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### **Norsk Tidsskrift for Misjonsvitenskap**

er et vitenskapelig tidsskrift, som publiserer forskningsartikler innenfor det misjonologiske fagområdet. Tidsskriftet inneholder også mange bokanmeldelser. Da Egede Instituttet ble grunnlagt i 1946, var en av de første oppgavene for Instituttet å gi ut et norsk misjonsvitenskaplig tidsskrift. I 1947 kom det første nummeret av Norsk Tidsskrift for Misjon. Navnet ble senere endret til Norsk Tidsskrift for Misjonsvitenskap. Siden det første nummeret kom ut, har det kommet med fire numre hvert år. Opprinnelig ble tidsskriftet gitt ut av Egede Instituttet, siden av Universitetsforlaget og senere Tapir Akademisk Forlag. Nå er det MF vitenskapelig høyskole som står for produksjonen.

# NORSK TIDSSKRIFT FOR MISJONSVITENSKAP

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# Introduksjon

Jeppes Bach Nikolajsen  
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Dette nummer av Norsk Tidsskrift for Misjonsvitenskap inneholder fire forskningsartikler, en populærvitenskapelig artikkel og to bokanmeldelser.

Den første artikkelen er forfattet av professor Sverre Bøe og høgskolelektor Håkon Leite ved Fjellhaug Internasjonale Høgskole. Forfatterne drøfter om det gir mening å si at Gud respekterer avvisning innenfor et menneskes levetid. Den andre artikkelen er skrevet av professor Frederick Hale ved North-West University i Sør-Afrika, som i forbindelse med et forskningsopphold i Norge har forfattet en artikkel, som tematiserer forholdet mellom *The Norwegian Lutheran Mission and National Christian Council of China*. Professor Frederick Hale har skrevet også den tredje artikkelen. Bakgrunnen for denne artikkelen er etableringen av en rekke misjonsstasjoner, som senere – mellom 1769 og 1821 – ble til byer på den nordamerikanske vestkyst. Siden ble disse missionsaktiviteter utsatt for kritikk av en rekke historikere. I denne artikkelen behandler Hale *The Missionary Play of Santa Clara*, som ble utarbeidet med utgangspunkt i disse historikers kritikk av misjonsaktiviteten på den nordamerikanske vestkyst. Den fjerde artikkel er skrevet av førsteamanuensis Torstein Try ved Ansgar University College; artikkelen utforsker forskjellige syn på konvertering blant kristne og muslimske venner i Norge.

Dessuten inneholder denne utgivelse en artikkel av Matsuda Seiichi ved Inasakashita Church i Japan, og professor Knut Alfsvåg ved VID Specialized University, om bakgrunnen for opprettelsen av Norsk Misjons Selskap og opprinnelig også Frikirkens samarbeidskirke i Japan, Kinki Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Avslutningsvis inneholder dette nummer to anmeldelser av nyere missiologisk litteratur.

Riktig god lesning!

Jeppes Bach Nikolajsen  
Ansvarlig redaktør  
Professor, ph.d., cand.theol.



# Respekterer Gud å bli avvist?

## En bibelteologisk analyse

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Sammendrag på norsk: Artikkelen drøfter ulike sider ved hvordan Gud ifølge Det nye testamentet møter avvisning. En lang rekke bibeltekster handler om mennesker som sier nei til Gud eller mer direkte til Jesus. Påfallende mange av tekstene gir inntrykk av at Gud finner seg i å bli avvist, selv om han arbeider aktivt for omvendelse. Artikkelen spør derfor med terminologi fra Menneskerettighetene om det gir mening å si at Gud innenfor menneskets levetid «respekterer» avvisning. Vi tror ikke det kan bevares med et enkelt ja eller nei, men overveier en rekke aspekt ved spørsmålsstillingen.

Søkeord: Menneskerettigheter, gudsbilde, avvisning, respektere.

Sammendrag på engelsk: This article discusses various aspects of how God according to The new testament reacts when he is rejected. A number of biblical texts tell about individuals or groups of people who turn down God – or more directly Jesus. Several of these texts do indeed leave the reader with an impression of God accepting this kind of rejection, while at the same time he keeps working for their conversion. This article picks up terminology from The human rights and asks whether or not we may say that God “respects” being rejected by people during their lifetime. We do not think that the question may be answered by a simple “yes” and “no”, but we try to reflect upon several aspects of the question.

## Innledning

Hvordan responderer Gud på å bli avvist? Gir det mening å si at han «respekterer» et nei? Vi vil i denne artikkelen prøve ut et moderne begrep – delvis assosiert med Menneskerettighetene – på et bredt bibelmateriale i NT, og spørre om Gud «respekterer» å bli avvist.

Spørsmålet har aktualitet på en rekke områder, både ekklesiologisk, apologetisk, økumenisk, kirkepolitisk, sjelesørgerisk – men ikke minst misjonsteologisk. Det å prøve ut moderne terminologi på klassiske spørsmål hentet fra Bibelen og den kristne tro, kan i beste fall åpne for fruktbare perspektiver. Samtidig er risikoen stor for anakronismer og skinnenighet/-uenighet.

Spørsmålsstillingen om «Gud respekterer et nei» er uvanlig. Den vokste frem i bevisstheten hos den ene av oss artikkelforfatterne for flere år siden.<sup>1</sup> Professor i apologetikk Lars Dahle avviser at Gud på noen som helst måte skulle tvinge menneskene til å tro på Gud, for «han respekterer vår frihet til å velge».<sup>2</sup> Professor Dag Øistein Endsjø bruker et lignende uttrykk når han taler om «retten til å gå fortapt»,<sup>3</sup> slik at individer kan motstå press i etiske og religiøse spørsmål. Fra katolsk side hevdet pave Benedict XVI at Gud «alltid respekterer menneskers frihet og aldri tvinger noen inn i relasjon med seg selv», for kjærligheten «alltid respekterer frihet».<sup>4</sup> C.S. Lewis ordlegger seg på en lignende måte ved å si at det alt i alt finnes kun to slags mennesker: «de som sier til Gud: 'Skje din vilje', og de til hvem Gud til slutt sier: 'Skje din vilje'».<sup>5</sup> På ulike måter antyder Dahle, Endsjø, pave Benedict XVI og C.S. Lewis at Gud «respekterer» menneskets avvisning. Vi vil i denne artikkelen etterprøve om det er forenlig med NT. Metode og begrepsavklaringer

Denne artikkelen har dermed en bibelteologisk tilnærming til et systematisk-teologisk emne.<sup>6</sup> Som nevnt avgrenser vi oss til NT, men unntaksvis trekker vi frem GT-tekster

1 Peter Legarth brukte i 2001 uavhengig av oss en lignende terminologi, se «Alles frelse – drøm eller virkelighet?» *DBI-Posten* 29, nr. 7 (2001), 3.

