥ*). Their snouts are compared with the parrot's beak (*śukanāsikaih*). In the Jātaka stories the Kamboj mules (*Kambojaka assatara*, J. IV, 654, G. 242) are mentioned. In the Mahāvastu (ii, 185) the superb horses of Kamboja (*Kambojaka asvavara*) are praised. In the *Sumangalavilāsini* (Vol. I, p. 124) Kamboja is spoken as the home of horses (*Kambojo assānam āyatanam*). In the Jain *Uttarādhyana Sūtra* it is said that a trained Kamboja horse excelled all horses in speed and no noise could frighten it (Jain Sūtras, S. B. E. Part II, p.47). The importance of the Kamboja horse was also recognised in the *Arthaśāstra* (*Arthaśāstra*, tr. P. 148, 3rd ed.).

Besides the mares, the Kamboja people sent as presents to Yudhiṣṭhira cows and chariots (M.B. II, 45, 20) in good number and three hundred camels (II, 45, 20; 47, 4). They also sent as presents clothes made of sheep's wool and lynx firs decorated with gold (M.B. II, 47,3), shawls and skins (Ibid). At another place the Kambojas are said to have presented very valuable blankets and the black. Grey and red skins of the Kadali deer (M.B. II, 45, 19).[118]

The earliest probable mention of the Achaemenid era Persians in Indian literature is by the Sanskrit grammarian Pāṇini who wrote his treatise *Ashṭādhyāyī* around mid 5th century BC.[119] Among the 'republics which observed the practice of arms or military art' (*āyudhajīvī sangha*), he identified *Parśu*, whose inhabitants were collectively called *Parśavaḥ*, and each individual member *Pārśava*.[120] According

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118. Moti Chandra, *Geographical and Economic Studies in the Mahābhārata: Apāyana Parva* (Lucknow: U. P. Historical Society, 1945), 35-36.

119. V. S. Agrawala, *India as Known to Pāṇini* (Lucknow: University of Lucknow, 1953), 475. Some scholars date Pāṇini to as late as 350 BC, but Agrawala's evidence is compelling.

120. Pāṇini, *Ashṭādhyāyī* V.3.117; cited in Agrawala, *India as Known to*

to Agrawala, Panīni's westward geographical horizon is indicated by the following places named by him.

> The western-most point is Prakanva [VI.1.153] corresponding to *Parikanioi* mentioned by Herodotus and to the modern country of Ferghana...To the south of Ferghana lay Kamboja (IV.1.175), which as will be shown later may be identified with the region of Badakshan-Pamir. South of it lay Kāpiśī (IV.2.99), capital of the kingdom of Kāpiśa, which may be identified with modern Kafiristan, south-east of the Hindukush. South of Kāpiśī was situated Gandhāra (IV.1.169) comprising of the Kabul river, with its frontier outpost at Takshaśilā (IV.3.93).[121]

Of the sixteen *mahajanapadas* mentioned in the Pāli *Tripitaka*, fourteen were located in the Majjhimadēsa (Middle Land), and two in the Uttarāpatha (Northern Reaches): Gandhāra and Kamboja.[122] According to later sources, Pāṇini was himself a native of Śalōtura in Gandhāra.[123] This may explain his apparent familiarity with the ethno-cultural features of northwestern India. Most scholars agree that the name Cambyses (*Kambūjiya*) was somehow connected with this place-name.[124]

Witzel's synopsis of Achaemenid linguistic influences on India is worth quoting in full.

> Direct Influence of the Persian Empire on Indian culture is visible only in the northwest, such as Taxila. The great grammarian Pāṇini, who came from Śalātura, a village near the confluence of the Kabul and Indus rivers, mentions some such

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*Pāṇini*, 445-446.

    121. Agrawala, *India as Known to Pāṇini*, 37.

    122. Bimala Churn Law, *Geography of Early Buddhism* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1932), 2-3.

    123. Agrawala, *India as Known to Pāṇini*, 9-11.

    124. J. Tavernier, *Iranica in the Achaemenid Period (ca. 550-220 BC): lexicon of Old Iranian proper names and loanwords, attested in non-Iranian texts* (Neuven/Paris/ Dudley, MA: Uitgeverij Peeters en Departement Ossterse Studies, 2007), 18-19.

cases in his grammar, most important the two words for "writing" *lipi/libi* [from Old Persian *dipi*, which is attested in that very form in Aśokan inscriptions] or *Yavana* "Greek" seen in *yavanikā*, or East Iranian *kanthika* "citizen." Despite the open and international environment in Gandhāra, Pāṇini remained a traditional scholar closely allied with late Vedic culture: he does not mention Prākṛt, Iranian, or other foreign languages but teachers the Vedic language (*chandas*) next to the elevated and the colloquial language (*bhāṣā*) of Gandhāra. Therefore, it cannot be observed in Pāṇini that Persian officials of his homeland used a Semitic alphabet and wrote in a form of Imperial Aramaic. He also did not take note, just like Patañjali a few hundred years later, of the presence of Iranian speakers, though he mentions the name of a border area, Varṇu (Bannu), or of Kārpiśa near Kabul, and though he knew still of a "king" of the neighboring Kamboja land, an Iranian area in eastern Afghanistan that spoke late Avestan.

Just as can be observed in Pāṇini's grammar, the influence of Persian culture became very well integrated with the general Indian background, and, therefore is not immediately recognizable. For example, there are a number of early "Sanskritized" loanwords from Persian: *pustaka* "book, manuscript," *divira* "writer," *mundrā* "seal, coin," *karṣa* "a weight," *bandī* "female slave" (Middle Persian *bandag*, New Persian *banda*), even *pīlu* "elephant" (Old Persian *pīru*, New Persian *pīl*).[125]

According to the *Bhuridatta Jataka* (No. 543), the people of Kamboja were known to kill certain animals with impunity, which was repulsive from a Buddhist perspective. "'Caterpillars and insects, snakes and frogs, and worms, and flies, they slay and are innocent;' these opinions of the people of Kamboja are dishonourable (*anariyā*, lit. un-

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125.  Witzel, "Brahmanical Reactions to Foreign Influences," 460-461.

aryan); they are false."[126] This is quite certainly a reference to the Zoroastrian practice of killing 'evil animals' (*xrafstars*), which were believed to have been created by the Evil Spirit Ahriman from material darkness.[127]

The *Bāveru Jataka* (No. 339) may reflect the maritime trade in exotic birds (in this case a crow and a trained peacock) between India and *Bāveru*, Achaemenid-era Babylon (Old Persian *Bābiru*).[128]

## 10. Botanical and Linguistic Borrowings from South Asia

The Achaemenid Persian influence over the Jewish people, both in Judea and throughout the diaspora, resulted in the transfer of many things Persian into Jewish life in the latter part of the Old Testament period. As noted, these included new words and idiomatic expressions (calques) into Late Biblical Hebrew. They also included new commodities, practices and ideas originating in Persia itself or mediated through Persia from lands and cultures farther afield. Some of these 'Persian' borrowings were of South Asian origin.

Although a few words of South Asia origin could have come into Hebrew through Ugaritic and Akkadian intermediary forms in earlier centuries, the significant majority of Hebrew words of apparent Indic origin were transmitted through Persian cognates. Some of these have already been discussed in the preceding article in this series. Here, we shall discuss two examples of such 'borrowings' from South Asia.

### 10.1. Cotton

The writer of *Esther* describes the opulent décor of Xerxes' banqueting pavilions with the detail that "there

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126. R. F. St. Andrew St. John, "Bhūridatta Jātaka Vatthu," *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1892 : (77-139) 132.

127. Mahnaz Moazami, "Mammals iii. The Classification of Mammals and the Other Animal Classes according to Zoroastrian Tradition," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, 2015. Accessible at: http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/mammals-03-in-zoroastrianism.

128. Klaus Karttunen, *India in early Greek Literature, Studia Orientalia, Vol. 65* (Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society, 1989), 27.

were white cotton [Heb. *karpas*] curtains and violet hangings fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rods…" (1:6 ESV). *Karpas* is a loanword in Hebrew and is clearly derived from the Sanskrit *kārpāsa* which appears in late Vedic literature from the first millennium BC.[129] Outside *Esther*, the word is not attested in Persian era sources, until we find *karpasu* in a Hellenistic era cuneiform tablet from Uruk dating from 253 BC, which lists garments for dressing the statues of gods.[130]

As was often the case, it appears that the name of the product entered the Persian language with the product itself coming into common use. However, it is evident that the cotton plant and the textiles woven from its fibres were known centuries before its Near Eastern consumers became familiar with its Sanskrit name.

Archaeological finds in Mehrgarh (c. 6000-4500 BC) and Shahi Tump (4th millennium BC), both in Balochistan in Pakistan, indicate that South Asian cotton (*Gossypium arboretum* L.) was being used for threading beads in pre-Harappan times.[131] The extensive cultivation of cotton for the purpose of weaving fabric appears to have begun in the Indus Valley during the Mature Harappan Period (2600 – 1900 BC).[132] The earliest archaeological evidence for the use of cotton clothing in the Ancient Near East comes from the royal women's burial vaults of the Assyrian palace of Nimrud (Kalhu) in northern Mesopotamia, dated to the 8th cent. BC.[133] The earliest cotton textile remains in Persia were

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129. Muthukumaran, 74. *Āśvalāyanaśrautasūtram* (IX.4.17), the *Lātyāyanaśrautasūtram* (II. 6.1; IX. 2.14) and the *Gobhilagṛhyasūtram* (II.10.10).

130. P.-A. Beaulieu, "Textes adminstratifs inédits d'époque hellénistique provenant des archives du Bīt Rēš," *Revue d'Assyriologie* 83 (1989): 53-87.

131. Muthukumaran, "An Ecology of Trade," 73-74.

132. Dorian Q. Fuller, "The spread of textile production and textile crops in India beyond the Harappan zone: an aspect of the emergence of craft specialization and systematic trade" in *Linguistics, archaeology and the human past. Indus Project*, edited by T. Osada and A. Uesugi (Kyoto: Research Institute for Humanity and Nature, 2008), 1-26.

133. Louise Quillien, "Dissemination and price of cotton in Mesopotamia during the 1st millennium BCE," *Revue d'ethnoécologie* 15 (2019): 2-3.

recovered from an elite burial in Arjan in Elam, dating from the end of the 7th cent. to the beginning of the 6th cent. BC.[134]

## 10.2. Etrog

According to rabbinic tradition, the etrog is the citrus fruit which (together with a palm frond, and sprigs of myrtle and willow) is part of the 'four species' used to celebrate the Festival of Sukkot (Numbers 23:40). The Aramaic word *etrog* (or *etronga*) is derived from Persian *wādrang*, but is never mentioned in the Bible. However, as attested by Josephus in the 1st century AD, etrogim had become a permanent fixture in the Sukkot ritual.[135] The citrus species with its distinctive *pitam* (stigma and style) and *gartel* (middle ridge) are also depicted in 1st and 2nd century AD Jewish coinage, and mosaics in later centuries.[136]

Evidently, the etrog was introduced into Israel during the Achaemenid period. In 2013 archaeobotanists discovered the earliest evidence for etrog cultivation from pollen embedded in the plaster of an Achaemenid era administrative compound and garden in Ramat Raḥel, four kilometers south of Jerusalem.[137] Remarkably, the etrog (like all citrus varieties) appears to have reached Persia through India. But India was itself not the place of its origin. Botanists Frank Gmitter and Xulan Hu have shown that its origins lay even farther afield.

> We consider the genetic diversity, coupled with the available natural system for plant dispersal, to be good evidence in support of the hypothesis that

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134. Javier Álvarez-Mon, "The Introduction of Cotton into the Near East: A View from Elam," *International Journal of the Society of Iranian Archaeologists* 1, no. 2 (Summer-Autumn 2015): 43-54.

135. Josephus, *Antiquities* 3:244–245; 13:372.

136. David. Z. Moster, *Etrog: How a Chinese Fruit Became a Jewish Symbol* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Pivot, 2018), 35-39.

137. Dafna Langgut, et al., "Fossil Pollen Reveals the Secrets of the Royal Persian Garden at Ramat Raḥel, Jerusalem," *Palynology* 37, no. 1 (2013): 128; Dafna Langgut, "Prestigious Fruit Trees in Ancient Israel: First Palynological Evidence for Growing *Juglans Regia* and *Citrus Medica*." *Israel Journal of Plant Science* 62 (2015): 98–110. See also, Langgut, "The Citrus Route Revealed: From Southeast Asia into the Mediterranean," *HortScience* 52, no. 6 (2017): 814-822.

the Yunnan area was a part of the primitive center of origin of contemporary Citrus species, along with nearby areas of India, Burma, and southern China.[138]

The diffusion of the etrog demonstrates how not only Persia, but also how India served as a corridor for the transmission of cultivated fruits from regions even further east. Apparently, "India" at the eastern edge of the 'world of the Bible' was itself a hub of commercial and cultural interactions with lands and peoples beyond the geographical knowledge of the Achaemenids, Greeks and Israelites. As Bauckham proposed, the principle of "representative geography" (that the named 'distant lands' of the Bible represented unnamed lands even more distant than those) applied quite functionally to ancient *Hoddu/Hinduš*.

## 11. Theological Reflection: Dispersal and Witness among the Nations

Despite the relative benevolence of their Persian rulers, even the Jews who returned to their homeland mourned the loss of their independence. "Here we are," Nehemiah prayed, "slaves to this day, slaves in the land you gave to our ancestors" (Nehemiah 9:36). In the Achaemenid administrative geography, 'Yehud' was a colony within the Minor Satrapy of *Ebir Nāri* (Heb. *'Abar Naharāh*, lit. beyond the [Euphrates] River, i.e. Trans-Euphrates/Syria). The Jews are neither mentioned in any of the 'empire lists' nor are they represented, as other nationalities are, on Achaemenid monuments. The Jews of the diaspora communities found themselves a vulnerable ethno-religious minority of relatively lower socio-cultural rank even among the other subjugated nations. Although individual Jews, like Mordechai, could attain high administrative positions in the state, the Jewish people as a whole felt very vulnerable.

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138. Frank G. Gmitter and Xulan Hu, "The Possible Role of Yunnan, China, in the Origin of Contemporary Citrus Species (Rutaceae)," *Economic Botany* 44, no. 2 (1990): 276; cited in Moster, *Etrog*, 14.

This is reflected within the story by insidious words and intentions of the antagonist Haman the Agagite: "There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from those of all other people and they do not observe the king's laws, so it is not in the king's interest to let them remain" (Esther 3:8).

These circumstances to preserve their identity and traditions, and yearn not merely for return, but a glorious restoration of Israel's own monarchy. But according to the prophets who appeared after the exile, God's message was not solely about return and restoration. God had intended His people to learn something new from their experience of living as foreigners among other foreigners. The Israelites had always been conscious of being a nation among nations. Now they were made to understand why God had brought them out of their homeland into further contact with other nations. Writing during the reign of Darius I, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah (both from c. 524 BC onwards) announced that because of their widespread dispersal among the Nations, the Jews would not only return but that multitudes of worshippers from those nations would eagerly accompany them back to worship God in Zion.

> Thus said the LORD of Hosts: Peoples and the inhabitants of many cities shall yet come—the inhabitants of the one shall go to the other and say, 'Let us go and entreat the favor of the LORD, let us seek the LORD of Hosts; I will go too.' The many peoples and multitude of nations shall come to seek the LORD of Hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the LORD. Thus said the LORD of Hosts: In those days, ten men from nations of every tongue will take hold—they will take hold of every Jew by a corner of his cloak and say, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you'. (Zech. 8:22-23).

The prophets saw God's purpose of dispersing the Jews among the "peoples and the inhabitants of many cities" of the vast Persian Empire as a means to 'evangelize' those

nations who "heard that God is with [the Jews]." People from many nations, including those from distant South Asian satrapies who had come into contact with Jews, had been provided an opportunity to know of God's covenant faithfulness even to a nation who had been unfaithful to Him.

We have no evidence in the narratives of *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*, or elsewhere, that non-Jewish proselytes accompanied the successive waves of Jewish returnees back to Yehud of their own free will. The only non-Jews among the returnees would have been their slaves and singers who were listed apart from the main "assembly" (Ezra 2:65; Nehemiah 7:67); and, of course, the "foreign wives" who were summarily dismissed (Ezra 9-10; Nehemiah 13:23-27; cf. Malachi 2:10-16). The fulfilment of this prophecy was deferred until the messianic age. The Apostles recognized its fulfilment in the ingathering of Gentiles into the earliest Christian communities across the Jewish Diaspora. When James referred to "the words of the prophets" (in the plural) who had foretold of God's intention to "take from [the nations] a people for his name" (Acts 15:16-18, quoting Amos 9:11-12) he obviously had in mind a series of Gentile-related oracles (e.g. Psalm 47:9; Isaiah 19:19-25; 56:2-8; 66:19-21, etc.), including those of the last three prophets.

Zechariah announced,

> Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for behold, I come and I will dwell in your midst, declares the LORD. And many nations shall join themselves to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people. And I will dwell in your midst, and you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. (Zechariah 2:10-11).

Haggai not only proclaimed the ingathering of other nations, but also the ingathering of their national treasures with them. Again, consistent with the oracles of Isaiah before him (eg. 23:18; 60:5-11), Haggai spoke of God as sovereign judge over all human kingdoms, justly demanding their tribute.

> For thus says the LORD of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the LORD of hosts. The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the LORD of hosts. (Haggai 2:6-8).

One cannot help seeing a parallel between the oracle that "the treasures of all nations shall come in" to adorn God's temple in Jerusalem and the Apadāna friezes of the tribute-bearing delegates being led before the emperor in Persepolis. Certainly, both draw upon the grandeur of Ancient Near Eastern imperial diplomacy and court ritual.[139] But there the similarity ends. Daniel, whose career as a prophet and civil administrator spanned the reigns of the Babylonian Nebuchadnezzar II (ruled c. 605 – c. 562 BC) to the third year of the Persian Cyrus II (ruled 559 – 530) (Daniel 1:1; 10:1), contrasted the nature of God's reign with those of human empires in his visions of "the four great beasts" and "the one like a son of man" (Daniel 7). Whereas the former are characterized by brutality and therefore incurs God's judgement, the latter (representing "the saints of the Most High", vv. 18, 22, 27) is found worthy and given all the kingdoms of the earth, forever (vv.17-27).

One further development in the theology of Malachi expands the horizons of Yahweh's universality to its fullest.

> For from the place where the sun rises to the place

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139.  But even if Haggai had lived in or visited Persepolis, he would not have seen the friezes of the stairways because they had not yet been built. Neither had Darius I yet conquered *Hinduš* which became the greatest tribute-supplier of gold (in the form of gold dust, used for gilding furniture and architectural decorations) in the empire. For an attempt to explore this conceptual 'connection' see Brent A. Strawn, "'A World under Control': Isaiah 60 and the Apadana Reliefs from Persepolis," in *Approaching Yehud: New Approaches to the Study of the Persian Period*, edited by Jon L. Berquist (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 85-116.

