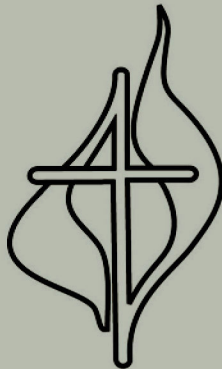


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From the Editor's Desk

We are happy to announce the publication of the first volume of the Journal of the Colombo Theological Seminary. It is our intention to publish this journal annually.

The articles in this issue cover a variety of themes ranging from Theology, Biblical Translation, Missiology and Church History. All these articles relate to theology in the context of South Asia, and Sri Lanka in particular.

The objective of the Colombo Theological Seminary is to make available the finest Christian scholarly studies, in the body of Christ worldwide, to both the seminary student as well as the keen Christian in the local church.

It is our hope that under God, this publication will lend itself to the education and strengthening of the vibrant Christian community in Sri Lanka and, particularly those who pray for the work of Christ in this land.

CTS invites qualified theological teachers in Sri Lanka in the fields of Biblical Studies, Church History, Theology, Ethics, Practical Theology, Religions and Mission to be a part of our vision to equip the Christian church in Sri Lanka with the wherewithal to further the Great Commission. The articles submitted will be referred before publication to an expert in the field, either in Sri Lanka or abroad. I wish to express my heartfelt thanks to the principal and the Board of Governors of the Colombo Theological Seminary, for this journal. It is our hope that this journal will continue to provide relevant reading material for evangelists and those who are evangelically inclined, in Sri Lanka.

This issue comes to you with our appreciation of your prayers and support.

G.P.V Somaratna

Lost Dhivehi Gospels

By Simon Fuller

Maldives is Sri Lanka's nearest neighbor, with the exception of South India. The two countries have many historical and cultural links, and Dhivehi, the language of the Maldivian people, is the nearest relative of Sinhala. It is generally accepted that there is no translation of the Scriptures into Dhivehi in existence. The purpose of this paper is to reconstruct the circumstances surrounding a little-known early translation which was partially completed but finally abandoned, and to explore the possibility of its survival to the present day¹.

In 1803 the Scottish poet and linguist John Leyden (1775-1811) reached India and immediately set about studying and analyzing the languages of the Subcontinent and the Far East, whilst holding various senior government posts. The extent of his ability can be judged by the fact that, although he died at only 36, his biographer estimates that he was competent in no less than forty-five languages². His connection with Dhivehi began apparently unintentionally, whilst on a sea voyage from Quilon (in Kerala) to Malaysia in October 1805.

In his own words he records:

*"On my voyage from Travancore to Pooloo Penang... .., as there happened to be several intelligent natives of the Maldives on board, I took every opportunity of making enquiry concerning these islands that a very tempestuous passage, a very bad state of health and very imperfect means of communication permitted."*³

Amongst the notes he compiled was a classified vocabulary of some 350 words in English and Dhivehi⁴. The presence of dialect words and the style of the script employed suggest that these first Maldivians Leyden met may have been from Minicoy (in Dhivehi, *Maliku*), an island to the north of Maldives and under Indian administration although populated by Maldivians.

From c.1806 onwards, Leyden held the post of Professor of Hindustani at Fort William College, Calcutta. Here he employed a number of language informants, apparently including one or more Maldivians, who would have come to Bengal on trading expeditions. Here also he would have moved closely with the pioneer missionary the north, was also Professor of Bengali and Sanskrit at Fort William College; and with the Rev. David Brown, the provost of the College, who was also the Senior Chaplain of the Presidency of Bengal, Secretary of the Calcutta Corresponding Committee of the British and Foreign Bible Society, and later of the Calcutta Auxiliary Bible Society. With such connections, it was probably inevitable that Leyden, although his motives had been primarily academic, should have been drawn into the work of the Scriptures translation.

In March 1810, Leyden wrote to Rev. David Brown, offering to have translations made of four Gospels into seven languages including Dhivehi (Maldivian). The others were Thai, Pashto (Afghanistan), Arakanese (Burma), Makassar and Bugis (Indonesia), and Jagatai (Central Asia)⁵. Leyden's Informants who were mother-tongue speakers of these languages, would do the translation, and he himself would be responsible for co-ordinating the work, correcting and collating the translation with Greek originals.

The Corresponding Committee of the Bible Society gladly accepted Leyden's offer, and agreed to pay Rs. 200 for each Gospel completed, in order to cover expenses⁶.

¹ This paper is based on research carried out in Colombo, London, Calcutta/Serampore and Malè in 1981-2

² John Reith, *Life of Dr John Leyden*, 1923

³ John Leyden, *Fragments concerning the Maldives* appended to his Journal, British Library Add. Ms. 26,562

⁴ Ibid

⁵ *British and Foreign Bible Society, Seventh Report* (hereafter referred to as B.F.B.S.), Appendix XLII, pp.74-78

⁶ Ibid

The Dhivehi translation seems to have made very rapid progress; on July 20, 1810, Leyden wrote again to Brown:

*"I beg you do me the favour to submit to the Committee the accompanying Papers, which I forward by way of reporting progress in the Translation of the Gospels, which I undertook Superintend. They consist of the Gospel of Matthew, from the beginning to the end of the 18th Chapter, in the Maldivian language... .. the Maldivian has been corrected and collated with the Greek, up to the last two chapters; but the sickness of my writer prevented me from having a fair copy made out, of any more than the first 18 chapters. Having very few specimens of style in Maldivian. I cannot speak so confidently of this translation, but as I daily expect a supply of MSS, it will be improved while the rest are in progress."*⁷

The Dhivehi translation continued to advance ahead of the other languages, Leyden had promised; before leaving Calcutta in March 1811 as an interpreter attached to an expeditionary force to Java, Leyden delivered to David Brown the manuscripts of nine translations of the Gospels in various languages, including Matthew, Mark, Luke and the second part of John in Maldivian⁸.

However, in Java Leyden fell sick, and on August 8 1811 he died of fever at Batavia (Jakarta). This tragedy left a gap which as the reaction of the Corresponding Committee at Calcutta was one of looking to God in Faith:

"The Corresponding Committee... do not consider the expense incurred by their engagement with Dr Leyden, to be wholly lost. In the varied and extensive plans, they cannot reasonably expect an uninterrupted course of success. Moving in paths untried before, they are prepared for disappointments. They are not surprised, if they meet with unforeseen delays in the execution of the most approved plan; and if sums are occasionally expended in undertakings which may turn out to be of distant than of immediate utility. And they deem it a point of no small consequence to lay a foundation on which future generations may build." (italics original)⁹.

Leyden's Maldivian translator stayed on at Calcutta, possibly working for a time directly under David Brown¹⁰. However, on June 14th 1812, only ten months after the loss of Leyden, the work suffered another blow by the death of Brown.

At this point, the Bible Society seems in effect to have shelved the project; members attending the Eighth Annual General Meeting in London were regretfully informed:-

*"Of the Gospels... translated by Dr Leyden – none have been printed, but the death of Dr Leyden in Java... must now delay the publications of them, as they cannot be committed to the press without the revision of a European scholar"*¹¹.

However, the Serampore (Baptist) missionaries, who already collaborated closely with the Bible Society's work in India, stepped in. In the *Memoir of Translations* printed in their Circular Letter of August 1813, William Carey and his associates wrote:

"The late Dr Leyden had made some progress in ascertaining the nature of this [Maldivian] language; and after his death, the learned native he employed coming to us, we thought such an opportunity of giving the Word of Life in the language of these numerous isles ought not to be lost, as it might not occur again for many years: we therefore retained him. He is well acquainted

⁷ B.F.B.S., *Seventh Report*, Appendix LVI, p.115

⁸ B.F.B.S., *Eighth Report*, Appendix LXIII, p.75

⁹ B.F.B.S., *Ninth Report*, Appendix. Quoted in Owen (Rev. John), *The History of the Origin and First Ten years of the B.F.B.S.*, 1816, Vol. II, P.256.

¹⁰ *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. VI (1841), p.43.

¹¹ B.F.B.S., *Eighth Report*, p.13

with Hindoost'hane, which renders the communication with ease. In this [Maldivian] language the Gospels are finished; and we have nearly completed a fount of types in this alphabet ...¹²".

This font of types, the first, and to this day the only set ever prepared for the letterpress printing of the unique *Thaama* script used for Dhivehi, was duly completed, and the Gospels were on the point of being printed; in fact a Report giving the progress in translation work up to June 1814 goes as far as to state, "Maldivian. The Gospels are translated; Matthew in the press.¹³"

Yet somehow, the anticipated printing never began; the manuscript was laid aside; and within a few years all mention of the project had disappeared from the bulletins and circulars describing the progress of the Serampore mission. The last significant mention I can find is in the publication of 1818. "*Specimens of Editions of the Sacred Scriptures in the Eastern Languages, translated by the Brethren of the Serampore Mission; and of several others.*" This booklet illustrates the Lord's Prayer in some 48 Asian Languages; but under the heading "9. In Maldivian," instead of the Lord's Prayer, there is simply the bald paragraph:-

"The types for printing in this Language were prepared several years ago, but owing to the native of the islands having left us to go to his own country and our not having since been able to procure another, the printing could not be begun¹⁴".

Presumably, in their concern for textual accuracy, especially bearing in mind that the translation was intended for a Muslim people with their high view of Scripture, the missionaries felt unable to proceed with printing without any proof-reader.

That the Maldivian translator's untimely departure was made under some pressure, can be gathered from a comment of Lieutenant W. Christopher, a British Admiralty Survey of the MALDIVES IN 1835. Christopher, together with another officer, I.A. Young, were sent ashore to gather information on the Maldivian's culture and language, and spent several weeks in Malè the capital. There he happened to meet the Maldivian translator. He described the incident in a note to the Rev. John Wilson at Bombay accompanying a Vocabulary of Dhivehi (1838) which was published in 1841¹⁵, and although his information is incomplete, he is unmistakably referring to the same translation :-

"So averse are the island authorities to anything like emigration, that a laudable attempt to translate the New Testament, by means of a Hindustani Munshi, failed at Bengal, the man who was engaged having been recalled by the Sultan of Mali, before the Gospel of Matthew was gone through. I have seen and conversed with the Maldivian above referred to (he is now venerably gray), and he spoke of his engagement under the Rev. Mr. Brown, with readiness and evident self-gratulation. This translation (so far as it goes) is, I believe, in the hands of the Serampore Missionaries."

Apparently the then-reigning Sultan Muhammad Mu'inuddeen I (1799-1835), described by the historian of Maldives H.C.P. Bell, as "narrow-minded and suspicious of European contact¹⁶", had sent some message warning his subject to return home immediately, and the translator obeyed through the fear of the consequences if he did otherwise. By the time of Christopher's visit in 1835, this Sultan had just died, and the Maldivian felt free to speak of what had happened. Not surprisingly, however, the frustrated missionaries at Serampore had been unable to find another Maldivian willing or able to take his place; and hence the project which had progressed so far was simply abandoned.

¹² *Monthly Circular Letters, relative to the Missions in India established by the... Baptist Missionary Society, Vol.VI (1813) (Serampore), p.157.*

¹³ *Brief View of the Baptist Missions and the translations, London, 1815, p.26.*

¹⁴ *Specimens of Editions ...*, Serampore, 1818, p.17.

¹⁵ *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, Vol VI (1841),p.43*

¹⁶ *The Ceylon Observer, Jan.14,1925, p.7.*

We have a clue to the probable identity of the Maldivian informant and translator, through a book formerly belonging to Leyden's personal collection, and now kept in the Library of the India Office, London. This is a volume printed in Calcutta in 1808 by the Hindoostanee Press, which worked in close co-operation with the College of Fort William¹⁷. The Book is entitled *A Vocabulary, Persian and Hindoostanee*, to which the words "and Maldivian" have been added in pencil. To the original Persian and Hindustani words, an individual identified as one Hasan bin-Adam of Himithi Island in North Nilandhe (now Faafu) Atoll, has added Dhivehi equivalents. We already know that the Maldivian informant working with Leyden and Brown and then Serampore use Hindustani as a medium of communication; furthermore the date of this volume (1808) accorded well with Leyden's claim that the persons assisting him in his literary researches had been "practiced in the work of translation" and were "engaged in preparing Vocabularies and Grammars"¹⁸, prior to his letter to Brown offering the Gospel translations in March 1810. It seems more than likely therefore that Hasan bin-Adam of Himithi was Leyden's Dhivehi-speaking assistant in Calcutta, and hence the one mainly responsible for the Dhivehi translation of the Gospels.

The passing reference made by Christopher, published in the Royal Asiatic Society Journal of 1841, quoted above, prompted the Secretary of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, Mr. H.C.P. Bell, who devoted many years of his life to a detailed study of the Maldives, in 1887 to initiate a search for the lost Maldivian Scriptures. However, being based in Colombo, he had no access to archives and records which would have helped him in his search. His complete correspondence with Serampore College was later printed in the *Ceylon Observer* of January 14, 1925:-

A). Rev Edward S Summer to Mr H. C. P. Bell

Serampore College

February 8, 1887

Dear Sir, - My Stevens of the R.A.S. (C.S.) has communicated with me about a Maldivian MS. of the Gospels supposed to be on our shelves, and which you wished to obtain a sight of. I am sorry that I can find no trace of it, and doubt whether it is here, as it is not down in the Catalogue of Scriptures. If, however, we have it, and I should come across it, I will communicate with you again.

- Yours truly

(Sgd.) EDWARD S. SUMMER,

Principal

H C P Bell, C.C.S.,

Hon. Secretary C.A.S.,

Colombo.

B). Mr H. C. P. Bell to Rev E. S. Summer:-

Colombo,

March 1, 1887

Dear Sir, - I have to thank you for your Post Card of the 8th ultimo, which took some time reaching me. Mr. Stevens on his way through Ceylon, after his visit to India, informed that he had been himself to Serampore, and handed over my letter - though I am not sure whether to yourself or to an assistant. I have been anxious to learn whether my quest was likely to be successful. You Post

¹⁷ Das, 1978, p.83

¹⁸ B.F.B.S., *Seventh Report*, Appendix XLII, pp.76-77.

Card, though not encouraging, leaves me still some hope that the long-buried Maldivian MS. May yet to come to light in archives.

As perhaps you are aware, I have for some years tried to make a special study of the Maldivian Islands, our sole dependency: and have to; to some extent, mastered their peculiar script and language with the help of my Maldivian friends.

There is no Maldivian literature beyond lithographed MS. Books, half Arabic, on their religion; songs and the stray letters on business matters, which reach Agents in Ceylon. The discovery of this Maldivian MS. Of St. Matthew's Gospel would be of very great interest, and I trust you will kindly aid me to obtain a sight of it, by having a renewed search made on your bookshelves etc.

Once obtained, I would endeavor to transliterate it myself, and make sure further use of it, as you might advise.

My authority for believing the MS. to be with your Mission at Serampore is the following the extract from a paper by Lieut. Christopher, I.N., communicated to the R.A.S. of England (Journal Vol. VI o.s., p.43):-

"So averse were the island authorities to anything like emigration, that a laudable attempt to translate the New Testament, by means of a Hindustani Munshi, failed at Bengal, the man who was engaged having been recalled by the Sulatn of Mal, before the Gospel of Matthew was gone through. I have seen and conversed with the Maldivian above referred to (he is now venerably gray), and he spoke of his engagement under the Rev Mr Brown, with readiness and evident self-gratulation. This translation (so far as it goes) is, I believe in the hands of the Serampore Missionaries."

The italics are mine. The extract will perhaps serve as some clue to the lost MS. Christopher was writing [of] in 1836. When did this "Rev. Mr Brown" work at Serampore? Could he not have put something on record touching the "engagement" with the Maldivian?

Trusting to hear from you shortly that the MS. has been unearthed, and is at my service (subject to your conditions) –

Believe me, yours truly

(Sgd.) H.C.P. Bell

Hon. Secretary R.A.S.C.B.

C.Rev E. S. Summer to Mr H. C. P. Bell

Serampore College

March 29, 1887

Dear Sir, - Your letter of March 1, though under difficulty as regards time (for I am leaving for England tomorrow) I write a few lines to say that I think there is no hope of recovering the desiderated MS.

After reading your reason for supposing that it was at Serampore College, I am satisfied that it is not. Dr. Brown was not at Serampore College Missionary at all; though I think there was a Church of England Chaplain of that name somewhere about that time. The center of our Mission and of our translation work has long since been removed from Serampore, and this work (if it ever was at Serampore) has either ceased to exist, or has been removed somewhere else; and I can offer no suggestion as to whether, or where, it can be found.

I am very sorry that I cannot help you in the matter, and must end with expressing the hope that a translation of the Scriptures, or some portion of them, in the Maldivian language may ere long be made. Linguists can have no nobler occupation.

Yours truly,

(Sgd) EDWARD S. SUMMER

H.C.P. Bell Esq., C.C.S.

Hon. Secretary R.A.S. (C.B.)

What is extraordinary about this correspondence is that the authorities at Serampore in 1887 should virtually disclaim all knowledge of the existence of the translation, and even of the identity of the 'Rev. Mr Brown', who is clearly identifiable as the Rev. David Brown, the founder of the Calcutta Auxiliary Bible Society. More than a century later, we can today only speculate whether if a more thorough investigation had been made at that stage, some vital clue might not have come to light as to the whereabouts of the lost Gospels.