2 Tore Hjalmar Sævik «Norges første professor i trosforsvar», i: Norges første professor i kristent trosforsvar (dagen.no), publisert 27.10.2023.

3 Dag Øistein Endsjø: *Religion og menneskerettigheter. Konflikt, balanse og idealer*. (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2022); se kapitteloverskrift s. 42.

4 I en tale i Castel Gandolfo 10.7.2011; God always respects our freedom, says Pope - VietCatholic News. <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/22921/god-always-respects-our-freedom-says-pope>. Vår oversettelse.

5 C.S. Lewis, *Den store skilsmissen, oversatt av Randi Brun Mannsåker*. (Oslo: Luther Forlag / Credo Forlag, 1980), 61.

6 Det finnes ingen enkel definisjon av «bibelteologi» som alle vil si seg enig i. Vi mener her en komparativ og sammenfattende eksegese av flere bibeltekster ut fra et begrep eller et saksområde, primært ut fra skriftgrupper, unntaksvis gjennom hele kanon. Bibelteologi stiller seg dermed et sted mellom eksegese og systematisk teologi. Tekstens tolknings- og virkehistorie utelates, mens fokus er på bibeltekstenes innbyrdes forhold, både i likheter og ulikheter.



der de er relevante, enten de uttrykker bakgrunn, kontinuitet, videreutvikling eller kontrast. Vi har valgt å strukturere analysen etter skriftgrupper i NT for å kunne ta høyde for mangfoldet av sjangere. Vi forholder oss til tekstene slik de står rent kanonisk, noe som innebærer at vi i liten grad tar stilling til spørsmål om for eksempel historisitet og forfatterskap. Av praktiske hensyn omtaler vi tekstenes forfattere med de forfatterne som står oppført i våre bibelutgaver – eksempelvis Matteusevangeliets forfatter som Matteus. Med «Gud» mener vi Gud slik han omtales i Bibelen, primært i vår drøfting NTs skrifter.

Ser man hvordan verbet «respektere» defineres i ordbøker, finner vi et visst spenn fra på den ene siden å ta noe til etterretning på en slik måte at en tar hensyn til det, og på den andre siden å vise en viss aktelse eller til og med ærbødighet for noe eller noen.<sup>7</sup> Graden av aktelse eller ærbødighet kan variere sterkt, for i et demokrati vil vi «respektere» andres rett til å ytre synspunkter vi kan være dypt uenige i, samtidig som vi har rett til å argumentere mot disse synspunktene, kanskje også med den hensikt å overbevise motparten. Da kommer vi nær opp mot innholdet av nærliggende begreper som «tolerere», «akseptere» eller «godta», men ordene har likevel viktige nyanser.<sup>8</sup>

Andre ganger kan «respektere» også inneholde en mer positiv holdning. Så verbet «respektere» kan brukes både om noe en bifaller og om noe en er uenig med, og verbet kan også brukes nøytralt uten noen direkte vurdering av saksinnholdet. Og uansett ligger det til grunn at den eller det som respekteres anses å ha en form for verdighet eller status til å ytre eller bestemme for seg selv. Verbet «respektere» brukes både om ytringer, holdninger, handlinger og valg en foretar, og det kan brukes mer relasjonelt om mennesker.

Anvendt på vårt saksområde betyr det at vi både kan drøfte om Gud «respekterer» mennesker som avviser ham, og om han «respekterer» ytringer, holdninger, handlinger og valg som dypest sett vokser frem på grunnlag av en avvisning av Gud. Det kan i så fall bety at Gud unnlater å tvinge gjennom sin vilje mot menneskers valg eller holdninger, og at han unnlater å straffe avvisning – eventuelt at han utsetter sin «dom». Spørsmålet vi skal drøfte i denne artikkelen er om det er dekning i bibelmaterialet for å hevde at Gud aksepterer å bli avvist uten å overkjøre avvisningen.

En grunnleggende forutsetning for hele vårt saksområde er hvordan Gud ifølge en lang rekke bibeltekster har gitt mennesket muligheten til å gjøre egne valg etter sin egen vilje, uten at vi dermed vil hevde en «fri vilje». Vi drøfter i denne artikkelen primært menneskers respons på Guds kall til omvendelse underveis i livet. Det er etter bibelsk tenkemåte et grunnleggende asymmetrisk forhold mellom Gud og mennesker, og det slår eksplisitt inn i møte med tekster om den siste dom. Vi kommer heller ikke

7 Se «Ordbøkene.no»: <https://ordbokene.no/bm,nn/search?q=respektere&scope=ei>, «Det Norske Akademis ordbok»: <https://naob.no/ordbok/respektere>, og «Store Norske Leksikon»: <https://snl.no/respektere>.

8 Viktige nyanser mellom «respektere» og «tolerere» drøftes på <https://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toleranse>.

til å drøfte menneskers avvisning av Guds kall til tjeneste eller særskilte oppdrag, det er primært kallet til frelse vi skal fokusere.

### «Respektere» i norske bibeloversettelser

Norske bibeloversettelser har tradisjonelt ikke brukt begrepet «respektere». NO78 og Bibel2011 bruker uttrykket «ha respekt for» i formaninger knyttet til overordnede i samfunn og arbeidsliv, samt i familielivet.<sup>9</sup> Aldri er verbet «respektere» brukt med Gud som subjekt. Engelsk bibelspråk har helt fra King James brukt uttrykket knyttet til at Gud ikke gjør forskjell på folk og i faste uttrykk som «med tanke på», men ikke i den mening vi drøfter om å respektere avvisning.

## Evangeliene

Hvorvidt Gud respekterer avvisning i de fire evangeliene, vil i stor grad dreie seg om hvorvidt Jesus respekterte å bli avvist. Ingen tekster i evangeliene kan sies å tale for at Jesus respekterte en avvisning i betydning å vise ærbødighet og aktelse for den. Derimot er det flere tekster som taler mot.

Blant de klareste eksemplene på dette finner vi i Matt 23 der Jesus polemiserer mot fariseerne og de skriftlærde. Gjennom Matteusevangeliet viser fariseerne motstand mot Jesus som kulminerer i en lang domstale av Jesus. I vid forstand må gjerningene til fariseerne, som Jesus kritiserer, anses som en avvisning av Gud. Selv om Jesu harde tale må leses i lys av datidens retorikk,<sup>10</sup> kommer en ikke bort fra at talen til dels kan oppfattes som lite respektfull. Jesus kaller motstanderne for «slanger», «ormeyngel», «blinde veiledere», «dårer» og «hyklere». Det at diskursen foregår i full offentlighet (Matt 23,1) legger ekstra tyngde i den skarpe kritikken. NT-forsker Richard Thomas France poengterer i tillegg at måten Jesu anklager er formulert på er spesielt til anstøt for de skriftlærde og fariseerne.<sup>11</sup> Med andre ord dreier det seg ikke om en generell kritikk som i dette tilfelle rammet fariseerne.