> where it sets, My name is honoured among the
> nations, and everywhere incense and pure oblation
> are offered to My name; for My name is honored
> among the nations—said the LORD of Hosts.
> (Malachi 1:11).

This startling revelation comes as a rebuke to the Jews
who were less-than-enthusiastic in their devotion to their
covenant Lord despite having returned to their homeland.
Now it was the diaspora Jews, who were vulnerable resident
aliens "among the nations... everywhere" who are portrayed
as the true Israel, fulfilling their mandate to be the light
unto the Nations. This is one of the earliest Jewish and
Christian interpretations of this puzzling text, as witnessed
by Justin Martyr (mid-second century AD): "...God did not
acknowledge the sacrifices of those who lived in Jerusalem
at that time and were called Israelites, but declared his
satisfaction with the prayers of the exiled members of
that nation, and called their prayers sacrifices."[140] With the
expansion of their knowledge about the world, the Jews also
appear to have grown in their understanding of God. He
could no longer be imagined as a national deity confined
to the boundaries of the Holy Land. Israel's God was with
Israel everywhere in the world, among the Nations.

Although we now know that Jews and South Asians
directly encountered each other in different parts of the
Achaemenid Empire, we do not know how they perceived
each other's beliefs and worldviews. We begin to discover
those 'philosophical' interactions only in the Hellenistic
period.

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140. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 117:2.

# PAUL'S LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT: 2 TIMOTHY AS A HANDBOOK FOR THE DEFENDER OF THE FAITH

## IVOR POOBALAN

**Abstract:** *Paul's final letter to Timothy has, over the past few centuries, been relegated as the third section of the collection called the Pastoral Epistles (PE). It has been consequently assumed that 2 Timothy functions as an extension, perhaps intensification, of the apostolic instructions for church order found in 1 Timothy and Titus. This article challenges this explanation by a comprehensive re-examination of the contents of 2 Timothy and their emphases and implications. It concludes that the deepest underlying concern of the letter is unique, and pertains to Timothy's own spiritual condition and his suitability to continue Paul's legacy as a defender of the faith.*

**Key words:** *Pastoral epistles, 2 Timothy, defending the faith, burnout in ministry.*

## 1. Introduction

Paul's Second Letter to Timothy is the last extant writing of the great apostle. He writes it from a second Roman imprisonment, sometime in the period AD 67-68, from which he is almost certain there will be no release. For this reason he is eager to meet his "beloved son" Timothy one last time and urges him to come to Rome in haste. Although the motive for such a reunion no doubt issued from his deep affection for Timothy and the desire to personally bid him farewell (1:4; 4:9), Paul's instructions about the itinerary – bringing Mark along and collecting Paul's cloak, books and parchments on the way (4:11, 13) – indicate a more pragmatic and focused reasoning behind the plan. What could this be?

We can only surmise about the activities that occurred in that Roman prison between the writing of

2 Timothy and the beheading of Paul on the Ostian Way, some three miles outside Rome.[1] But taking into account Paul's insistence that Timothy bring along "the parchments" (*tas membranas*), which may have been "early Christian documents, perhaps collections of sayings of Jesus or early versions of Christian preaching or Old Testament exegesis", Thomas Oden proposes an interesting hypothesis.[2] Combined with the fact that this is the only known occasion when two of the later Gospel writers, Mark and Luke, are found together, Oden ventures to ask:

> Could these have been the materials Luke and Mark used later to put together their Gospel accounts? For what parchments would have been so crucial to Paul in these waning moments of his life that he would send Timothy out of his way to pick them up? . . . But why did Paul particularly need Mark with him in Rome? Was that in any way connected with his fervent desire to retrieve the parchments? Was Paul deliberately interested in a written record of Christ's life? Would not this be consistent with the central theme of the Pastorals – to guard the good deposit of the gospel? . . . If so, might Paul have provided advice in the editing of those Gospels? Did Paul himself (who had been associated with Christian preaching since about A.D. 35 or 36) supply any of the documentary information from known oral traditions? Did he urge Luke or Mark at that point to write down the history of Jesus?[3]

These are fascinating questions, especially in the light of the later history of the church, and the crucial role played by the writings of Luke and Mark in consolidating the traditions about Jesus Christ, and the subsequent formation of the Christian Scriptures.

But other than urging Timothy to come to him in

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1. On this see F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 450-451.
2. Thomas C. Oden, *First and Second Timothy and Titus*, IBC (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1989), 178-179.
3. Oden, *First and Second Timothy and Titus*, 178-179.

Rome (whether to facilitate the writing of the earliest Gospels we may never know for certain), what other reasons pressed upon Paul to write 2 Timothy in the way that he did?

Regrettably the answer to this question is gravely affected by the history of the interpretation of this unique document. First, by the title bequeathed to it in Church history, the "*Second* letter to Timothy", which may imply immediately an organic continuation in theme and purpose with the *First* letter. More importantly, the prevailing tendency to cluster 2 Timothy, together with 1 Timothy and Titus, as a *corpus of writings called* the "*Pastoral Epistles*" (a concept now ossified by the common abbreviation PE) precludes a fair opportunity for its distinctive voice to be heard.[4]

A range of definitive "pastoral" concerns such as ethical and moral instructions to new converts, the life of prayer, public worship, the appointment of leaders, the care of the needy, and the ministry of the Word are found in full display in both 1 Timothy and Titus. 2 Timothy, however, lacks most of these types of instructions, but by designating it as the third part of a whole called PE we have almost completely succeeded in subsuming its vital message and so forfeited the benefit of this brief but powerful testament that is so relevant to our times.[5]

In what follows we shall argue that 2 Timothy, when read on its own terms, falls more certainly within the genre of testamentary literature, "by which a letter might be presented as the last message of a dying religious leader

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4. "They presuppose the same false teachers, the same organization, and entirely similar conditions in the community. They move within the same relative theological concepts and have the same peculiarities of language and style" (W. G. Kummel), cited in George W Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles,* NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 3.

5. Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 2: "[T]he tendency to read them as a corpus – a three-volume work in which no one of the three parts can be read apart from the other two, and in which observations in any one part may be taken as immediately applicable to the interpretation of the remaining two."

to a faithful follower (cf. Acts 20:17-35)."[6] The suggestion that 2 Timothy also belongs to the category of "parenetic" literature[7] has its merits, because it maintains the pattern of "a father showing the way for a son", and maintains the emphasis on pursuing an acceptable form of conduct while eschewing unacceptable behaviour.[8] Towner explains that parenetic letters typically also show "diversity of content, and brief admonitions that are strung together."[9] But these latter features are lacking in 2 Timothy, which, as we shall argue, sustains a *singular* concern rather than "diversity of content" and certainly does not string together disparate moral and ethical instructions. In addition Towner concedes that "the polemical discourse carried on against opposing teachers in 2 Timothy diverges from the parenetic form."[10]

It is without dispute that 2 Timothy is best understood as Paul's last will and testament communicated to his beloved son in the faith.[11] But what was the thrust of this final available written communication? Oden suggests that the main point of the writing, its primary impulse, was what echoes within the final chapter: getting Timothy to where Paul had been incarcerated. In summary: "Come to Rome. I want to see you. Come before winter."[12] But others rightly point to another theme that dominates much of the letter: the widespread and powerful influences of heretical teachings on the fundamental message of the gospel, and consequently on the integrity of the Christian faith. This however is also at the heart of 1 Timothy, and was the express reason why Paul wrote that letter: "Stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain people not to

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6. Towner, *Letters to Timothy*, 35.
7. "Paraenetic" refers to some kind of moral exhortation where the reader is being urged to pursue a particular set of choices and behaviours and to avoid others.
8. Towner, *Letters to Timothy*, 36.
9. Towner, *Letters to Timothy*, 36.
10. Towner, *Letters to Timothy*, 36.
11. Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, NIBC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 13: "It is a letter of many parts. In a sense it is a kind of last will and testament, 'a passing on of the mantle'."
12. Oden, *First and Second Timothy and Titus*, 7.

teach false doctrines any longer" (1:3). His letter to Titus too was provoked to a large extent by the activities of false teachers in Crete.

> In all three letters the writer is greatly preoccupied with heretics, as he considers them, who hawk round a message distinct from, and opposed to, the true gospel, sow strife and dissension, and lead morally questionable lives. He reverts again and again to the theme, impressing on Timothy and Titus . . . the urgency of taking counter-measures with every means at their disposal.[13]

How then is 2 Timothy any different in purpose from these related letters? Is not Paul simply going over much the same ground, at least with regard to Timothy's pastoral responsibilities to protect the church from the heretics?

## 2. A Fresh Perspective of the Overarching Purpose of 2 Timothy

When Paul writes this second letter to Timothy around AD 67, his younger associate is still pastoring the church in Ephesus where Paul had left him around AD 62 following his release from the first Roman imprisonment (Acts 28). He had already written him the 'first' letter (AD 63?): to build Timothy's morale, guide him in the vital importance of contending against the spread of false doctrines especially through "proper organization", and to give instructions on correct behaviour in public worship.[14]

After Paul had stationed Timothy at Ephesus he had travelled quite extensively. Hendriksen reconstructs his itinerary from the various travel-plans scattered throughout his epistles. He thinks Paul first went to Macedonia

13. J.N.D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, BNTC (London: A & C Black, 1963), 10.

14. William Hendriksen, *A Commentary on the Epistles to Timothy and Titus*, HNTC (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1957), 41. But see, Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 7, who argues: "everything in the letter has to do with 1:3," i.e. the problem of false teaching, and the need to contain it, and that this "not only makes sense of every detail in the letter, but also helps to explain the nature and content of Titus and 2 Timothy as well."

(Philippi? Phil 2:24) from where he wrote 1 Timothy and Titus. Thereafter he headed to Nicopolis (Tit 3:12) and then to Spain (Rom 15:24), before returning to Asia Minor. It may be that he saw Timothy for a final time there, which caused the tearful parting (2 Tim 1:4), and then went down to the harbour town of Miletus, where he left Trophimus who was ill (2 Tim 4:20), before heading for Rome. On the way he visited Carpus at Troas (2 Tim 4:13) and left Erastus at his home city of Corinth (2 Tim 4:20).[15] When he reached Rome, the city was under the tyrannical rule of Nero, who had only recently begun to turn his irrational hostility against the Christians. Paul is arrested a second time, denied many of the privileges that his Roman citizenship had previously allowed him, and incarcerated.

Along with the dramatic changes to his personal situation, Paul realizes that the circumstances of the churches that he had planted over the years had also changed dramatically. In the early years the churches, with their significant numbers of gentile converts, had faced the difficulties that were posed by their Jewish heritage and the insistence of Judaizers that gentiles must convert to Judaism to secure salvation. These contentions are prominent in letters like Galatians, Romans, the Corinthian Correspondence and Philippians. Most importantly the opposition in that early period was mostly external; itinerant preachers or Judaizing parties that went about trying to win over converts to their philosophies. In all those instances Paul had squarely faced the threats to his churches, and vigorously refuted the arguments of his opponents, while simultaneously addressing their clever arguments by corresponding directly with the churches, and or sending across one of his emissaries like Timothy or Titus to represent his stand on the matter.

Over the years, however, the "opposition" to the Church had arisen from within; individuals who bore their credentials as church members, even elders, had begun distorting the fundamental tenets of the Christian faith. In

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15. See Hendriksen, Timothy and Titus, 39-40.

his farewell speech to the Ephesian elders prior to his first imprisonment Paul had prophetically spoken about this very transition: "*Even from your own number* some will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:30). While the disputes were still related to matters of the Law and to Jewish speculations, they had become more sophisticated, incorporating other elements such as Greek philosophical thought.

The resulting amalgam of Jewish, pagan, and Christian thought, together with the influential positions that their strongest proponents occupied in the Ephesian church placed Timothy in an extremely difficult and unenviable position as the person responsible for the doctrinal and ethical fidelity of these believers. The greatest difficulties arose from the way these distortions undermined the very foundations of the Christian way of believing and behaving, and mounted pressure on the communal wellbeing of the church on multiple fronts.

Oden helpfully points to "six characteristic tendencies" that mark the opponents that Paul and Timothy had to deal with: Gnostic elitism (1 Tim 6:20), Rejection of the bodily resurrection (2 Tim 2:18), Asceticism (1 Tim 4:3-4; 2 Tim 3:1-7), Antinomian license (2 Tim 3:6), Fascination with myths and genealogies (1 Tim 1:4; 4:7; 2 Tim 4:4), and Divine speculative controversialist (1 Tim 6:4; 2 Tim 2:23).[16]

It was this extremely complex challenge that Paul had left Timothy in charge of, and later encouraged him by letter (1 Timothy) to confront by way of a series of strategies towards establishing discipline and church order. Evidently things had not gone to plan. The opponents were ascendant, the church was at grave risk, and Timothy was showing

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16. Oden, *First and Second Timothy and Titus*, 9-10; also see, Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 11-12, 26-28. Kelly, *Pastoral Epistles*, 10-12, avers that the nature of the heretical teaching is closely related to (albeit a less-sophisticated form), of the Colossian heresy: "It is the syncretistic Christianity of the Colossian heretics, however, with its gnostic, ascetic regulations, Jewish legalism, which, in spite of striking differences, supplies us with the most instructive parallel. If anything, it seems to have been more advanced and more destructive of basic Christian truth than the heresy of the Pastorals" (12).

signs of losing his grip on the situation. In fact 2 Timothy implies that he was on the verge of total exhaustion (1:6), even perhaps of abandoning his calling (1:8; 2:3; 2:11-13):

> Timothy is depicted as reeling from the battle and perhaps disheartened by the failure of the corrective measures enjoined in 1 Timothy. But the false teaching and the opponents who spread it still form the backdrop to personal paraenesis to Timothy (e.g., 2:14-26; 3:10; 4:1-5), though preparing the community for his departure to Paul (2:1-7) has now changed the tone.[17]

It was perhaps this reality, more than Paul's personal need for receiving the comfort of Timothy's physical presence that issued in an urgent summons to Timothy to come to Rome (4:9, 21). The fact that Paul had already endured the tortuous pain of multiple experiences of abandonment, betrayal, and loneliness *before* he writes 2 Timothy, suggests that it was some ministry-related concern, rather than his emotional needs, that dominated the command: "Do your best to come to me quickly" (4:9).

Such a view further integrates the purpose of 2 Timothy in a fresh way. Most exegetes would view the letter as having either the overall purpose of calling Timothy to Paul's side (for which reason Timothy had to prepare the community for his departure),[18] or two disparate purposes: 1) to ask Timothy to visit Paul in Rome, and 2) to urge Timothy to hold fast to sound doctrine and defend it vigorously.[19]

We propose that 2 Timothy is dominated entirely by Paul's concern about the problem of false teachings, but now particularly by the growing realization that his erstwhile companion and "true son in the faith" (1 Tim 1:2), who had always proven to be such a responsible co-worker, was ill-equipped and unprepared to carry out Paul's legacy as a *defender of the faith*; one who would do everything in

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17. Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 39.
18. So Oden, *First and Second Timothy and Titus*, 7.
19. See Hendriksen, *Timothy and Titus*, 44.

his power to safeguard the church from "the savage wolves [that] will come in among you and will not spare the flock" (Acts 20:29).

Paul's letters to churches such as the Galatians and Corinthians castigated them for accommodating false teachings, and his letters to apostolic co-workers such as 1 Timothy and Titus instructed them how to order church life so as to protect the churches from vulnerability to error.

*2 Timothy, however, is unique. It focuses entirely on the formation of Timothy ("the Lord's servant" and Paul's assumed successor) in this manifest area of weakness: his calling to be a defender of the faith as emphasised in the apostolic tradition. This overarching theme therefore defines and unifies the purpose of the letter: 2 Tim 1:1-4:8 functions as a handbook to motivate Timothy to this task, while 2 Tim 4:9-21 further illustrates how Paul exemplifies the role even as it urgently summons Timothy so that Paul may have the opportunity to personally consolidate these instructions in the presence of Mark and Luke.*

## 3. Internal Evidence for Paul's Deep Concern about Timothy's Credibility to be a Defender of the Faith

An argument for such an overarching purpose for 2 Timothy must be supported by internal evidence that corroborates this claim. The fact is that Timothy had served with Paul for over fifteen years, and in every reference to him – both in Acts and in Paul's other epistles – one finds some positive sentiment. In six of Paul's thirteen letters Timothy is mentioned as a co-author, on three occasions we find that he was sent as Paul's emissary to churches that needed pastoral attention (1 Cor 4:17; 16:10; Phil 2:19; 1 Thess 3:2, 6), and whenever Paul describes Timothy to others he uses such commendatory expressions:

> Therefore I urge you to imitate me. For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church (1 Cor 4:16-17)

> I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel (Phil 2:19-22).

With a character certificate like this it is difficult to imagine any inadequacy or shortcoming in Timothy as a Christian leader, and one immediately assumes that he must have thrived in his last-known church office as the senior pastor of the church in Ephesus. But we must reckon with the fact that the "Letters to Timothy" provide the latest information on this major New Testament figure, and so try to extrapolate from them (without recourse to earlier writings) what can be known about Timothy's performance and wellbeing at *that particular stage* of his life and ministry and in *that particular context* of ministry. And it is in these letters that we find Paul alluding to Timothy's weaknesses of disposition, which now threaten his present ministry and certainly his future responsibilities as Paul's successor.

First, we note that other than for Paul's initial greeting calling Timothy, "my true son in the faith" (1 Tim 1:2) and "my beloved son" (2 Tim 1:1), and commending his "sincere faith" (2 Tim 1:5) there aren't any other directly personal commendations of Timothy's performance in either letter. Certainly both letters show that Timothy is still highly trusted and that Paul has the deepest affection and respect for his young assistant. Nevertheless 1 Timothy only majors on instructions by way of commands of how Timothy must conduct his ministry, and then presents several warnings about what he must avoid.

Second, we find in 1 Timothy, however, notes of growing concern: about Timothy's temperament (1 Tim 4:12); his responsibility with regard to his spiritual gift (4:14); and the state of his physical wellbeing (1 Tim 5:23). He is becoming anxious about what others think of him and

perhaps becoming unduly concerned for their approval. In addition he is showing signs of "carelessness" towards the all-important spiritual gift that had been divinely granted to him to equip him for the ministry. Furthermore, he is neglecting his own health, possibly because of his fear of medicating himself in a way that might risk the disapproval of others.

Third, in 2 Timothy we find fairly intensive notes of concern that echo throughout the letter. These concerns, and what they imply about Timothy and his circumstances, tend to get muted because of our preconceived notions about Timothy's complete and mature formation as an apostolic successor by the time he receives Paul's last will and testament. Is it possible that Timothy's spiritual wellbeing had not kept to the trajectory anticipated in Acts and in the early Pauline correspondence? What are these notable concerns that point us in such an unexpected direction?