Another are of interest although perhaps not directly relevant to the history of this particular manuscript, concerns the circumstance leading to Bell's 1887 correspondence being published in 1925. A certain Mrs K. Wood Kumarakulasinghe of Nuwara Eliya, together with her husband, who was "in government service," had been for some time concerned to share the Gospel with the Maldivians. Mr Kumarakulasinghe had attempted a fresh translation of the Scriptures into Dhivehi. Exactly how far this progressed or what was the fate of his manuscripts is not clear, but once again, as with Leyden, the project was cut short by his death. Mrs Kumarakulasinghe had attempted to continue the work, but again unsuccessfully¹⁹. Finally she had expressed her concern to Sir Anton Bertram, the Vice President of the Ceylon Auxiliary Bible Society. Addressing a meeting of the Society at Kandy on January 2, 1925, Bertram referred to Mrs Kumarakulasinghe's correspondence, and it was reading the published text of this speech in the *Times of Ceylon* of January 5, 1925 that prompted H.C.P. Bell to submit his correspondence with Serampore College for publication, simply to demonstrate that a previous attempt to translate the Scriptures for the Maldivians had been made.

What, then, was the fate of the 1811 Dhivehi Gospels?

C.E. Wilson, in his commemorative booklet *A Century and a Half of Bible Translation by the Baptist Missionary Society (1942)* gives a dramatic answer: he explains that Leyden's Four Gospels in Maldivian were never issued because both fount and manuscript were destroyed in the disastrous fire which gutted the Serampore printing-house on March 11, 1812²⁰. But although it would be interesting to know Wilson's basis for such claim, we must reject it on two counts:-

1) Very detailed accounts were issued by the Serampore missionaries of everything that had been lost in the fire – which did include several fonts and manuscripts – but the Maldivian materials all date from after this event. The *Brief Narrative of the Baptist Mission in India* (Fourth Edition 1813), in a list of translations engaged in as of June 1812, the month of David Brown's death and three months after the fire, makes no reference to Dhivehi. However, a letter of William Carey dated November 1812 is referred to which speaks of "no less than eighteen translations, some of which have fallen into their hands by the death of other translators"²¹. This presumably includes the Dhivehi Gospels. The earliest explicit Serampore reference I have found is in the Preface to Volume V of the *Periodical Accounts relative to the Baptist Missionary Society*, which summarized the state of progress at the close of 1812. In the field of translation, 'Maldivian' has appeared on

¹⁹ Kumarakulasinghe, 1923

²⁰ C.E. Wilson, 1942, pp.8,12

the end of the list (no. 18) of languages being worked on, with the comment, “commencing”. This would clearly be impossible if the work had been destroyed in March 1812, at which date the manuscripts were almost certainly in the hands of Rev David Brown at the Bible Society.

Another possible scenario is that the controversial manuscripts were removed from Serampore to Malé on the orders of the then Maldivian government as a condition for the translator’s pardon, and there scrutinized and subsequently destroyed. However, this would seem to be ruled out by the apparent implication of the last Serampore references to the effect that the missionaries still had the translation though not the translator. Since there is this no conclusive evidence of the end which befell the manuscripts, in principle we may not totally rule out the possibility that they may yet be preserved somewhere in Calcutta or Serampore. However having searched in all the likely institutions in Calcutta and Serampore and found no trace of the manuscripts, I regretfully conclude that the ravages of climate and environment make it most unlikely that these unique documents could have survived to the present day.

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The God of Hope: A Look at the Book of Ruth Through Sri Lankan Eyes

By Mano Emmanuel

In the last seventeen years, Sri Lanka has become a place of terror and despair as the island is buffeted by civil war. The conflict has led to poverty, fear, suspicion, and bloodshed. Countless numbers of civilians, men, women and children have died at the hands of terrorists, as well as at the hands of the armed forces meant to protect them. Others have lost homes, livelihoods, loved ones and with them the hope that justice and peace will ever prevail. Family life is disintegrating as young people leave the island in search of a future elsewhere. Sri Lanka is a land that appears to lie under a curse. The seemingly unending misery caused by this situation either drives people to God as the only source of hope, or away from him as the source of the plight.

In the story of Ruth, as in Sri Lanka, land plays an important role. The characters labour under what appears to be covenant curses – famine, barrenness, exile and death. The narrator does not attribute these curses to Yahweh. Yahweh is only mentioned by the narrator in connection with blessing (food, prosperity). Naomi though, is certain that it is Yahweh who is responsible for her state of poverty and loss. The book reflects many of the questions that perplex Christians who live through a similar situations in Sri Lanka. The Biblical text reminds us that behind the headlines which number victims in their tens or hundreds lie the stories of individuals and those they love.

THE SETTING

The narrator Ruth, by indicating that the story is set in the time of judges,¹ reminds us of the atrocities that attended that time, most famously occurring in ‘Bethlehem of Judah’ (Ruth 1:1-2, cf. Judges 17-19). That little phrase conjures up images of violence (including horrific violence against women), and idolatry, prevalent in the era of the judges (Judg 17:7,9, 19:1,18). The location of the story is firmly within the tradition of the covenant people of God and the Promised Land.

The happy ending which leads many to describe the story as idyllic must not blind us to the feeling of grief, disappointment, fear and despair that the women, especially Naomi, must have felt when they did not know how their story would end.

NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

The author uses word plays, puns and skillful literary techniques to deliver the story. For example, the name ‘Elimelech’ translated ‘God is my King’ reminds us that the land was in turmoil because there was no king, not even God (Judg 17:6, 18:1, 21:25). The repeated use of verbs like ‘turn’, ‘return’, ‘go back’, ‘turn back’ and ‘brought back’ help to alert the reader to the reversals which form an important theme in the book (1:6,7,8,10,11,1,15, 2:6, 4:13 etc.). the controlling pattern of the work, from a literary point of view, is given to us in Chapter 1 where the theme of emptiness-fullness is depicted in Naomi’s circumstances.² First there is famine in the land, followed by the death of family and the acknowledgement that the barrenness of her womb makes this state permanent. The emptiness zooms in from the widest level down to the personal anguish of one woman. The barrenness of the old woman parallels the barrenness of the land, but while there is hope that the land will blossom again, there is no similar hope for Naomi’s own cycle of life. But though Naomi cannot see it, there are signs of hope hinted at by the narrator. Naomi is not alone. Her daughter-in-law has pledged to be her companion to the end of her days

¹ Some suggest it was written as a polemic against the Ezra-Nehemiah reforms. See Andre LaCoque, *The Feminine Unconventional* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990) 84, where Ruth is described as a ‘brilliant polemic performance under the guise of an antique and innocuous tale.

² D.F. Rauber, ‘Literary Values in The Bible: The book of Ruth’, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 89(1970) 27-37, citing 29.

(1:16-17) and as they reach Bethlehem, it is the start of the barley harvest. The plot of the story revolves around the need for food, a husband, an heir, a king; the 'restoration of seed.'³ At the end of the story (4:13), the author returns to this theme by balancing the total emptiness of chapter one with complete fullness and fulfilment. Here is fertility, the reestablishment of full family and social harmony.⁴ Obed will be a 'restorer of life', causing Naomi's life to turn around. Redemption is an important concern of the book (e.g. 3:9,13, 4:1,3,4,6,7, etc.).

Like a parable, the story invites us to identify with the characters. Much of the story is presented in the form of dialogue which gives rise to ambiguity since one character's point of view is often reflected through another's (2:7,11 3:17).⁵ Sri Lankan readers might identify with Ruth, leaving behind what is familiar, hoping for a better future elsewhere. Others might identify with Naomi, apparently stricken by God, robbed of all that was dear, unable to see hope for the future.

RUTH – DAMSEL IN DISTRESS

Ruth is the focus of interest in the book although her thoughts and feelings remain unclear. She is the main interest of both Naomi, and the reader who is always aware of her and wants what will happen to her.⁶ Ruth leaves her own country, her people and her god and travels to a foreign land. We do not know if she left behind the possibility of re-marriage, a return to familiar life or if all she faces was the stigma of being a barren widow of a 'foreigner' highly ineligible for marriage,⁷ or even destitution. She finds security, in the form of marriage to a good provider; she finds new identity, as a wife and mother; and perhaps she finds a new God. The book does not tell us if Ruth ever believe that it was Yahweh who turned her life around. We do not know if it was Yahweh of Chemosh to whom she cried out when she felt far from home, wear of being labelled- 'the Moabite', fearful about the future. Or did she decide that you make your own luck? Is it a coincidence that she begins to have hope after she takes the initiative to make her own way?

Ruth makes her own decision to return with Naomi. There is no suggestion she was prompted by Yahweh to do so. Perhaps she broke with tradition in making such a decision without her family's consent. It is a bold decision, not a 'sensible' choice. She abandons herself to the unknown. Was this because of her hope in Yahweh? Love for her mother-in-law? Belief in her own ability to survive? An untenable future in Moab? A mixture of all or some of these? Her allegiance to Yahweh might rank along with allegiance to houses and burial plots and as easily be changed.⁸ But the narrator clearly wants us to see a commendable loyalty to Naomi and Ruth's actions, a striking example of sacrificial loyalty, *hesed* (1:8, 3:10).⁹

Ruth decides for herself to go glean in the fields. Once again it is a bold decision; to take what is available to her, to go alone into a public place where some people at least would look askance at this Moabite. Others though, might look on her kindly and they do. The narrator tells us that she 'happens' to come into the field owned by Boaz. Are we meant to see that 'within human luck is divine unintentionally'?¹⁰

Throughout the book Ruth is consistently labelled as a foreigner, a Moabite (1:22, 2:2,6,21, 4:5, 10). Moabites do not appear in a favourable light in Hebrew scripture (Num 25:1-2, Judg 3:1, Dt 23:3, Zeph 2:9, Neh 13:1). How does she feel when she hears Naomi's statement that she had come back 'empty' (1:21)? Ruth's risky decision to throw in her lot with her aged mother-in-law, her promise of companionship has been dismissed as nothing by that thoughtless phrase. Her worth is gradually recognised by Naomi and her community. When she becomes

³ Barbara Green, 'The Plot of the Biblical Story of Ruth', *JSOT* 23 (1982) 55-68, CITING 56.

⁴ Rauber, 'Literary', 34

⁵ Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1983), 97.

⁶ Berlin, *Poetics*, 84

⁷ Danna Nolan Fewell & David Miller Gunn, *Compromising Redemption* (Louisville" Westminster John Knox Press, 1990) 98.

⁸ Fewell and Gunn, *Compromising*, 97.

⁹ *Hesed* ({}), is translated loyalty, faithfulness or loving kindness.

¹⁰ Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978) 176

Boaz's wide her Moabite background seems to be discarded (4:11). To the men it seems, her value and identity come from being a wife and mother (4:11-12). The women recognise her loyalty and love and pay her the great compliment of declaring she is worth seven sons (4:15), and Yahweh chooses Ruth, a despised Moabitess, as the ancestor of his Messiah - someone else who would know what it was to be despised and rejected. The role of the stranger had been to transform the hopes and expectations of the 'insiders' Naomi and Boaz. She has challenged and confronted their presuppositions. She has provided their 'redemption'.

In the threshing room Ruth goes beyond what Naomi tells her to do by stating explicitly Boaz's role of redeemer. The description of the scene bristles with sexual innuendo.¹¹ Ruth had no guarantee that she would leave that place any better off than when she came. On what did she place her trust? Her own persuasiveness? Boaz's *hesed*? Yahweh's *hesed*?¹² Is it possible that Ruth was enabled to believe in the *hesed* of Yahweh by the graciousness of Boaz' response to her in previous encounters? Ruth tells Boaz that he has 'comforted' her (2:13). The Hebrew *naham* meant more than kindly words. It was a promise of practical help (Gen 5:10-21, Is 51:3). Boaz's words could be seen to have given Ruth hope of a change in her situation.¹³ Some writers suggest that Ruth could have come to worship Yahweh because she became a part of an Israelite family. But it is equally likely that Ruth did not lie what she saw of Yahweh's activity in Naomi's family. If she had begun to doubt his care, as Naomi had, the kindness and blessing of a worthy Israelite may have begun to change her mind.

BOAZ – THE REDEEMER

Boaz has frequently been upheld as a type of Christ. However, he is portrayed much more as a 'rounded' character like Ruth and Naomi. He is a *gibbor hayil* (2:1), a worthy man, a term whose many connotations include wealth, success, virility, and upright behaviour. He is a successful sower of seed and is going to be the answer to deficiencies made known to us at the beginning of the story. Boaz shows that he understands what it is to be a stranger. And implicitly compares Ruth to Abraham (2:11 cf. Gen 12:1-5).

He acknowledges Ruth's *hesed* to Naomi and calls for a blessing on her from the God under whose wings (*kanap*) she has come for refuge (Ruth 2:12).¹⁴ At first sight he appears to make the mistake that many Christians are guilty of. He commits the cause of this 'stranger' into the hands of Yahweh and seems to wash his hands of responsibility towards her. To his credit however, he does allow her to glean, and invites her to share in his meal thus presumably demonstrating to his workers he regards her with respect, setting them an example. He progresses from referring to her as 'girl' (:5), to 'my daughter' (2:8), reflecting his superiority, but in a family relationship, to finally raising her status to his own by describing her as a 'worthy' woman (*eset hayil*), a direct match with the narrator's description of him as *gibbor hayil*.¹⁵

On the threshing floor, Ruth uses Boaz's own words to challenge him to be the answer to his prayer for her (2:12). *Kanap* can have the meaning of either 'wing' or 'skirt'. Here Ruth requests that Boaz spread his *kanap* over her, for he himself is her redeemer.¹⁶

¹¹ Threshing floors are notorious for illicit liaisons (Hos 9:1). Words like 'uncovering' and 'lying down' are suggestive, 'Feet' is euphemism for genitals.

¹² Many commentators laud Ruth's commitment to the continuance of the line of Elimelech. However, this is to read the story strictly through the lenses of patriarchal Israel. Perhaps the women were more interested in security, wherever that was found (1:8-9). Frederick Bush, (*Ruth/Esther*, Dallas: Word Books, 1996), 97.

¹³ E John Hamlin, *Ruth: Surely There is a Future*, (Michigan: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 34

¹⁴ The Old Testament frequently refers to the security of Yahweh's wings (Ps 57:1, 91:4-6, 63:7, Dt 32).

¹⁵ At the end of the story, there is a wish that these 'worthy' partners will prosper (lit. produce {} *hayil*) 4:11. The term is also used to describe the 'capable wife' of Prov 31 and is the opposite of the immorality associated with the term *nokriya* (Prov 2:16 {} cf. Ruth 5:20). Hamlin, *Surely*, 47.

¹⁶ Many commentators see Ruth's request as a marriage proposal, based on Ezek 16:8 though others point out that its usage in that context is metaphorical and therefore we cannot set too much store by it as a referent. D.R.G. Beattie, 'Ruth III, *JSOT* 5 (1978) 39-48, CITING P.42

NAOMI – OR MARA?

Although the book bears the name of her daughter-in-law, it is Naomi, her concerns and her point of view that dominate.¹⁷ Naomi has lost her identity and status as wife and mother and so, apart from the introduction (1:2), she is only referred to as ‘Naomi’, or ‘mother-in-law’. This highlights both her centrality and the importance of the relationship with Ruth.¹⁸ Naomi leaves Bethlehem, ‘the place of bread’ when it has no bread. She returns bitter, angry, and hopeless (Ruth 1:13). Perhaps her despair is all the worse because she has had her hopes raised so many times only to have them come to nothing. First, her hopes are high as her family find food and a new life, then they are dashed when she is left as a widow. She hopes again when her sons take wives, only to find those hopes turned to ashes when both sons die, childless. Hope deferred makes the heart sick. She has no doubt who is responsible. God is the author of the death who has afflicted her, cursed her (1:20-21). ‘Life is utter, total, complete emptiness – from famine at the very core of her being.’¹⁹ Her name is a mockery to her ({} Her name means ‘my delight.’ 1:19-22). She fails to see the possibilities of hope in the presence of her daughter-in-law, in the plentifulness of the barley harvest, in kinship with a worthy man.²⁰ Possibly, Naomi felt her sons had been punished for marrying Moabite women. In that case, she might have blamed Ruth for her son’s death and the barrenness which robs her of her future. Naomi does not go out to glean with Ruth. Perhaps her age prevented her, perhaps she felt ashamed at her poverty, perhaps she was waiting for Yahweh to act on her behalf or perhaps in despair she had given up. She searches for security and the only place it is available for her, as a woman, seems unattainable. We do not know how she feels about Ruth, for she does not praise her loyalty or thank her for her provision, but she does not suggest a plan to enable her to find security, which ultimately secures Naomi’s own.

GOD – FAITHFUL OR HARSH?

According to some commentators, the story of Ruth is about ‘the firm, guiding “hands” of divine providence’ at work in the world of ordinary human affairs.²¹ To others this is wishful thinking. For example Sasson purposes that Ruth could well be a story written for the sake of entertainment, describing probable, rather than actual events. He would be perfectly happy to accept that Israel was able to tell a story well ‘without having to hide God behind sheave, threshing floors and city gates.’²²

Although almost exclusively absent as a character, Yahweh pervades the story. He is evoked in numerous blessings as a protector redeemer and refuge. The narrator attributes to God those areas of life which were most seen as being out of the control of humans. At the start of the story, God gives his people food (1:6) and at the conclusion, causes Ruth to conceive (4:13).²³ By framing the story with this theological inclusion, the narrator affirms by sovereignty of God.²⁴ Having done that, he avoids mention of divine intervention. However, every prayer in the book is answered during the course of the plot (1:8-9, 2:12,19-20, 3:10, 4:11-12,14). Such answers are surely meant to indicate God’s activity.²⁵ Although human activity seems to bring about the answers to those prayers, there is a limit to what humans can achieve, says the narrator. It is Yahweh who initiates events (1:6). The narrator uses the phrase ‘as it happens’ (2:3) to suggest that could not have been planned or foreseen by humans,

¹⁷ Berlin points to the fact that all other characters are defined by their relationship to her. They are the husband (1:3), sons (1:4), daughters-in-law (1:4), kinsman (2:1), grandson (4:17), *Poetics*, 83-84.