Likevel er ikke polemikk den mest frekvente responsen på avvisning i evangeliene. Langt oftere løfter Jesus fram dom over avvisning, noe som også kommer fram i Matt 23 i form av flere ve-rop. Om dommen i denne sammenheng er å forstå som noe relativt nært forestående (Jerusalems fall) eller noe mer futuristisk er det ulike oppfatninger om, men det berører i mindre grad vårt tema. Poenget er at dommen ikke inntraff umiddelbart, noe som svarer til det gjennomgående mønsteret i evangeliene. Dette viser at Gud for en tid i det minste tolererte eller bar over med en avvisning.

9 Bibelsitater i denne artikkelen hentes fra Bibelselskapets *Bibelen* 2011 om ikke annet oppgis.

10 Richard T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2011), 854 n. 5.

11 France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 867.

For vår undersøkelse er særlig noen utsagn om noen som *ikke* «ville» direkte relevant. Jesus ønsket å «samle» folket i Jerusalem «som en høne samler kyllingene under vingene sine», «men dere *ville* ikke» (Matt 23,37, gresk *thelo*; jfr. Luk 13,34). Lukas forteller at dette fikk Jesus til å gråte (Luk 19,41), noe som opplagt har vært oppsiktsvekkende – en voksen mann gråt offentlig! Teksten gir inntrykk av at Jesus «respekterte» dette valget i betydning å ta hensyn til det.

Tilsvarende «*ville* ikke» gjestene komme til kongesønnens bryllup, enda de var spesielt invitert (Matt 22,3). Hele lignelsen fokuserer direkte på gjestenes valg – til å komme til festen, eller til å avvise invitasjonen. At kongen tok hensyn til avvisningen, innebar ikke at de slapp unna sanksjoner (Matt 22,7). Kongen viste slik sett forakt for avvisningen ved å straffe, uten å overkjøre beslutningen.

Lignelsen om de to sønnene i Luk 15,11-32 forteller hvordan den gode faren sterkt ønsket fellesskap med begge sine sønner, men også at han like fullt «respekterte» både den yngste sønnens oppbrudd og den eldste sønnens boikott av festen – selv om han tok en ekstrarunde ut i mørket for å invitere ham inn. Men igjen blir det med en vennlig invitasjon, ikke noen ordre, en manipulerende plan eller truende sanksjoner. Og lignelsen har en åpen slutt, noe som sikkert er tilsiktet: Leseren skal selv stilles på valget om å delta eller ikke i den «festen» Gud inviterer til. Når sønnen kommer tilbake igjen, skjer dette nærmest på eget initiativ. Faren simpelthen «respekterte» sønnens avvisning og gledet seg over hans gjenkomst. Det sentrale i disse tekstene er at Gud ikke overkjørte menneskers beslutning om å avvise, men tok hensyn til deres valg og lot dem få det som de ville med de konsekvensene det innebar.

Når Jesus tar hensyn til en avvisning, finnes det eksempler på at han nærmest trekker seg passivt tilbake. Eksempelvis lot Jesus den rike unge mannen gå «bedrøvet» bort uten ytterligere «forhandlinger» – han «respekterte» mannens valg, enda det både sies at mannen ble «bedrøvet» og at Jesus «fikk ham kjær» (Mark 10,21-22). Dette er likevel ikke hovedtendensen i evangeliene. Avvisninger møtes oftere med advarsel om dom og i flere tilfeller et fortsatt kall til omvendelse.

Disse tekstene gjenspeiler mønsteret fra GTs profetskrifter der Gud møter avvisning med både sorg, advarsler og kall til omvendelse. Med andre ord gir han ikke simpelthen opp mennesker så fort han møter et «nei». Det er mot et slikt bakteppe at den japanske teologen Kazoh Kitamori (1916-98) utviklet sin teologi om «The Pain of God».<sup>12</sup> Den smerten Kitamori kjente på når de aller fleste japanere avviste det kristne budskapet, deles dypest sett av Gud selv når han avvises. Kitamori trekker i den sammenheng også inn tekster fra Det gamle testamentet, som der Gud sammenligner sin historie med Israel med en fars mislykkede barneoppdragelse, nesten som om han utleverer seg. Til tross for all farskjærlighet og omsorg, trekker barnet (=Israel) seg lenger bort. Dermed avslører Gud sin egen sorg og fortvilelse: «Hvordan kan jeg oppgi deg, Efraim, overgi deg, Israel? Hvordan kan jeg oppgi deg som Adma, gjøre med deg som med Sebojim?

12 Kazoh Kitamori, *Theology of the Pain of God* (Or: Wipf and Stock, 1965).

Hjertet vender seg i meg, all min medlidenhet våkner» (Hos 11,8). Guds kjærlighet til Israel bringer ham inn i et voldsomt dilemma, men å overkjøre eller manipulere «barnets» (=Israels) avvisning ser ikke ut til å være et aktuelt alternativ, slik det heller ikke var for Jesus som gråt over Jerusalem.

GT-forskeren Walter Brueggemann finner en «åpen», «dynamisk» og «flytende» «mutuality» i selve gudsbildet også i GT med en spenning mellom «maskuline» metaforer som «konge» og «dommer» og mer «feminine» metaforer som «hyrde» og «lege».<sup>13</sup> For Guds *pathos* og solidaritet med Israel står som motvekt («counterpoint») mot hans suverenitet. Slike «moderlige» trekk gjør at tekster som Hosea 11 kan tegne Gud som både «sårbar» og nærmest «svak».<sup>14</sup> Selv om det er en forskjell mellom Bruggemanns relasjonelle og følelsesmessige kategorier og vår mer juridiske bruk av «respektere», er det en viss likhet mellom tilnærmingene.

Tilsvarende har Jesu holdninger og utsagn i møte med avvisning slik sett en dobbelthet i seg – både av dom og av en sorg som gir «synderen» tid til ettertanke og omvendelse.

Da Peter grep til sverd for å forsvare Jesus i Getsemane, fikk han klar melding: «stikk sverdet i sliren!» (Joh 18,11), for “min kongsmakt er ikke av denne verden” (Joh 18,36). Et lignende poeng kommer frem i teksten der Jesus i særdeles klare ordelag avviste forslaget fra Jakob og Johannes om å be Gud «by ild fare ned fra himmelen og fortære» folket i en samaritansk landsby som avviste Jesus: “Dere vet ikke hva slags ånd dere er av. For Menneskesønnen er ikke kommet for å ødelegge menneskeliv, men for å frelse”, (Luk 9,54-55).