(i)     The flickering flame of his spiritual gift (1:6): "fan into flame the gift of God" – This unique phrase in the NT is governed by the present infinitive *anazōpurein*, "rekindle", with the imagery of "stoking the fire." Towner thinks the present tense implies keeping an already burning fire in a steady state, and cites a reference in *1 Clement* to corroborate this. He does note, however, that Ignatius uses the same verb to imagine a "revival from death."[20] Hendriksen alerts us to the fact that 1 Tim 4:14 had already indicated the trajectory that had brought Timothy to this point of high risk. There Paul had implied that Timothy was becoming "careless" or "neglectful" (*ameleō*) of the "gift" (*charisma*), which had now spiralled down further: "The flame had not gone out, but it was burning slowly and had to be agitated to white heat."[21]

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20. Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 457 (also fn. 4).
21. Hendriksen, *Timothy and Titus*, 228-229; note also the three

(ii)     A spirit of cowardice (1:7) – Commonly translated as "timidity", *deilia* (another NT hapax) also bears the important connotation of "cowardice", and it is this echo that we find in a similar context of leadership-succession in the OT; in Joshua 1:1-9. There Moses orders Joshua to "be strong and courageous, be not cowardly [*deiliasēs*]."²² The fact that Paul implies that Timothy is displaying such a tendency is telling, and hints that Timothy's personal spiritual health is at significant risk. His courage in the face of the opposition and discouragement has waned considerably, and his natural reticence was setting him up for a cowardly response.

(iii)    The temptation to shame-causing inaction (1:8) – The allegation of "shame" (*epaischunomai*) is the third negative description of Timothy that comes in quick succession to the suggestions of a neglected gift and a general cowardliness. In the Greco-Roman context of honour-shame cultures, this was a more serious charge: "Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or about me his prisoner." The force of the construction *mē epaischunthēs* (negative particle + aorist subjunctive) suggests a forbidding of a specific action: "the point is not so much that Timothy *feels* embarrassment or shame and so fails to give witness, but more that by his failure he is discrediting and shaming the ones mentioned."²³ Within the same chapter Paul cites both himself and Onesiphorus as examples of those who have refused to express shame at the 'testimony about our Lord' (1:12) or about 'Paul the prisoner' (1:18) respectively.

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other occasions where *ameleō* is used in the NT: Mt 22:5; Heb 2:3; 8:9.
     22.  See Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 460-461: "the tone, narrative setting, and intent of the instructions create a plausible match."
     23.  Ibid, 463.

(iv)   A general sense of personal weakness (2:1) – "You then my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." "You then" shows that Paul has transitioned to a new section, yet immediately returns to Timothy's notable weaknesses, asking him to "be strengthened"[24] by the grace that is available in Christ. The fact that Paul issues this as a *command* to Timothy renders it more likely as a middle verb, placing the primary responsibility on Timothy to take steps to overcome his own weaknesses and strengthen himself.[25]

(v)   A desire to stand aloof from shared Christian suffering (1:8; 2:3) – In these verses alone in the NT do we find the verb *sunkakopatheō*, "suffer together with someone."[26] The verb does not occur in earlier extant Greek literature including the LXX,[27] making Paul the likely originator of the term. Could it be that seeing Timothy's growing reluctance to be drawn into the eye of the storm of doctrinal conflict (where his mentor had gone), and based on Paul's theology of Christian suffering as an act of fellowship with Christ *and* his body (Phil 3:10; Col 1:24), he coined this term? Furthermore the imperatival form in both uses again presses responsibility on Timothy to do something that he is apparently failing to do.

(vi)   A flagging confidence in Paul's words? (2:7) –

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24. This may be either passive (implying that "strengthening for ministry comes through divine agency," Towner, 488), or middle (implying the subject's action on himself).

25. Of the seven references to *endunamoō*, the only other middle voice is found in Eph 6:10, this time as a second plural imperative, "be strong in the Lord."

26. Knight III, *Pastoral Epistles*, 373: "Since the someone is not explicitly indicated, and since Paul, who is obviously suffering, is the one encouraging Timothy to suffer together with someone, it is often assumed that the someone is Paul."

27. Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 465.

Following Paul's second reminder to Timothy that he must be willing to share in suffering for the sake of Christ (2:3), Paul places three metaphors of Christian service before Timothy: the soldier, the athlete, and the farmer. Under normal circumstances, with the level of intimacy and relationship Paul had enjoyed with Timothy, there would be no need to explain the relevance or personal application of these to his dear son. But now we detect a seeming cautiousness of tone as Paul presses the point: "Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this." It is as if Timothy is still in the early stages of being an apprentice; still not close enough to his mentor to pick up immediately the thrust of what he was getting at, prompting Paul to give him the space to "consider" and "think over." Paul even feels the need to assure him that if he feels uncertain about what *Paul* is saying, "The *Lord* will give insight."

(vii)   The temptation to give up and deny (2:11-13) – One of the common features in Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus are the "faithful sayings" (*pistos ho logos*), mentioned in 1 Tim 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Tim 2:11; Tit 3:8. Most will recognize these as markers that Paul is drawing on some known tradition, but also emphasising "the authentic correspondence of the saying and its authority with the apostolic tradition, the [his] gospel, the sound teaching and so on."[28] We note that this is the only occurrence of the phrase in 2 Timothy, and it follows on to a creedal or hymnic fragment that dwells on the nature of reciprocity between Christ and his followers. He apparently quotes a section that provides "two pairs of epigrams, which are general axioms of

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28.  Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 144.

Christian life and experience."[29] The first pair
is positive and easily agreed, but it is the second
that surprises and expresses a severe warning
to Timothy: "If we deny him he will also deny
us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful,[30]
because he cannot deny himself" (2:12b-13).
The key verbs are: *arneomai*, "deny, disclaim,
disown" (which also describes Peter's actions
before the crucifixion), and *apisteō*, "to refuse to
believe, be incredulous" (the opposite of "the
good confession" of 1 Tim 6:12). The force of
the second verb is weakened by translations that
render it as mere *lack* of faith ("faithless"). Is Paul
sensing that Timothy is in grave spiritual danger
by his apparent distancing of himself from
the theatre of conflict; a danger that Peter had
fallen prey to long ago, and more recently had
marked "all in the province of Asia . . . Phygelus
and Hermogenes" (1:15), and Demas (4:10)? Is
this the reason that he brings to mind the severe
axiom, "If we deny him, he also will deny us"?

(viii) Accountability to standards of ministry (2:15)
– Here Paul again calls for decisiveness from
Timothy. This time to do with the standards of
ministry that Timothy must uphold. He urges
him to "do your best" (*spoudazō*) to achieve
two standards: to be "approved" (*dokimos*,
"approved after examination"; see, 1 Tim 3:10),
and to be "presentable" (*paristēmi*, "to present

29. John Stott, *The Message of 2 Timothy*, BST (Leicester, England:
Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), 63.

30. On this see Stott, *2 Timothy*, 64, who argues that "he remains
faithful" means that the Lord will remain true to his commitment to deny
those who deny him; also Hendriksen, *Timothy and Titus*, 260: "the clause,
"he on his part remains faithful" . . . is, after all, the same (even more
forcefully expressed!) as, "he on his part will also deny us," for *faithfulness*
on his part means carrying out his threats (Matt 10:33) as well as his
promises (Matt 10:32!)."

(to God), to prove"; bears both a cultic and legal connotations). The picture then is of Timothy being challenged to prepare for his exams. Will he pass or fail? Paul then employs a clause that again suggests ambiguity in his present assessment of Timothy: "a worker who does not need to be ashamed." First, Paul uses the noun *ergatēs*, "a worker", which he has previously used only sarcastically as an appellation for preachers he disapproves of (2 Cor 11:13; Phil 3:2). Second, he employs, for the only time in the NT, another word within the "shame" word-group, *anepaischuntos*, "without cause of shame." In fact Paul is urging Timothy to take care not to be one in whom God might be ashamed.[31]

(ix)    Lack of conviction about the connection between godliness and persecutions (3:12) – 2 Timothy repeatedly returns to the theme of hardship and suffering, especially Paul's own (1:12; 2:9-10; 3:11; 4:6). Paul has urged Timothy not to stand aloof from experiences of suffering as a Christian leader, but to embrace them as a "sharer in suffering" (1:8; 2:3; 4:5). He reminds Timothy that his early association with Paul made him privy to the whole story of the apostolic ministry, which had included consistent experiences of persecutions and sufferings (3:10-11). Why does Paul have to labour this point with a disciple who has known him better than most people? Is it possible that those "who want to live a godly life" in Ephesus (including Timothy) have been influenced by the incipient prosperity theology that had already worked its way into the church? The false teachers there were those "who think that godliness (*eusebeia*) is a means to financial

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31. See Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 521, fn. 27: "the possibility that the word describes "the workman" as one in whom someone else (God) need not be ashamed."

gain" (1 Tim 6:5). Did Paul have to counteract this corrosive mischief for the sake of his associate, for which reason he makes the most dramatic, unambiguous claim for the relationship between a Christian view of "godliness" (*eusebōs zēn*) and persecution: "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution"?

(x)    Timothy's incomplete ministry-formation (4:5) – A final hint of incompleteness in Timothy's ministry-formation may be detected in the very last words of instruction before he moves to a conclusion: *tēndiakonian sou plērophorēson*, "*complete* your ministry!" Paul had, in the context of his trial as a prisoner, "completed the Gospel" (4:17, *to kerygma plērophorēthē*). Now he challenges his younger associate to avoid falling short; aspire to successfully "complete" what he had set out to do.

## 4. Supreme Priorities for the 'Defender of the Faith'

As an apostle of Christ Jesus, Paul had been faithful to the mandate to *declare the faith* among the gentiles. But very early in his ministry he had also come to terms with the fact that the apostolic calling also included another crucial responsibility: to *defend the faith*. The hostile antagonists that Paul encountered were forces found both outside the church and, more importantly, opponents who identified themselves as fellow-believers, even fellow-preachers. This dual challenge is captured well in Paul's final exhortation to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:29-30: "I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and not spare the flock. Even from your own number some will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them."

His role then, as a defender of the faith, had often drawn Paul into bruising and painful encounters. His faithfulness to safeguard the Gospel from being discredited had cost him goodwill, friendships and opportunities.

Bitter opposition had risen against him and associates had deserted him. The earlier epistles, such as Second Corinthians, display the effective and vicious campaigns mounted by Paul's "opponents", and Second Timothy, Paul's final epistle, conveys something of the loneliness and sadness that Paul had had to endure as a result.

Timothy had been Paul's closest associate and travelling companion, and over the years he had gone from being the promising young Lystran of mixed parentage to becoming an evangelist, church-planter, co-author of epistles, and bishop of the church in the gateway city to the province of Asia. For most of this time Timothy had laboured faithfully in the shadow of his great mentor, assisting him in whatever tasks assigned to him. Occasionally we find him going ahead of Paul to make preparations, or taking temporary responsibilities of pastoral care over churches so that Paul could press on with his itinerary. But it was only during his latest stint – as bishop of the church in Ephesus – that Timothy had to face the reality that his calling as a successor to an apostle came with its inherent dual duties: the declaration of the faith *and* the defense of the faith. And it was the latter responsibility that had most tested his capacity and now threatened his suitability to carry on Paul's legacy. He had faced serious setbacks and those who opposed him had become ascendant. Unlike his mentor, Timothy was not inclined to wage into battle with the zeal of a Saul of Tarsus, and so with each encounter he had been losing confidence and losing control.

> While Timothy may have been predisposed to fearfulness (1 Cor 16:10), even a modest reconstruction of the turbulent church situation depicted in 1 and 2 Timothy gives enough reason for his reluctance. Opposition to Paul's gospel and rejection of his authority are evident from the overrealized doctrine of the resurrection identified in 2:17-18. If the letter reflects the continuation and growth of problems with false teachers addressed by 1 Timothy, then it is not hard

to imagine Timothy, feeling outnumbered and outmaneuvered, with his own delegated authority in doubt, cowering in the face of threats and Paul's declining reputation. . . Timothy's confidence and courage to stand for the gospel had received a hard blow.[32]

In such a situation, the spiritual wellbeing of the Ephesian church was not the only factor at risk; should Timothy capitulate to the "present world" like Demas (2 Tim 4:10) the very sustainability of Paul's ministry among his churches would be in grave danger. 2 Timothy therefore is written with urgency and care to incline Timothy to take up his role as a 'defender of the faith'. Consequently we propose that the instructions and allusions in this regard make this brief epistle an invaluable handbook for successive generations of church leaders who must continue this solemn responsibility.

## 4.1. The Spirit-controlled temperament[33]

> *ou gar edōken ēmin ho theos pneuma deilias alla dunameōs kai agapēs kai sōphronismou* "For God did not give us a Spirit of cowardice but of power, love and self-discipline" (2 Tim 1:7)

Right at the outset Paul endorses Timothy's right standing with God; his "sincere faith" (1:5). His previous letter had ended with a warning about the danger of "departing from the faith" (1 Tim 6:21) like some had done. Although Paul prepares now to address some tough issues with Timothy, it would not, however, be on the basis that Timothy had defected or had compromised his personal convictions in the truths of the Gospel.

Nevertheless Paul sees the tendency that Jesus had anticipated among his followers in Matthew 5:15; Timothy was likely to become like those who, "light a lamp and put it

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32. Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 461-462.
33. The expression, "Spirit-Controlled Temperament" is taken from the title of a book: Tim LaHaye, *Spirit-Controlled Temperament*, Chicago, IL: Tyndale House, 1994 revised ed.

under a bowl." In the face of the severe opposition Timothy was defaulting to his natural temperament, allowing himself to feel intimidated (1 Cor 16:10-11; 1 Tim 4:12), and this had now resulted in the near-extinguishing of the "gift of God" by the "spirit of *deilia*" (cowardice, timidity) that had overcome him.

Paul argues that the defender of the faith must operate out of a *Spirit-controlled temperament*, because the Holy Spirit alone has the wherewithal to counter the demoralizing and damaging effects of false doctrines (1:7, 14). In Acts we read that being "full of the Spirit" was a prerequisite for the selection of the deacons (Acts 6:3, 5) and it was Stephen's Spirit-controlled temperament that enabled him to defend the Gospel before the Sanhedrin, even to the extent of martyrdom (Acts 6:10; 7:55).

There are three attributes of the Spirit that would transform Timothy's capacity, courage and confidence: the qualities of "power, love and a sound mind" (1:7).[34]

"Power" *(dunamis)* connotes Timothy's ability to act in ways that are consonant with his responsibilities. Towner suggests that, "[T]his particular quality is central to this entire discussion of Timothy's renewal for ministry (1:8, 12; 2:1))" and "it is so intrinsic to the understanding of the Spirit that it almost a tautology to speak, as Paul does here literally, of the "Spirit of power."[35] "Love" *(agapē)* relates to Timothy's motivation; the affective quality that would govern his emotions and responses as he faces the challenges of ministry. The third quality of the Spirit-controlled temperament is associated with the cognitive: *sōphronismos* ("self-discipline") is a NT hapax meaning "rendering sound-minded; vigor of mind" and is a cognate of *sōphroneō*, which in addition connotes "being sane."[36]

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34. It is significant that these Spirit-qualities correspond with the categories considered essential in holistic character-formation today: the behavioural, the affective, and the cognitive.

35. Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 462.

36. Wesley Perschbacher, *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 402; see also Hendriksen, *Timothy and Titus*, 230: "If a person *fears* Satan's persecuting power more than he *trusts* in God's ability and ever-readiness to help, he has lost his mental balance."

## 4.2. The gospel as a trust

*tēn kalēn parathēkēn phulaxon dia pneumatos hagiou tou
enoikountos en ēmin,* "Guard the good deposit entrusted
to you though the Holy Spirit who lives in us" (2 Tim
1:14)

The noun *parathēkē*, "a deposit, a thing committed to
one's charge, a trust", is only used thrice in the NT and all
in the letters to Timothy (1 Tim 6:20; 2 Tim 1:12, 14). The
second use (1:12) is disputed with regard to its meaning:
does it describe something God entrusted to Paul or
something Paul entrusted to God?[37]
The first (1 Tim 6:20) and the third (2 Tim 1:14) hold
more potential for mutual interpretation. Both command
Timothy to "keep, guard, defend, and have in custody"
(*phulaxon*) a "deposit-entrusted" *(parathēkē)*:

The distinctive phrase – composed of the verb "to
guard" in combination with the noun "the deposit"
(*parathēkē*) – alludes to the process (in Greco-Roman
and Jewish cultures) of entrusting some commodity
with a person who is to ensure its safekeeping (and,
in this context, proper use) and eventually return
it to its owner. Assumed in the process are the
ownership of the commodity and the obligation of
faithfulness on the part of the trustee.[38]

So the message of the Gospel is pictured as a precious
possession (NEB: "treasure put into your charge") that has
been entrusted to Timothy's safe custody:

For the gospel is a treasure – a good, noble and
precious treasure – deposited for safe keeping with the
church. Christ has entrusted it to Paul, and Paul now
entrusts it to Timothy. . . There were heretics abroad, bent
on corrupting the gospel and so robbing the church of the
priceless treasure which had been entrusted to it. Timothy
must be on the watch.[39]

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37. See Knight III, *Pastoral Epistles*, 379-380.
38. Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 430.
39. Stott, *2 Timothy*, 44.

In context, "the good deposit" is defined in terms of "the pattern of sound teaching" (1:13, *hupotupōsin eche hugiainontōn logōn*),[40] and presents the contents of the Gospel and their meaning as a *standard*[41] by which one may evaluate and measure the veracity or validity of all other claims to divine revelation:

> Whereas in the earlier Pauline epistles the gospel is viewed as something dynamic, the Pastoral Epistles see it as a fixed body of received doctrine which can be used as a clear-cut standard to counter heresy.[42]

## 4.3. The passage of the faith by tradition

> *kai ha ēkousas par emou dia pollōn marturōn tauta parathou pistois anthrōpois hoitines hikanoi esontai kai heterous didaxai,* "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Tim 2:2)

In 1:13-14 Paul had urged Timothy to safeguard the "good deposit" that had been entrusted to him. In 2:2 he instructs him to set in motion a system that would ensure that this precious gospel ("the things you have heard me say") is safely and accurately conveyed to successive generations of spiritual children. The imagery is compelling: what Paul has entrusted to Timothy he must now entrust in turn to "reliable people" *(pistois anthrōpois)*, who will "teach others" *(didaskō)* as well. This brief reference shows something of a strategy that Paul had developed to ensure the accurate continuation of the Christian faith:

He has made explicit this sense of the authority

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40. The noun *hupotupōsis*, "sketch, delineation, formula, pattern, model," is only used in 1 Tim 1:16 and 2 Tim 1:13.