¹⁸ Berlin, *Poetics*, 87.

¹⁹ Trible, *Rhetoric*, 174

²⁰ Trible, *Rhetoric*, 175

²¹ Romert L. Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth* (Michigan: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988)63

²² Jack Sasson, ‘Review of Edward F Campbell Jr. On Ruth’, *Interpretation* 30 (1976) 415-419, citing p.417.

²³ Cf. Sarah, Gen 21:1, Rebekah 25:21, Leah 29:31, Rachel 30:22.

²⁴ Hubbard, *Ruth*, 69

²⁵ Hubbard, *Ruth*, 70

and could therefore be dismissed as mere chance, came about by divine providence. The narrator does not say that God directed Ruth to the field but implies that God provided the opportunity for Ruth and Boaz to meet, without controlling their actions.²⁶ The character of God as portrayed here accords well with the covenant God revealed in much of the Old Testament. It is Yahweh who gives fertility and prosperity (Lev 26:2-5, Deut 28:4-5, 8-12). He cares for the widow and the alien (Exod 22:21-23). He reunites the *hesed* of humans with his own *hesed*.

Naomi sees the hand of Yahweh at work in her bereavement. He is responsible for her plight (Ruth 1:13,20,12). She still commits her daughter-in-law to Yahweh's *hesed* (1:8). Yahweh, unlike Chemosh is not restricted to one geographical area. Naomi has not lost her faith that Yahweh can be a God who brings blessing-it is just her, whom Yahweh has treated badly.

Although the emphasis is on Israel's covenant relationship with Yahweh, the story assumes that Yahweh is sovereign over the universe. Naomi's complaint is issued against *Shaddai* (1:20), the cosmic ruler, indicating that Yahweh also oversees the world's moral order, connecting consequences to their corresponding human actions.²⁷ Her complaint arises from the apparent injustice of her situation. The same belief prompts Boaz to call on Yahweh's blessing as a reward for Ruth's *hesed*. Naomi's plea that Yahweh repay Ruth and Orpah for their *hesed* further shows that she did not expect Yahweh to restrict his rewards to Israel. The book views *hesed* as a constituent element of the moral order which Yahweh oversees (Gen 21:23, Jos.2:1, Judg 8:35, Prov 3:3 etc.) and of which Israel's ideal was but a particular expression.²⁸

Hubbard suggests that the understatement of God's activity is meant to underline two characteristics of Yahweh's work in the world – its hiddenness and its continuousness. God does not work through intermittent miracles followed by long periods of absence. Rather, his activity is hidden behind seemingly chance events of life and behind human action (cf. Gen 39:2-6).²⁹ God, in this story, cannot easily be pinpointed, his point of view cannot be determined, and his providence cannot be equated with the speech or actions of anyone. Yes he is here. Somewhere in the midst of the complicated relationships and mixed motives, wherever there is redemption God is there.³⁰

LESSONS FROM RUTH

What hope can today's Sri Lankans glean from this little snapshot of life in the Bible?

For those who have to leave their homeland, there is knowledge that God can be with exiles in a new land and help make it home. Those who belong to the God of the nations will find parents, brother, and sisters wherever God's people are. God's provision and care will often be mediated through the people they meet.

Hope is found in the possibility of change. Bethlehem once was a place of hopelessness, violence, and godlessness. But that is not the end of the story. Bethlehem is never again described as 'Bethlehem of Judah' in the Old Testament but in the New Testament 'Bethlehem of Judah' is, as in this story, a place of new beginnings – the birthplace of Jesus (Matt 2:1,5).³¹ The narrator makes the story of Ruth 'the beginning point of trajectory' that extends through time to climax when Bethlehem is the birthplace of the Saviour (Ruth 1:, 4:11, cf. 1 Sam 17:12, Mic 5:2, Lk 2:4,11).³² Today's situation is not necessarily the end of the story for Sri Lanka. Stories of dramatic reversals are still seen in modern history. Today South Korea has the largest churches in the world. A hundred years ago there were no Christians there. Of course, we must also remember that Rwanda boasted an

²⁶ Hamlin, *Surely*, 29

²⁷ Hubbard, *Ruth*, 68

²⁸ Hubbard, *Ruth*, 68

²⁹ Hubbard, *Ruth*, 70

³⁰ Fewell & Gunn, *Compromising*, 105.

³¹ Hamlin, *Surely*, 6; but it is also a place of terror for some, as Herod orders the massacre of the infants.

³² Hamlin, *Surely*, 6. The narrator envelopes the story with the mention of Ephratha, and 'Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah' (Ruth 1:2, 4:11) a phrase repeated elsewhere only in the description of David (1 Sam 17:12).

approximately ninety percent Christian population in the 1930's and became a bloodbath in the 1990's. Our hope cannot be vested in nationhood or land. As one church leader in Rwanda said 'We do not want a new world, we want new hearts.'³³

Remembrance of the ways God has worked in the past keeps hope alive, as long as it is his ability to work and not exact replication of previous acts that we hold on to. In exile, Israel remembered God's mighty acts of creation and deliverance (Jer 32:17-22, Ps136). In partaking of bread and wine, Christians remember that their God who Might seem hidden, is the God of creation and the exodus, the God who raised Jesus from the dead, they remember.... Until he comes again. The story is unfinished. 'Miracles are recited in loss, as a refusal to forget or succumb to defeat.'³⁴ This same God has worked to save, heal and empower his church today.³⁵ We must not forget in the darkness what we have learned in the light.³⁶ The story of Ruth shows how short-sighted we can be in our despair. Naomi had forgotten Yahweh's role in providing her fullness. Our view of God is often coloured by our immediate circumstances, blinding us to his past actions and future promises. Naomi sees Yahweh as the power behind her destitution and that blinds her to the hope that could have been hers. It is easy to build a theology on our experience leaving God no room to do something new.

Naomi could see only one possibility of redemption – through her own sons. When there was no possibility that her body would produce more sons she gave up hope. Her redemption came from a source she had not considered. It is possible that the hope for Sri Lanka will not be found in partition, large armed forces or even democracy but in co-operation, forgiveness and reconciliation with the very people we blame for our plight. Ruth 'clung' to Naomi (1:14). The word is the same as is used in Gen 2:2 to indicate the cleaving of the man to his wife in an inseparable bond, a new unity.³⁷ The co-operation between the women engendered hope for the future.³⁸ To start with, Naomi did not appear to count Ruth as an asset to her. She did not expect her salvation from a weak woman, a foreigner. In an area like Sri Lanka, hope can be found in the binding of Christians into a community that cannot be divided by ethnic, national or family claims. A seemingly weak minority gaining strength from each other and from the power of God at work in them, claiming solidarity with those who are looking for refuge. Unless people see God's *hesed* apparent in the actions of God's people they are unlikely to see that he is the only one who can bring real hope and security.

Even in a story rich with covenant themes, it is a non-Israelite who appears to enjoy God's favour, Ruth's story is one among many which subvert the majority storyline which seems to proffer blanket condemnation to non-Yahwistic nations.³⁹ This story challenges our nationalism, our rigid boundaries which distrust and enmity. Ruth's story is about reconciliation, the admittance into society of one who was supposed to be refused fellowship (Neh 13:1)

The importance of human responsibility is stressed in that although the concerns of the people are committed to Yahweh, over and over we are shown the necessity for people to be the answer to their own prayers. The story suggests that Yahweh's acts and those of human who act with *hesed* are somehow linked. This is explicit in the word play on *kanap* where all the characters are involved in answering Boaz's prayer for Ruth by translating it into an offer of marriage. We can often see the results of our actions, or of divine activity, in hindsight (4:14). Ruth and Boaz both took risky decisions without knowing what the outcome would be. Their actions are contrasted with

³³ Rev. Fredrick Robertson cited by E.M. Kolini, 'A Tutsi's Hope', *Christianity Today* April (1997) 10-11, citing 10.

³⁴ Walter Breggemann, 'Suffering Produces Hope,' *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 28 (1998) 95-103, citing 97

³⁵ Remembrance both sustains faith and is the source of doubt when God appears to change from the person we thought we knew.

³⁶ Yancey, *Where is God When it Hurts?* (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 229.

³⁷ Hamlin, *Surely*, 19.

³⁸ Julie L. C. Chu, 'Returning Home: The Inspiration of Role Differentiation in the Book of Ruth for Taiwanese Women', *Semeia*, 78 (1997) 47-51, citing p.48.

³⁹ For example, the stories of Rahab, Tamar and Naaman.

those of their counterparts, Orpah and the unnamed kinsman who, though they act reasonably, and as might be expected, somehow seem to fall short. The narrator holds up Ruth and Boaz as example of *hesed* in their commitment, devotion and loyalty.⁴⁰ But they could not have known what the consequences of their actions would be. To show *hesed* to those who stand at the margins of society is risky, causes misunderstanding, may lose us our reputation but it is what is commended in even commanded of God's people.

Balanced with this acceptance of human responsibility must be the difficult task of hope, based on God's divine sovereignty. This story is remarkably free of unambiguous divine intervention in the form of the miraculous. Yet the narrator is convinced that God is active in human history. Therefore, gratitude to God for the good things in our lives instead of taking them for granted is important though this is not to trivialize the pain. The characters always consciously attribute their circumstances good or bad, to Yahweh. This gives rise to an attitude of thankfulness for good time, and a turning to God in bad time, even if in complaint. To hope in God and his future does not mean we trivialize the pain of the present. Grief must be expressed and losses mourned. There is no place in Christian realism for facile cries of 'peace' or denial of pain. Victims deserve the dignity of having the truth public. To hope is to recognise that this too will pass. It might last for the rest of our lives, but not for ever. To deny our grief, to refuse to protest, stifles hope. Christians must be able to weep both individually and corporately for the pain of the nation.

HOPE FOR TODAY

Hope '...insists on expanding our perceived horizons of possibility, broadening the landscape of reality..(so as to set our present circumstances in a wider perspective and thereby rob it of its absoluteness.'⁴¹ Those who do not hope must eventually conform to the world around them. Such an acceptance of the way things are will also lead to cynicism, resignation and even inhumanity, such as is seen in terrorism and other acts of brutality. If things are never going to change, why should we? Those who hope are able to critique, can work for change. To be Christian is to be set free from having to conform. It is the freedom to be truly human- to do what we know to be right.

Hope is not to be equated with optimism, wishful thinking. Christian hope springs from the promise of God that the best is yet to be. A divine promise indicates that the future is not restricted to what is humanly possible but 'arises from that which is possible for the God of the promise.'⁴² Christian hope is set, not on human achievement but on the God who rescues, the God for whom all things our sense and fairness. It offers a general warning to all humanity that something is wrong with this planet and we need outside intervention.⁴³ We instinctively feel this is not the way things should be. The Bible makes it clear that our instincts are right- there should be and is, a world of peace, equality and plenty, where all injustices will be put to rights (Rev 21:4, 27, 22:1-6). Unfortunately it is not this world. Hope is 'an activity of imaginative faith.' Knowing what is past, knowing what is desired, with eyes wide open to the threat the future holds, hope sees ways of flourishing in spite of danger.⁴⁴ The resurrection of Jesus is for Christians the 'paradigm case for Christian hope.'⁴⁵ He is the first fruits of the new creation making the Christian hope realistic.

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⁴⁰ Hubbard, *Ruth*, 73.

⁴¹ Richard Bauckham & Trevor Hart, *Hope Against Hope* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1999) 54.

⁴² Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, (London: SCM, 1967),103

⁴³ Phillip Yancey, *Where*, 84

⁴⁴ Bauckham & Hart, *Hope*, 53.

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On Infomercials

By Sebaratnam Kumaran Xavier.

1. The context:

By far, television has surpassed all other media as the prime source of information, entertainment, infotainment etc. Developing and evolving into new channels worldwide and this increased airtime, it also has increasing viewership. A notable feature of it, now observable. In Sri Lanka, *Dynavision*, *ETV* and *Swarnavahini*¹ have slotted airtime for infomercials. A further equal airtime if not more is consumed during non-slotted hours² and as commercials spliced in between programs in these other channels.

What are infomercials? How do they impact people? What do we learn from them and how are we to respond to them? These are some of the concerns we would raise in this paper.

2. Infomercials, what are they?

In the late 1800s when cinematography was invented, motion pictures were increasingly employed for entertainment, education and information. Some wealthy industries too produces their own motion pictures – “audio-cine-visuals” – for their products,³ and screened them in strategic places to provide information publicity thereby creating impressive awareness about those products among viewers. These audio cine visuals informed people about the product and its sales spots to impulsively lead them to buy that product. As the next phase of development in the 1960s, some soap manufacturers of their commercials for about ten minutes, thus giving birth to *Soap Operas*⁴. Needless to say, viewers always saw such commercials as definite interruptions to their entertainment.

As TV channels increased in number, each channel increased in number, each channel had to compete with the others. Since airtime cannot be maximized beyond 24 hrs a day (!), they has to compete on efficient usage of it. Comparatively, late nights, early dawns and afternoons were “sleepy” and rated as inefficient timeslots⁵; these slots were sold at cheap rates for lengthy commercials (initially in USA). To productively use such sleepy hours, an entertainment format was devised to present information and education on their products. These lengthy programmes lasting several minutes, focused on one branded product at a time, and giving information about it with a commercial perspective, are the infomercials. On a per minutes basis, they cost about 20% of the cost of 30/60-second commercial⁶. Soon, media-buying firms emerged, bought airtime and hired it to advertisers, giving rise to professional advertising agencies which, specialized in producing infomercials. They would silt in enough information about the product to the viewer (potential customer) in an entertainment mode as to ensure s/he watches it in full (thus sowing ideas into her/his mind)

¹ *Teleseen Marketing*, *Quantan Tele-shopping*, *DRTV Shopping*, *DRTV Home Shopping* are the programme names given in these channels for infomercials.

² Especially in *ETV* and *Dynavision* after mid-night

³ *Products* would mean goods and/or services, unless otherwise specified.

⁴ See *infomercials: concept and birth* on web page, <http://www.infomercials.net/main.html>

⁵ It does not mean zero viewership, but during these slots viewership drops substantially.

⁶ See for a good education on these and other information, *Ron Sherman Advertising and Teleproductions* webpage on, <http://www.ronshermanadv.com/infomercials.infomercials.com>

Categorized according to their formats, there are four types of infomercials.⁷ (1) the Documercial: i.e., a slow paced soft program in a documentary format presenting the development of the product with plenty of references on how to purchase it. (2) the Demonstration: a fast paced program done before a live studio audience, continually reinforcing the product's qualities through demonstrations and testimonials of people who have used the product. (3) the Talk Show: guests and experts are brought in and questioned about the product, which would tend to build a sense of credibility in the viewer's minds. This would come with commercial breaks, the commercials of the same product talked about, soliciting action in an urgency exhortation – such as “next half an hour” etc. (4) the Storymercial: a drama set up in which actors dramatize real life situation usages of the products.

There are specialized advertising agencies for infomercials because it is a major enterprise like film shooting; production of it cannot exist as a department of that product's company. There are celebrities, experts, “random” samples of wo/men (test pieces!), studio audience etc; music is carefully chosen; filming is carefully done; technological expertise employed;⁸ communication modes⁹ are carefully selected; and carefully selected utensils present the story/document/episode (a sole episode!). Products advertise by infomercials range from equipment (i.e., fitness, home, automobile, kitchen etc related) to cosmetics.

There are definite advantages in infomercials¹⁰. An infomercial provides good product such as its shape, size, handling, price etc, and is often a “call away” (or on a mouse, a click away), home delivered etc, so that it appeals for direct response from the consumer. This would relieve her/him from otherwise confronting a salesperson in between, who might often be unfamiliar with the operation, usage and versatility of the product. The *direct response* also enables the product company to keep a close monitor on product sales which otherwise would necessitate elaborate market study. Such “quality control” enables a product produced in a company of a country to be internationally marketed, saving the troubles of setting up multi-national companies. Thus in principle, everyone anywhere could consume genuine foreign products, in keeping with the current trend of globalization. It also alleviates the consumer from being cheated by “imitations” of the product.

However, there are definite disadvantages of infomercials too¹¹. Infomercials are not programmes aimed to bring a revolutionary technology to one's home, but paid advertisements, the sole aim of which is to sell product. There are these truths blown out of proportion, half-truths, and truth untold – sometimes even obviously knowable facts if viewed physically at a sale point¹². Next, in its acclaimed “money back” guarantee, *money back* is not as speedy as *money-spend*. The success of the product is advertised with such force, that it psychologically makes many customers conclude that something is wrong not with the product but with them. Further, the experts, celebrities and even studio audiences featuring in an infomercial are paid performers, performing to the best of their ability. They exploit the credibility of science and fidelity of experts by even made up microscopic slides, and social norms such as “if many say the same thing then it must be true.” They also use professional performers to praise the product. They also appeal to the subconscious mind of the audience; thus their slogan, “the more you tell, the more you sell.”¹³ All this is done in order to bloat the value of the promoted product. Infomercials do not neutrally highlight a product's specific features, but run down other similar products to make them look small

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Such as camera techniques, light setting, audio controls, visual aids etc.

⁹ i.e., such as testimonies, sit-comes, before-after pictures, ad type or commercial type interruptions etc.

¹⁰ Material for this paragraph is taken from “The Advantages of infomercials” in the webpage <http://insiderreports.com/BIZRPRTS/R187.htm>

¹¹ Material in this paragraph is gleaned from the *Federal Trade Commission's* report on the webpage <http://www.geocities.com/TelevisionCity/Set/1222/info.html>

¹² For instance, about the infomercial on the “Sobakawa pillow” (a pillow filled with buckwheat hulls), see the testimonies presented on Mark Hendricks' “Consumer Reports” to *Special to Channel 6000*, in the webpage, <http://www.koin.com/athome/wisebuys/athome-wisebuys-980715-203656.html>. Such a thing as the size of the pillow was half told as per one's testimony in the webpage, <http://www.makura.com/lang/comments.html>.