Her er det en viss endring fra grunntendensen i “den gamle pakt”/Det gamle testamentet, uten at vi skal forfølge det temaet her. I enkelte kretser lever det en gammeltestamentlig uttrykksmåte knyttet til evangeliseringskampanjer eller misjon om å «innta landet» eller byen. 5 Mos, Jos og Dom sier 20 ganger at Israel skulle «innta landet» eller erobre «det lovede land» fra kanaanerne, gjerne kalt «landnåmet». Det skjedde ofte – om ikke alltid – gjennom åpen krig, gjerne kalt «hellig krig» eller «Herrens kriger» (Joel 3,14; 4 Mos 21,14). Men NT bruker aldri noen slik uttrykksmåte om kristen misjon, og tankegangen rundt misjon i den nye pakt går i en helt annen retning. Det finner det derfor problematisk å videreføre en slik terminologi.

Selv om det finnes flere tekster som peker i retning av at Gud tar hensyn til en avvisning i evangeliene, finnes det også tekster og uttrykksmåter som kan peke i en annen retning og som i det minste nyanserer det som foreløpig er skissert. Tross noen eksempler på at mennesker oppsøkte Jesus på nærmest eget initiativ, ligger den sterke vektleggingen i evangeliene på Guds initiativ til omvendelsen. Det er *Gud* som kaller til omvendelse og etterfølgelse, ikke mennesker som melder seg frivillig. I flere tilfeller

13 Walter Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology: An Introduction*, The library of biblical theology (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 140 og 137.

14 Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 137–38.

omtales dette initiativet som en «hardhendt manøver» som kan framstå lite hensynsfull. Et klart eksempel finner vi i Joh 6,44 der det står at ingen kommer til Jesus uten at det er Gud som «drar» (på gresk *helkyo*) ham. Her ligger det knapt nok innenfor tekstens horisont å tale om «å respektere» et nei. Samtidig er det omdiskutert hvorvidt man kan stå imot at Faderen «drar». <sup>15</sup> På den ene siden inneholder Johannesevangeliet formuleringer med deterministiske trekk som Joh 6,44, men også tekster som oppfordrer til å ta en beslutning som om det hele hvilte på menneskets beslutning. <sup>16</sup> Disse kontrastene leder fort inn i dogmatiske distinksjoner om hvordan slike vers skal «løses», noe som ligger utenfor denne artikkelens hensikt å drøfte nærmere. <sup>17</sup> Men vi merker oss den tyske teologen Udo Schnelles observasjon: «For the Fourth Evangelist, neither faith nor unfaith is merely a matter of individual decision, for their “whence” lies outside the realm of human possibility.» <sup>18</sup> Dette fanger essensen i mange av de bildene som brukes om nettopp omvendelsen i NT. Flere av bildene og uttrykksmåtene for omvendelse gir lite om noe rom for menneskets evne eller «rett» til både omvendelse og avvisning, da det ligger utenfor mennesket selv. Lignelsen om sauene som ble funnet og sølvmynten – begge i Luk 15 – faller inn i dette mønsteret.

I lignelsen om den bortkomne sauene ligger vekten helt klart på gjeterens innsats. Om gjeteren måtte «fange» sauene eller om sauene mer eller mindre velvillig lot seg plassere på gjeterens skuldre (v.5), sier ikke teksten noe om. Det er likevel grunnleggende en viss vilje til stede i et dyr, og det er ikke umulig å se for seg en målbevisst og kanskje hardhendt inngripen fra gjeterens side som trosser sauens motstand. Også sølvmynten blir funnet og «omvendt» ene og alene som følge av enkens innsats. Det ligger i myntens vesen som en viljeløs og ikke-personlig gjenstand, at den verken kan avvise eller yte motstand, men kun forholde seg helt passivt. Da gir det lite mening å hevde at eieren – dypest sett Gud – «respekterte» eller viste «manglende respekt» for myntens «vilje». Til tross for noen nyanseforskjeller mellom disse lignelsene, har de begge det til felles at omvendelsen skildres med bilder som enten ikke gir rom for avvisning som med sølvmynten, eller der Gud sørger for omvendelse uavhengig av eventuell motstand mot omvendelseskallet, som med sauene. I begge tilfeller gir det lite mening å hevde at Gud «respekterer» i betydning å vise hensyn til en avvisning.

Samtidig står en slik diskusjon i fare for å lese mer ut av lignelsene enn det som er intendert. Lignelser løfter primært ett hovedpoeng og vi må derfor vokte oss for å presse frem poeng basert på enkelttrekk i fortellingene. NT-forsker Klyne R.

15 Edward W. Klink, *John*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2016), 335.

16 Udo Schnelle, *Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2009), 714–15.

17 Calvinismen opererer som kjent i denne sammenheng med begrepet «irresistible grace», «uimotståelig nåde».

18 Schnelle, *Theology of the New Testament*, 715.

Snodgrass poengterer at lignelsen om sauene forteller lite om omvendelsens vesen, men at vektleggingen ligger på Guds glede over omvendelse.<sup>19</sup> Dette gir også mening om man leser lignelsene om sauene, mynten og sønnene i Luk 15 sammen, noe som også var meningen. Spør man lignelsene om hvordan mennesker forholder seg til «omvendelse», vil lignelsene sprike i svarene de gir. Derimot er de samstemte i at de forteller om noe eller noen som er mistet og funnet som igjen resulterer i glede.

Å trekke entydige konklusjoner om omvendelsens vesen basert (bare) på lignelsene i Luk 15, blir dermed vanskelig. Også såmannslignelsen tar for seg noe viljeløst som fire slag jordsmonn (Matt 13,1-9 og 18-23). Jordsmonnet er på sett og vis overlatt til omstendighetene utenfor seg selv for om det bærer frukt eller ikke. Og likevel kan det retorisk sett anes en viss oppfordring fra Jesu side til å være «den gode jord», ikke minst fordi lignelsen avsluttes med en oppfordring: «Den som har ører, hør!» (Matt 13,9).

### *Andre observasjoner*

Vi møter også et sett med tekster som taler i retning av at Gud tilskynder og fremprovoserer en avvisning. Et eksempel på dette er Jesu forklaring på hvorfor han underviser i lignelser. Valget av lignelser som undervisningsmetode bunner ikke i en pedagogisk grunntanke om at bilder og fortellinger er lettere å forstå enn mer abstrakt undervisning. Tvert imot forklarer Jesus at han forteller i lignelser nettopp for å hindre mennesker i å se, høre, forstå og vende om (Matt 13,10-17).

Særlig i parallell-tekstene hos Markus og Lukas kommer intensjonen tydelig fram i form av en *hina*-konstruksjon (gresk *hina* = «for at») – for at de *ikke* skal se, høre, forstå og vende om (Mark 4,12 og Luk 8,10). «Forherdelsen» fremstår dermed som selve formålet med valget av lignelsessjangeren og ikke bare som en utilsiktet konsekvens av en ellers klar undervisning. Disse tekstene utfyller og utfordrer dermed det bildet som allerede er skissert. Hvordan er Guds aktive rolle i forherdelsen forenlig med bildet som tidligere er skissert av en Gud som tar hensyn til menneskers egne valg?<sup>20</sup>

For det første må det poengteres at et klart skille mellom årsak og virkning ikke alltid er like klart i bibelske skrifter. R.T. France kommenterer om Matt 13: “The distinction between divine and human causation which we find so necessary seems to have been less clear to the biblical writers. Nothing that happens can happen without God, and the same effect may thus be attributed both to human (or demonic) will

19 Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, Second edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 108.