41. NRSV (in contrast to TNIV): "Hold on *to the standard* of sound teaching that you have heard from me," about which Towner (477-478) avers: "Paul does not have in mind his message as a general pattern, but, in this context of false teaching, the main point is the specific standard of accuracy his words represent."

42. D. Müller, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 2:171.

and permanent significance of his words on several
earlier occasions (cf. 1 Thes. 2:13). He speaks of his
teachings as "tradition(s)" (παραδοσι") received from
him and to be held and followed by Christians . . .
So it comes as no surprise that what he has done
throughout his ministry he now requires Timothy
to do, i.e., to see that that the teaching be faithfully
entrusted to "faithful men."[43]

Paul adapts the Jewish pedagogical strategy as displayed in
the Book of Proverbs – where wisdom is transferred inter-
generationally, from parents to children – and has made
reference to the benefit Timothy had experienced as a
recipient of such a "tradition." He had gained his "sincere
faith" because it came down to him from his biological
grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (1:5). Now Paul
argues that this provides a model for how the church can
function as a spiritual family passing on the wisdom of the
gospel from one spiritual generation to the next.

The instruction gains a great deal of solemnity by
the mention of "many witnesses"[44] who could attest to
Paul's gospel, and the charge to "entrust" (*parathou*) to
"reliable" men, who would be "qualified to teach." This
schema defines the Christian movement as it transitions
from the Apostolic period to the post-Apostolic era and
beyond. It is this "tradition" of passing on the faith from
one generation to another that Athanasius (AD 296-
373) famously referred to when he said that Christians
universally subscribed to: "The actual original tradition,
teaching, and faith of the catholic church, which *the Lord
bestowed, the apostles proclaimed, and the fathers safeguarded.*"[45]

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43. Knight III, *Pastoral Epistles*, 390.
44. Chrysostom saw the expression as evidence indicating the
public nature of the transmission of the body of Christian truth: "You
did not hear in secret or privately, but in the presence of many, with all
openness of speech" (Knight III, *Pastoral Epistles*, 390).
45. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper &
Brothers, 1958), 31.

4.4. The inevitability of trials

> *kai pantes de hoi thelontes eusebōs zēn en Christō Iēsou diōthēsontai,* "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim 3:12)

Historically the experience of persecution has been the litmus test of Christian maturity and faithfulness. In the teachings of Jesus he had repeatedly emphasised to his disciples that their alignment with him and his message would lead to suffering and persecution (see Mt 5:11-12; Jn 15:20). But over time the question arose whether suffering and persecution was inevitable to the experience of the Christian life; in fact whether persecutions like the kind Paul endured was clear evidence of Paul's inadequacy as a minister of Christ?

On several occasions therefore Paul draws the closest connection between the Christian experience and suffering and persecution (see, Acts 14:22; 2 Cor 11-12; Phil 1:29-30; 1 Thes 3:3). In 2 Timothy he twice calls Timothy to embrace suffering (1:8; 2:3). His thesis is that the pursuit of "godliness" (*eusebōs*, "in a godly manner", particularly referring to the way a person related to God) will assuredly result in the hostility and active rejection from society. Although in the Acts narrative Luke portrays the Roman world of AD 30 to AD 58 as ambivalent to the Christian movement, now it had taken a different turn. Emperor Nero had commenced the cruellest persecution of Christians thus far, in the immediate environs of Rome. Furthermore Jewish hostility against the church was rapidly intensifying. The latter would lead, within a few decades, to the formulation of the Eighteenth Benediction against the "followers of the Nazarene" that would permanently sever Jewish Christians from their formal participation in Judaism. Suffering for the faith could no longer be imagined as just likelihood; it was a clear certainty.

This inevitability of trials for the defender of the faith is amply illustrated in Paul's own life. In 2 Timothy Paul speaks of his personal suffering at several points: 1:8,

12, 15-16; 2:9-10; 3:11; 4:6, 10, 14, 16, 17-18. They include imprisonment, abandonment, persecutions, hardships, betrayal and harmful actions against him.

4.5. The need for tact

> *tas de mōras kai apaideutous zētēseis paraitou eidōs hoti gennōsin machas, doulon de kuriou ou dei machesthai alla ēpion einai pros pantas didaktikon anexikakon,* "Avoid foolish and uneducated controversies knowing that they give birth to quarrels; and the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but gentle with everyone, able to teach and bearing up with evil without resentment" (2 Tim 2:23-24)

Another crucial skill required of the pastoral leader is tactfulness, both to know how to respond proactively to those whose opposition demonstrates their own spiritual bankruptcy, as well as to know when to refuse to be drawn into mind-numbing and conflict-generating controversies.

In 2 Tim 2:22-26 we find a key text that presents Timothy with important instructions. We first notice that it echoes 1 Tim 6:11-12 with one striking contrast. In both texts Paul is urging Timothy to "flee" vices and pursue virtue in keeping with a traditional teaching device used from classical times.[46] But whereas in the latter Paul consequently urges Timothy to "fight the good fight of the faith" (1 Tim 6:12; cf. 1:3-4, 18-19), here he does the opposite; he wants Timothy to "avoid" or "excuse himself" from the quarrel instead of waging into an all-out battle.[47]

The importance of avoiding or excusing oneself from potentially conflictual situations, especially when they major on vain debates, is highlighted by the repetition of this as a strategy in 2 Tim 2:16 and 3:5, using different imperatives each time in the *middle voice*, and so emphasizing Timothy's personal responsibility to make sure he stays clear from being drawn into "foolish and

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46. See Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 408, fn. 8.
47. Gk. *paraiteomai*, carries the connotations "excuse oneself, avoid, shun"; cf. 1 Tim 4:7.

uneducated controversies."[48]

In 2 Timothy Paul also elaborates on a proactive course of action when dealing with some opponents. Almost surprisingly in this context, he advocates *gentleness* and *humility* in the face of people who have set themselves against the "servant of the Lord" (2:24-26). This shows how Paul distinguishes between the issue of doctrine and the matter of persons. It is the body of false teachings that he had previously condemned as "things taught by demons" (1 Tim 4:1), which in turn have a corrosive and corrupting effect on the consciences of those who adopt them and pass them on to others (1 Tim 4:2).

In our text (2 Tim 2:24-26) Paul argues for a redemptive strategy with such persons who are caught in the "trap of the devil who has taken them captive to do his will" (2:26).[49] The pastor must recognize the grave spiritual danger that this opponent has been placed in, and employ an approach that holds out some hope for salvation: "in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth" (2:25). But in order to effectively achieve this Timothy must demonstrate both Christian graces ("gentle", "non-resentful"[50]) as well as pastoral skill ("able to teach"[51], "humbly instruct").

In the later letters of the NT we find a greater concentration of interest in false teachings and false teachers. In the letter of Jude we find a parallel instruction that again shows the need for discernment that will enable the church to tactfully opt for various possible applications when dealing with misled church members: "Be merciful to those who doubt; save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy mixed with fear – hating even

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48. The verbs, respectively: *periistaso* ("stand around, avoid, shun"); *apotrepou* ("avoid, turn away from").

49. In Jude 22-23 too we see evidence for diverse, adapted-approaches to Christians who have come under the influence of heterodox belief systems.

50. Gk. *anexikakon*, "bearing evil without resentment," is a NT hapax.

51. Gk. *didaktikos*, "able to teach" is only used again in 1 Tim 3:2 in the list of qualifications for a bishop.

the clothing stained by corrupted flesh" (Jude 22-23). This multiplex approach – rather than a one-size-fits-all strategy – is critically important for pastoral care of Christian congregations in the face of fine-sounding and persuasive heretical teachings.

4.6. The authority of the text

> *kai hoti apo brephous ta hiera grammata oidas ta dunamena se sophisai eis sōtērian dia pisteōs tēs en Christō Iēsou,* "And that from infancy you know the sacred Scriptures that are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 3:15)

2 Timothy contains the most elaborate and definitive description of the Christian's relationship to the text of Scripture (3:14-17). This occurs in the context of Paul's exhortation that Timothy takes the path that would be diametrically opposed to the "evildoers and imposters" who "will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived" (3:13). How was Timothy going to be able to secure this alternative trajectory?

Paul proposes two means: the belief-tradition of faithful predecessors ("you know those from whom you learned it"), and the God-breathed (*theopneustos*) text of the Holy Scriptures. While the former is echoed throughout the letter[52], the latter is highlighted here only (3:15-17), but provides unique insights into the apostolic opinion on, and rationale for, the central position of the Jewish Scriptures in the church.

We may note the following:

(i)     The Holy Scriptures (*hiera grammata*) have an evangelistic purpose: it provides the pedagogical preparation for an individual to receive salvation (3:15). Notwithstanding the fact that the *Tanak* contained diverse genres and had many different uses within the Jewish worshipping community, Paul underscores its overall singularity of

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52.  See above, "The Passage of the Faith by Tradition."

purpose, the golden-thread that runs through the whole: God's plan of salvation "through faith in Jesus Christ."

(ii)     "All Scripture" is organically related to the divine being, carrying the very "breath" or "spirit" of God in its words, message and conveyance (3:16). The unique adjective, *theopneustos* ("God-breathed), coined by Paul may allude to the imagery of God blowing into the face of the clay-formed man, the "breath of life" (Genesis 2:7). The latter action conveyed the idea of an organic relationship between the man and God. This then may be the implication of Paul's creative description here for the Scriptures.

(iii)     Paul further emphasises how indispensable the Jewish Scriptures were for spiritual formation and equipping for ministry in the life of the Church, especially for anyone who had been set apart for ministry as a "man of God" (*ho tou theou anthrōpos*) like Timothy (3:16-17). The *hapax* Paul employs to indicate how effective and indispensable the Scriptures are in the equipping of such a leader, is *artios*, which carries the idea of being "entirely suited" or "complete in accomplishment."

The writings of the apostles and their associates, which later were canonised as the New Testament of Holy Scripture, followed a Christian hermeneutic of the Jewish Scriptures as ultimately pointing to the person, preaching and work of Jesus. Consequently the Church has historically applied the logic of Paul's teaching about the Jewish Scriptures now to the corpus of the Christian writings, and regards the whole, both Old and New Testaments, as *inspired* (*theopneustos*) Scripture.

In the physical absence of Paul as a mentor, and in the face of his imminent departure, Paul commends to Timothy two priorities: the *faith-tradition of his predecessors*

(mother, grandmother and Paul, among others) and the *corpus of written* Scripture. These would be the vital resources Timothy could depend on to remain anchored in his Christian convictions and to receive guidance in his Christian calling.

4.7. The commission to teach

The final priority we may find woven into the text of 2 Timothy is the imperative to engage in the work of teaching the community the doctrines and ethics of the Christian faith. We have already considered how Paul had set in motion a 'tradition' whereby the central tenets of the faith would be faithfully conveyed to successive generations via Timothy, "faithful men", and "others", through teaching (2:2).[53] On two further occasions in 2 Timothy Paul will return to this same theme.

The first is in 2:15 where he challenges Timothy to be one who "correctly handles the word of truth" (*orthotomounta ton logon tēs alētheias*). The metaphor refers to "cutting straight" and is found again only in Prov. 3:6 and 11:5. The KJV comes closest to the literal meaning: "rightly dividing the word of truth", which pictures the Timothy as an artisan skilfully "cutting through" the Gospel message – the "good deposit" (1 Tim 6:20; 2 Tim 1:14) – to expose its deeper meaning and implication. Such responsible teaching will be in stark contrast to the others who have invaded or risen up from within the Ephesian church (see 2:14, 16).[54]

The second occasion for the command to effectively communicate the Christian message to the church through preaching and teaching is found in 4:1-5. Noticeably Paul had just concluded his commendation of the Jewish Scriptures as an indispensable pedagogical resource for the instruction of the church and its leaders (3:16-17). He

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53. Knight III, *Pastoral Epistles*, 392: "Timothy is to entrust what he has heard from Paul to others *marked by their ability to teach others*" (emphasis added).

54. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy*, 255: "Thus Paul is not urging that he correctly interpret Scripture but that he truly preach and teach the gospel, the word of truth, in contrast to the "word battles" (v.14) and "godless chatter" (v.16) of the others.

immediately follows on with a solemn charge to Timothy (4:1) to "preach the word" (*kēruxon ton logon*), irrespective of how convenient or inconvenient it may seem (4:2). Unlike often happens with modern evangelists, such preaching would not be one-off sermons preached to audiences that the preacher would be a stranger to. Rather, Paul envisages a ministry of proclamation of the gospel message that is sustained over the long-term (*makrothumia*) and accomplished through "teaching" (*didachē*).

This emphasis on teaching as a strategic means of defending the faith from error is underscored in Paul's previous letter to Timothy. In it Paul brings up the matter of the teaching responsibility in the church more than once (2:12; 3:2; 4:11; 5:7; 6:2), coupling it on occasion with the term "command" (see 4:11 and 6:2). In these texts we discover that the only skill demanded of a "bishop" is his "ability to teach", and Timothy was to exemplify this role.

## 5. Conclusion

We began by querying the purpose that determined Paul's writing of his second extant letter to Timothy, and argued that the issue had become somewhat confused by it being classified together with 1 Timothy and Titus as the "Pastoral Epistles" (PE) from around the eighteenth century.[55] This latter fact successfully subsumed the highly specific intention of 2 Timothy under the overall concerns of 1 Timothy and Titus, and disregarded the internal features that clarified its unique message.

By assuming that it was a mere continuation of the message of 1 Timothy, where the purpose is stated in terms of combating false teachers, interpreters have failed to see the evidence for Paul's deep concern about the spiritual and emotional condition of his dear son in the faith. This latter concern is not an isolated or obscure feature of the letter, but is its major theme; we noted ten prominent features

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55. The earliest known use of this designation is in D. N. Berdot's exegetical approach to Pauline theology in 1703; see Knight III, *Pastoral Epistles*, 3.

evident in the text.

Through a careful reading of 2 Timothy we have argued that the overall purpose may not be reduced (as some do) to a summons to Timothy to make a farewell visit to Paul in his prison cell in Rome; Paul's purpose was far more significant for the mission than that. In 1:1 – 4:8 he is challenging Timothy to his responsibility as a Defender of the Faith, and pointing to him the most important priorities that he must restore if he is to "fully discharge his ministry" (4:5). We have also considered that the final section that majors on Paul's instruction to Timothy to come to Rome may also arise from the urgency of restoring Timothy's confidence to simultaneously defend the faith even as he declares the faith. Having Mark and Luke there with them on that occasion opens the tantalizing possibility that the critical consultation about the super-importance of the safe passage of the gospel, the "good deposit", inspired them to write their accounts of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The final note about Timothy in the New Testament (Hebrews 13:23) – which establishes that he had suffered imprisonment for the faith – suggests that the final letter he had received from Paul and his likely final face-to-face encounter with him had achieved its objective. Unlike "everyone in the province of Asia" (1:15) and Demas (4:10), who had deserted Paul and the gospel, Timothy had stayed true to the example of his *guru*, and "joined with [him] in suffering for the gospel" (1:8).

# TRINITY, THEODICY AND SUFFERING IN COMMUNITY: A DISCUSSION ON THE TRINITARIAN DOCTRINE OF CREATION

NATHANAEL SOMANATHAN

***Abstract:*** *Like other eras, the modern age (referred to here as the secular age) has distinctive markers. One such marker is the development of the term theodicy which was coined in the 18th century. The secular deployment of theodicy as an ideological argument against the existence of God has resulted in the wholesale Christian acceptance of its philosophical premise as a theological preoccupation, despite the term's internal discrepancies. Hence the many different theodicies that try to reconcile the "goodness of God" and the "problem of evil." However, a historical analysis of the term and the secular age it exists in reveal significant correlations between theological trends towards deism and away from orthodox trinitarian theology. Consequently, the Trinitarian doctrine of creation which has important implications for the Christian understanding of community and communion has also been sidelined. As a result, the Christian response to human suffering and horrendous evils both in the West and the globalizing world has been anthropocentric, rationalistic and individualistic. Alternatively, I assert that the Christian response to the problem of evil and pain must be an embodied theodicy—a robust community, modelled in the image of the Trinitarian God, capable of absorbing the suffering and grief.*

***Keywords:*** *Theodicy, Trinitarian doctrine of creation, Suffering in community, Secular Age*

## 1. Introduction

"There's a branch of Christianity that promises a cure for tragedy," says Kate Bowler, in her autobiographical work *Everything Happens for a Reason*.[1] Here, after her diagnosis

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1. Kate Bowler, *Everything Happens for a Reason: And Other Lies I've*

of Stage IV colon cancer, she records her journey of self-discovery amidst the lies she had inadvertently believed as a participant of the cultural ethos of North America. These were not merely tenants of the prosperity movement—she had succumbed to the American dream: hard work, positivity, and good behaviour will be fairly rewarded.[2] Her conclusion, on the other hand, is that everything does not happen for a reason in the individualistic sense. One must live in the acknowledgement that God is the one who writes humans into His story, not the other way around.

Bowler's realization through suffering (like many others) indicates a disenchanting worldview that characterizes the West. This worldview has not only formed the secular age[3] but has also found its way into the ethos of Western Christianity and wherever it has touched. The secular society has disregarded the Christian God, and the Christian community has reduced the creator God of the universe to a distant, "transcendent watchdog, a bureaucratic manager."[4] The assumption that characterizes this secular age is that "we must control our existence by acquiring the power to eradicate from our lives anything that threatens our autonomy as individuals."[5]

Suffering, especially suffering that does not seem to be warranted, threatens autonomy. What if one is truly not in control of their life and its events? What if the 'retribution principle'[6] is not validated by life's deepest and

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*Loved*, First edition. (NY: Random House, 2018), xi.

2. Bowler, *Everything Happens for a Reason*, 8.

3. "Taylor's notion of the secular as an age of contested belief, where religious belief is no longer axiomatic. It's possible to imagine not believing in God." James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 142.

4. Stanley Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 60.

5. Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering*, 60.

6. "The retribution principle is the belief that the righteous will prosper and the wicked will suffer, both in proportion to the degree of righteousness and wickedness. This is sometimes extended to the idea that those prospering must be righteous, ..." John H. Walton and J. Harvey Walton, *The Lost World of the Israelite Conquest: Covenant, Retribution, and the Fate of the Canaanites* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017)

darkest moments? Stanley Hauerwas in his provocative analysis of suffering and its relation to God and medicine points out that "when confronted with the suffering of a child, believers often discover that, despite their explicit convictions, they are in fact practical atheists; unbelievers sometimes discover that, despite their explicit disbelief, they are sustained by habit of a community of belief." [7] Certain kinds of suffering have justified the abandonment and the dethroning of the Christian God, where God's existence has been brought to question in response to the reality of evil and suffering. The age-old 'problem of evil' has taken a new face in the secular age than it had in the Patristic and Medieval ages.