¹³ See “12 DRTV facts” on the webpage, <http://www.conceptmedia.com/drtvfact.html>

compared to the promoted product, thus creating a hostile competition for, it is possible for some genuinely worthier product to get annihilated from the market and be replaced by an inferior product, by infomercials. Customers attuned to infomercials can become totally ignorant of other products in the market.

3. Critical Analysis of Infomercials

We will confine ourselves to social and religious analyses. There have been many global attempts religiously, anthropologically, socially etc. to critically study and evaluate the impact of such television cultures. To fit our preview, we will firstly look at some religiously based criticisms raised from one such conference¹⁴.

Dr. Azizah Y. Al-Hibri, a visiting scholar at the Harvard Divinity School and Center for the Study of World Religions and an associate professor of Law at the University of Richmond, VA, presented paper on "Television and the Soul" which focused on infomercials. Her arguments are more humanistic than Islam. She primarily notices that the consumerist messages in infomercials are usually transmitted *discreetly* and *subliminally*. They arouse the suppressed desired of the viewer (eternal youth, quick results, etc.) and then recommend specific tools (products), which they claim will help them fulfil their desires. She observes three serious problems in such an approach. Firstly, "subliminal messages *do not permit critical responses or rebuttals*. They seep into the subconscious without resistance or recognition like an enemy by stealth at night. Their *pollution of personal systems of values* is only exhibited after (that) in an individual's subconscious actions and preferences"¹⁵. Secondly they create *insatiable consumer needs*. This, she laments, is reflected in the increased crime rate to gain wealth, things, etc. thirdly, their *victimizing nature*. By their fast-moving images, ever-changing plots, demanding sound bytes etc., they create a consumerist mentality. She is very poignant in pointing out that religious worship, as a result, is seen as a consumerist business, asking its introspective spiritual dimensions, making even the servants of God lust after worldly things. These concerns of Al-Hibri speak to us. Next, Dr. Tran Van Dinh of Vietnam hailing from Confucian, Buddhist and Taoist heritages, a professor emeritus at Temple University, Philadelphia, PA, speaking on *Consumerist Television* from a Buddhist perspective had this to say. "(It) chains him/her (viewer) to an *obsessive determination to dominate nature and man*, promotes and *glorifies cravings and material possessions*, thus *polluting his/her body and mind*. In short, consumerist television stands as a major obstacle to human edification, liberation and purification... an institutionalized force." Sulak Sivaraksa, a leading social thinker of Asia, in his untitled write-up names this force as *secularists' religion*, which promotes *false happiness*. In theistic terms he comments on this religion and says, "by participating in the *sacrament* of purchase, *sacrificing* money, we ... buy an object... (and).. place (it) in the system of images we have sacred"¹⁶. He notes that while advertisements rightly identify an unsatisfactoriness/lack in mankind (akin to the Buddha's *dukkha*), it is totally wrong in promoting craving (*tanha* – a clinging desire)/consumption of a product as a guarantee for relief whereas, in Buddhism, *dukkha is because of tanha!* He aptly comments "commercialism and consumerism sell us (our craving) to ourselves (as a remedy for our lack), the ultimate prostitution".

Swami Agnivesh, an activist of *Arya Samaj*, who served also as a Minister of Education of the Hariyana State, comments more on the information flow. He seems to embrace it as a desirable, purging religions of superficial religious traditions and setting the core religious traditions aglow. He assures, but baselessly, that the flood of information will not break down social institutions such as family and long cherished values. However, his

¹⁴ The Philadelphia conference report on "*Religions, Television and the Information Superhighway*," held on April 22-23, 1994, at the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia which was published under the same title and also made available at webpage, <http://www.asc.upenn.edu/research/trvis/rtvis.html>. There were fifteen panelists comprising five religious representatives of the major religions (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism), five from various communication schools and five from various television sectors; another fifteen were invited guests.

¹⁵ See Azizah al-Hibri's report "Television and Soul" in the Conference Report (op. cit.). Emphasis mine.

¹⁶ See Sulak Sivaraksa's untitled write-up in the conference report (op. cit.). Emphasis mine.

distinction and elaboration between core religious superficial religious traditions tells us at least two things. (1) there had been a serious lack of anthropological concerns¹⁷ in most of the organized religions; and (2) there is a need for all religious traditions to work together on such a global affecting issues (to what extent is debatable though).

Rabbi Michael Paley, the chaplain of Columbia University, NY and the vice president of ARIL (Association of Religion and Intellectual Life) says the *individualism* of the modern consumer society is a serious threat to religious communities. He perceives religious communities as collective active bodies (the *Keihilah* for Jew, mentoring on the information superhighway, though he agrees that it holds potential to aid better collective actions re-weaving their conscience, he observes that they have become “more obsessed with their attack on the sacred, the spiritual and the religious”. In other words, the information superhighway’s “collective action” aids only vandalism against the sacred touts not God, but modern technology and wisdom (even capable of uncovering ancient secrets!) as capable of bringing hope; not soul-care, but body care, face care, home care, hair care etc are elevated as essential. Paley is more than prophetic.

Michael Traber, the editor of the international journal, *Media Development*, presented his report entitled “Ethical Principle of Communication – a Christian perspective”. His criticism is more on social grounds, that there has resulted in injustice in communication. “No information superhighway is planned for the developing world... for the marginalized communities”. This trend would only “widen the gap between the information rich and the information poor and make it unbridgeable in the foreseeable future”. Apart from this, the poor, the marginalized, the refugees, the old, the disabled (apart from exceptional cases), etc would continue to be non-people while the powerful, the rich, the businessmen etc would be “the people” information would flood to.

Socially, many viewpoints are raised; some of the religious criticisms too can best be categorized as social. Basically, the impact of infomercials on society values. As Andrew Wernick proposes, there is a whole promotional culture on the rise¹⁸. Consider, for instance, the simple issue of rating a product. A product use to be rated on its price, dependability, durability, longevity, reparability, versatility etc. But now, infomercials introduce a new rating, based on human instinct; i.e., a judgement based on consumerist values, rather than the actuality of rating. This new rating system in turn, as can be seen, has affected the value systems of our society. Nowadays, in any trade or action, *publicity* is sought more than *professionalism*; *farin well* is replaced with *performing well*.

The current media technology introduces much virtuality, to concoct a virtual community far from reality; the real human community of actual human touch and face to face interactions etc is replaced. Emails, cyber marketing, cyber sex, cyber chats are some of them. Infomercials fuel such virtuality by captivatingly ushering the consumers into virtual markets (but real purchases!)

Infomercials in marketing actually open the Pandora’s box of human “ingenuity” to invent efficient means to make seductive appeals to elicit desired response-purchase. Such ingenuity would enhance strange ethics, which in turn infects societies. For instance, one such ethic that is, lying (which includes half truths) for the purpose of promotion of products is not seen as wrong. Thus are impostors on the rise, solely marketing themselves or their concerns into societies, rather than serving them.

4. Infomercials form a Christian Perspective

Much, if not all the criticism raised above are either Christian or akin to Christian concerns. We would not duplicate them here, but lay our fingers on a few of them to empathize with the Christian view. Firstly, on the whole aspect of truth telling. In Michael Traber’s words, “Isaiah’s lament has a modern ring, “in the public square,

¹⁷ Agnivesh defines anthropological concerns as “concern and care of the environment, human rights, and the rights of nations and diverse civilizations and peace”. See the Conference Report (op. cit)

¹⁸ See, Andrew Wernick, **Promotional Culture – Advertising, Ideology and Symbolic Expression** (London, ..., New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1991). With various examples, he traces the growth and establishment of such a culture.

truth has been brought to its knees; honest =y cannot enter" (Isaiah 59:14). Truth is an attribute of God, and truthfulness the mark of his believers". Concerning the information the information superhighway. Traber raises a set of ethical questions, How manipulative will it be? How easily can information be verified? Will truth become subordinate to *popular appeal and profit*? Will the powerful combination of words, music and images make it easier to lie, deceive and disinform? The question posed for us Christians is, can we tolerate such half lies? What should our stand be concerning the truth?

Next, human creativity. God made wo/men creative beings. For the profit of all, they need to participate in communities. Such a participation is more than consumer choice or passive access. Wo/men should participate actively in the economic, political and cultural life of the community for both the health development of the community and for the progressive actualization of their potentials. As can be seen readily, most of the political, economic and social systems offer only weak (or no) "popular" participation. Mr./Mrs. Citizen is expected either to *face up to* or *comply with* the political/economic/social decisions, to which they are neither part nor responsible, thus mortifying their creativity. But infomercials have gone a step further, not offering popular participation but offering freedom of choice, a freedom but for passive, unthinking action at that, thus making Mr./Mrs. Consumer totally uncreative.

False contentment is another aspect to focus on. Someone said that infomercials lead the viewers to a culture portrayed by the advertisers. And the culture is virtual reality, for those who feature in infomercials are not of real life situations of Mr./Mrs. Viewer. Soon, being repeatedly bombarded by those celebrities and specialist spokespersons, Mr./Mrs. Viewer would be let to the limit of discontent that s/he poses the whole world (all he wants), yet s/he remains incomplete, for completeness come when He who is complete fills up.

These are not all. It would be fruitful exercise for the reader to take up the issues presented in section 3 and see them from a Christian perspective to understand how those akin to Christian concerns too.

5. What should be the Christian Response?

Basically consumerism stands in stark contrast to Christianity. Christianity teaches that perfection is an eschatological reality. But consumerism offers that in this lifetime on its twin premises, (1) we can make it and (2) we have to *satisfy* our instinctive wants (wants are not necessarily *needs*). Infomercials give direction to accomplish that. Since both the stated premises are not Christian, they warrant a confrontational approach, both toward consumerism and infomercials. On the other hand, infomercials do give information on some of the latest innovations. Some innovations are rediscoveries of some aspects of forsaken ancient lifestyles while some others are new. Thus the net demand is that we watch infomercials, but critically.

As Christians, our guiding principle to spending money is stewardship. Thus, our prime concern should be "how is my consumption justified as a steward"; not "is it good for me". Or "is it of reasonable price" etc., for any instincts aroused by infomercials. We need to educate our members on these lines of thought.

When infomercials bombard us saying that we lack something seriously, must we, as Christians be shaken? Some of those features highlighted by the infomercials may be true of us (for instance baldness). Surely, we all lack many things in our lives. But then, before we act, we need to ask some questions. Should all our lacks be filled? Are we to presuppose contentment upon our lacks being met or is contentment a mindset? Look at such passages as Phil. 4:12-13. Paul says, "I *know* how to be abased, and I *know* also how to abound; in everything and in all things, have I *learned* the secret of both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want. I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me" (ASV). Such questions based upon God's word can preserve us from being totally educated by infomercials.

How about those infomercials which promise speedy solutions to our problems? The *speed* implies, (1) so far we have done it all inefficiently (even in the wrong way) and (2) this particular product gives better results easily speedily. Should we allow ourselves to be governed by speed? For =, we need to understand that these products are not free from the curse dictum of Gen.3. Speedy solutions without much "sweat" have inherent

disadvantages. In this pressure cooker world, we rarely realize at what cost we enjoy speed. It is in the destruction of something that we have speedy solutions. The speedy developments impinging drastically on ecology, speedy rearing of animals ending up in thousands of them being annihilated at one time due to dreaded diseases, speedy crops using Genetically Modified Techniques but seriously lacking some of the basic nutrients and vitamins, thousands dying in accidents in speedy modes of transport, many side effects of speedy-recovery medicines are some to cite a few. Thus speedily and easily assured results should not be the necessary criteria for our consumption. We need to look into all the possible “side effects” of it. Doing it in the hard old way is sometimes less destructive.

As a church, how concerned are we about infomercials? While infomercials appeal for individual direct responses, we as a church should bring that concern to the community. This is not to provide an easier market (!), but as a community aiding one another to evaluate, educate, etc. In this way, it would not only become possible to identify good and profitable items, but also promote a sense of accountability amongst the members. Sadly, in many churches, many such issues are either conveniently swept under the carpet or dealt with elusively as if they were private individual issues. With increasing trends towards individualism and personalism, would the church continue to do away with more such issues as “individual”? I would suggest that, from time to time, at least a few of those infomercials that are cause for concern may be identified, and the church sit together to spend time and study the issue interactively.

As pointed out in section 3, there are many religious viewpoints on this issue that are parallel to the Christian. Perhaps they educate us in some of our blind spots. This calls for health inter-religious dialogue on such issues. The tendency of most of us has been that other religions proffer possible religious platforms for antichrist. But what if the “antichrist”ian religious platform is something forceful and seductive like consumerism, then it is the common enemy of all religions.’ This paper should be an eye-opener to a biting social issue about which we have been critically uninformed for unduly long. Though infomercials on principle are a revolutionary form of marketing, yet in practice they manifest sinfulness in no uncertain terms. As a window, this issue on infomercials opens our eyes to critical analyses of the current “opium of the masses,” globalization, with which infomercials co-grow up. How hopeful can we be about the increasing global trends? Or, is globalization compatible with heaven? On the horizon as global trends (such as the IT super corridor and the communication superhighway) swirl, will the violent vortices give rise to a great divide, dividing the globe into two, one floating high (as privileged “haves”), while the other get deeply drowned (as underprivileged “have nots”)? These are issues integrated with infomercials, that we cannot avoid being concerned about. It demands our mindfulness and true knowledge (not filling our minds with information like bank accounts).

It is comforting to note that there is an increasing awareness on this issue of infomercials. There are even some structural defenses set up to safeguard consumers who are totally taken off guard¹⁹.

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The Use of Music in Cross Cultural Ministry

By Dawn Remtema

The Psalms make reference to singing or praising God before the nations. Psalm 108:3 & 4 say, "I will give thanks to You, O Lord among the peoples, and I will sing praises to You among the nations." Psalm 96:3 & 4 express it this way, "Tell of His glory among the nations, his wonderful deeds among all the peoples, for great is the Lord and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods." Verse ten in the same chapter is somewhat of a command. "Say among the nations, 'The Lord reigns;' Indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved; He will judge the peoples with equity." Psalm 46:10 states about God, "I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." In Psalm 108, David says in song, "I will give thanks to You, O Lord, among the peoples, and I will sing praises to You among the nations."

It seems that songs, exaltations, praises, speaking out were a means of revealing to the nations surrounding the nation of Israel the person and character of God. As one reads the Psalms, it seems that this was a very natural expression before the other nations. Praise and worship were not totally private. No doubt there were many songs that David sang that only God heard. But the Psalms capture an outward expression of praise that impacted other nations and people. The expression in Psalm 117 was long before salvation was extended to the Gentile, yet there was expression that worship, praise, adoration for the one true God was to be practiced among all the nations, not just the nation of Israel.

Psalm 117

Praise the Lord, all nations; Laud Him, all peoples!
For His loving kindness is great toward us,
And the truth of the Lord is everlasting.
Praise the Lord!

John Piper in his book, *Let the Nations be Glad*, says, "Worship is the fuel and goal in missions. It is the goal of missions because in missions we simply aim to bring the nations into the white-hot enjoyment of God's glory. The goal of missions is the gladness of the peoples in the greatness of God."¹ This statement seems to indicate that unless a believer has truly been a worshipper, he will not be effective in the mission of reaching the nations for Christ's honour and glory. At the same time, when, a mission is accomplished the nations are brought to a place of enjoyment of God's glory. His glory is their delight. So many Psalms referring to singing and praising God to the nations, demonstrate that the blessing of forgiveness and salvation that God has granted to Israel was meant, eventually, to reach all the peoples of the world.

The main concern under consideration in Sri Lanka, where my husband and I had the opportunity to spend fourteen years of service. In John Piper's book the reader hopefully goes to another nation as a worshipper of God on a mission. In contrast, the focus of this paper is those in Sri Lanka, involved or preparing in the mission. This is no small task! Sri Lanka has been a place of unrest with an ongoing ethnic war since 1984. In September, 000 a missionary friend with The Evangelical Alliance Mission wrote that upon his return to Sri Lanka from furlough he found the Christians were beginning to lose hope. The war is ongoing and all government settlements have not been successful. This loss of hope was confirmed by many sympathizers of the Gospel in Sri Lanka. The question at hand would be, "Does worship of the true and living God restore and sustain hope?"

The second consideration in this paper is my own understanding of what is important cross-culturally, concerning worship. One of the deep impressions left in my memory are the common every day scenes of Sri

¹ John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books 1993), 11.

Lankans worshipping. Almost daily, as I passed the market, Buddhist worshippers would be kneeling in worship before a statue of Buddha or at a temple. I often wondered if others around me truly saw me as a worshipper of the one and only true God. I wondered if there were other ways to sing forth the praises of my God so that they could gain an understanding of who Jesus is and what He did for them. I often woke to the sound of drums and Buddhist monks chanting on their way to a place of worship. Worship permeated the culture. As I have read the Psalms, I often meditated on ways in which Christian worship could penetrate the culture.

Does worship of the true and living God restore and sustain hope?

Charles R.A. Hoole, a lecturer at Baldaeus Theological Seminary in Sri Lanka, wrote an article in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, that gave a review of past history to the present day both of the political situation in Sri Lanka, and the church. In talking of the moral vacuum now present, he says, "In Sri Lanka, the ethnic conflict has pulverized the traditional social order. Widespread social dislocation has led to breakdown in the traditional authority and kinship structure and the bases of communal solidarity. Separatist-inspired 'ethnic cleansings' have contributed to the general militarization of social life, evidenced by the emergence of a gun culture."² The deterioration of the values with the increase of violence is in contrast to the past, which embodied nonviolence as a religious value. This inversion is a reflection of the dramatic changes which have occurred within the Buddhist and Hindu pantheons in Sri Lanka.