20 Disse spørsmålene hører til de klassiske stridspunkter innen teologien, også bibelfaglige diskusjoner følger ofte nokså tradisjonelle konfesjonelle skillelinjer. Leighton Flowers drøfter spørsmålet her: <https://soteriology101.com/2015/02/07/judicial-hardening-gods-sinless-use-of-sinful-actions/>

and to the divine purpose.”<sup>21</sup> Å trekke entydige konklusjoner om hvem som gjør hva i forherdelsen i Matt 13 og andre tilsvarende steder kan være å lese mer ut av tekstene enn det er grunnlag for.

For det andre må forherdelsen også leses frelseshistorisk. Lignelsene utgjør bare én brikke i et større mønster i evangeliene, bedre kjent som «Messias-hemmeligheten».<sup>22</sup> Ser vi nærmere i f.eks. Lukas-evangeliet finnes flere tilsvarende eksempler på at Jesus holder kortene tett til brystet for ikke å avsløre for alle at han er Messias, som i Luk 9,21, der Peter bekjenner Jesus som Guds Messias, hvorpå Jesus forbyr ham strengt å spre dette videre. Messias-hemmeligheten, som forherdelsen er en følge av, har til formål å lede opp til Jesu død og dermed gjennomføringen av selve frelsesverket som nettopp er for alle mennesker (Matt 28, 18-20; Luk 24). Selv om forherdelsestekstene isolert sett står i kontrast til Guds universale frelsesvilje, bruker Gud forherdelsen som et ledd i en større plan, der hensikten nettopp er at evangeliet skal nå ut til hele verden (Matt 28,18-20, Luk 24,47).<sup>23</sup>

## Apostlenes gjerninger

Apostlenes gjerninger forteller om spredningen av evangeliet og dermed også om hvordan det ble mottatt og avvist. Mest eksplisitt inneholder denne boken mer stoff om hvordan de som forkynnte evangeliet responderte på avvising enn hvordan Gud selv gjorde det. Samtidig må vi merke oss at apostlenes og Guds virke går hånd i hånd – apostlene forkynnte, men det var likevel Herren som «hver dag» la «dem som ble frelst til menigheten» (Apg 2,47). Av hensyn til omfang kommer vi likevel til å avgrense oss til de skriftstedene som mer eksplisitt uttrykker Guds respons på avvisingen.

Et gjentagende mønster i Apg er at der evangeliet forkynnes deles lytterskaren i to – de som kommer til tro og de som avviser (17,4-5; 17,33; 18,4-6). Kun i begrenset grad forteller tekstene noe eksplisitt om Guds respons på disse avvisingene. Stefanus hevdet at «alltid står dere Den Hellige Ånd imot» (7,51). Tilsynelatende avviser de altså apostlene og deres lære, men dypest sett er det Den Hellige Ånd de står imot. Selv om tekstene er lite eksplisitte på Guds respons, peker mangel på respons i retning av at Gud i det minste ikke overstyrer valget om å avvise. Dette uttrykkes mer eksplisitt der det står at Gud tillot «alle folkeslag å gå sine egne veier» (Apg 14,16).

21 France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 508. Han sier videre: “So the two categories are not hard-and-fast; the boundary can be crossed. It is not the purpose of these verses to explain how that crossing takes place, but only to depict the situation as it is” (s. 509).

22 Uttrykket og saken ble fremmet av W. Wrede i 1901, og er presentert og drøftet av Hans Kvalbein, *Jesus. Hva ville han? Hvem var han? En innføring i de tre første evangeliens budskap* (Oslo: Luther, 2008), 22 og 324-27.

23 Se utdrag fra Flowers, Leighton C. *The Potter’s Promise: A Biblical Defense of Traditional Soteriology*. (Evansville, Indiana: Trinity Academic Press, 2017), tilgjengelig fra <https://soteriology101.com/2017/12/16/the-messianic-secret-2/>



Det eneste stedet i NT der det direkte er uttrykt at noen «ikke ville tro» finner vi Apg 19,9: Noen i synagogen i Efesos «gjorde seg harde og ville ikke tro», da Paulus forkynte evangeliet hos dem. Selv om Gud ikke ønsker og har behag i selve valget, lar han mennesker likevel ta valget og bære konsekvensene av det.

Samtidig står det også uttrykt i verset som følger at Gud «lot ... dem ikke mangle vitnesbyrd om seg» (Apg 14,17). Slik sett har han ikke trukket seg passivt tilbake fordi han møtte avvisning, men han fortsatte å vitne om seg selv gjennom det som dogmatisk uttrykt går under betegnelser som «den allmenne/generelle åpenbaring». Så finnes det også i Apg tekster der Gud uttrykker dom som en respons. Episoden med Ananias og Safira kan i vid forstand oppfattes som en avvisning av Gud, noe som møtes med umiddelbar dom (Apg 5,1-11). Det samme kan også sies om Herodes' dødsfall (12,23). Og likevel handler ingen av de tekstene direkte om kallet til frelse.

Paulus' tale på Areopagos-høyden (Apg 17) er kanskje det nærmeste vi kommer en «respektfull» holdning overfor ikke-kristen tro, og den teksten nyanserer dermed i noen grad bildet.<sup>24</sup> Samtidig merker vi oss at denne teksten sier mer om hvordan Paulus responderer på avvisning og ikke Gud. Innledningsvis i talen uttrykker Paulus en viss respekt for grekernes religiøsitet (17,22) og viser til alterinnskriften «For en ukjent Gud» (17,23). Skal vi forstå Paulus ordrett, anerkjenner han til og med at de driver med gudsdyrkelse, enda det var epikureiske og stoiske filosofer han diskuterte med (17,18). Dette skaper i det minste inntrykk av en viss respekt og aktelse overfor ikke-kristne religiøse og filosofiske ståsteder, men er dette tilstrekkelig for å hevde at Paulus «respekterte» en avvisning?

For det første må vi ikke overse teksten i forkant av talen som uttrykkelig sier at Paulus ble «rystet i sitt innerste da han så at byen var full av gudebilder» (Apg 17,16). Paulus stiller seg i utgangspunktet avvisende til disse religiøse ståstedene.

For det andre må vi merke oss at i den grad Paulus viser respekt overfor andre filosofiske og religiøse retninger i denne sammenheng, er det kun på ett punkt han er enig med sine meningsmotstandere og ikke stoisme eller epikureisme i sin helhet. Det er ikke de sidene ved disse filosofiene som bryter med kristen tro han i så fall viser respekt for, men det som sammenfaller.