Additionally, amid political upheaval and innumerable disasters, a major shift can be observed post 18th century: people are asking more existential questions than ever before. As will be examined in this paper, "theodicies" are at the forefront of discussions surrounding God and the reality of evil and suffering. It is noteworthy that the nature of the questions surrounding the historical debate of the 'problem of evil' is significantly different today from that of the previous eras.

This paper will endeavour to provide an analysis of the present secular age, and of what is at stake when talking about 'theodicies.' I will argue that a trinitarian doctrine of creation can address the cultural deism that has permeated Christianity, especially in the face of horrendous evils and unexplainable suffering. An account of human anthropology analogous to the Trinitarian God will be provided to assert the role of the Christian community in responding to the 'problem of evil.'

## 2. Modernity and the Secular Age

Modernity can be characterized by several different cultural and socio-economic shifts of attitudes and practices. Like many paradigmatic shifts between the 16th and 18th centuries, the Newtonian revolution, renaissance

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7.   Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering*, 60, fn. 26.

humanism, and Enlightenment have all played a role in the development of a worldview, exclusive to modernity, that excluded the need for God's existence and activity in the world. According to some historians, the transition into modernity can be characterized as a shift from an 'age of belief' to an 'age of reason.'

While a single divide cannot strictly signify modernity, it embodies a series of continuing divides. Modernity has now further evolved into what is known as post-modernity. Modernity ushered in objectivism, which led to the inevitable demise of experience as a valid source of enquiry, and questioned any claim based on faith as suspicious. Post-modernity, on the other hand, has incited subjectivism and moral relativism, increasingly complexifying the task of epistemology. Hasting states that "Whereas the modernist holds to an objective unity of understanding, grounded in the Enlightenment's conviction of the universal clarity of reason so that there can and should be in principle a single discourse acceptable to the modern world as against the multiple discourses of religious faiths and regional cultures, the postmodernist challenges any such imperialist hegemony of a single world-view."[8] While post-modernity is seen as a category of its own in philosophical discourse, it will be considered as an extension and subset of 'modernity' for the purposes of this paper.

Within the realm of lived reality, however, the turn to modernity has created the perception wherein belief in the transcendent is increasingly irrational. Charles Taylor describes this new era inaugurated by modernity as the 'Secular Age.' His analysis in *A Secular Age* is not concerned with the content of what is believed or not believed in this new epoch, but rather with the conditions of belief. He asks, "How did we move from a condition where, in Christendom, people lived naively within a theistic construal, to one in which we all shunt between two stances,

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8. Adrian. Hastings, *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, eds. Alistair. Mason and Hugh S. Pyper (Oxford ; Oxford University Press, 2000), 444.

in which everyone's construal shows up as such; and in which moreover, unbelief has become for many the major default option?"[9] The question is profound and relevant to this discussion. Theodical questions are no longer asked in a setting where God is a presumed constant; God's existence has to be proven before one can proceed to answer the problem of evil.

Taylor's synopsis, as Smith points out, is that "the emergence of the secular is bound up with the production of a new option—the possibility of exclusive humanism[10] as a viable social imaginary—a way of constructing meaning and significance without any reference to the divine or transcendence."[11] More succinctly put, the modern framework precludes the transcendent, leading to the reality of the 21st century, where God is just one of many viable options for belief and meaning. The default perspective of the universe in the secularized society is in naturalistic and scientific terms. In this framework, the story of history is that as humans became more and more rational and as science gave way to new discoveries, what was attributed to spirits and supernatural forces is now understood as explicable occurrences. Smith sums up this modern reductionistic narrative as "Religion and belief withered with scientific exorcism of superstition."[12] All of this was a natural consequence of the acceptance of the deistic framework post 16th century, supplanting the orthodox notion of the Triune Creator God who is both transcendent to and immanent in creation.

## 3. Modern Theodicies and the Problem of Evil

### 3.1. A brief history of the term 'theodicy'

James Crenshaw, who devoted much of his scholarly

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9. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007), 14.

10. "Exclusive humanism: A worldview or social imaginary that is able to account for meaning and significance without any appeal to the divine or transcendence." Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular*, 141.

11. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular*, 26.

12. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular*, 24.

life to this subject, defines theodicy as "the attempt to defend divine justice in the face of aberrant phenomena that appear to indicate that deity's indifference or hostility toward virtuous people."[13] The term, coined by G. W. Leibniz in 1705, consists of two Greek terms: *theos* (God) and *diké* (justice). He first used the term in his only major book on philosophy following discussions with Sophie Charlotte, queen of Prussia, on God's goodness, free will, and the origin of evil.[14]

Though it was well known that Leibniz introduced the term 'theodicy,' it was long understood as naming a long tradition preceding him. In recent times, however, a growing consensus in the philosophy of religion (including voices such as Odo Marquard, Kenneth Surin and Terrence Tilley) disagree with the usage of the term to describe pre-modern thinking about evil. Marcel Sarot suggests that "It is now often assumed that – parallel to the 'Enlightenment project' – the theodicy project is a typically modern project, and that is misleading to apply the term 'theodicy' to pre-modern thinking."[15]

The shift in thinking, reflected in modernity and the introduction of theodicy, is that evil is no longer seen as only a practical challenge to be overcome—it has now become the basis for questioning the existence of God. The transcendent God was a presupposition that never came into question in pre-modern thinking. That is not to say that the problem of evil was not an issue. The problem, however, was seen only as a conceptual and realistic one. The philosophical and non-personal treatment of the problem is uniquely modern. Hauerwas considers the emergence of 'theodicy' in parallel with the rise of modern atheism. This is evident in modern religious and secular discourses, as a-theological methods are used to structure arguments around the existence of evil to disprove God.

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13. James Crenshaw, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary, vol. 1*, ed. Noel Freedman, 1st ed., vol. 6 (1st edition, New York: Doubleday, 1992), 444.

14. Marcel Sarot, *Theodicy in the World of the Bible*, eds. A. Laato and J. C. de Moor (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 2.

15. Sarot, *Theodicy in the World of the Bible*, 1.

Furthermore, Sarot makes three historical observations of the broader cultural context that characterizes the modern problem of theodicy: Firstly, it was during the Renaissance that a new standard and emphasis on earthly happiness emerged. The medieval view had been that evil was a practical obstacle for the Christian preparation toward eternal bliss. Secondly, Ernst Cassirer argues that "theodicy coincides with the decline of the belief of original sin." Previously, all sin was somehow explicable as a result of the Fall. However, "the optimism that was characteristic of the Enlightenment [is that] not all suffering is deserved." Thirdly, Odo Marquard has pointed out that the project of theodicy is a luxury of the modern man. The modern era has brought about a distance from actual suffering due to the innumerable advancements in modern medicine and technology. Suffering has become less of a practical issue and more of a theoretical one.

Another key development in secular society is the rise of anthropodicy in place of theodicy. This inevitable shift was the result of a society that had rid itself of the transcendent. It indicates that the problem of evil remains a problem, even if God is taken out of the equation. Ernest Becker, regarding this, writes,

> [M]an had to settle for a new limited explanation, an anthropodicy which would cover only those evils allowed for human remedy. The only way to achieve this new explanation was to gradually shift the burden from reliance on God's will to the belief in man's understanding and powers. This was a shift that was to occupy the whole Enlightenment, and it was not easily accomplished. In fact, it is still not accomplished today.[16]

## 3.2. Inherent discrepancies within 'theodicy'

Much like the secular preoccupation with "theodicy" as an ideological argument against the existence of God, the Christian preoccupation reveals a wholesale acceptance

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16. Ernest. Becker, *The Structure of Evil: An Essay on the Unification of the Science of Man* (New York: G. Braziller, 1968), 18.

despite the term's inherent discrepancies and the secular worldview it espouses. Hence the various theodicies employed by Christians to reconcile 'the goodness of God' and the 'problem of evil.'[17] Of particular interest are the presuppositions modern theodicies are constructed on, often neglecting the cornerstone of proper theological discourse— the Trinitarian God.

Theodicy seeks to understand God's goodness and omnipotence in the face of natural and moral evil. Natural evil is usually understood as the suffering and evil caused by nature. Moral evil, then, is the evil and suffering inflicted by human beings on each other, other creatures, and the earth they inhabit. While other philosophers of religion use a plethora of terms to categorize and understand evil, Marilyn McCord Adams introduces the term 'horrendous evils' that will be useful to understand the heart of the matter.[18] This category is reserved for those evil acts we cannot potentially explain as having significance or meaning in naturalistic thinking. It connotes evil such as the sudden death of a child, forced impregnation through incest, gang rape of an underage girl, and so on. These evils make a specific impression in people's hearts due to the cruelty of the act and the innocence of the victim. While some evils can be understood as the result of bad choices or the consequences of natural causes, horrendous evils remain a mystery. Needless to say, most theodicies fail or are deemed inadequate in dealing with the reality of horrendous evils.

While all evil has a particular significance to theodicies, 'horrendous evils' in particular create a problem for the traditional and orthodox understanding of who God

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17. Laato and Moor provide a synopsis of the prominent modern theodicies in the following list: (1). Retribution theology; (2). Educative theodicy; (3). Eschatological theodicy; (4). The Mystery of theodicy; (5). Communion theodicy; (6). Human determinism, in *Theodicy in the World of the Bible*, xxx. In *Faith Seeking Understanding* Migliore provides a wider scope of the recent theodicies: Protest theodicy, Process theodicy, Person-making theodicy and Liberation theodicy.

18. Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000).

is. Modernity's problem with Orthodox Christianity is that it claims that God is both good and omnipotent/omniscient at the same time. Some theodicies, such as process theodicy, have sought to answer this critique by either compromising one of the doctrines or the other. Hauerwas suspects that the difficulty with the modern conception of the 'problem of evil' is that "the issue presupposes that the question of God's existence can be separated from God's character."[19] The problem is such that religion may not ever be able to present an adequate response that is logical or viable without compromising on at least one of the core orthodox doctrines. Addressing this challenge, Brueggemann asserts that "today the theological discussion seems to insist on holding on to God's love even at the risk of God's sovereign power. What faith offers is a sense of trust that is prepared to submit. That deep trust summons us to hard rethinking about the categories in which we do our reflection."[20]

In other words, all theodicies are contextual and are formed as a result of the existing cultural worldview. Modern theodicies that see the problem of evil as a basis to question the existence of God versus a practical challenge to overcome, are the product of a disenchanted universe that works according to a scheme of access and benefits. Brueggemann points out that "The question of theodicy is never a narrow religious question. It must be understood sociologically as a question about law, about the rule of law, about the reliability of the system of rewards and punishments."[21] As observed, the Secular Age has replaced the transcendent with the immanent frame, where one's view of the world is now devoid of a creator God who is sovereign over creation. In other words, theodical questions are not asked in a historical vacuum and are not divorced from a social context. As Brueggemann puts it: "The practical effect is that theodicy is a theory of power about

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19. Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering*, 42.
20. Walter Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary*, Augsburg Old Testament Studies (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1984), 169.
21. Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 169.

who makes decisions and who obeys them, who administers and controls good, who has access to them and on what terms." [22]

Another failure of theodicy is that it surrenders to the Enlightenment assumptions that a true understanding of self can only be reached when we are rid of all "traditions and communities other than those we have chosen from the position of complete autonomy."[23] This is reflected especially in the lack of emphasis given to a community and its history in forming perceptions of suffering and evil. The fundamental convictions of the Christian faith can only be absorbed through the conversion of an individual into that community. The assumption that the 'problem of evil' is intelligible from any perspective is invalid. "The 'tradition free rationality' has led to a way of dealing with the problem of theodicy in sophisticated philosophical 'possible worlds' which hardly touches anyone who is suffering."[24] This immanent frame consists of narratives that try to provide theoretical accounts for evil and suffering rather than necessitating a community that can absorb it.[25]

It is likely that in a context where the triune God—the God who is both good and all-powerful—has been traded for a system of rewards and punishment, where autonomy is elevated, and contingency of any sort is eliminated, that suffering is seen as absurd. Along this line, Karl Barth is known to have rejected any attempt at theodicy and "dismissed it as an inadmissible mental exercise."[26]

This by no means invalidates the reality of horrendous evils or the pain of those suffering. The question dealt with here, however, is how have Christians historically understood the 'problem of evil.' Modern theoretical theodicies that deal with the 'problem of evil' on a merely philosophical level are symptomatic of the secularization of the society and church. Furthermore,

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22. Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 170.
23. Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 53.
24. Sarot, *Theodicy in the World of the Bible*, xiii.
25. Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering*, 49.
26. Sarot, *Theodicy in the World of the Bible*, xii.

the creator God seen as the all-powerful monarch of the universe who rules from afar and not as the Trinitarian God who lives in loving community within the Godhead, upholds the universe by his providential care, and moves it towards a telos, has brought severe implications for how a community cares for those suffering.[27]

## 4. God as Triune Creator

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1 ESV). Few verses have had such significance for Christian theology. The fundamental tenant of the doctrine of creation is that God has revealed himself as the one who creates. All that is known to humans through their sensory faculties, the splendour of creation, the known universe and beyond, find their origin in the beginning. There is nothing that can be known before this beginning, except that there was nothing and then there was everything. Dietrich Bonhoeffer points out that humans cannot, in their sinful state, distinguish the beginning (or the end) from the middle. "No one can speak of the beginning, but the one who was in the beginning."[28] The beginning and the end are known, in other words, only through God's given Word, which is Christ.

However, the Scripture does not limit God to being only the Creator of the material universe. He is also the God of time and history. Barth states that God in "His speaking and activity and work outside himself" gives to the world and humankind a part in the history in which He is God.[29] This is primarily characterized in the work of creation, and the twofold nature of the existence of man—the reflection of the inner life of God Himself. This God is not merely a monotheistic God; He is the triune God who both creates the world and guides it to its final telos—the eschatological end reached through the concursus of the triune God and

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27. Sarot, *Theodicy in the World of the Bible*, 17-19.
28. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 29.
29. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, 197.

creation in perichoretic relationship.

Migliore contends that the doctrine of the Trinity is crucial to the Christian identity. This is the distinctive mark of the Christian God—the one God in three persons. Furthermore, the trinitarian doctrine of creation is crucial to the understanding that God is both transcendent over creation and yet immanent in creation, the affirmation that God is the Creator through the Son in the Spirit. As Migliore points out, "The grace of the triune God is present not only in history but also in nature, not only in the gift of forgiveness but also in the gift of creation and the gift of consummation."[30] The incarnation of Christ into humanity, taking the form of a created being, further amplifies God's nearness to creation—that is Immanuel, God with us. Irenaeus uses the analogy of the "two hands of God" to assert how God upholds and preserves the world through both His Word and Spirit. Some 20th century theologians, such as Karl Rahner and his contemporary Jürgen Moltmann, would even go as far as to claim that the "economic trinity" and the "imminent trinity" are one and the same. Moltmann sees God's Spirit infused into creation in such a way that creation and nature are in a sense, divinized by virtue of its life source.

It is due to the loss of this particular identity that Christianity became vulnerable to the project of secularization brought about by modernity. As emphasis shifted from the perichoretic relationship of the person within the inner life of God to the mere transcendence of God, there was increasing suspicion of God's immanence in the life of creation. The 18th century landmarks of the industrial revolution, the rise of exclusive humanism and expressive individualism[31] created an irreverent ideology of

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30. Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, (3rd edition, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 112.

31. Expressive individualism: "Emerging from the Romantic expressivism of the late eighteenth century, it is an understanding "that each one of us has his/her own way of realizing our humanity," and that we are called to live that out ("express" it) rather than conform to models imposed by others (especially institutions). Sarot, *Theodicy in the World of the Bible*, 17–19.

the world in the West. This had a significant ecological and sociological impact, as Moltmann points out. He states that "The ecological crisis... brings with its social crises – crises of value and significance in human society, and a growing instability in the crises of personal life."[32]

While much of modern theology rightly points out the ecological crisis as a consequence of the lost emphasis on the Trinitarian doctrine of creation, the social crisis remains relatively understated. The self-giving love and the deep communion shared within the Godhead are necessary markers for the Christian understanding of what it means to live in community, even in the fallen world.

## 5. Trinity and Community in Suffering

Migliore draws from Calvin when he says that "our knowledge of God and our knowledge of ourselves are always inextricably intertwined, the route that we take and the conclusions that we reach in the doctrine of God will profoundly influence everything else we say about Christian faith and life."[33] If God exists in community—the three persons in loving and self-giving relationship, in service and union—then this must characterize something of the created order.

The triune God is not just an analogy for communal living, but also is how we find significance in suffering. This is an essential aspect of the Christian view of suffering and horrendous evils. While theodicies attempt to provide an impersonal theory for the reality of evil and the benevolence of God, the triune God presents Himself in fellowship to the sufferers. Walter Brueggemann, regarding this reality in the Old Testament, suggests,

> The Old Testament clearly offers no explanation for the inexplicable reality of suffering and no antidote for it. Rather the Scripture offers a

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32. Jürgen. Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 24.
33. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 66.

recontextualization, whereby suffering is situated in a relationship with YHWH and, in the end, the relationship itself is the be-all and end-all of faith. The more powerful truth of fidelity reconstitutes suffering as meaningful.[34]

Some theological perspectives take an even stronger stance: God suffers in the same way as the sufferer in a real sense. God, in this view, is more than co-agent. He is also co-sufferer.[35] Bonhoeffer is famously quoted as saying, "The Bible directs us to God's powerlessness and suffering; only the suffering God can help."[36] Moltmann has gone as far as to suggest that at the event of the cross, the Triune God suffers. The Son of God experiences suffering and death, the Father suffers in the loss of his Son, and the Spirit proceeds from this reality of suffering at the event of the cross.[37] It must be noted here that while the suffering of God alongside the creature promises new features to a theology of suffering, it presents a threat to the doctrine of impassibility. However, the challenge is a necessary one to recover a theology where God is not merely an omnipotent ruler, but also the self-giving, loving, liberating provider of His own self in suffering. As Migliore notes, "Such a theology is centred not in a triumphalist "logic of control" but in the "logic of trinitarian love..."[38]

The *imago Dei,* as understood by many theologians, carries within it a social implication—man and woman in relationship with each other and with God exemplify the "image of God." The individualism of the modern era constitutes the problem of evil as an individual project where the sufferer is only attended to from the outside.

34. Walter Brueggemann, *Reverberations of Faith: A Theological Handbook of Old Testament Themes* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

35. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 136.

36. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer - Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (NY: Macmillan, 1972), 361.

37. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (London: SCM, 2001), 235–49.

38. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 137.