This social culture of violence is no small matter when it comes to commitment to Christ and as a true worshipper following the passion of God's heart for the lost. In a recent article in the "Servant" magazine of Moody Graduate School, Dr. Marvin J. Newell talks of the mission challenges in our day. He counts at present 40 "hot spots" of sectarian violence in the world where fragmentation is taking place. His concern is for the care of Western missionaries going to those places. In reference to Sri Lanka, the concern is for those preparing to minister and continue ministering in such a place of unrest. For the western missionary, they, including myself can come away from it. But what about the local church or ministry, those in seminary training who cannot come away? They live in a world of violence about them.

Charles Hoole continues in his article to give an overview of Christianity in Sri Lanka. In the last two decades the church has grown and is no longer labeled as nominal. There is tremendous spiritual vitality. Yet in the midst of that, among the Buddhists, there is an organized attempt to resist Christian penetration. Along with the Buddhists, there were elements of anti-Christian proposals endorsed by a few mainline church leaders, which were under consideration a few years ago for a new constitution.

John Piper's book, *Let the Nations Be Glad!*, carries the subtitle, "The Supremacy of God in Missions." One of the chapters is entitled, "The Supremacy of God in missions through suffering." He uses the Apostle Paul as the example to express that the suffering of missionaries is meant by God to magnify the power and sufficiency of Christ. Paul's suffering brought him to the end of his resources to rely on Christ's sufficiency. "Suffering with joy proves to the world that our treasure is in heaven and not on the earth, and that this treasure is greater than anything the world has to offer. The supremacy of God's worth shines through the pain that his people will gladly bear for his name."³ Philippians 3:7-8 is the biblical basis for this concept of suffering. "But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss *for the sake of Christ.*"

It seems that Mr. Piper is saying that only real joy in suffering is possible as a result of Christ being the supreme focus of the believer's life. From birth up, Bach understood that a man worships what he believes. So what we believe of this biblical basis of God is what fortifies us for suffering with joy. It is more than just a biblical head knowledge of God, based on the full council of God's Word, but choices of belief from our heart for our daily walk with God. Bach felt called to pursue a career as a servant of God. His music was used to spread the Gospel

² Charles R.A. Hoole, "Sri Lanka at 50," in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* Vol. 34, No.4 (October 1998), 455-461.

³ John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 103.

of Christ. True worship of God uplifts the Trinity and Christ centered. Quiet often Johann Sebastian Bach placed the abbreviation "S.D.G." at the end of his many manuscripts meaning for *Soli Deo Gloria* or "to God alone be glory." God's glory was obviously his life's ambition in all he did. It seem that unless the believer in Sri Lanka are solidly focused on exalting and uplifting Christ at all cost, with His supremacy at the center of their belief, they will not be able to live in hope that can only come from God and His Word. Having lived there through some of the unrest in the 80s. I am somewhat aware of the cost involved in ministry. Many families live with interruptions in schooling, and at times safety risks. Our children's school was hit by terrorist activity, and military checks were a part of everyday life. Bringing glory to God goes beyond considering oneself, it involves entire families and communities.

As believer in Sri Lanka have prayed and waited for encouraging resolutions from the government as regards the ethnic war at hand, to no avail, it is only God and His glory which can sustain their hope for the present. This is so beautifully illustrated in Psalm 115:1-6, and verse 8.

Not to us, O lord, not to us, but to Your name give glory
 Because of Your loving kindness, because of Your truth.
 Why should the nations say, where, now, is their God?"
 But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever he pleases.
 Their idols are silver and gold, the work of man's hands.
 They have mouths, but they cannot speak;
 They have eyes, but they cannot see:
 (verse 7 continues to describe man's gods)

Those who make them will come like them, everyone who trusts in them.

Not only is the violent social order of concern as regards hope, but also the spiritual maturity of believers. Many have come to Christ as a result of revivals in the past two decades along with a great lay movement, as God's spirit moved, many Christian became bold in their witness, and the gospel was taken to the poor. Yet there is an urgent need to address the theology of the revivalist movement. This seems to be a combination of Western Pietist, holiness, and Pentecostal tradition, being fed by allegiance to religious authorities rather than God, and an interpretation of the end times which says, there is no hope for humanity except in Christ's second return. Theological error has been part of the inadequate view of sin, and leadership lifestyle.

So often poor theology is played out in forms of worship and particularly in the worship service. Early in the 1990's some of these theological needs were being addressed. One of the ways was the establishment of the Colombo Theological Seminary already the largest Protestant seminary established in May, 1994. There is good systematic theology being taught. I would ask if there is a need to look at worship, that of singing, praising, speaking out the truths of who our God is in both private and corporate worship? "Worship is shaped by what we really believe. Worship is the ritual re-enactment of our theology. If in our worship people are not confront with God's judgment and grace, seeming success in evangelism is actually failure, and we have only made genuine evangelism more difficult."⁴

I have found that a believer can have a good theology but still never learn to worship God or know how to encourage and lead others in worship. That outward expression will be the result of his heart belief. Also, if forms of corporate worship are I error to God's Word, in turn it will become the belief of the believer. As Bach said, "As a man worships, so he will believe."

David Hall, with Frontiers Mission and now doing missionary work in Europe has come up with a definition of worship. "Worship is both an event and a lifestyle in which believer center their mind's attention and their heart's affection on the Lord, humbly glorifying God in response to his greatness, his might acts, and his Word." True worship generates hope and joy not free from suffering but to go through the suffering. In Dave Hall's article

⁴ Michael Horton, "Beyond Style Wars: Recovering the Substance of Worship" in *The Herald* (April-June, 1999), 16-19

entitled “10 Reasons Why every Church-planting Team Needs a Worship Leader,” he makes very clear we are first worshippers then missionaries, evangelists, witnesses. One of his stated reason for needing a worship leader is that the enemy hates our worship of God. When Satan tempted Christ it was all about trying to get him to worship the evil one. We often as believers, underestimate the victory and strength we have in Christ in the battle as we sing and speak out praises to our God.

Warren Wiersbe in his book, *Real Worship*, says true worship is warfare. He relates how Israel was a worshipping army. When they were right with God, there was victory in the battles they fought. Success in the battle depended on their worship of God. He goes on to say “our spiritual worship of God hinders Satan’s work, defeats his plans, robs him of territory, and increases his hatred of God and God’s people.”⁵

I recall when my oldest daughter was finishing high school at the international school in Sri Lanka, she had the opportunity to sing in a school assembly along with a Korean friend. They sang a worship song, very descriptive of God’s power, glory and His relationship with the believer. The response from her classmates from various religious backgrounds was overwhelming. It was obvious their hearts were touched as they heard of our great God. As she worshipped from her heart, it has an impact on those listening.

What has to be considered in worshipping cross culturally

The above example of my daughter’s worship song being sung in a cross cultural situation, gives much to ponder. Both Hindu and Muslim friends responded to the song sung. Was it the truth about God that touched their heart or that it was sung from my daughter’s heart of belief in the greatness of her God? Was the music style part of the powerful impact upon the listener? Most likely the truths of God and the music style were new to the listener.

The words “aesthetics” and “contextualization” seem to be in opposition to each other, and yet I’m not convinced they are. R.C. Sproul says “Part of the persuasive relativism of our age is growing trend toward reducing aesthetics to pure subjectivism.” This statement is especially true of our Western mindset where everything done and enjoyed is very “I” centered.

Having taught piano for many years in a cross-cultural context, I noted some interesting differences in how culture affected my students’ music appreciation. When you have students for many years, you are gradually developing in them an appreciation for musical periods. Students gradually develop a love for the classics, twentieth century music, jazz and rag through years of exposure. I noted in Sri Lanka that it was almost impossible for Sri Lankans to learn to enjoy twentieth century music of composers such as Bartok and Stravinsky. The missionary children who were Americans, some having been born in the United States, and my own children born and raised in Sri Lanka, easily developed a love for that period of music. It seemed there was a certain beauty they could enjoy that a Sri Lankan could not. Could it be that other exposures to art and music within our homes provided the openness to the twentieth century music?

Some of the greatest minds in the history of western civilization have attempted to find objective standards for true beauty. “For Thomas Aquinas and Jonathan Edwards, the quest was driven in part by the conviction that the character of God is the fount of all beauty, just as He is the source and foundation of all truth and goodness. The train of virtues – the good, the true, and the beautiful – all find their root and norm in God himself.”⁶

Sproul makes another observation that the first people recorded in Scriptures filled with the Holy Spirit were the artisans and craftsmen ordained by God to fashion the furniture for the tabernacle. Scriptures tells us we are to worship God “in the beauty of holiness.” This has very little to do with our feelings and everything to do with God. Our focus definitely needs to be on what God is like in expressions of music and art as unto Him. One thing for sure is that God is not the author of confusion, and music forms and other art forms should not in any way

⁵ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Real Worship*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 148

⁶ R.C. Sproul, “The truth of Beauty” in *Tabletalk* (October 1998), 4-7.

lead to confusion. On the other hand, His Word also portrays Him as a God of diversity. Often in Scriptures His ways seem very unpredictable to the human mind.

An integral aspect of beauty is the “soul” or “heart” that is expressed in art. A soulless performance is not demonstration of beauty and does not carry excellence. I believe those who have a personal relationship with the Creator have a greater capacity of “heart” expression exalting the Creator rather than the created being. How often at the time of performance I have been humble by the sounds of my fingers have produced not because of what I have done but because of the Creator’s beauty expressed through music.

As in the situation with my piano students, there will be some that can develop a heart for certain styles of music, and yet at the same time because of their cultural background, they will never be able to develop a real heart love for certain styles of music.

I was one of four adjudicators who spent all day at a Buddhist girl’s school. Two of the adjudicators were Sri Lankan musicians, and two of us were Americans. The two Sri Lankans and I were pianists, while the other American a trombonist. Each girl student played three pieces of music, two of which were set tunes by Beethoven and Chopin. One selection was the choice of the student. One student played well her two set tunes, and then proceeded to play one of her own compositions. Both Sri Lankan adjudicators were adamant this student should be disqualified even though the guidelines in no way indicated a student’s own composition could not be played. The other American adjudicator and I were captivated by this girl’s pianistic abilities and creativity. We had sine vey great concern over the Sri Lankan adjudicators’ response. It took a firm stand on my part and the other American to keep this student in the competition, let alone be one of three winners. Obviously what was beauty to the Americans was not beauty to the Sri Lankans. Or was beauty the issue? My Sri Lankan piano students, unable to appreciate twentieth century music, and this student playing her own composition with twentieth century components, seemed like a contradiction. I am more incline to think it had everything to do with history and the lack of opportunity to express one’s heart through music and art, a result of foreign control for hundreds of years previously.

This brings me to the word “contextualization.” “A problem for the Christian movement is its close link to western civilization. In many of the third world countries “Christian” equals “Western.” There is no particular Christian culture.”⁷ Sri Lanka was ruled from the beginning of the sixteenth century to 1948 by European colonial powers. Christianity in a cultural sense was known as western. This foreign rule had both positive and negative effects. As far as forms of worship, most were from the west. There was not any local expression. Not only was this true of Christianity but in other aspects of culture. I wonder how much of this mindset was affecting the student’s opportunity to be a part of the music contest in the Buddhist school.

Contextualized worship in Sri Lanka looks far different than contextualized worship in a tribe in Papua New Guinea where the scriptures are just being put into a local language. Contextualized worship in Sri Lanka has everything to do with past history and the lack of opportunity to worship in one’s heart language. One cannot being to seriously contextualize forms of corporate worship without first understanding the worldview of the Sri Lankan. Our worldview is the sum of one’s beliefs about the most significant issues of life. We all have a collective and individual set of assumptions that we cannot readily articulate but which make up our belief system.

Contextualization has everything to do with the music of the heart. What is heart music, and why use it? It is music which a group of people have heard and participated in as children and young people Tom Avery, the International Ethnomusicology Coordinator for the Summer Institute of Linguistics, expresses that even though a hymn, Gospel song, or praise song means something to him, it will not mean the same thing to a person raised in another musical culture. “Even if it is pleasing to their ears, it remains foreign. We do not want to transmit the universal message of God’s offer of salvation in a way that makes it sound alien. It is for this reason that we discourage hymn translation in which foreign music is used to accompany words that are translated into the local

⁷ IBRA Radio, “Church Planting Via Radio” September, 2000

language. Instead we encourage that development of an indigenous hymnody in which the local people themselves produce Christian songs in the local language and music system.”⁸

Some of Dave Hall’s thinking about contextualization began as he led worship for missionaries in Europe. Worshipping through psalms, hymns and spiritual songs that they grew up with carried such meaning in worship. They admitted they could not meaningfully participate in corporate worship in the churches where they ministered even after years of using a foreign language.

Contextualizing has everything to do with learning to think differently. Natun Bahattacharya, now with Mission Training International says, “The logical, analytical, linear, and extremely systematic way of perceiving the world and doing theology do not necessarily match the biblical way of viewing the world. This tendency toward analysis and linear thinking is best reflected in the way systematic theology is taught, in contrast to the relatively ‘disorganized’ way various issues are presented in the Bible.”⁹ Without the practical application of theology to life, it becomes head knowledge. That is where an understanding of worship is so important for true worship comes from the heart. Bahattacharya goes on to say that, “We must continually examine our world view in light of scripture and consciously work to change its understanding of reality.”¹⁰

Paul Needly, an ethnomusicologist with Wycliffe Bible translators, expresses the incredible experience seeing people set free to worship God. Using the language and music from their hearts with their unique cultural resources, there is full understanding of what they are saying. In Sri Lanka there is real value in worshipping in a way as much as possible free of the “static” of foreignness.

Contextualization must fit within biblical guidelines. 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 is usually one of the biblical passages used in defense of contextualization. The verse in the flowing chapter is of great importance in contextualization. “Everything is permissible- but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible- but not everything is constructive.” (1 Cor. 10:23) The Christian musician’s attitude, including his close walk with his Lord is of utmost importance. Frank Fortunato, International Music and Art Director for Operation Mobilization, says that it takes careful discernment in order to contextualize worship music.

While crossing the line of contextualization to compromise, and syncretism, if of concern, another biblical consideration is maintaining unity within the body of Christ. For several years, I have received Global Worship Report found on the AD 2000 web site. In June 2000, in the midst of many thrilling accounts of positive expressions of worship, was an article indicating that Native American Christian leaders were divided over the use of cultural symbols used in worship. Former missionaries had often told people that they must reject their music, language, and tribal customs in order to serve God. People were afraid that if a native drum was beat in a service an evil spirit would come forth.

The above description looks like a music issue, but is it? In Duane Elmer’s book, *Cross-Cultural Conflict*, he reflects on God’s creation being created very good. He believes that in the immense creation of God, full of variety, we begin to capture the character, grace and glory of God. He goes on though to say that the very differences pronounced good by God are the greatest threat to Christian unity. Both cultural diversity and unity among the brethren are part of God’s glory. The unity of the body of believers demonstrating love to each other is a reflection to the unbeliever that we belong to God’s Kingdom. Only through unity do we bring glory to Him. He uses the church at Corinth as an example of the importance of unity. There were so many issues in the church to be addressed. But in 1 Corinthians 1:10 Paul begins with his goal: “I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no division among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.”

⁸ Tom Avery, “Music of the Heart: The Power of Indigenous Worship in Reaching Unreached Peoples with the Gospel,” in *Mission Frontiers* (May-August, 1996)

⁹ Natun Bhattacharya, “Think Differently” in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* Vol. 34 No.4 (October 1998) 48-451

¹⁰ Ibid.

As I seek God's place of service, while considering the possibilities of working cross-culturally, it is important I think seriously of Duane Elmer's words: "It takes time, conversations, questions, listening and the whole range of learning skills to form accurate perceptions about people who are different from me. I must suspend judgment, maintain an open mind, and seek more information before drawing conclusions. Building the unity of the body of Christ is the most effective way of jealousy guarding the glory of God."¹¹

This does not mean unity at any cost to keep peace. The book of 1 John is all about the fellowship of believers and the test to being a Christologically base fellowship. One contrast in the book is apostates versus believers. There is warning about false prophets being deceived by evil spirits versus the Holy Spirit of God. The believer is told to test the spirits. Only those who truly believe that Jesus is the Christ are His children. The knowledge and understanding of such truth is utmost importance in Sri Lanka where some churches and leaders claiming to be "Christian" have no upheld the sufficiency of Christ only for salvation.

Dave Hall makes it very clear that a good theological basis and practical application of God's Word is essential for a cross-cultural ministry as a worship leader. A worship leader is responsible for nurturing disciples in the foundations of the faith, including a biblical theology and philosophy of worship. He says that the third principle is an outgrowth of the second. If people are not living out unity within the body of Christ as scriptures teaches, there will be conflict in discerning proper contextualization because of a lack of understanding the mind of Christ. In Sri Lanka where there has already been a theological deficiency, being trained in God's Word is essential in order to worship "in spirit and in truth."

Unfortunately in the past too often we have looked at the giftedness of the musicians and put him in place of worship leadership without a good theological basis, appreciation for the body of Christ, and a commitment to God for ministry involvement. Being equipped with all three for worship involvement, lends itself to careful consideration for both aesthetics and contextualization. Warren Wiersbe says, "If the church is to be true to its calling, it must teach each new generation not only the truth of the biblical tradition (2 Tim. 2:2), but also the truth of the worship tradition, theology expressed in 'psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.'"¹²

Scriptures indicates that in the Old Testament the musicians, those of the tribe of Levi, were skillful players of instrument and trained. They were people set apart for this special aspect of ministry (2 Chron 25:7,8, and 23:13). In order to teach and lead others in worship they had to prepare and learn themselves. How many schools and seminaries have given careful training to prepare those wanting to lead other in worship, and yet the nation of Israel seemed to consider this great importance.