For det tredje ser ikke poenget til Paulus ut til å være å rose filosofene for deres religiøsitet, men heller å ta innskriften på bildet som en innrømmelse av at de ikke kjenner Gud. Med andre ord må ikke enigheten mellom Paulus og filosofene – at det finnes en Gud som bør tilbes – overdrives. Nettopp derfor fortsetter Paulus med å utfylle det bildet av hvem denne «ukjente Gud» er som de ikke kjenner.

Areopagos-talen er en viktig påminnelse om å finne «common ground» med meningsmotstandere og at kirken rent misjonsstrategisk kan bruke dette som en inngangsport for evangeliet. Men talen kan vanskelig legitimere religiøse og filosofiske

24 For en utførligere drøftelse av teksten se Sverre Bøe, *På vegne av Kristus. Misjon i Bibelen* (Fredericia: Kolon, 2021), 219-29.



standpunkter som bryter med evangeliet. Som vi har sett av den foregående diskusjonen, er dette neppe intensjonen med talen og det er heller ikke forenlig med bildet vi så om at de «river ned tankebygninger og alt stort og stort som reiser seg mot kunnskapen om Gud» (2 Kor 10,4-5). Samtidig viser formaninger som å vise alle vennlighet/mildhet overfor alle mennesker (Fil 4,5), at dette ikke reduserer evangelisering til polemikk og nedsettende kritikk av ikke-kristne religiøse og filosofiske ståsteder.

Som i evangeliene møter vi på tekster i Apostlenes gjerninger der omvendelsen ser lite hensynsfull ut og dermed utfordrer bildet av en Gud som respekterer. Det klareste eksempelet er Paulus' møte med Kristus på vei til Damaskus (Apg 9) der han møtte et så kraftig lys at han falt fra hesten og ble blind i tre dager. Aldri ellers i NT møter vi tekster der Guds kall til omvendelse og i dette tilfellet også tjeneste foregår så inngripende at det fører til fysisk skade. Dette sier også noe om at dette er et klart unntak fra, om ikke en regel, så i det minste et tydelig mønster. Guds kall til omvendelse er verbalt og ikke ledsaget av fysisk maktbruk. Dette betyr likevel ikke at kallet til omvendelse foregår uten makt. Peters preken på pinsedag «stakk» tilhørerne «i hjertet» (Apg 2,37), noe som viser at om kallet til omvendelse og etterfølgelse er verbalt, kan det likevel treffe hardt uten at det koker ned til psykologisk tvang eller manipulasjon.

Av andre observasjoner, skal en merke seg at Gud flere steder responderer på avvisning i Apg ved å sende evangeliet videre (Apg 28,25-28): Da jødene i Roma hadde avvist Jesus-budskapet, hevdet Paulus at «denne Guds frelse er blitt sendt til hedningene og de skal høre» (Apg 28,28). Her skimter vi en guddommelig passiv. Det er *Gud* som har sendt evangeliet videre til hedningene fordi jødene avviste det. Her fører Apg videre forherdelsestematikken i evangeliene. Ikke bare ledet Israels forherdelse til Jesu korsfestelse og dermed frelsesverket, men nå også utbredelsen av evangeliet til hedninger. Menneskers avvisning stenger en ute fra frelsens goder, men hindrer ikke Guds frelsesplan.

## Paulusbrevene

Også Paulus-brevene berører ofte spørsmål knyttet til menneskers avvisning av Gud. Allerede i Rom 1 hevder han at avgudsdyrkelse dypst sett er en avvisning av Gud, siden Gud gjennom det vi ofte kaller «den naturlige åpenbaring» har gitt seg til kjenne for menneskene. På en måte «respekterer» Gud dette skjebnesvangre valget, og det kommer blant annet til uttrykk i Rom 1,24-28 der Paulus tre ganger poengterer at Gud overga mennesker til seg selv. Mennesket *får* på en måte velge, men de må også bære konsekvensene av sine valg.

Selv om Gud her ikke bruker tvang, fortsetter han aktivt å kalle til omvendelse. Paulus setter dette på spissen når han i Rom 10,21 henter opp et GT-sitat fra Jes 65,2: «Hele dagen rakte jeg mine hender ut til et ulydig og gjenstridig folk». Guds tålmodighet og fortsatte godhet mot uomvendte, har til hensikt å drive til omvendelse

(Rom 2,4). På den ene siden bruker han ikke tvang, men han trekker seg heller ikke passivt tilbake.

Og når et menneske lar seg frelse, uttrykkes dette i Paulus-brevene med ganske kraftfulle uttrykk. Omvendelse, dåp og helliggjørelse tegnes hos Paulus i brutale vendinger som å «tilintetgjøre», «drepe» og «begripe» det gamle mennesket (Rom 6,6; 8,13; Kol 3,5). I den forstand «respekterer» ikke Gud avvisning og vantro, like lite som han «respekterer» annen synd.

Siden Gud «besluttet» å «frelse dem som tror, ved den dårskaper som vi forkynner» (1 Kor 1,21), var det helt i orden for Paulus å opptre både «svak, redd og skjelvende», for mottagernes tro «skulle ikke bygge på menneskelig visdom, men på Guds kraft» (1 Kor 2,3-4). Han var innforstått med at det var et «anstøt» eller en «snublestein» (1 Kor 1,23), så en avvisning kunne forventes og dermed og på en måte «respekteres».

Som i Apg tar også Paulus opp forherdelsestematikken vi møter i evangeliene. Den fylldigste utgreiingen finner vi i Rom 9-11 der Paulus drøfter Israels status og rolle i Guds frelsesplan. Ved at noen naturlige greiner (israelitter) er brukket av, har ville oljekvister (hedninger) kunnet blitt podet inn (Rom 11,11 og 17). Gjennom at Israel avviste Gud, har Guds folk blitt utvidet til også å omfatte hedninger ved at de podes inn på selve stammen/Kristus. Her er Paulus inne på samme tanken som er uttrykt i Apg om at evangeliet går videre når noen avviser det. Det kan nærmest se ut til at Gud her ikke primært står *mot* avvisningen, men virker *med* den. Her er det en viss parallell til faraos avvisning av Gud i dramaet som utspiller seg i 2 Mos, særlig kap. 7-11. Men i dette tilfellet fører Israels avvisning til noe godt, nemlig at evangeliet nådde folkeslagene eller “hedningene”. Og Paulus forteller som en “hemmelighet” at det også etter det skal komme enda en positiv vending: Når “hedningene” har “kommet inn” fulltallig, skal også Israel vende om til Jesus som sin frelser (Rom 11,25-26). Så i dette tilfellet resulterer Israels tidlige avvisning av Jesus flere positive vendinger: først at evangeliet går videre til “hedningene”, dernest at også Israel skal bli frelst.

Det er særlig ett moment hos Paulus som utfordrer tanken om at Gud viser hensyn til en avvisning. Det er hvilken rolle Gud spiller i ethvert valg mennesker gjør, noe som kommer fram i spesielt to tekster – Rom 9 og Fil 2,12.