*TRINITY, THEODICY AND SUFFERING IN COMMUNITY:*
*A DISCUSSION ON THE TRINITARIAN DOCTRINE OF CREATION*

The historical approach to suffering and the sufferer is not this way. Hauerwas suggests that "Christians have not had a "solution" to the problem of evil. Rather, they have had a community of care that has made it possible for them to absorb the destructive terror of evil that constantly threatens to destroy all human relations."[39]

The community constructed by a Secular Age that values autonomy above all else cannot and has not met the deepest desire of those suffering— "solidarity." Modern psychologists report that the modern man and woman long deeply for connection in a society that is deeply fragmented and dispersed. The internet and social media culture are a reflection of the desperate desire to fill a void. Moltmann's theological anthropology goes even further. He states that before a human-being can be interpreted as *imago Dei*, he/she must be seen as *imago mundi* – "a microcosm in which all the previous creatures are to be found again, a being that can only exist in community with all other created beings and which can only understand itself in that community".[40]

Rooted in a trinitarian doctrine of creation is the realization that as the Creator gives Himself to his created beings through his providential care and redemptive work of the cross, so we are called to embody the work of the Spirit in "mourning with those who mourn" and "weeping with those who weep." The problem of evil cannot be merely dealt with on a philosophical or metaphysical level. The Scripture, in its wisdom, invites the sufferer into fellowship with the divine and the community in his/her suffering.

## 6. Conclusion

Bowler, in her story at the beginning, exposes a general tendency in the church towards evil and suffering in the world. They are often "cast as 'the will of a God who works in mysterious ways' or as the result of human

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39. Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering*, 53.
40. Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 186.

'sinfulness,' among myriad other possible explanations."[41] However, the retribution principle, which can cause (in a sense) a deistic view of life in relation to God, has failed to address the problem of horrendous evils. The book of Job especially provides a challenge to any notion of suffering as a consequence of unrighteous or ungodly living. The anti-theodical book concludes with God's assertion that he is the Creator God who knows all things and whose purposes cannot be thwarted. While the restoration of Job's riches and family points to a glorious ending, Job is not provided with a solution for the 'problem of evil.' Furthermore, his friends are denounced by God for trying to give reasons for Job's suffering, and Job is commended for appealing to God.

The attempt to explain away evil and suffering, inevitably, surrenders to deism and the project of secularization—the notion that everything has an explanation independent of God's activity (or existence) in the world. As a result, in modernity, "evil" is an excuse that avoids examining cultural practices that have excluded the triune God and the need for a caring community. Hauerwas points out that "our perception of pain and suffering as well as the significance we ascribe to them is correlative to ways of life that are not simply given but depend on community habits of care."[42] Examples include our treatment of the elderly in our communities, our care for the terminally ill and those living in poverty and need.

The practices of lament and mourning as provided by Scripture, are sometimes traded for lesser balms, such as the attempt to find meaning through humanistic reasoning. The house of mourning has been converted into a brief service of exchanging condolences. Brueggemann argues more poignantly for the raw and candid approach we have to God in lament. He cautions that "When the lament form is censured, justice questions cannot be asked and

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41. Jeremy E. Uecker, "Religious and Spiritual Responses to 9/11: Evidence from the Add Health Study," *Sociological Spectrum : The Official Journal of the Mid-South Sociological Association* 28, no. 5 (2008): 3. Accessible online: https://doi.org/10.1080/02732170802206047.

42. Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering*, 70.

eventually become invisible and illegitimate. Instead we learn to settle for questions of 'meaning' and we reduce the issues to resolutions of love."[43]

The Christian hope is rooted in Christ and his redemptive story towards an eschatological end. As I have tried to demonstrate here, however, this hope does not extinguish the reality of suffering and the problem of evil. Hauerwas writes,

> "The problem of evil is not about rectifying our suffering with some general notion of God's nature as all powerful and good; rather, it is about what we mean by God's goodness itself, which for Christians must be construed in terms of God as the Creator who has called into existence a people called Israel so that the world might know that God has not abandoned us. There is no problem of suffering in general; rather, the question of suffering can be raised only in the context of a God who creates us to redeem."[44]

While theodicies may provide logical and apologetic argumentations that have some use in the public square to defend against the absurdity of modern atheistic critiques, the historical faith calls the Christian community to a different way of embodying the ministry of God. The calling is to be a community that affirms and communicates the trinitarian creator God as both transcendent and immanent, who has given himself to the history of humanity, and who through His Son's redemptive work and Spirit is reconciling all of creation towards the renewal of all creation. In Hauerwas's words, "I cannot promise readers consolation, but only as honest an account as I can give of why we cannot afford to give ourselves explanations for evil when what is required is a community capable of absorbing our grief."[45]

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43. Walter Brueggemann, "The Costly Loss of Lament," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 11, no. 36 (October 1986): 64. Accessible online: https://doi.org/10.1177/030908928601103605.

44. Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering*, 79.

45. Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering*, xi.

# WHAT THE PANDEMIC REVEALED ABOUT THE CHURCH IN SRI LANKA

MANO EMMANUEL

***Abstract:*** *Although most of us have not lived through a worldwide catastrophe of these proportions, Sri Lanka has known much community suffering over the past few decades. Therefore, her response at this time should reflect the wisdom of the past. This article surveys some of the common responses of the Sri Lankan church to the pandemic. It suggests that the church could do more theological and biblical reflection to provide a more robust understanding of suffering, the purpose of corporate worship, and what the new normal should look like.*

***Key words:*** *Pandemic, Sri Lankan church, suffering, technology, digital theology*

## 1. Introduction

It is not as though the Sri Lankan church is a stranger to suffering. A thirty year civil war, a tsunami, floods, dengue, the Easter Sunday attacks just over a year ago, sporadic attacks on churches (and mosques) and now a pandemic. And yet in some ways this disaster is different. For the first time, we are all equally at risk, not just those of a particular ethnic group or region or religion. This time the enemy is known but completely unseen and undetectable. This time, we are unable to protect ourselves by ourselves. We need each other's help. This time we don't seem to know how long the threat will last. No amount of political power can control it. There are no "safe" places to which we can flee. And this time, churches were shut when the risk seemed greatest. Innovation was the order of the day – new ways to be church, to home school children, to work from home, shop on line and hope that scientists would discover a new way to eradicate the menace. Face masks, social

distancing, sanitizers and zoom meetings were supposed to enable us to navigate this new normal.

The pandemic revealed a world which was deeply divided along ethnic and economic lines, as the media flashed images of the world situation, including snapshots of riots in the United States, starvation in Yemen, and of unemployed workers walking miles to get home in India. It revealed that rather than being "all in the same boat" we were all in the same sea, but some in luxury liners and some in leaky lifeboats. It revealed a world where nature demonstrated that a release from human subjection brought relief. Air pollution decreased, animals ventured into urban areas, and waterways were refreshed. It brought about reversals as rich became poor and essential workers were supermarket cashiers, garbage collectors and hospital cleaners, all generally looked down on in highly stratified societies like ours. It also revealed a world more complex and unmanageable than we modern people like to think, as the myth of human progress was unveiled in contradictory scientific statements about the pandemic, in ethnic tensions across the globe, in stifling of dissent in many countries.

In Sri Lanka, at the time of writing this article, churches are allowed to meet in restricted numbers. Many businesses and schools have re-opened and in some ways life is returning to normal, and yet we inhabit a new reality. The world has changed, in some ways irrevocably. We are told that pandemics of this kind could recur; we hear of business empires crumbling, we see millions lose employment. In a globalized world, Sri Lanka will inevitably experience some of the ramifications of these changes. But what changes might we expect to see in the post covid church in Sri Lanka?

This article seeks to review some of the responses of the Sri Lankan church to the pandemic. Some of these trends were most evident on social media as churches and individuals increased their on-line presence. Some feedback was received from pastors and church workers connected to our Seminary who were interviewed about how their churches coped with the restrictions. While broad

generalizations cannot be made, some areas seemed to present themselves as areas for discussion and action.

## 2. Response 1: Looking for the Reason

The initial reaction to the news of the threat was panic and confusion among many believers. "We were not prepared " said one church worker (this despite the long years of war, epidemics of dengue and so on). As fear, loneliness and financial loss hit families, there was a desperate search for answers to the questions "what is God doing?" and "why". That this was not confined to Sri Lankan churches was evident by the rapid production of booklets such as John Lennox's *Where is God in a Corona Virus World?* And N.T. Wright's *God and the Pandemic.*

### 2.1. The pandemic as a sign of the end times

Social media posts revealed that some Christians were convinced that the virus was a sign of the imminent end of history. This fascination with a particular eschatological view has long been apparent in the church, evidenced by mass attendance at conferences on end time events, the keen desire for Bible studies on Revelation, the unquestioning acceptance of inaccurate information about various prophecies being fulfilled in world events, and a strong support for the state of Israel. As one church worker said, there is a vast difference between the attendance at 'end time" events and the attendance at other Bible studies or conferences on topics such as discipleship or prayer. What is, in fact, a particular brand of apocalyptic teaching generally imported from American teachers is taken on board uncritically.

Bauckham says, "Revelation does not respond to the dominant ideology by promoting Christian withdrawal into a sectarian enclave that leaves the world to its judgment while consoling itself with millennial dreams."[1] The book of Revelation calls for active participation in

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1. Richard Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 161.

truth and justice in all spheres of life.[2] Unfortunately, unlike in the past when a focus on Christ's return fueled hope, endurance and resistance to evil, this avid interest is generally more focused on satisfying personal curiosity and affirming a sense of personal security. The intention of the apocalyptic vision, which is to promote hope, courage and endurance is stifled. Initially, some attributed the disease to God's judgement on certain peoples and nations for their ungodliness and idolatry. The situation became more perplexing, however, as nations that some assumed to be "Christian nations" reported alarming numbers of infections and deaths.

Many churches would benefit from more robust teaching on living in the end times (which of course began with Jesus' inauguration of the Kingdom of God) so that their congregations are biblically informed. Meanwhile, some Prophets and Apostles from both inside and outside Sri Lanka encouraged their followers to hunger for mysteries to be unravelled and signs in the political and cosmic spheres to be deciphered. So, the pandemic too became a sign to be deciphered, like various blood moons or technological advances. New Testament theologian N T Wright suggests that there is no need to look for more signs. The signs have been given to us in Jesus' life , death and resurrection. "In other words, if Jesus' followers are waiting for special events to nudge them into looking for Jesus' kingdom on earth as in heaven, or to tell them to repent when they were drifting into careless sin, then they've gone to sleep on the job."[3]

2.2. Looking for a way out

In the early days of the pandemic, believers looked for assurances that they would be preserved from the disease.

One church offered believers the chance to purchase the secrets of "Christocentric bio-hacking."[4] Believers were

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2.   Bauckham, *Theology,* 161.
3.   N. T. Wright, *God and the Pandemic* (ePub version; London: SPCK/ Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020).
4.   Accessible on: https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=37570

urged to take advantage of the "union-flow" in which they could employ their mystical union (fusion) with God to protect them from the virus. The fullness of the Spirit and the mind of Christ (which is theirs) would "re-structure" the very DNA of their bodies. In particular, the power available through partaking in the Lord's supper was stressed, since in eating and drinking, believers were "taking in his very nature". Believers could be assured that their bodies were "genetically modified" ensuring longevity since believers possessed the same exalted body that Christ has.

Psalm 91 was frequently commended as way to ward off the pestilence and believers were urged to recite the psalm and claim the promise of protection. To many believers, for a teaching to be biblical only requires the addition of a bible verse to the authoritatively delivered message even if the verse is taken out of its literary, historical and canonical context. A biblical view of suffering would not be so selective in its use of scripture. For example, Psalm 91 is the psalm that Satan chose to quote when tempting Jesus. Jesus knew the context of the psalm and how it could be applied. If anyone had the right to expect God to send his angels to protect him it was Jesus. Yet he did not expect that deliverance to be his at the start of his ministry (Mt 4:7). Although attended by angels in the wilderness and in Gethsemane, he did not call on legions of angels to fight for him at his arrest (Mt 26:53-54).[5] That God can deliver is certain. That he must is not the witness of scripture or church history.

## 2.3 A deeper biblical theology of suffering

Why is it that the Sri Lankan church, on the whole, still seemed to be ill prepared to think biblically about national suffering? Could it be that many churches have failed to present the realistic and nuanced approach to suffering that the Bible sets out? In cases where there has been a steady diet of either simplistic answers to suffering (it is your lack of faith, only the disobedient suffer) or

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5.   Mark 1:13 says the angels attended him in the wilderness.

triumphalistic preaching of an over-realized eschatology (Christ has achieved it for you…claim it) this has kept large sections of the church immature in this respect. Add to this a highly mobile consumeristic congregation who will leave if they do not receive what they want to hear, and preachers have another challenge to overcome.

In summary we might say that the proliferation of various strains of the prosperity gospel prevalent in some churches and the tendency towards triumphalistic or positive thinking style sermons in other churches meant that many believers did not have a robust enough theology of suffering with which to meet this new challenge. Perhaps karmic cultures who are used to the idea that suffering is a way of paying for one's sins and that health and prosperity is a reward for goodness find such thinking easy to transfer to Christianity.

D. A. Carson warns that Christians must decide where the certainties and the mysteries are in our faith. Both are present. We just sometimes find them in the wrong places.[6] He goes on to say "in addition to holding that Christian beliefs are true and consistent, the Christian, to find comfort in them, must learn how to use them."[7] To be triumphant without being triumphalistic, to be confident in certainties and allow for mystery in what has not been revealed is a delicate balancing act but must be consistently practiced to be faithful to scripture and to the God it reveals.

N. T. Wright came under fire for an article in *Time Magazine* that suggested that the church did not have all the answers.[8] It seems that it is not only the Sri Lankan church that finds it hard to live with the mystery of God's dealings with his world. In Wright's extended reflection in his *God and the Pandemic,* he suggested that what the church

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6.  D. A. Carson, *How Long O Lord* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1990, 2006), 26.
7.  Carson, *How Long,* 20.
8.  N. T. Wright, "Christianity Offers No Answers about the Coronavirus. It's Not Supposed To," *Time*, updated: March 29, 2020 3:47 PM EDT; originally published on March 29, 2020 8:00 AM EDT. Accessible at: https://time.com/5808495/coronavirus-christianity/.

needed to do was to join in the groaning of the world rather than attempt to supply answers. He pointed out that as the world groans and we groan with it, the Spirit groans too (Rom 8:26-27 ). Many others pointed to the rich spiritual resource available to us in lament. Sri Lankan theologian Ajith Fernando was one of these.[9] Lament as a response to communal suffering seems to be largely absent from Sri Lankan churches.

One reason for this could be that some sections of the church have been largely protected from other national disasters- churches in large cities, for example may not have felt the deep pain of rural Christians facing poverty and persecution. Christians in the South may not have felt the need to lament over the plight of the people living in war zones. Sri Lankan theologian Vinoth Ramachandra in his recent book, *Sarah's Laughter,* explores Christian hope in suffering. He covers the topic of lament and quotes a Tamil lament written by a clergyman living in Jaffna (north Sri Lanka) during the war years.[10] So, lament does exist in the Sri Lankan church but it is not common. Perhaps we have not really lived up to Paul's vision of a church in which the whole church suffers when one part suffers (1 Cor 12:29).

Secondly, many believers have been conditioned to believe that pastors and leaders must provide answers rather than weep over suffering. Ajith Fernando recalls more than one occasion when he has led his church in communal lament[11], but many of the rapidly growing churches in Sri Lanka do not expect that from their leaders, and would perhaps see that response as a lack of faith.

Thirdly, the church in Sri Lanka is hugely influenced

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9. Fernando outlines his "theology of groaning" in his book *The Call to Joy and Pain* (Colombo: Youth for Christ Publications, 2007), 31-35.

10. Vinoth Ramachandra, *Sarah's Laughter: Tears, Doubt and Christian Hope* (Cumbria, UK: Langham Global Library, 2020), 17. Ramachandra also refers to the Anglican Church's Service of Lament held in 2013 to commemorate the lives lost in the years of the civil war. While, as Ramachandra says, there were many from many denominations who attended, such services were also criticised by other Christians for being unpatriotic and for down- playing the government's victory.

11. Fernando, *Call to,* 33.

by Western styles of worship. As Ramachandra says " the virtual disappearance of lament from the pulpit, prayers and liturgies in Asian churches that slavishly imitate the worship styles of affluent Western churches are a matter of grave concern, not just because it encourages dishonesty in our relationships with God and one another."[12]

## 2.4 A deeper understanding of the theology of the cross

In the early church, especially following the conversion of Emperor Constantine, the cross became identified with the kind of power that was visible in the secular world. "The cross became an almost magical weapon, at the disposal of the visible church to repel its enemies."[13] We do see, however, that through Church history there have also been theologies that critiqued this understanding of victory. Martin Luther pointed out that the cross was God's primary revelation of his character. This is what he called "the theology of the cross" as opposed to what he challenged- "the theology of glory". In the famous Heidelberg Disputation in 1518, Luther presented the following:

> That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened. He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.

Luther's theology of the cross was based on 1 Corinthians 1 (particularly, vv. 18-25). Luther challenged the church of his time, with its pomp and wealth, to recognize that the power, wisdom and love of God is revealed primarily in the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross.[14] Atonement and revelation must not be kept apart. Luther's theology

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12. Ramachandra, *Sarah's Laughter*, 19.

13. Heino O. Kadai, "Luther's Theology of the Cross," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (1999), 174.

14. Carl R. Trueman, "Luther's Theology of the Cross," *New Horizons* (October 2005). Accessible at: https://www.opc.org/nh.html?article_id=2.

was re-visited and brought to the fore by theologians who lived through times of great national and international crisis, such as the second world war. Theologians like Kazoh Kitamori, Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Jurgen Moltmann theologized about the weakness and suffering of God, voluntarily embraced for the world. As Bonhoeffer writes "Only a suffering God can help."[15] The way God works in atonement is the way he typically works, and reveals his character. God brings victory out of defeat, conquers through weakness and brings glory from suffering. We therefore cannot attribute to God the common (worldly) understanding of concepts like power or blessing. We cannot explain the pandemic in triumphalistic terms (or perhaps any terms at all). Least of all can we assume that we have the right to be spared from its effects because we are followers of Christ.

Trueman explains the significance of this for those who face inexplicable suffering.

> The answer to the problem of evil does not lie in trying to establish its point of origin, for that is simply not revealed to us. Rather, in the moment of the cross, it becomes clear that evil is utterly subverted for good. Romans 8:28 is true because of the cross of Christ: if God can take the greatest of evils and turn it to the greatest of goods, then how much more can he take the lesser evils which litter human history, from individual tragedies to international disasters, and turn them to his good purpose as well.[16]

N. T. Wright says something similar.

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15. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison,* (London: SCM Press, 1967), 361. See Richard Bauckham, "Only the suffering God can help" for a brief summary of twentieth century theologians and their challenge to the traditional doctrine of divine impassibility in *Themelios* 9, no. 3 (1984) https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/only-the-suffering-god-can-help-divine-passibility-in-modern-theology/

16. Trueman, "Luther's Theology."

> The point is this. If you want to know what it means to talk about God being 'in charge of' the world, or being 'in control', or being 'sovereign', then Jesus himself instructs you to rethink the notion of 'kingdom', 'control' and 'sovereignty' themselves, around his death on the cross.[17]

In short, rather than attempting to explain why, or to think that an explanation is the only way to defend God's character, the church's response in prayer for the world and in lament for the suffering best fits the theology of the cross. Victory is sure but it is through weakness and suffering. Prayer is powerful because the Spirit joins us, even when we are too overwhelmed to be articulate.