Scriptures gives two pictures of what we can expect in the last days. "Nation shall rise against nation" which is what we are seeing in the world. Revelation 7:11 gives us a picture of worship in heaven. The worshippers of the Lamb of God are pictured being an "array from every nation, tribe and language." This give understanding to the psalmist who confidently proclaimed, "Let the nations praise you, O God!"

¹¹ Duane Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Conflict*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993) 16.

¹² Warren W. Wiersbe, *Real Worship*, (Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 2000) 192.

‘Hero of the Cross:’ The Mission of Colonel Arnolis Weerasooriya (1857-1888)

By G.P.V. Somaratna

In the recent past Sri Lankan Leaders have taken a special interest and made a conscious attempt to unearth national heroes of the historical past of the country to inspire the present generation and to enhance the national morale.¹ A good percentage of these heroes lived in the period of the struggle for national independence in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In this search for national heroes, the men and women who contributed to the national well being from the Christian point of view, have had very little and reluctant recognition. They are popular personalities among the secular and non-Christian people. This tendency has also kept Christians ignorant of their heritage. It is the intention of this article to show the contribution of one such a hero who deserves national respect.

If one considers hero as a “man admired for his achievements and noble qualities” and “one that show great courage” Arnolis Weerasooriya undoubtedly fall into the category of hero.² Arnolis has been one of the outstanding Christian leaders whose life has been inspiration to the Christian community in Sri Lanka for over a century. Although he had comparatively short span of life, Christians of the present day can find inspiration and courage from the story of this great personality.

Heritage

He was born at Dodanduwa in the southern province of Sri Lanka on September 20, 1857 and dies at Admadabas in Gujarat on May 18, 1888. He came from an outstanding Buddhist family in the Southern Province that took a leading role in the Buddhist revival of the nineteenth century. Dodanduwe Piyaratana Tissa Thero (1826-1907) whose activities led to the founding of Buddhist schools³ and the organization of low country Sinhalese Buddhist to face the challenge of the Christian mission, was his paternal uncle.⁴ Piyaratana Tissa organized a society called Lokarthasadhaka Samagama in order to set up schools and fund the agitation for Buddhist rights.⁵

At his birth, following the traditions of the family, Arnolis was dedicated to the Buddhist priesthood by Piyaratana Tissa, his uncle. It was the expectation of the family that Arnolis would one day head the temple, which his uncle had developed and brought to a prominent position in Buddhist Sri Lanka.

Arnolis’ sister Anagi wrote thus regarding her family: “My parents were devoted Buddhists. When my father, David Weerasooriya, was about 40 years old, the Christian missionaries in Ceylon and the Buddhist priests were having a religious controversy.”⁶ According to Arnolis, “My father’s mother was a chief devotee of the great temple of Sailabimbarama in the South of Ceylon. My mother was the chief devotee of the Ambalangoda temple. From my childhood I was set apart for priesthood. My uncle, the priest took me around the country when we went on festivals.⁷ The intention was to get me accustomed to the life of a Buddhist priest.”⁸

¹ A series of books have been published by the Educational Publications Department entitled *Pujita Jeevita*

² This definition is taken from *Webster’s New World Dictionary*, 1998.

³ {}, 120, Walpola Rahula, {}, Colombo: Lankaputra Press, 1948, p. 104.

⁴ Pollawatte Buddhaddatta, {}, Colombo: Gunasena, 1964, pp.112-112.

⁵ Kitsiri Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese society, 1750-1900*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976, p.234.

⁶ Full account is found in Evangeline Darling, *Story of a Christian Mission*, Dehiwala: Sri Devi, 1991, p.5-6.. For information about these debates see: R.F. Young and G.P.V. Somaratna, *Vain Debates*, Vienne: Di Nobili Press, 1996.

⁷ *Ibid*, p.7

⁸ Booth Tucker, *The Warriors’ Library: no. XIII, Colonel Weerasooriya*, London: Salvation Army Book Department, 1905.

When he was six years of age (1863), his father became a Christian, shattering the expectations of the family. It was conversion of conviction. He had nothing to gain from becoming a Christian. On the contrary, he was to lose much of his personal assets because of his Christian Leanings. His conversion was considered as a heavy blow to the devotees of the Sailabimbaramaya which spearheaded the Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka during this period.⁹ Arnolis' father David Weerasooriya being the younger brother of Piyaratana, the conversion became an embarrassment to the Buddhist prelate. In fact Arnolis, who was brought up in the traditional Buddhist custom vehemently opposed his father's conversion. By this time Arnolis was dedicated to become a samanera following the traditional practices of the day.¹⁰ The family continued their opposition to Christianity despite the conversion of David. David's mother persistently remained a strong opponent to the conversion of David despite the fact that his lifestyle became drastically changed for the better. A storm of anathema and persecution burst over David's conversion. David's devoted wife deserted him with her children as if a leper had come into occupation of her house. Every form of abuse was heaped upon David in his village of Dodanduwa, and even his life appeared to be in danger.¹¹ The most sophisticated exponents of Buddhism were brought to convince him out of the new religion. They were of no avail as David's conversion was caused by a personal. Though subjective, experience. Several years later when the opposition dies out his wife rejoined him. Arnolis was only a child of six when his father embrace Christianity; now he was twelve years old. When his father cut the spirit thread from Arnolis' hand he was so angry than he tore and trampled his father's Bible. With the conversion of the mother Arnolis also gradually abandoned his hostility to the Christian faith. He nevertheless remained a nominal Christian, despite his attendance at the services of the Holy Trinity Anglican Church at Dodanduwa.¹²

Schooling

Arnolis and his primary education at the Anglican bilingual school at Dodanduwa. He was not sent to the Anglo-vernacular Buddhist School set up by Piyaratan Tissa at Dodanduwa in 1869.¹³ In employed as the headmaster, a Sinhalese who had his education in a missionary school, who had now given up Christianity to become a Buddhist, in order to show the power of Buddhism.¹⁴ Later the father sent Arnolis to Trinity College, Kandy. He passed through the school with credit as a scholar, and then obtained a good position in the same institution as a teacher, receiving a good salary. His exemplary character won the confidence of the school management; therefore he was chosen to be president of the religious society of the College in 1882. It was then that Arnolis began to search for his personal salvation. To Arnolis' sense of failure to obey the rituals was added the feeling of hypocrisy, which drove him to the edge of what moral theologians described as "open blasphemy." He declared that he would even become a Muslim, a Hindu or anything to gain peace of heart, victory over sin, and a consciousness of salvation. A godly colleague counselled him that it was necessary to be right with God in order to find salvation. Nevertheless, it took a long and painful period to reach the point where he found the answer to his quest.

Search for Salvation

⁹ On a land donated by David Weerasooriya the Anglican Church was built in 1875 at a cost of Rs.2000 and was dedicated to the Holy Trinity. Messrs A.S. Amerasekara and G.B. Perera served as deacons from that time till 1882. *Centenary Volume*, p.121. see also, Colonel Victor Thomson, *Hero for the Cross*, London, 1912.

¹⁰ The tradition of the chief monk's sister's son becoming the successor of the temple was clearly seen in the history of the Dipaduttamaraya at Kotahena where Mohittiwatte Gunananda Thera (1823-1891) resided in the nineteenth century.

¹¹ This information is gleaned from the Anagi Weerasooriya's testimony recorded in her daughter's (Evangeline Darling's) book. op. cit. pp. 5-11. Anagi Paynter, nee Weerasooriya, was Anrolid's younger sister.

¹² David Weerasooriya delivered a speech at the opening of the Anglican church at Boossa on September 9, 1875. Others present at the meeting were Rev. E. George Goodnewardene and Rev. Solomon Peiris of the Wesleyan Methodists Churches at Galle and Ambalangoda. *Satyalankara* ({}). Wednesday 13th October 1875, p.457

¹³ *Buddhist*, June 1907

¹⁴ Malalgoda, op. cit. p.234

While he was serving on the teaching staff of Trinity College, he accidentally came across the book entitled 'From Death unto Life' by Haslam. College life brought totally dissatisfied with formal religion, so that he sought Christ in his own room. While reading this book he came to the realization that he was a sinful man who could not save himself by his own efforts. He also realized that he was never really converted even though he read the Bible, said prayers, and attended church. Horrified at this position he turned to those around him for spiritual advice. They could not help him, instead they tried to alley his alarm. It was then that he began to question whether some of his spiritual advisers themselves were converted in the spiritual sense. Therefore, day and night he cried out to God for salvation. It was in July 188 that he experienced a relief from his agony at a service at the College Chapel.

"One Sunday morning, in July 1882, he entered the Trinity College Chapel in Kandy, and knelt in prayer, declaring himself that he would not rise till Christ revealed Himself to him. The congregation rose to sing and knelt to pray; stood again to sing and sat to hear the lessons; rose again to sing and resumed their seats for the sermon' but he regardless of the many eyes turned on him, remained on his knees, pouring out his soul to God. Then Christ came to him, the gloom vanished, his sinse were forgiven, he was filled with power, and his heart was nigh to bursting with the joy and love God... Suddenly he seemed to hear a voice, saying, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee'." ¹⁵

"As soon as the service was over, he hastened to the vestry to tell the good news to the clergyman, who was a friend of his also confessed that he himself had not the same blessed assurance of salvation; and there and then the two knelt in prayer until the seeker found blessing. This thin an hour of his conversion Arnolis Weerasooriya won his first convert" ¹⁶

He expressed his joy in the letter he wrote to his father in the same week:-

"This first and the best news that I have to tell you is that I have found Jesus fully and truly. I cannot express how happy my mind is. It is great reality and a treasure, not to be given up for the world." ¹⁷

Dedication to Gospel

He became enthusiastic about sharing the joy of salvation with others. "Weerasooriya felt now that the call had come to him to separate himself for the work of preaching the Gospel. He therefore resigned his appointment and salary and began to work in the villages and around Kandy preaching to Buddhists and nominal Christians." His new zeal and earnestness annoyed some of his associates. A few called him mad, and Rev. Ireland Jones of the CMS, who is in charge of the Sinhala work at Kurunegala, wrote to his father telling jim that his son was suffering from "religious mania." ¹⁸ When he began proclaiming the Gospel among ardinary people in Kandy he was not an ordained minister or a man detached to a missionary organization. It was his zeal that made him embark in program of itinerant preaching. ¹⁹

Connections with the Salvation Army

¹⁵ Ibid, p11

¹⁶ Ibid, p11

¹⁷ Ibid, p11

¹⁸ Rev John Ireland Jones arrived in Sri Lanka in 1857 and died on November 13, 1903. J.W. Balding, *The Century Volume of the Church Missionary Society*, Madras: The Diocesan Press, 1922, p.213; F.Lorenz Beven, *History of the Diocese of Colomo*, Colombo, 1946, p.276.

¹⁹ F.A. Mackenzie, *Booth Tucker" Sadhu and Saint*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930, P.101

Captain William Gladwin²⁰ of the Salvation Army, who had already begun work in India, arrived in Sri Lanka in January 1883. During this tour he held a meeting at the Wesleyan Church at Brownrigg Street in Kandy. Arnolis who attended this meeting was attracted to the preaching on the Holy Spirit. The Army's teaching regarding Holiness was a new Gospel to young Weerasooriya. In addition, he was fascinated by the simple Indian dress of a bare footed white man and the humility in the way he spoke to the people. It was during this week that Arnolis made a decision to join the Salvation Army.

He was a cadet at the Salvation Army Training Home in Madras Later in Bombay from November 1883 to March 1884. His personality impressed everyone. Colonel Booth Tucker saw him and perceived that here was an enigmatic personality. During a brief visit that he paid to Madras he stated "I realized that our newly arrived Cadet possessed remarkable natural gifts, as well as a special baptism of the Holy Ghost, which would make him extremely valuable to accept the Salvation of India. I felt that God had sent us the kind of man who would labour to unlock India's heart for the Saviour, whom he so passionately loved himself, a propeller of the faith and more than a prophet. I was not disappointed."²¹

On graduation he was made a major of the Salvation Army in South Asia. He joined Colonel Booth Tucker²² (1853-1929) in the ministry in Western and North India. Because of his enthusiasm and dedication he was raised to the position of Lieutenant, and later to Staff Captain and subsequently the Division Officer in Charge of the work in Sri Lanka.

Bramwell Boot, who succeeded to the position of his father William Booth (1829-1912) to head the Salvation Army in England met Arnolis in Madras in 1884 for the first time. Within a short period he was convince of the spirituality of Arnolis. In this connection Bramwell Booth (1856-1929) wrote in 1905 "Few men of my acquaintance have impressed me more with the greatness of simplicity than did Colonel Weerasooriya." In March 1884 Arnolis was appointed to the position of Colonel to oversee the work in South Asia. During the next eighteen months he joined the Salvationists in ministering to the people in Bombay, Pune, Calcutta and Madras.

Contextualization

It was the practice of the elite of this period to wear European dress. However, the Salvationists deviated from this habit and acquired the dress of the Indian people. Arnolis had been comfortable with European dress up to this time. However, he was convinced that if he were to reach the common man with the Gospel he had to be one of them. He found the European dress, which he was so far accustomed, to be stumbling block to communicate Christ to the man in the street. He stated:

"I was dressed like a native gentlemen; had hats and boot. But my heart went after the poor people in the streets. I felt a great gulf between myself and the people I loved. I soon found it out to be my dress, and high, respectable life. I knew I had to give up a great deal, and come down before I reached those whom I wanted."²³

Today we call this practice contextualization, incarnation ministry and so on. He preferred to travel in the third class compartments of the railways in order to meet the ordinary people and to share the Gospel with them.

Another area that received his attention was the language of communication. The hitherto accepted method of many missionaries was to preach to the common people through an interpreter. However, Arnolis realized the necessity to learn the local languages while he was working among the people of Gujarat. Therefore,

²⁰ Captain William J Gladwin was the Territorial Commander of the Salvation Army in Sri Lanka from 1883 to 1889. The Salvation Army was founded in 1865 in London by the English Methodist Minister William Booth.

²¹ Arch Wiggins, *The History of the Salvation Army*, New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1964. Vol. IV 1668-1904, p.11

²² He was a civil servant under the Indian Government before his conversation. Arnold Wright, *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon*, London: Lloyd's, 1907, p.280.

²³ Booth-Tucker, Op. Cit. p. 24

within a short time, he learnt Gujarati and translated the English documents of the Salvationists into that language. During this period he also acquired a working knowledge of Hindustani and Marathi which were related languages.

According to Booth-Tucker "...his beautiful life, devotion, and prayerfulness, his flashing eyes, commanding presence, and beaming countenance constituted a sermon which seemed to require no translation."²⁴

"People felt that God had raised up a prophet and a leader of their own. This was no foreign teacher. He was one of themselves, wearing and proud to wear the purely native consume, with the distinctive yellow robe which marked him as a religious leader."²⁵ The secret of success of the dress of the Salvationists of this period made some Indian Christian leaders acquire the saffron attire to present themselves as religious leaders familiar to the Indian mind. This dress was soon to become the costume of the Indian Christian *sadhus*.

The other area which received the attention of Arnolis in his ministry was caste. In order to prevent cast prejudices which affected their ministry in India, it is stated that, "we had resolved during this tour to sleep under the trees and spend most of our time in the open air, lest, in accepting the hospitality of any particular caste, whether high or low, we should cut ourselves off from the rest."²⁶ "The discomforts of an open-air existence, where our whole life and minutest actions were constantly subjected to public scrutiny, were abundantly compensated for by the glorious results God permitted us to witness."²⁷ While he was careful in dealing with the caste issue in India his sympathy towards all castes and classes reached its climax in Sri Lanka. His success among the so-called low caste people in the Rambukkana District is a testimony to his love for these downtrodden people. It was after his ministry among these people that the other missions such as the Church Missionary Society and later the Ceylon Pentecostal Mission embarked on an evangelical drive among the depressed castes which resulted in a 'people movement.'²⁸

Serene Joy

Salvation Army members preached on pavements and other outdoor areas, holding street meetings, or open air meetings. In September 1884 Arnolis arrived in Sri Lanka together with Colonel Gladwin. On this visit they held a series of meetings at Richmond Hill, Galle.²⁹ Booth-Tucker recalling this event recorded "Once when going to a meeting along with Rev.Gladwin³⁰ they were both attacked by a crowd of people who beat them severely. The missionary fainted, and Weerasooriya was kicked to the ground by a man whom he kept in mind. When he next met him, Weerasooriya took both his hands and kissed them. The Spirit of the Lord conquered; and the man converted."³¹ Arnolis was overjoyed when people of other religions came to Christ. Tucker records that on one occasion at a meeting in India "Weerasooriya was in his glory. He would fairly shout for joy, while the tears of gladness would stream down his face."³² The numerous conversions, some 400 recorded between 19 September 1886 and the beginning of 1887, which took place in Ceylon following the arrival of the forty officers brought from England by Commissioner Tucker and Weerasooriya after the first international Congress, gave rise to

²⁴ Op. Cit.p.32

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Op. Cit.p.33

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990. Pp. 140-141.

²⁹ *Ceylon Observer*, September 25, 1884.

³⁰ Colonel William J. Gladwin was the first Territorial Commander of Sri Lanka of the Salvation Army. He served in that capacity from 1883 to 1889.

³¹ *Church of Christ in Ceylon*, Vol.5, No. 7&8, July-Aug. 1917, p.59.