Ifølge Fil 2,13 er Gud «virkosom» i mennesker, så de «både vil og gjør etter det som er Guds gode vilje» (Fil 2,13). Riktignok handler det her om de troende og det å ville gjøre etter Guds vilje, noe en avvisning ikke er. Likevel peker verset i retning av at Gud er aktivt involvert i menneskers valg. Men der Fil 2,13 i all hovedsak tar for seg Guds virken i troende til å handle etter Guds vilje, går Paulus et skritt lenger i Rom 9: «Altså viser han godhet mot den han vil, og forherder den han vil» (v. 18). Gud er pottemakeren som har makt til å gjøre som han vil med leiren, jf. Jer 18,1-10. Mennesket kan derfor ikke stå imot Guds vilje eller ta til gjenmæle mot Gud (Rom 9,19-20).

Å gjøre nærmere rede for de ulike tolkningene av Rom 9 sprenger rammene for denne artikkelen, men vi skal stoppe opp for tre moment. For det første nevner vi kort

det vi allerede har vært innom, nemlig at bibelske forfattere ikke alltid har et skarpt skille mellom årsak og virkning. For det andre peker Rom 9 på noe grunnleggende ved det asymmetriske forholdet mellom Gud og mennesker: Mennesker har ikke en iboende «rettighet» overfor Gud som han er underlagt å overholde. Gud står helt fritt til både å respektere (i betydning «ta hensyn til») og ikke respektere menneskers valg. Når Gud respekterer en avvisning, gjør han det av eget valg og ikke av plikt til å overholde menneskers rettigheter. Inkarnasjonen tjener som et parallelt illustrerende eksempel på at Guds handlinger mot mennesker ikke skjer av nødvendighet eller menneskerettstenking, men av eget valg. Den opphøyde Gud valgte å gi avkall ved å fornedre og ydmyke seg selv (Fil 2). Selv om Gud står over mennesker og asymmetrien ikke utviskes, valgte Gud likevel å bli et menneske og paradoksalt nok være «på like fot» med sine skapninger, ikke av plikt, men kjærlighet. Det samme kan også tenkes om «å respektere».

### **De katolske brevene**

Ingen tekster i de katolske brevene taler for at Gud respekterer avvisning i betydning å vise ærbødighet. Den harde polemikken i Judas' brev eksemplifiserer at Guds møte med avvisning, som vranglære må kunne sies å være, ikke er preget av respekt, men forakt. Dette forklarer de destruktive termene om Guds ords virkning som et kløvende sverd (Hebr 4,12). Gud står imot en avvisning (Jak 4,6, 1 Pet 5,5) og viser harme, vrede og dom over den (Hebr 3,11 og 17). Ingen som avviser skal unnsnippe Guds dom (Hebr 12,25).

Samtidig ser vi et mønster i at Gud likevel tar hensyn til avvisningen ved at han ikke overkjører den. Hele premisset Hebreerbrevet bygger på at Gud lar mennesker som faller ifra troen bære konsekvensene av sin avvisning, og nettopp derfor kaller han dem tilbake. Dette viser også en annen side ved Guds hensyn til en avvisning – han trekker seg ikke passivt tilbake, men fortsetter å kalle. En bemerkelsesverdig tekst i den sammenheng er 2 Pet 3,9 der Gud nærmest utsetter eller drøyer med dommen, nettopp for at flere skal få mulighet til å vende om: «Herren er ikke sen med å oppfylle sitt løfte, som noen mener. Nei, han er tålmodig med dere, for han vil ikke at noen skal gå fortapt, men at alle skal nå fram til omvendelse». Tankegangen ligner på gartnerens pleie av det ellers ufruktbare vintreet fra Jesu lignelse i Luk 13,6-9.

Likevel er det også i disse brevene formuleringer som nyanserer bildet av en «hensynsfull» Gud. Selv om flere moment taler for at Gud viser hensyn, er han også sterkt involvert i omvendelsen av et menneske, noe vi har vært innom tidligere i denne diskusjonen. 1 Peters brev omtaler omvendelsen som ville sauer som er blitt omvendt (gresk *epestrafete*) (1 Pet 2,25). Bruken av passiv-form indikerer Gud som det logiske subjektet. Omvendelsen blir slik sett et resultat av at Gud vender mennesket om, noe vi allerede har diskutert.

## Johannes' åpenbaring

Sjangerspørsmålet i Johannes' åpenbaring legger føringer for hvordan boken skal tolkes og dermed også hvordan den belyser problemstillingen i denne undersøkelsen. Johannes' åpenbaring er en kombinasjon av både brev, profeti og apokalypse, og det er særlig de to sistnevnte som er aktuelle å kommentere i denne undersøkelsen. Som apokalyptisk litteratur har deler av Johannes' åpenbaring et deterministisk preg der fremtiden er satt og historien kun må gå sin gang. Dette kan, som bibelforskeren Robert Mounce skriver, føre til «a rather complete pessimism about people's ability to combat the evils they encountered».<sup>25</sup> En slik tilnærming kan rokke ved et av premisene vi antydte for denne undersøkelsen, nemlig at mennesker gjør egne valg. Hvilken mening gir det å snakke om «egne valg» dersom de er determinert, og ikke minst dersom valgene er determinert av Gud selv? Og videre, hvilken mening gir det da at Gud respekterer – eventuelt ikke respekterer – å bli avvist dersom avvisningen allerede er satt og bestemt? Uten å gå for lang inn i sjangerspørsmålet i Johannes' åpenbaring, må de deterministiske og apokalyptiske trekkene ved Johannes' åpenbaring balanseres opp mot de profetiske trekkene ved skriftet som vektlegger omvendelse og det å «velge side», slik R. Mounce sammenfatter det: «While there can be no doubt that Revelation shares certain characteristics common to the apocalyptic genre, it would be wrong to overlook all the ways in which it resists being placed without qualification in that category».<sup>20</sup> Leseren sitter igjen med et bilde av en Gud som både er aktivt involvert i å styre historiens gang, men som også sender ut et åpent omvendelseskall.

Sendebrevet til Laodikea (Åp 3,14-22) inneholder flere nyanser av å «respektere»: I dette brevet tegnes det en situasjon der Jesus selv er ble stilt på utsiden av sitt eget «hus». På den ene siden «respekterer» Gud å bli plassert på utsiden, for i stedet for å trenge seg inn med makt, blir han stående på utsiden og banke stillferdig på døren. På den andre siden viser Jesus her ingen respekt for en slik avvisning, for han «refser og tukter» dem (3,19 NB 88/07) og truer med å «spy [dem] ut» (3,16 NB 88/07) dersom de ikke vender om. Riktignok er tukten et uttrykk for kjærlighet,<sup>26</sup> men da primært kjærlighet til menneskene i Laodikea og ikke til selve avvisningen. Forakten for avvisning må derfor ikke forstås som en forakt mot menneskene, snarere tvert imot.