2.5 The benefits of knowing our Christian heritage

Perhaps one of the reasons for the level of shock and panic at the pandemic was the fact that parts of the church are largely unaware of history or even current world events. To think that this kind of suffering is unprecedented is to ignore the world wars, the holocaust, pandemics such as the Spanish flu, the SARS epidemic, and the effects of HIV in its early days. Viruses, famines and wars have swept away millions of people.

A knowledge of our Christian heritage enables us to learn from those who theologized and lived out their faith in times like these, over the centuries. N. T. Wright points out that the concept of caring for those who were ill or poor was unknown in the Roman Empire in which the church grew. It was Christians who went against the flow to take care of those in need, even at the risk of their own lives.[18] Early Christians were known for the courage which with they faced the vicissitudes and dangers of living in the midst of disease, poverty and persecution. Church historian Alan Kreider traces the growth of the early church and attributes it in part to the distinctive lifestyle of Christians who were free from the fears that held their contemporaries

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17. Wright, *God and the Pandemic.*
18. Wright, *God and the Pandemic.*

captive. They certainly knew about victorious living, and about the power of the cross to deliver them from all manner of evil. But they also knew how to face hardship and suffering, even to the point of death.[19]

Martin Luther's advice to Christians asking if it was permissible for Christians to flee the plague was widely quoted.[20] Luther advocated a nuanced approach to the threat. Take all possible precautions, and if deemed necessary flee. But personal safety was not to be the sole or primary criteria for action. If your neighbor needed you, or if your duty lay within the stricken territory, stay.[21]

In many of the fastest growing churches in Sri Lanka, the desire for novelty has overtaken any interest in our Christian heritage. C. S. Lewis reminds us of the benefits of remembering history. By analyzing past times and peoples, Lewis suggests, the serious student of history builds up intellectual antibodies that offer some immunity "from the great cataract of nonsense that pours from the press and the microphone of his own age"[22]

## 3. Response 2. Doing Church Digitally

Many churches responded to the government's banning of meetings with on-line services. Of course, smaller rural churches with less resources and whose congregations did not have ready access to the technology required could not attempt such things. For some churches this was their first foray into the digital realm, others

19. Alan Kreider, "Worship and Evangelism in pre-Christendom," *Vox Evangelica* 24 (1994): 7-38. Accessible at: https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/vox/vol24/worship_kreider.pdf accessed 2 Sept 2020. Kreider mentions that in addition to freedom from demon possession, Christians were seen to live lives free from other habits that enslaved many- sexual promiscuity, violence and hatred, the magic arts and materialism (12-13).

20. Martin Luther, "Whether One May Flee From a Deadly Plague," letter to Rev. Johannes Hess (dated 1527). Accessible at https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/may-web-only/martin-luther-plague-pandemic-coronavirus-covid-flee-letter.html.

21. Luther, "Whether One May Flee."

22. C. S. Lewis, "Learning in Wa-Time" in *Weight of Glory* (New York: Harper Collins, 1949, 1980), 59.

had been an online presence for some time. That many churches made this transition, sometimes with meagre resources and little preparation, was commendable. In one way, this brought the church into the public space which was where all of us quarantined people spent time.

> While we watch and wait, we are scrolling, typing, and tapping. By and large, it is social communication that gives us a sense of connection and community, a sense of belonging, a sense of participation and presence these days. For the church to be able to enter into this strange vigil has been eminently appropriate and uplifting.[23]

Statistics reveal that in Sri Lanka, there were 10.10 million internet users and internet penetration was at 47% as at January 2020, while social media penetration was at 30%. The number of mobile connections was 149% of the total population.[24] So, this transition to digital services was a meaningful one. Many churches reported that "viewers" far exceeded the usual number of attendees and this was a cause for celebration. It was also noticed that those who did not normally attend church and some who had drifted away were now attending these on-line services. On-line church is "uniquely visible"[25] to outsiders and unthreatening to seekers. What started off as a necessity borne of the imperative to minister to a local congregation in some meaningful way has in some cases, taken on a life of its own. Pastors are considering how to continue these on-line services, sometimes because of demands from their own members, sometimes because they see this as an

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23. Daniella Zsupan-Jerome, "Is It Real? Mystagogizing the Livestreamed Service" in Heidi Campbell (ed), *The Distanced Church: Reflections on doing church online* (Digital Relations Publications, 2020)*,* https://ctbi.org.uk/the-distanced-church-reflections-on-doing-church-online/ accessed 28 October 2020.p91.

24. Taken from Digital Sri Lanka 2020 report at https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-sri-lanka accessed 29 Oct 2020. We have to keep in mind that this number is not distributed evenly across the population but is influenced by geographic location, economic status, gender and age.

25. Digital Sri Lanka 2020 report.

opportunity to minister to seekers.

As churches were allowed to re-open, the response from believers was varied. In some cases, it seemed, absence did make the heart grow fonder. Sinhala and Tamil congregations were most likely to want to return to worship together. In English language congregations, the response was more mixed. Surprisingly, some older members of the congregation were anxious to return to worship though more at risk, while younger adults stayed away.[26] In some cases, people were reluctant to return because of fears of the risk of being infected. Others found that the ease and convenience of on-line services outweighed any consideration of returning to see their fellow believers face to face. In some cases, absence allowed people to "give in" to feelings that had lain dormant-dissatisfaction, weariness with church activities, broken relationships, for instance, could be easier dealt with when worshipping on-line. Viewers could preserve their anonymity and attendance was unthreatening. Viewers were not required to set aside a particular time for worship, participate actively in worship or even listen to the message – they could mute or fast forward what did not appeal. They did not have to mingle outside the church doors or be available to others. "Watching" church was convenient – it could be done at one's own convenience and comfort. This begs the question of how much corporate worship has become a spectator event rather than an active response to God. It also raises questions about the extent to which the church is seen as a community of shared life.

## 3.1. Knowing what we mean by 'church'

It is doubtful if many churches thought theologically

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26. Barna researchers in the USA have found that millennials were the group most disconnected from digital church in this period. Though the research did not include causation, a suggestion was made that those most used to a digital platform found that digital worship did not make a satisfactory transition. Accessible at: https://stetzerleadershippodcast.com/?mc_cid=ee22da54e0&mc_eid=74d543d86eaccessed 12 September 2020.

about the means and methods of digital church. And perhaps his is because we do not always know what we mean by church. We are used to saying "church is not a building it's the people." But if the church does not meet in a place, together, is that still church?

Churches that were already strong in their pastoral care through small groups or other systems were best placed to minister to their people's pastoral needs. Some pastors said they contacted church members personally regularly throughout lockdown, while others had pastoral teams, cell groups or Bible study groups through which members were reached. Pastors noted that church members volunteered to shop for those who were housebound, called those who lived alone, provided lifts for hospital visits and donated financial gifts so the church could assist the needy. However, it was clear that some church members did not fare well during lockdown and were not noticed. The elderly who lived alone were perhaps the hardest hit. No longer able to engage in church activities and least able to access services on-line, some visibly deteriorated during this time. In Colombo at least, this exposed the significant number of elderly living on their own, many with no family nearby. If being church means pastoral care, we would do well to remember :

> Whereas the worship service is something that churches can produce and broadcast at scale to whoever will watch, community and personal connection are "anti-scale." That means they resist mass reproduction. Being personally known and cared for is almost always a one-on-one experience and can't be mass produced.[27]

Churches that had an educational programme for their church were more likely to see homes became "centres of worship", as one pastor called them. But congregations who

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27.   Adam Graber, "It's not enough to broadcast a service. Churches need to foster community," *Christianity Today*, 17 August 2020. Accessible at: https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/august-web-only/zoom-church-covid-attendance-decline-lessons-community.html.

were heavily dependent on church leaders for Bible study and prayer were less likely to have the spiritual resources to maintain a healthy spiritual life on their own. As one church worker said, "We don't have followers of Christ, we have followers of Christian leaders."

There are many 'pros' and 'cons' we might put forward, for doing church on-line church. Ronald Giese explores the implications of on-line church and suggests two reasons why considering pros and cons is not enough. He argues that on-line church is an oxymoron.[28] The first reason is based on a theology of God's presence. Certainly God is present everywhere (Giese calls this a level 1 presence, for ease of differentiation). God is also present with each household attending a live-streamed service (level 2). But he is also present in the local church (level 3). Therefore, even though church is not a building, church is no longer church if there is no gathered community where this level 3 presence can be experienced. Secondly, while there may be some things an on-line worship service can do as well or even better than a physical meeting, it misses an important aspect of what it means to be a human community. We are embodied beings and our relating, our serving and fellowshipping is affected by our distance from one another.[29] Giese's arguments might need further consideration and refinement, but bear reflection.

3.2 Thinking theologically about technology

Technology has been used to good ends by the church through the centuries, from printing presses, to multimedia to bible apps. But while new is not necessarily bad, neither is it automatically good. The adage "Technology is neither good nor bad; neither is it neutral"[30] means that new

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28. Ronald L. Giese Jr., "Is 'On-line Church' Really Church?" *Themelios* 45, no. 2 (August 2020): 347-67.

29. Giese, "Is 'On-line Church' Really Church?": 355.

30. Melvin Kranzburg, "The information age: evolution or revolution?" in *Information Technologies and Social Transformation*, edited by B. Guile (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1985), 50. Cited in "Thinking Biblically about Technology," accessible at: https://www.jubilee-centre.org/ebooks/tba-social-media.

ventures into technology need to be evaluated, not only because there are both advantages and disadvantages, but also because they reveal certain assumptions and values which may have to be affirmed or challenged. While the elements of a Sunday service could be reproduced on screen, digital church did not allow for interaction between people. It disallowed informal conversations at a time when many may have needed to question, share prayer requests or feel the comfort of another's presence. While some churches used a platform which allowed the congregation to see each other, most did not. Even in groups where people could see one another's faces, there were often comments about longing to see one another 'face to face'. Obviously they did not mean they wanted to see a digital image- they wanted something more. There are ways that on-line community could be fostered- the use of chat facilities during services for comments and questions or appreciation, whatsapp prayer groups, zoom break out groups after a church service, all can be used creatively and intentionally to build community. However, there can be a risk that some of these communities can be fragile. While existing relationships can be built on during this lockdown, new on-line communities may not last because on-line communities afford people choice unrestricted by location.

> Online platforms are centered around the individual, and the communities created differ from offline communities where the choices of individuals are limited by time and space. Moving online may enforce this scattered and more individualistic shape of communities, which could impact offline communities that are regulated and determined by different factors.[31]

Professor of Communications Heidi Campbell lists six traits a congregation looks for in an on-line church community, according to her research. They are: a sense of relationship,

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31. Anita Cloete, "The Church is Moving On(line)" in Heidi Campbell (ed) *Digital Ecclesiology* 30. https://ethosinstitute.sg/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Free-E-book-DIGITAL-ECCLESIOLOGY.pdf

care and encouragement, to be valued, connection, intimate communication, and shared faith.[32] She goes on to say that churches tended to either transfer exactly what they did in a service to an online platform, or they translated it to fit into the digital format. But what they really needed to do was transform their ministry to make sure it delivered what the congregation needed.[33] Space does not allow us to say more but it is clear that theological discussion on the use of technology and its impact on ecclesiology has begun in many other parts of the world, though this season has arguably been a new experience for the church in most countries. Sri Lankan churches could do with engaging in this conversation.

Sri Lanka is considered a collectivist culture in which the community, especially the extended family is essential to a person's identity and well-being. The number of deaths from Covid-19 being low, we were not so exposed to the harrowing stories of the deaths of patients totally isolated from family, or funerals and burials without family attending.[34] The pandemic revealed the beauty, importance and fragility of our embodiedness. It is our bodies that are at risk and so we are told to adhere to "social distancing". But the impact of isolation from embodied community had effects that were spiritual, psychological, and physical. The Bible affirms our embodied state in creation, in the incarnation, where the Word became flesh, and in the promise of bodily resurrection of which Jesus is the first fruits. The church has been generally good at caring for physical needs, like food; perhaps it has not fully realized the human need for presence. Physical touch like a hug, or an arm round the shoulder, the sight of a smile or a nod of

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32. Heidi Campbell, "What Religious Groups Need to Consider when Trying to do Church Online" in *Distanced Church*. https://ctbi.org.uk/the-distanced-church-reflections-on-doing-church-online/ accessed 28 Oct 2020.
33. Campbell, "What Religious Groups Need to Consider"
34. There was some outrage expressed at the Government's insistence that bodies must be cremated rather than buried, despite WHO guidelines for safe burials. Cremation is against Muslim religious tradition and this caused much grief to Muslim families bereaved by the virus.

understanding; being acknowledged and seen are all part of being cared for.

Sri Lanka is a community based culture but in the cities it is rapidly becoming as individualistic as many western cultures. One of the effects of increasing individualism is the effect it has on what is expected from belonging to a religion. Digital church fits in with both the ideology of individualism and with the trend to privatize religion.[35] With individualism

> Religiosity doesn't disappear; it morphs into something adaptable, something you embrace on your own terms. Faith is no longer focused on reality or something true; it's a therapeutic choice intended to aid you in your pursuit of self-exaltation and self-fulfilment.[36]

In summary, the church could do with thinking through the meaning and purpose of corporate worship and what being church means. While many churches give a lot of attention to the elements of the Sunday service, there is a danger that the objectives of a church service are not clear. The impact of individualism on the attitude to corporate worship, to pastoral care and the sacraments are all areas to consider. Finally we need also to evaluate to what extent our members are "self feeders" able to maintain a healthy spiritual life if secluded, equipped to deal with their own fears and loneliness and motivated to act towards "one another" in the church with compassion and sensitivity.

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35. N. T. Wright muses that while it is right to be responsible citizens and avoid meeting until we are allowed to, by shutting churches and allowing other gatherings the West is subscribing to the worldview that says religion is a private affair and not part of public life. N. T. Wright, "Should churches reopen? The answer lies in thinking of this as a time of exile," *Time*, May 21, 2020 7:30 AM EDT. Accessible online: https://time.com/5837693/should-churches-reopen-thinking-about-exile/. While this may not be the case for a religious society like Sri Lanka, it is worth making sure Christianity does not become regarded in this way.

36. Trevin Wax, "Why is expressive individualism a challenge for the church?" October 18, 2018. Accessible at: https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/expressive-individualism-challenge-church/.

## 4. Response 3. Being Church in the Community

The pandemic revealed our global connectivity as the virus spread. In Sri Lanka, tourists and returning Sri Lankans were the initial victims. The effects of the virus on businesses and industries were sometimes due to conditions overseas which had a knock on effect. Sri Lanka benefitted from the rapid action to impose curfew. When the curfew was announced, people responded (generally) with acceptance.[37] After all curfews are not new to Sri Lankans.

Inequalities between rich and poor became apparent as the curfew extended. Some residential areas received regular visits from vendors supplying vegetables, fruit, and perhaps fish. More exclusive areas received vendors supplying processed meats, cheeses, desserts and eggs. On-line shopping was tedious but met other produce needs. In other parts of the community, families found they could not put food on the table. Daily wage earners had no income. A government subsidy of Rs. 5,000 was to be given out to those in need. But not everyone who needed it received it, while others received it who were not entitled to it. A new phenomenon emerged- the newly impoverished. Formerly well to do and financially secure families were faced with redundancies and pay cuts. Formerly secure middle class professionals and entrepreneurs were unable to sustain their lifestyles. Children's fees, leases, rents were due and could not be paid. While some people found creative ways to replace lost earnings by setting up new ventures like catering businesses, others were left in the difficult position of having to receive help from the churches they had once supported. In Sri Lankan culture, such a situation is difficult to bear because of the shame associated with being dependent. Churches had to find sensitive ways to deal with these members.

Also hard hit were churches who depended on their members' tithes and offerings to pay pastors and church workers. "Just like businesses panicked, so did churches"

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37. Newspapers reported that hundreds of curfew violators had been arrested or charged.

said one church worker.

The media reported that women had been hardest hit during the pandemic. Firstly, there were high incidence of domestic abuse during lockdown. Secondly, women had been disproportionately affected economically as three of the hardest hit industries were those in which women workers predominate- tea production, the garment industry and migrant workers, especially in the Middle East. Women headed households were vulnerable both in terms of providing care for children and elderly and also in providing for families. [38]

Existing divisions within society were exploited by the media, and individuals on social media. For instance, members of the Muslim community were accused of being deliberately careless and causing the spread of the virus. While the church as a whole was not involved in propagating such stories, the inherent suspicion and animosity between ethnic groups is yet to be completely eradicated.

The church in many places was able to offer practical help not just to their members but to the wider community. In the tradition of Christians down the ages, churches looked outside their own Christian communities to their neighbours. Some took the initiative to support small businesses in their neighbourhood rather than shop online or patronize the big supermarket chains. Others bought extra rations to share with anyone who came to their gate in search of relief. Many showed generosity and care for their domestic workers by paying them salaries even though they could not work. Owners of businesses and companies made sure that their employees were fairly treated at a time when some employers cut salaries or made people redundant, not always with just cause.

Trained counsellors found that within some communities, there was an increased level of need, as people faced difficult family situations now exacerbated by

38.  Shereen Abdul Saroor, "Disproportionate Effects of Covid 19 on Sri Lankan Women." Accessible at https://groundviews.org/2020/08/04/disproportionate-effects-of-covid-19-on-sri-lankan-women/.

the lockdown, anxieties over the future, fear of sickness and financial problems. Some Christians had opportunities to encourage, pray with and explain the reason for the hope they have, with those around them.

As families were forced to stay home for the seventy or so days of curfew, some benefitted from the family time together. There was more time for conversation. Parents found creative ways of keeping children entertained; some began family prayer times or Bible study times they had not had before. Forgotten pastimes like cultivating home gardens became possible in this relatively stress free time.[39] It taught some to re-order their priorities and simplify their lives. A few even found that their health improved- diseases like diabetes and high cholesterol levels improved, perhaps partly due to the simpler lifestyle imposed on them.

As in the past, (for example during the tsunami, regional floods and droughts) the Sri Lankan church has been active in the community, caring for neighbours' physical, emotional and spiritual needs.

## 5. Conclusion

Novelist Arundhati Roy wrote that the pandemic was "a portal, a gateway between one world and the next."[40] She stated that it was up to us to decide how we would enter it, what we would take with us and what we would leave behind. One Church worker mentioned a saying in Sinhala that Sri Lankans have short memories and that two weeks after an events, it is forgotten. That does give us a certain resilience, but it does little to help us learn from the past. Whether the saying is a fair representation or not, it seems fair to say that as Sri Lankans return to work, school and church, most are tending towards an old normal rather than a new. Should the church be doing the same?