³² Booth-Tucker, op. cit., p.33. The devotion of the Weerasooriya family to Buddhism is seen from their contribution to various meritorious projects in this period. Weerasooriya Patabendige Don Dineris Silva and Don David Weerasooriya of Dodanduwa appear at the top of the list of names of those who contributed to the fund to set up Lankopakara Press in Galle 1861, *First Report of Lankopakara Printing Office*, 1865, p.17. Lankopakara Press was the first Buddhist printing press in Sri Lanka Dineris Weerasooriya was the father of David Weerasooriya, Polwatte, op. cit, p.112.

considerable opposition from the Buddhist community, and in some places a Buddhist “salvation Army” was formed.³³ This innovation attracted large congregations to its gatherings, the doctrine of Buddhism, however, did not lend themselves to its success and the imitation army found it difficult to maintain interest and soon faded out.³⁴ It is recorded that the Salvation Army was pelted with stones at Galle on the street rounds prior to these meetings.³⁵ It is reported that some of the opposing parties were led by the people of Dodanduwa where anti-Christian propaganda was very powerful during this period.³⁶

Promotions

Arnolis as a leader of the Salvation Army in South Asia traveled to Europe, America, and South Africa. In 1886 at a meeting of the Salvationist held in London, Arnolis was selected as the leader of the converts from Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim religions. On April 1, 1887 Arnolis was promoted to the position of Colonel by Commissioner William Booth. He was also assigned the position of chief secretary of Commissioner Booth and the second in command of the Salvation Army in South Asia, a remarkable achievement for a native of the heyday of colonialism and white supremacy.

He, as a chief in Salvationist activities in South Asia, began a tour of the mission stations in the summer of 1887. Having traveled in Sri Lanka and various parts of India he arrived in Bombay in April 1888. From Bombay he traveled in Gujarat and at Ahmadabad he caught an infection of cholera while ministering to the people there. He succumbed to this sickness and dies on May 18, 1888. He was thirty one years old and merely completed five years of service in the Salvation Army.³⁷

Work of the Salvation Army

The evangelistic work of the Salvation Army was from the beginning mixed with social work. Within a short time they started a prison-gate home for the regeneration of ex-criminal and a rescue home for elevating degraded women. They maintained a dairy farm in order to support that work. They also held meetings in the prisons every Sunday and the discharged prisoners were met at the prison gate. They also maintained a rescue home where needlework and lace making was taught. Three village banks were set up by 1888 in order to relieve the people from the debt burden in some areas. They also started mission schools following the tradition of the other Christian missions. As a result of this philanthropical and evangelistic work the Salvation Army claimed membership of about 1500 in Sri Lanka by the turn of the century.³⁸

An Evaluation

Arnolis was among those missionaries who realized that the Christian mission in South Asia was a spiritual battle. He was a man of prayer. He spent long hours in prayer and meditation. He never visited any place for preaching without preparing the ground in prayer. During his five years of service as a Salvationist he contributed to the founding of several significant and lasting Salvation Army stations in South Asia. In Sri Lanka the Salvation Army

³³ The Salvation Army's social services were offered without discrimination as the race or creed while the Buddhists tried to confine their work among the Sinhala Buddhists

³⁴ Arch Wiggins, *The History of the Salvation Army*, Thomas Nelson and Sons: New York, 1964. Vol. V 1668-1904, p. 12

³⁵ *Ceylon Observer*, July 17, 1883... The Salvation Army band had the habit of provoking the people of other religions by playing the big drums and singing while passing near the temples. A.C. Dep, *History of the Ceylon Police*, Vol. 1, Colombo: Ceylon Government Press, 1969, p.281.

³⁶ R.F. Young and G.P.V. Somaratna, *Vain Debates*, Vienne: De Nobili Press, 1996, pp. 203-5

³⁷ Arch Wiggins, op cit. p.81; *Life of Mrs. Booth*, Vol II, International Headquarters, nd. p.188, Weerasooriya dies of cholera caught while nursing a European officer

³⁸ Arnold Wright, *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon*, London:Lloyd's, 1907, p.280

outposts at Beligodapitiya, Hevadiwela, Rambukkana, Talampitiya, and Morotuwa and several others owe their origin to the labors of Arnolis. His unassuming, selfless service made it possible for the South Asians to accept the doctrines of the Salvation Army. As a result, within a short time the Salvation Army was able to reach a prominent position in the missionary activities in South Asia. Arnolis Weerasooriya was an example of incarnation presentation of the Christian Gospel to the South Asians in an age when missionaries tried to present the Gospel in a European garb.

Arnolis Weerasooriya's ministry coincided with the height of his uncle. Piyaratana Tissa's activities as a Buddhist leader. His home village was enthusiastic about their Buddhist heritage when Colonel Henry Olcott of the Theosophical Society kept a close association with the Buddhist leaders of Dodanduwa. While one branch of the Weerasooriya family was actively seeking to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ another branch of the same family was in the forefront of the Buddhist revival.³⁹ Therefore Arnolis was never a 'prophet honored in his home town.'

Arnolis utilized his connections with the fisher caste to mingle with the fishing community in the western littoral of Sri Lanka. Whenever he had an opportunity he mixed with them to introduce the value of Christian living. In order to indigenize Christian worship among the Sinhalese speaking people, he wrote several Sinhalese hymns for use in the Salvation Army. Arnolis realized the necessity to indigenize the Christian religion, if it were to be accepted by the people as the religion of their heart.

"He was able to achieve in five what a missionary would achieve in fifty years."⁴⁰ His contribution extended beyond the confines of the Salvation Army. His saffron dress was later acquired by two other Sri Lankan Christian leaders, Alwin de Alwis and Ram Paul at the initial stages of the Ceylon Pentecostal Mission. It is also believed that the idea of *Anagarika* (homeless) life which the famous Buddhist leader, Dharmapala, acquired during the 1890s owes its origin to the latter's reminiscence of Arnolis Weerasooriya's attire and life style.

Arnolis' life is also testimony to the honesty of the leaders of the headquarters of the Salvation Army.⁴¹ Even though this was the height of the age of imperialism they were not reluctant to place a black man in the position of leadership that was hitherto confined to the white Europeans. General Booth Tucker summoned Weerasooriya to London, promoted him to the rank of colonel and appointed him as second-in command in India to Commissioner Tucker. Thus upward of 100 European officers were subject to national control, a thing that had hitherto been unheard of in missionary annals.⁴² The first Indian Staff Council was held in Bombay during March 1885.⁴³ Now Ceylon and India were under the leadership of Commissioner Tucker and Colonel Weerasooriya.⁴⁴ Booth Tucker was criticized by many Christian leaders of other dominions for promoting a native to such a high position where the Englishmen held subordinate positions.⁴⁵

In addition to the gifts and talents that Arnolis possessed, the Salvation Army's idealist expectations in the initial years of its existence, helped him to rise to the high positions he held in the organization. The fact that he was in contact with the founding father of the organization was also helpful to him. The formalism and rigidity which is normal to a mature organization was absent at this stage in the Salvation Army. The promotion of Arnolis

³⁹ Polwatte Buddhadatta, {}, PP.112-115

⁴⁰ {}, P21.

⁴¹ "Arnolis Weerasooriya was a son of a heathen mother and a Christian father. His father had gone through all experiences of persecution when he became a Christian, wife and family forsaking him, and only being won back after considerable effort. Arnolis, a nominal Christian, was a student at Trinity College, Kandy, and after graduating became a teacher there, at college, he had remarkably vivid spiritual experiences, and developed into an active, devout Christian. One day he attended a Meeting of the Salvation Army at Kandy and listened to Captain Gladwin, dressed in native clothes, preaching Christ. He was sent to the cadets' training home newly setup in Madras. Arch Wiggins, op cit. p111

⁴² Arch Wiggins, op cit. p.111

⁴³ Ibid 118

⁴⁴ The fact that he was the nephew of a Buddhist high priest was often emphasized in the records of the Salvation Army.

⁴⁵ See Angi Payter's memoirs in Evangeline Darling, op. cit passim

helped the Salvationist to show that they really cared for the poor and needy. Booth Tucker said of him: "For five years he had fought by my side, and our love for one another was like that of David and Jonathan. In times of sorrow he was an unfailing and sympathetic comforter, in times of doubt and difficulty he was a sagacious and farsighted counsellor, seeming to foresee dangers with an instinctiveness which almost amounted to prophecy, in times of danger he was an intrepid, dauntless hero."⁴⁶

The story of Arnolis Weerasooriya would be comfort to those Sri Lankan historians who have blamed the protestant as well as Roman Catholics missions for not training the local leadership to take over the ministry in their native land.⁴⁷ These missions allowed indigenous leaders much later and rather reluctantly in many cases. The first Roman Catholic Bishop was Edmund Pieris appointed in 1939 in the newly created small Diocese of Chilaw. Similarly the first Anglican Bishop Lakdasa de Mel, who was given the new Diocese of Kurunegala, a small part of the former Diocese of Colombo, was appointed in 1945. Arnolis Weerasooriya's rise to a position second only to William Booth in India, in the latter part of nineteenth century shows the broad minded nature of the leadership of the Salvation Army in an age when South Asians were not allowed positions of this importance. Colonel Booth was aware of the fact that placing a native over a number of officers who were mainly Europeans, was thought at the time to be a very daring and even dangerous move. But one of the fundamental ideas of the Salvation Army in India has been that there should be no "colour bar merely because of colour."⁴⁸ This is a remarkable experiment in an era of white supremacy and imperialism. Where a man of Indian birth proved his capacity, he was given the same opportunity as an Englishman. Colonel Weerasooriya has shown such remarkable qualities as a spiritual leader, as an organizer and a man of God, that he seemed marked out for this place. The experiment splendidly justified itself. Weerasooriya proved himself a mighty second in command in the few years that remained before he died what was almost a martyr's death.

⁴⁶ Booth Tucker, *The Warriors' Library: no.XIII, Colonel Weerasooriya*, London: Salvation Army Book Department , 1905, Arch Wiggins, *The History of the Salvation Army*, p. 173.

⁴⁷ K.M. de Silva, 'Christian Missions in Sri Lanka and Their Response to Nationalism: 1910-1948' in Prematilleke (ed.) *Paranavitana Felicitation Volume*, pp.21-233.

⁴⁸ F.A. Mackenzie, *Booth Tucker: Sadhu and Saint*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930, pp.115-6.

The 'Colossian Heresy' Reconsidered

Ivor Poobalan

Introduction

It is a characteristic of the majority of Paul's letters that at some point he moves to engage with some form of opposition evident in the church that he seeks to address. Often the opposition might be personal-false teachers who wanted to subvert the apostle's role in the local congregation. However, more importantly, the opposition was doctrinally dangerous; threatening to undo the faith that had been entered into by the new converts.

In Romans, Galatians and Philippians the opposition was from 'Judaizers' who contended that a simple faith in Jesus Christ was wholly insufficient for salvation. What was needed, the asserted, was a renewed emphasis on the fundamentals of contemporary Judaism, such as Sabbaths, circumcision and the Law.

When we come to the letter to the Colossians we are on different terrain. For over one-hundred years the 'Colossian Philosophy' has fascinated and teased New Testament scholars. In addition the bewildering array of propositions regarding the nature of such a problem – from Hooker's implicit denial of conflict in Colossae¹, to hypotheses such as Gnostic Judaism², Pagan Mystery Initiation³, Jewish-Pagan Syncretism⁴, and Mystic-Judaism⁵ - only serve to confirm (in Dunn's terms) that, 'the Jury is still out in the question'⁶.

The near-unanimous agreement among scholars is that in Colossians the writer is responding (at least at points) to what he understands to be conflicts that this church in the Lycus valley faced. These issues were threatening to undermine the progress of an otherwise healthy community. It is also clear that the difficulty one encounters in attempting to reconstruct 'The Colossian Philosophy' arises both from our distance from the historical situation, as well as the limitation of possessing only one side of a dialogue, which in turn is based on a given set of presuppositions inaccessible to the interpreter⁷.

Background to the Letter and Methodology

A simple reading of the letter suggests that many, if not most of the believers in Colossae were *Gentiles* (1:1 and 2:13 establishes their pagan past) who had been converted under the ministry of Epaphras (1:7) who himself a *Gentile* (4:13-14). Paul the author that never met them personally, but had maintained his concern and prayer for them 'from the day [he] heard of [their] faith...' (cf. 1:9, 2:1, 5).

The letter was probably prompted by Epiphra's visit to Paul, through which the apostle learned not only about the progress of the believer, *but also about a danger that now posed a threat to their faith*. This latter fact

¹ M, 'Hooker, 'Were there false teachers in Colossae' in B.Lindars, S.Smalley (eds) Christ and Spirit in the New Testament, 315-331.

² See J.B.Lightfoot, 'The Colossian Controversy' in F.Francis, W.Meeks (eds) Conflict in Colossae, 13-59.

³ See M.Dibelius, 'The Isis Initiation in Apulleius and Related Initiation Rites' in Francis, Conflict, 61-1221.

⁴ See G.Bornkamm, 'The Heresy of Colossians' in Francis, Colossians, 123-145.

⁵ See J.d.g.Dunn, 'The Colossian Philosophy: A Confident Jewish Apologia', *Biblica* 76 (1995), 153-181.

⁶ Dunn, 'Philosophy', 154.

⁷ F.Francis, 'Humility and Angelic Worship in Colossians 2:18' in Francis (eds), Conflict, 165, '... difficulties result from summary historical allusions, a kind of shorthand between writer and readers'.

is most noticeable in 2:4; 2:8; 2:16-18; 2:20-23. At the outset it needs to be mentioned that although there is justification for the scholarly scrutiny of these texts for information about the 'error', to study them in isolation as the 'clearly polemical passages'⁸ is to risk disregarding the polemical thrust of the letter as a whole, especially through the characteristics that make it distinctive in the Pauline corpus.

How should we approach a subject that has developed into such a complex debate? Francis guides us to the point-of-entry:

'...the value of any approach to the text varies directly with its capacity to illuminate the concrete historical circumstance referred to in the text. This is to say that methodological adequacy requires both relative simplicity (that is accounting for the data with a minimum of presuppositions or extraneous additions) and relative comprehensiveness (that is accounting for all the data).'⁹

This is what we hope to do in our handling of the Colossian text. Consequently we will need to first engage in an exegesis of the most disputed texts (2:8, 16-18, 0—23) to identify some implications on the nature of the erroneous philosophy and thereby construct a working hypothesis. Thereafter we must ask if such a hypothesis coheres with the outstanding themes and overall thrust of the letter before we can reach a definitive conclusion.

Exegesis of Colossians 2:8, 16-18 & 20-23

Colossians 2:8

('Watch out to ensure that none of you are taken captive through an empty and deceptive philosophy, according to the traditions of men, according to the elemental powers of the universe, and not according to Christ')

{ } (watch out, beware) is usually followed by { } + aorist subjunctive (eg. Mt 24:4). This is the only instance in the NT where { } is followed by a future indicative; { }¹⁰. Murray Harris suggests that this construction 'tends to make the danger more imminent, and the warning more urgent'¹¹

Paul's use of { } constitutes a NT hapax which may be translated, 'carry off as booty' or 'kidnap'. The warning is graphic: the 'philosophy' which the believers may presume to be harmless is poised to render them powerless; that which appears to winsome will violently rob them of their glorious status in Christ¹².

The first hint of the nature of the controversy is found in the phrase, { } ('through an empty and deceptive philosophy'). Again { } is a NT hapax. Nevertheless the term had very distinct and dignifies connotations within both Hellenism and Judaism. As for the former, in Paul's day, groups such as the Stoics and Epicureans propagated their beliefs as a 'Philosophy'. But, with Philo we see the tendency to use the term { } almost as a *synonym for the Jewish religion*. In fact he chooses to describe Torah as { }, 'the ancestral philosophy'¹³. How then is Paul using the term?

⁸ R.DeMaris, *The Colossian Controversy*, 41-45. He concludes, for example, that 2:9-15 has 'minimal value in reconstructing the Philosophy'. See also C.Evans, 'The Colossian Mystics' *Biblica* 63 (1982), 189.

⁹ Francis, 'Humility', 166.

¹⁰ A.T.Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 995.

¹¹ M.Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 91.

¹² E.Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 94, '... [{}] indicates seduction but also points to the evil intent of those who are trying to gain influence over the community'.

¹³ See H.Weigelt, 'Wisdom' in C.Brown (ed), *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. (Vo.3), 1034-5

We first note that the two nouns in the genitive ({} and {}) are qualified by one preposition and definite article ({}). This indicates ‘that one conceptual entity, not two, is being named’¹⁴. Thus, by the apposition of {} (empty deceit) Paul shows that he is not really describing the ‘opposition’ as a philosophy, but rather denigrating as a vacuous¹⁵.

Further clues regarding this ‘so-called philosophy’ are forthcoming in the three clauses that follow: {}. Notice that staccato effect by which attention is drawn to each phrase: {}...{}...{}. Commentators agree that in the first two {} clauses we may detect the first specific reference to the content of the philosophy, although the inferences vary¹⁶. How then are we to understand these three clauses?

If we first consider {}, the third clause, Paul’s emphatic assertion is that whatever the nature and content of this so-called philosophy, it is ‘not according to Christ’. For the apostle, Jesus Christ is the acid test of faith and practice. Whatever does not centre on him can be nothing more than hollow, deceitful and dangerous.

As for the first clause, ‘according to the traditions of men’ ({}), it is of great significance that this same phrase appears in Mark 7:8 in a context where Jesus condemns the Jewish religious leaders for forsaking the commands of God while pursuing the ‘traditions of men’. The suggestion of a Jewish provenance for the phrase becomes more appealing when we note that a further descriptions of the ‘philosophy’ found in Colossians 2:22, ({}), ‘according to the commandments and teachings of men’) coincides with the gist of Isaiah 29:13 (LXX) quoted in Mark 7:6-7; {}, ‘teaching as teachings the commandments of men’. What tentative conclusions could we draw? Just that the correspondence between the phraseology in the teachings of both Paul and Jesus may provide evidence that the apostle is simply alluding to the familiar Christian apologetic against Judaism’s claim to sufficiency.

What then are we to make of the second clause, {}, ‘according to the elemental powers of the universe’? Surely this is a clear indication of at least Jewish-pagan syncretism, since Jewish religion never endorsed belief in ‘elemental powers’. Once again we need to exercise patience and consider the semantic, grammatical and historical evidence before arriving at a conclusion.

Firstly a {} is ‘a constitute element of a series’ such as a character in the alphabet. Harris identifies four principal meanings that have been advanced for the phrase, {}:

1. The elements of which the universe is composed.
2. The elemental forces operating in the world.
3. The elementary teachings of the world.
4. The elemental spirits of the world.¹⁷

Although the semantic background to the phrase may be helpful¹⁸, one has to equally consider how Paul chooses to use it. The exact phrase occurs thrice in Paul (2:8, 20; and Galatians 4:3) with the related phrase {}, ‘the weak and beggarly elemental spirits’ (NRSV) appearing in Gal. 4:9. We must make note of the fact that both in Galatians and Colossians Paul is dealing with polemic; he is not setting out to deliver an academic exposition of a philosophy! This implied objective controls Paul’s turn of phrase. To Gentile converts who once worshipped the ‘elemental

¹⁴ Harris, Colossians, 92.

¹⁵ Harris, ‘... Paul means neither philosophy in general nor classical Gk. Philosophy specifically but so-called philosophy... that has the mere “appearance of wisdom” (cf. 2:23)’, 92.

¹⁶ E.g. NIV understands a {} between {} (1) and {} (2); Harris, Colossians, 93-94 takes {} (1) as indicating origin or source of the ‘philosophy’, and {} (2) as indicating content of the ‘philosophy’, with the third {} clause engaging the first two. His resulting translation reads, ‘derived from human tradition and centred on the elemental spirits of the universe, but not based on Christ’.

¹⁷ Harris, Colossians, 93.

¹⁸ T. Sappington, Revelation and Redemption at Colossae, 164-7, outlines the three fundamental interpretations.

powers' and utterly rejected them at conversion, the thought of returning to such a lifestyle would be abhorrent, unthinkable. That however would not be their attitude towards the torah. Had not Christianity emerged out of the Jewish faith? Was the Gospel not the culmination of Jewish revelation? If so could it be possible that although they had been privileged to know Jesus Christ, being Gentile converts, they had missed the 'fullness' necessary for sure salvation? It is not hard then to understand why both in Galatia and Colossae these believers were powerfully attracted to what Philo had called {}. How was Paul to show them the depth of their misunderstanding? How can he warn them of the dangers?

He considers using word-picture they could feel. In Galatians 4 he describes his own pre-conversion condition. In 4:3 he says, "So with us... we were enslaved to the elemental spirits of the world" (NRSV). In reality Paul never in his life worshipped the elemental spirits. Rather, he (being a Jew) was enslaved 'under the law', ({}). But, he says, in effect it is no different to being enslaved to the 'beggarly elements'. So for Paul it appears that {} functions like a stock phrase for 'paganism'¹⁹ just like 'the law' or 'Moses' may function as a stock phrase for Judaism. The point being made is that the latter is as powerless to save as the former.

Furthermore, in its context in Colossians 2:8, 'the elemental powers of the universe' occurs in a clause that is grammatically parallel to 'according to the traditions of men' [{} + def.art.(accus.) + noun (accus.) + def,art, (gen.) + noun (gen.)]²⁰. This suggests that the second clause is only restating the first.

Thus to former pagans now attracted to Judaism, Paul says in effect, 'Thus so-called philosophy is just a set of human traditions, no different to paganism in its value, having absolutely nothing to do with Christ'²¹.

Colossians: 16-18, (16) {}.

'Therefore let no one condemn you regarding food or drink, or with regard to a festival, or a new moon, or sabbaths' (17) {}. 'These are a shadow of what is to come, the reality is of Christ'(18) {} 'let no one disqualify you delighting in humility and worship of the angels, dwelling on visions, being vainly puffed up by his fleshy-mind'

V.16 'Therefore' ({} within the context refers us back to vv. 9-10. There Paul had carefully explained that the believer were already complete ({} by virtue of the fullness inherent in Christ. How is this 'completeness' described? To a predominantly Gentile audience Paul says, 'you were circumcised' (v.11) albeit spiritually. The most cogent explanation for this progression of thought is the possibility that in Colossae the believers were having to deal with an effective Jewish polemic that took pride in the physical evidence (circumcision) of their status with God²², and argued that the Gentile Christians, lacking this, were somehow incomplete.

Although dietary restrictions ('food and drink') weren't exclusive to Judaism, it was one distinctive feature of the religion²³. In any case the matter is put beyond dispute both by the term 'sabbaths', and its occurrence in the 'stylized threefold formula' that follows: 'festival or new moon or sabbaths'. This was a regular Jewish way of speaking of the main festivals of Jewish religion (e.g. 1 Chron. 3:31; Neh, 10:33; Isaiah 1:13-14)²⁴

V.17 With this verse Paul's argument is sharper than ever. That which the opponents cherished and used in browbeating the Christians is really, says Paul, 'a shadow ({} of what was to come'. The writer to the Hebrews deal with much the same situation when he says, {} (Heb. 10:1), thereby identifying the 'shadow of the good things coming' to be none else that the Mosaic Law ({}). The articular participle {} is mentioned from the standpoint of

¹⁹ T. Sappington, Revelation, 169, argues that, 'it is a Pauline characterization of the error'.

²⁰ T. Sappington, Revelation, 169

²¹ N.T.Wright, Colossians and Philemon, 102 arrives at a similar conclusion.

²² So Dunn, Philosophy, 161, although he would go only so far as calling it an 'apologia'.

²³ Prohibitions on drink are uncommon in the OT being limited to the Nazarite laws. However certain strands of Judaism in Paul's day had developed extreme asceticism.

²⁴ Sappington, Revelation, 163.

the Old Covenant. The conclusion then in both Hebrew and Colossians 2:17 is that *Christ is the reality and fulfillment of which Judaism was but a pale reflection.*

V.18 This has been described as one of the most contested passages in the NT in which every term has been taken up for debate. Just as in v.16 Paul had urged that no one be allowed to condemn the believers, so he repeats, "let no one disqualify you". {} could be translated 'depriving one of a prize or reward'. How did the opposition 'deprive' the Christians of their reward? By 'delighting' or taking pride in certain super-spiritual experiences the believers could not identify with. What could these be?

{}, 'in humiliation and worship of the angels'. Now humility is a virtue highly recommended in the Scriptures and is Paul's nuance in 3:12 when he enjoins a life characterized by {}. Why does he speak negatively of humility in 2:18 and 23? This latter fact has often prompted translators to qualify it as 'false humility' (e.g. NIV) following Lohse's suggestion that it points to the 'eagerness and docility' in fulfilling cultic ordinances²⁵. Francis on the other hand argues that {} was a technical term of the opposition such as is found in Tertullian and Hermas where it denoted 'rigor of devotion' (including fasting and abstinence) whereby one qualified for greater spiritual experiences²⁶.

However the most radical and satisfying solution is the proposal made by Rowland that {} could explain both {} and {}. In other words, 'the references to the false teaching would not be fasting by human beings followed by devotion to exalted angelic beings, but entirely concerned with the angels in heaven'²⁷. It was Francis that first argued that 'of the angels' lend itself to being interpreted as a subjective rather than an objective genitive. This means that instead of assuming a scenario where humans worshipped angels, one could consider a situation where humans attempted to observe, and even participate in the worship that angels offered to God²⁸. Historical factors further resist an objective-genitive interpretation:

1. It was a key teaching within Judaism that angels were not to be worshipped.
2. There is absolutely no evidence within the period that angel-worship was practiced anywhere within Judaism.

Therefore to suppose such a possibility we would have to envisage a form of Jewish syncretism unlike anything known to date²⁹.

{}, 'dwelling on visions' (NRSV).

M. Dibelius' essay in 1917, 'The Isis Initiation in Apuleius and Related Initiation Rites' (which saw in {}, 'enter', the key to the Colossian problem) led the way in scholarship for nearly half a century. His thesis was based on the use of the term in a technical sense associated with {} (Initiation) in the Claros Inscriptions of the cult of Apollo. Discovering {} (mystery) to be quite prominent as well Dibelius was able to articulately explain the 'Philosophy' as a pagan mystery cult that practiced secret initiation ceremonies, and were worshippers of {}. They had not made any attempts to influence the Christian community, but some individual Christians had joined the cult without abandoning their faith, thus originating a syncretism where Christ was placed alongside the elemental spirits³⁰.

²⁵ Colossians, 118

²⁶ Francis, Humility, 167-171

²⁷ C. Rowland, 'Apocalyptic Visions and the Exaltation of Christ in the Letter to the Colossians', JSNT 19 (1983), 75

²⁸ An experience attested to by Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:1-4 and John in his Revelation. It was an already established notion within the Jewish practice of 'Mystical Ascent'.

²⁹ Dunn, 'Philosophy', 173

³⁰ Dibelius, 'Initiation', esp. 89-90

But it was a fact that he had chosen to ignore the characteristically Jewish elements of the teaching Paul was polemicizing against³¹. S. Lyonnet challenged the thesis, "... the text itself is scarcely certain, and it would be imprudent to erect a whole theory on a single term."³²

Colossians 2:0-23: (20) {}

'If you died with Christ from the elemental powers of the universe, why do you let yourself be dictated to³³ as if living in the world? (21) {}, 'Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not even touch!³⁴ (22) {}, 'these things are all destined to perish with use being the commandments and teachings of men' (23) {}, 'They lead – though having an appearance of wisdom with their would-be worship, humility and sever treatment of the body, without any value – to the gratification of the flesh'.

V.20 We noted in verse 8 that Paul equates living under the elemental powers of the universe to attempting to live under the demands of the Jewish law. He continues that same argument here with an added force from the clause, 'as of living in the world'. To let go of their trust in the absolute sufficiency of Christ and allow themselves to be dictated to those who only know the 'shadow' of God's full revelation was, in Paul's thinking, a return to worldliness. This is all the more ironic considering that the Colossian believers were by and large those who, because of Christ, had died to the elemental powers of the world.

V.21-22 Paul appears to pick up the injunctions of the opponents, 'Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not even touch!'. Chrysostom thought he was ridiculing them, "Mark how he makes sport of them, handle not, touch not, taste not, as though they were keeping themselves clear of some great matters"³⁵. In any case this brings out the ascetic nature of the 'philosophy'³⁶. Paul is drawing attention to the irony of a tradition that boasted of heavenly visions, and yet could not free itself with a preoccupation with sensual and temporal realities.

V.23 In B. Hollenbach's analysis of this verse he argues that {} stands alone as they predicate of the main clause, {}, 'They lead... to the gratification of the flesh'. The middle section beginning at {} constitutes a subordinate concessive clause³⁷. This analysis is followed in our translation. The idea is then continuous with our interpretation of vv.21-22. i.e. that legalistic religion, being devoid of Christ, may idealize the spiritual and denigrate the physical, and yet ironically is 'led' by this very same stance to an increasing appetite for the sensual. Our translation also explains the contrast that follows in 3:1, 'If therefore you were raised with Christ seek things that are above...'

Hypothesis

The nature of the 'philosophy' falls entirely within a Jewish provenance with evidence of a strong interest in Mystic Judaism. The conversation of their pagan neighbours to the teachings of a Palestine Rabbi, (to the extent of the utterly rejecting their life under the 'elemental powers of the universe'), had highly impressed certain

³¹ Recently E. Schweizer, adopts the same faulty methodology. See, 'Slaves of the Elements and Worshipers of Angels: Gal. 4:3, 9& Col. 2:8, 18, 20' JBL 107, (1988), 464f

³² 'Paul's Adversaries in Colossae' in Francis (eds), Conflict, 150.

³³ {} could with be a reflexive middle, 'why do you submit yourself' or a permissive use of the passive, 'why do you let yourself be dictated to'. This translation prefers the latter. See Harris, Colossians, 128.

³⁴ Although {} and {} (handle, touch) are virtually synonymous some scholars have suggested that the former may have a stronger connotation meaning to 'take hold' of something or 'possessing'. Our translation following P.O'Brien, Colossians, Philemon, (1982), 150, brings out sense that the prohibitions become increasingly pointed.

³⁵ Cited in O'Brien, Colossians, 149.

³⁶ Cf. 'severe treatment of the body' in v.23.

³⁷ 'Col.ii.23: Which Thing Lead to the Fulfilment if the Flesh' NTS 25(1978-79), 254-61

individuals within the Jewish community in Colossae³⁸. Consequently they viewed the young believers as potential proselytes who ought to be carefully introduced to Judaism.

The fact that Christianity adopted a Jewish worldview, paved the way for a Jewish polemic that offered 'fullness' through Judaism. Now Epaphras, being a Gentile, could not have refuted these 'persuasive arguments' with any credibility. As a result Paul, who had never met the believers in Colossae, gets involved to clarify the apostolic position on the matter. The fact that he was a Jew with no small reputation for his understanding of Judaism and the Law would have lent great weight to his reassurance that the believers were already raised with Christ, and lacking nothing in terms of their salvation. Consequently they did not need to be persuaded by this 'philosophy'. To do so would be as worldly as returning to paganism.

Coherence with other outstanding characteristics in the Letter to the Colossians

Our hypothesis must be supported by the overall thrust of the letter if it is to stand. We shall now relate it to four of the most outstanding features of the letter.

1. The Christ-Hymn (1:15-20)

Does this majestic piece of doxology – which Paul writes long before he even hints of a problem in Colossae – have a polemical purpose? First we note that in the hymn Christ is described using the clear Jewish idea of 'Wisdom'³⁹. Second the seven references to 'all' in the periscope underlines the supremacy of Christ in creation and redemption without exception. This is coupled with the remarkable idea that in him even the fullness of deity resides – an idea picked up again in 2:9-10, and applied in a transferred sense to believers.

2. Realized Eschatology (2:11-15; 3:1-4).

Although futuristic references are found in Colossians, commentators agree that here with regard to the characteristics Pauline already-not-yet tension, the accent falls on the former⁴⁰. Why is this so? One possibility is that Paul is dealing with the opponents arguments that, the Christians, by rejecting paganism and turning to a Jewish 'messiah' had only come 'nearer'. But, it would only be by full proselytism (marked by circumcision) that they could have 'a share in the inheritance of the saints in the light' (1:12). The credibility for these assertions – their 'wisdom' – lies in their experiences of heavenly visions through which is the disposition and worship of the angels has been revealed. Paul is saying, "You do not need mystical ascents when you have been raised up with Christ, and when in fact your very life is (already) bound securely in God"

3. Paul's Awesome Importance (1:24-2:5)

P. Pokorny sees this passage as demonstrating 'the dependence of the community addressed – and actually the whole church – on the apostle Paul'⁴¹. If we agree that his self-references were not simply an ego-trip on the part of Paul, we have to explain why he chooses to describe himself in such impressive terms to a community that he had not even met.

The reason lies in his pastoral instincts. Paul knows that Epaphras' position has been undermined by charismatic personalities from the Jewish community who were using 'persuasive arguments'. There was a crisis in terms of leadership. Paul, has to step in, but unfortunately the Colossians do not know him. Why should they

³⁸ The Jewish male population in the neighbouring district of Laodicea has been estimated at about eleven thousand. O'Brien, Colossians, xxvii.

³⁹ Wis. 7:26 describes 'Wisdom' as God's {}; Prov.8, Sir.24 & Wis. 7-9 portray 'Wisdom as God's helper in creation; Philo calls 'Wisdom' {}.

⁴⁰ O'Brien, Colossians, xlvi, '... there is an emphasis on realized eschatology in Colossians, called forth by the particular circumstances of the letter'.

⁴¹ P. Pokorny, Colossians: A Commentary, Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991.

take his counsel? Consequently Paul brings out all his credentials': he completes what is lacking in Christ's suffering; he is commissioned by God to proclaim the mystery of the ages; he has a Christ-like-function of presenting Christians perfect at the eschaton; and he exercises a Christ-like ability to be present in spirit in the Colossian church.

4. The Unexpected References to Circumcision (22:11-15, 3:11& 4:11)

Dunn sees 'the prominence given to the theme of circumcision in the letter' as evidence of the Jewish character of the philosophy⁴². We have already looked at 2:11-15, but two more references remain.

In 3:11 Paul employs a formulaic saying which he uses elsewhere (cf. 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:28) to emphasize the new-found unity and equality experienced in Christ. It is only in Colossians that he qualifies, 'no longer Greek or Jew' with the added clause, 'circumcised or uncircumcised'. Isn't Paul reaffirming the non-significance of circumcision in belonging to Christ?

Again in 4:11 he states, "These are the only ones of the circumcision among my co-workers..." Paul seems to use the term almost apologetically to show that he did not view uncircumcised Christians as in any way disadvantaged, even when it came to belonging to the apostolic party.

Conclusion

Our conclusion then is that the 'Colossian Heresy' was a form of Mystic Judaism which, although not hostile, was actively trying to proselytize the believers of Colossae⁴³. The opponents were using persuasive arguments based on appeals to visions of heaven, impressive asceticism and claims to re-enact on earth the very worship of heaven.

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⁴² 'Philosophy', 160.

⁴³ Contra Dunn, 'Philosophy', 179.

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