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39. Incidents of domestic and child abuse grew worldwide. It is impossible to say whether Christian families were among these numbers.

40. Arundhati Roy, "The pandemic is a portal," April 3, 2020. Accessible at: https://www.ft.com/content/10d8f5e8-74eb-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca.

This article has suggested that the church do more theologizing about what it means to live in these uncertain and dangerous times. It might seem that the last thing we need in a global pandemic is theology and theologians. In no one's estimation would they be considered part of essential services. And yet, Brian J. Tabb argues that serious scholarship is as important in a time of pandemic as it ever is.[41] His reflection is based on an address given by C. S. Lewis to Oxford University students in 1939, just as World War II began. Lewis points out that life has never been normal. A pandemic (or world war) does not create a new situation but exposes the existing fragility of human existence. Humans have always lived "on the edge of a precipice," he stated. "Normal life" is a myth. If people wait for optimal conditions before searching out knowledge of what is true, good, and beautiful, they will never begin.[42]

And so, even now, and maybe especially now, there is a need for theologizing in the Sri Lankan context. Some areas have already been mentioned in this article- a more nuanced theology of suffering, a broader christology, a more biblically grounded eschatology, a greater appreciation of history and a stronger ecclesiology to underpin the emergence (for Sri Lanka) of digital church. These conversations have already begun in other parts of the world, and have been joined by the Colombo Theological Seminary in webinars produced during the pandemic. We can hope that others will join this conversation as we seek to live in the new normal with realism, faith, integrity and hope.

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41. Brian J. Tabb, "Pursuing Scholarship in a Pandemic: Reflections on Lewis's "Learning in War Time," *Themelios* 45, no.2 (August 2020): 227–32.

42. C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 42.

# THE DIGNITY OF DEPENDENCE: A KEY TO CHRISTIAN LIFE AND MISSION IN A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

ASIRI FERNANDO

**Abstract:** *At the heart of sin is prideful independence calling us to have our own way. And at the heart of the Christian life is humble dependence, a kingdom virtue, exemplified by Christ, that should permeate every aspect of our walk with God and people. Believers share a oneness with Christ and one-another which encourages us to be inter-dependent even as we carry one another's burdens. Dependence is not only essential for our spiritual vitality. It is a means of bringing out the best in those who help us and is an indispensable key to meeting the urgent needs of world missions in a post-pandemic world.*

**Keywords:** *Dependence, mutual burdensomeness, holiness, humility, missions, Body of Christ.*

## 1. Introduction

In an age of self-sufficiency and one-upmanship it may seem counterproductive to talk about dependence. For many, dependence is a sign of undignified weakness. However, nature itself teaches us that dependence is a key to our existence. We enter into this world in a state of total dependence. And those who boast of achieving great feats of human strength become fully dependent on others as they reach old age. For the Christian, dependence is everything. At the heart of sin is our pride-filled independence from God and our salvation is achieved on the bedrock of total dependence on the finished work of Christ's death and resurrection. We depend on the Holy Spirit for our sanctification and Christian service. However, dependence is not simply part of our vertical relationship with God but an essential aspect in our horizontal relationships with one

another. As we shall see, a spirit of dependence (which has always been a virtue of Christian discipleship within the body of Christ) will become especially relevant to Christian life and mission even as we step into a post-pandemic world.

## 2. Dependence and the Kingdom of God

In his book *The Radical Disciple*, John Stott wrote,

> Christ himself takes on the dignity of dependence. He is born a baby, totally dependent on the care of his mother. He needs to be fed, he needs his bottom to be wiped, he needs to be propped up when he rolls over. And yet he never loses his divine dignity. And at the end, on the cross, he again becomes totally dependent, limbs pierced and stretched, unable to move. So in the person of Christ we learn that dependence does not, cannot, deprive a person of their dignity, of their supreme worth. If dependence was appropriate for the God of the universe, it is certainly appropriate for us.[1]

Our dependence on one another naturally flows from the primacy of dependence in the kingdom of God, as exemplified by Jesus. In the Old Testament, dependence is often associated with the poor. Necessity caused the poor to look to God for help. God's special concern for the poor is evident especially in the Psalms (e.g. 9:18, 10:14, 12:5, 34:6). Following suit Jesus in his first sermon on earth quotes Isaiah saying "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor" (Luke 4:17-19). The Sermon on the Mount has a similar emphasis. Luke's version says "Blessed are the poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (Luke 6:20). God was reaching out to those who were in a state of dependence.

The Covid pandemic exposed how the false gods of the age have failed us. Many who sought security in money

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1.    John Stott, *The Radical Disciple: Some Neglected Aspects of Our Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 111.

or their vocation saw to some extent the fragility of such a pursuit. This includes those who sought to build their identity in Christian ministry. This rude awakening caused many to look to God. An article in the *Guardian* newspaper pointed to a survey that showed that during the first wave of the pandemic a quarter of adults in the UK watched or listened to a religious service, and one in twenty started praying during the crisis.[2] Yet how many would embrace this dependence in the long-term of our 'new normal' post-pandemic world?

The rise of materialism and secularism is making its mark on the church. Christians increasingly enslaved in a consumption-driven world are becoming increasingly susceptible to the lures of comfort, convenience and entertainment. As we see the staggering amounts of entertainment that young people consume or the many seemingly attractive worldviews they are exposed to, I fear that unless a spirituality of dependence is exemplified in the church, its pews and seats would become empty in the decades to come.

## 3. The Poor "in Spirit"

For Luke's "Blessed are you who are poor" (60:20), Matthew's version of the sermon reads "poor in spirit" (5:3), pointing to the blessedness of spiritual dependence. As the poor acknowledge their material poverty and earnestly look to God, the poor in spirit understand their spiritual poverty and turn to God for their salvation. The poor in spirit are then those who acknowledge their sinfulness before a holy God, that they are spiritually bankrupt and have nowhere to turn to, but God! Total dependence is central to Jesus' teaching on entering the kingdom of God. Jesus points to the necessity of having child-like dependence (Mat 8:3) and gives a strong warning to the rich who depended on their

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2. Harriet. Sherwood, "British Public Turn to Prayer as One in Four Tune in to Religious Services." *Guardian*, May 3, 2020. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/03/british-public-turn-to-prayer-as-one-in-four-tune-in-to-religious-services.

material possessions making it harder for them to enter God's kingdom (Mat 19:24). And so we acknowledge our helplessness like the tax collector in Jesus' parable who beat his breasts and cried out, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' (Luke 18:13), and thank God that he has "...chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?" (James 2:5b).

Our sanctification is wholly the work of God (1 Thes 5:23). Therefore, we humbly and earnestly depend on God's help, for our sake, and for those in our lives, that "God will keep us blameless for the day of Christ" (1 Thes 5:24, Phil 1:10). Jesus asked the Father, "Sanctify them with the truth, your word is the truth" (John 17:17). When we open the scriptures we look to God with a sense of desperation, like a baby bird looking up to the mother bird who has just brought food. Christ was perfect in every way yet exemplified a dependent spirit when he said "the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing..." (John 5:19). He modelled humble dependence when he prayed all night before choosing the disciples (Luke 6:12), and when praying for their sanctification (John 17).

## 4. True Power in Life and Ministry

Paul was often weakened and pressured to the point of total dependence (2 Cor 11:24-28). This dependence unleashed the power of God in his ministry (2 Cor 12:9, 1 Cor 15:10, Col 1:29). Hudson Taylor said "All God's giants have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on God being with them." God's power is available to those who are in a place of weakness & dependence. It is said that when Charles Spurgeon would mount the pulpit he would repeat to himself; "I believe in the Holy Spirit, I believe in the Holy Spirit... and so on".

My wife and I recently had an interview for my son's admission to Grade One. I struggled to get words out of my mouth. I had always struggled with speech especially

at tense moments like this. Later on someone rebuked me saying, "You should have gotten over this by now." I smiled and nodded. I knew this was where God's power was being made perfect especially in my calling to preach and teach. It was my place of dependence, so that when God comes to my help, he can receive all the glory. And if he allows me to struggle, as at the interview, I can say confidently with the psalmist "My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Psalm 73:26). I am reminded of my father saying how he would be silently crying out "Please God, please God, help!" in his mind when trying to solve a problem with my mother. Perhaps the greatest secret for Spirit-filled service is to never lose that sense of dependence on God.

## 5. Dependence within the Body of Christ

Is it not fascinating that the creator of the universe chose to become dependent when he took on flesh? As Stott reminds us, Jesus' mother changed his nappies as a little baby. He depended on his parents to feed him, bathe him, clothe him and teach him as a child. Some women financially supported his earthly ministry (Luke 8: 1-3). In Jesus' weakest hour, Simon of Cyrene helped carry the cross for him. On the cross, in great thirst, he had to ask for water (John 19:28). Jesus exuded a heart of dependence. The all-sufficient Lord of the universe has exemplified dependence to His creatures, giving us an example to follow (1 John 2:6).

Dependence is fundamentally a human characteristic since we are made in the image of the Triune God who relates to one another in mutual interdependence and love. Yet as we ponder upon oneness of the body of Christ, this common union with Christ becomes a buttress for a deep dependence on one-another. We shall explore this aspect in the points below.

## 6. Self-sustainability?

Proverbs talks about how we must work hard and

store up for the future (Prov 6:6-8). This is a commendable way to live and may be encouraged. Most importantly, these passages address the lifestyle of a sluggard who is not willing to work hard. In Acts 20:34-35 Paul mentions how his hands ministered to his own needs and those around him. But it is clear his greater concern was working hard to support the weak (v. 35). Jesus' parable of the rich fool who was more concerned about storing up instead of being rich towards God is jarringly clear! (Luke 12:13-21).

Conversely, Paul remembers how the Philippians cared for his personal needs (Phil 4:15-18). He celebrated this dependent relationship, and again, was less concerned about himself but the fruit that increases to their credit (v. 17). Paul was content! And was not worried about his own needs. In faith he could tell the Philippians "my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (v. 19). Paul supported himself by working hard, but mostly, when he was weak and in need, he gratefully received help from those who joyfully supported him.

## 7. Dependence and Holiness

Following the beatitude "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Mat 5:3) comes "blessed are those who mourn" (v. 4). Jesus is referring to those who are so sensitive to sin and evil that they mourn over it. After about one year of discipling a young leader in Youth for Christ, he confessed a sin to me. While part of me was grieved by what he had done, another part of me rejoiced that a spirit of contrition was moving in his heart. He had become sensitive to sinning against God and wanted to bring it to light (1 John 1:7-8) and seek help. James says "confess your sins to one another" (5:16). Dependence on friends who acknowledge the seriousness of sin, yet see each other through the eyes of grace is crucial in our pursuit of holiness. Yet how many overlook this kind of dependence? Paul urges young Timothy to "flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure

heart" (2 Tim 2:22).

How many Christian leaders could have avoided serious moral failure if they sought the help of a few friends early on in their ministry? And how many rash, unwise (often life altering) decisions could have been avoided with the wise counsel of friends (Prov 27:9). Sinful pride insists on its own way, refusing to depend on God or people. But as we grow closer to the heart of God we embrace dependence on him and others. Coming under the counsel and strength of a few friends, leaders or a ministry board is embracing a God ordained means for security and longevity in ministry.

Furthermore, superficial relationships in a technologically 'connected' world have resulted in an epidemic of loneliness. Anxiety, depression and addictions have preyed on this demise of authentic connection. As the writer of Ecclesiastes says, "Woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!" (4:12). May we pursue relationships and depend on friends "who [are] closer than a brother" (Prov 18:24b).

## 8. Mutual Burdensomeness

Much of the church growth around the world has happened through the independent church movement. Many of them are house churches. However, the recent pandemic and its lockdowns brought severe challenges, even hunger, to many non-urban pastors and their families who depended on their daily jobs or weekly tithes from their small congregations. Churches that were too isolated from the rest of the body of Christ struggled.

Our personal oneness *with* Christ must not be divorced from the reality that the church as a whole is together one body *in* Christ. Jesus said we are one with him and one with each other (John 17:21). As the church, "each member belongs to all the others" (Rom 12:5). Crucial to this oneness is learning to "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal 6:2). That means we not only carry the burdens of others but let others carry our burdens.

Stott rightly calls this "mutual burdensomeness."[3] This truth, as weak as it sounds, may be an indispensable key to the church's mission in a post-pandemic world.

## 9. Partnership in Mission

Together with the 'center of gravity' of world Christianity shifting to the Global South, so is the burden of mobilizing workers for world missions. According to Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary's Center for the Study of Global Christianity, in 2010 Brazil (34,000), South Korea (20,000) and India (10,000) were among the top ten countries sending missionaries out to other parts of the world. But the most astonishing statistic was that the country which contributed the largest proportion of missionaries by population size was tiny Palestine (3,401 per 1 million church members) compared, for instance, to the US (614 per 1 million church members).[4] This is a testament to the spiritual vitality that exists in these regions. Yet it is a sobering reality that 95% of pastors worldwide have had no formal theological training![5] The greatest need for training is in the Majority World. Meanwhile the increased materialism and secularisation in developed nations calls for an urgent spiritual awakening in the West. What is the role of dependence in global missions?

I work for Youth for Christ in Sri Lanka, and over the years we have tried to embrace a posture of dependence in our ministry. As a result, the body of Christ in developed nations like Singapore have graciously supported and cared for our many needs. During the recent pandemic Singapore YFC trained us in digital evangelism! With increased

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3. Stott, The Radical Disciple, 110.

4. *Christianity in its Global Context, 1970-2020: Society, Religion, and Mission* (South Hamilton, MA: Gordon-Cowell Theological Seminary Center for the Study of Global Christianity, 2013), 76. Accessible online: https://archive.gordonconwell.edu/ockenga/research/documents/ChristianityinitsGlobalContext.pdf

5. Ramesh. Richard, "Training of Pastors." Lausanne Movement, December 21, 2017. Accessible online: https://www.lausanne.org/content/lga/2015-09/training-of-pastors.

dependence we have been able to mobilize more labourers to blaze new trails for the Gospel.

But that is not the end of the story. Sri Lanka is full of prayer warriors and the Singaporean body of Christ can depend on them. Many of our leaders in YFC are from impoverished and underprivileged backgrounds. Perhaps the greatest lessons I have learned from them is the desperation and persistence with which they cry out to God. The Majority World is less time-driven, and would perhaps more easily persevere in prayer at the feet of God. This is a significant way through which we can bless developed nations. What explosive spiritual power would emerge if the church in the Majority World would unite in praying for a mighty revival in post-Christian Europe? And what if the church in developed nations would make a rallying cry to the Majority World to pray for them? This requires a heart of dependence. Moreover, the developed world can be greatly blessed by the penetrative insight that comes from applying the Bible in contexts of hardship and suffering.

Paul also constantly asked for prayer for his ministry and personal needs (Rom 15:30-33; 2 Cor 1:10-11; Eph 6:19-20; Phil 1:19; Col 4:3-4; 1 Thes 5:25; 2 Thes 3:1-2). He makes a distinction between Christ's direct help to him and Christ's help through the prayers of the saints (Phil 1:19). Paul knew that when others prayed for him there was power. How much do we depend on the prayers of the saints for our families, our marriages and our ministries? Humbly asking for prayer is a beautiful expression of the oneness of the body of Christ. We ought to embrace it!

## 10. Dependence for the Sake of the Poor

Many Majority World leaders are hungry for theological education. However in their hunger they must proactively ask for help. Those who have the humility to ask must take this role seriously. Paul himself vigorously sought the help of churches in order to support the poorer parts of the body of Christ, namely the Jerusalem Christians in need of financial support (1 Cor 16:1-4, 2 Cor 8, 9). By seeking

help, Paul embraced the dignity of dependence and the poorer parts of the body of Christ were blessed!

There was also a spirit of dependence among Jesus and his band of disciples. We learn that a group of well-to-do women disciples "provided for them out of their means" (Luke 8:1-3). The early church also exemplified 'mutual burdensomeness' even as they shared all things in common (Acts 4:32).

## 11. Dependence and the Redistribution of Missionaries

Over the last few years, the country that I have prayed for the most next to my own is Japan. Out of that nation's 127 million population there are less than 1% professing Evangelical Christians.[6] Yet there are missionaries from about 33 nations in Japan. It seems there is a great need to mobilize workers from among the Japanese people themselves to take leadership in reaching the 126 million of their people headed for a Christless eternity.[7] On the other hand there are now more than 2,000 Korean theologians who have Ph.D. or Ed.D. degrees, and who find it difficult to get teaching positions in Korea. As Bong Rin Ro points out, this calls for a redistribution of missionaries among the nations.

One important factor that can propel this redistribution is if nations in need would urgently, proactively and humbly start seeking help from nations that have this wealth of theological knowledge and education. Moreover, with the rise of online platforms such as Zoom and Google-Meet the opportunities are vast. How urgent is the need to mobilize, give training and theological education to the locals of these vastly un-reached or under-reached nations? We could be entering the heyday of mobilization. But for this to be a reality, the church must embrace a spirit of dependence.

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6.   https://joshuaproject.net/countries/JA
7.   Kim Kyu-dong, "The Missionary Church in the Mission Field of Japan," *Korean Christian Press,* July 14, 2012; quoted by Bong Rin Ro, "Missiological Issues in Asia Today," *Journal of Asian Evangelical Theology* 18, no. 2 (Sep 2014): 61-77.

## 12. Reaching the Postmoderns

Dependence may be a key factor in reaching a generation of postmoderns to whom the 'absolute truth' of the gospel may sound arrogant. However if this arrogant sounding message is brought by those who have made themselves low with genuine humility and unashamed dependence, they may be more ready to listen. Two ways to adopt a posture of humility before this generation are to humbly serve them (Luke 22:27) and humbly ask for help (John 4:7-9).

As for serving the unreached, one example would be to organize a musical event, give young people an opportunity to display their artistic talents, taking every opportunity to serve them in the weeks leading to the show. Previously it was the believers who were on stage doing the entertaining/serving. We had to change our model around to demonstrate who was being served, and who was serving.

## 13. Conclusion

In Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman Jesus was tired and came in weakness and asked for water. Jesus humbly asked for help before speaking truth into her life. In our work when we organize large scale talent shows for those of other faiths (to serve them), we also ask those from other faiths to help in some way (e.g. to use their artistic talents to help in painting backdrops, etc.). When we ask for help we are acknowledging that they have something we do not. Consequently, they are more open to hearing a message that we have, but they do not. Through dependence we meet people at their highest! And that will open doors for the gospel.

In conclusion, dependence is a key to our discipleship and a necessity to meet the many needs of global mission. In a world that is becoming increasingly secular, a spirit of dependence in the body of Christ would open the way for a vibrant Christian counterculture that would make us shine as lights in the world.

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