Denne forakten for avvisningen gjør seg gjeldende i resten av Johannes' åpenbaring. For eksempel fører Gud dom over Babylon (Åp 18,21) og han skal «ødelegge dem som ødelegger jorden» (Åp 11,18). Og himmelen gleder seg over at Satan – anklageren – «er styrtet, han som dag og natt anklaget våre søsken for vår Guds ansikt» (Åp 12,10). Til slutt skal også djevelen bli «kastet i sjøen med ild og svovel» sammen med dyret og den falske profeten til evig pine (Åp 20,10).

25 Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, Rev. ed, The new international commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998), 3.

26 Mounce, *Revelation*, 112.

I kontrast til dommen mot Laodikea, som kommer i form av tukt, og som dermed har en tydelig oppdragende funksjon, sprenger den siste dom rammene for enhver pedagogisk forklaring, nettopp ved at den siste dom presenteres som evig og uomstøtelig. Framstillingen av dommen i Åp 20-22 ser ikke ut til å åpne opp for omvendelse etter den siste dom. Og side om side med henvisningene til hvordan Gud holder dom på vegne av uskyldige ofre, begrunnes dommen vel så ofte i Guds eget vesen – hans rettferdighet, hellighet, allmakt og «nidkjærhet»/«sjalusi».

Samtidig ser vi det samme mønsteret i Johannes' åpenbaring som i resten av NT, at Gud likevel ikke overkjører avvisningen. Det faktum at de som avviser Gud i Johannes' åpenbaring møter dom, viser at Gud ikke tvinger gjennom sin frelsesvilje. I sendebrevet til Laodikea ser vi dette i form av en betingelse: «Om noen hører min røst og åpner døren, vil jeg gå inn til ham og holde måltid, jeg med ham og han med meg» (Joh Åp 3,20). Dermed holder han åpen muligheten for (fortsett) å bli avvist.

## Oppsummering av den bibelteologiske delen

Vi har funnet en rekke tekster der Gud selv – respektive Jesus Kristus – tilsynelatende finner seg i å bli avvist uten å gripe til maktmidler eller manipulasjon for å endre utfallet. I mange av tilfellene fremheves den smerten dette skaper, som når Jesus blir stående utenfor Jerusalem og gråte. Han ønsker sterkt at de som har avvist ham skal ombestemme seg – «omvende» seg – og han fortsetter å kalle til det. Men han overkjørte ikke de avvisningene han møtte.

Samtidig er det en rekke bibeltekster som vanskelig passer inn i en enkel modell av at Gud «respekterer» avvisning. NT kan til tider bruke sterke ord om hvordan Gud medvirker ved et menneskes omvendelse, som med Saul ved Damaskus. Vi har også stanset ved flere utsagn som ser ut til å antyde at Gud medvirker i selve avvisningen med uttrykk om «forherdelse», men vi har også sett at flere av disse tekstene antyder at Gud kan bruke avvisning til å åpne nye muligheter, som i Romerne 11.

Motiser dermed Bibelen seg selv? Vi tror ikke det. Men selve saken er så sammensatt at det på et rent logisk plan kan være vanskelig å forene alle utsagnene i ett enkelt dogmatisk lærepunkt. Når det skjer – som i calvinistisk lære om «Guds umiotstæelige nåde» – fører det til at en rekke bibeltekster omkring valgets mulighet overkjøres. Kanskje kan selv apostlene i sitt misjonsarbeid ha følt på en dobbelthet i selve saken?

## Konklusjon

Vi har sett hvordan en rekke nytestamentlige bibeltekster faktisk gir oss inntrykk av at Gud «respekterer» å bli avvist *underveis* i livet. Særlig i den nye pakt/Det nye testamentet finner vi mange slike tekster, der Jesus ser ut til å finne seg i avvisning. Det gamle testamentet hører slik sett til i en litt annen sammenheng med sterke teokratiske drag. Men hele Bibelen understreker sterkt at avvisning bedrøver Gud, og den gjør noe med ham, for hans kjærlighet søker etter fellesskap med sine skapninger. Derfor fortsetter han å kalle på dem, og Guds «pedagogikk» i møte med avvisning er bred og tilpasset

dem han ønsker å vinne. Så et stykke på vei kan vi bekrefte påstandene vi begynte med fra Dahle, Endsjø, pave Benedict XVI og C.S. Lewis.

Samtidig ser vi en rekke tekster som drar i en annen retning, særlig knyttet til Gud som dommer og til tekster om «forherdelse». Slike tekster finner vi oftere i GT enn i NT, men *hele* Bibelen peker frem mot den siste dom. Ut fra tanken om to utganger på livet gir det lite mening å si at Gud til sist ser med ærbødighet på en avvisning som han selv holder dom over. Men det at han lar mennesker velge avvisning med de konsekvensene det innebærer uten å manipulere, taler for at Gud velger å ta hensyn til og dermed respektere selve muligheten for å avvise ham. Og samtidig betyr ikke det at Gud – eller hans profeter, apostler eller misjonærer – ikke skal kunne forsøke å få mennesker til å skifte overbevisning og standpunkt. Bibelens Gud «taler og kaller på jorden fra solens oppgang til dens nedgang» (Sal 50,1 Norsk Bibel 1988/07).

Vi bør derfor avstå fra en enkel konklusjon i retning av ja eller nei på vårt spørsmål om Gud «respekterer» å bli avvist. Vi tror ikke at dette skyldes at ulike nytestamentlige forfattere målbærer ulike meninger, men at det heller er uttrykk for en så sammensatt virkelighet, at de ulike tilnærmingene må få lyde samtidig, selv om vi vanskelig kan utmeisle noen systematisk tese som fanger opp alle sider ved saken.

Bibeltekstene vi har undersøkt bekrefter sterkt behovet av det som «Codes of Conduct» skriver om relasjonen til andre religioner: «I forbindelse med forkynnelsen av evangeliet er enhver bruk av makt, trusler, manipulasjon eller villedning – i ord eller handling – uakseptabel.»<sup>27</sup> Fra et luthersk ståsted berører dette viktige sider ved læren om de to regimentene; det åndelige regimente skal ikke bruke verdslig makt i noen form for å vinne tilhengere. For vi har sett en rekke bibeltekster der Gud selv unnlater å bruke sin allmakt for å vinne tilslutning.

Vi gir N.F.S. Grundtvig siste ord i saken, her i norsk gjendiktning:

Tvang til tro er dårers tale, Hjertet vegrer seg med fynd;  
Tvingen tro ei sorg kan svale, Føder mere løgn og synd.  
Kun til helved' kan der tvinges, Men til himlen bare ringes,  
Frihet følger sannhets Ånd.

De neste versene sier at Gud «ei vil ondt med ondt betale», for «fredens evangelium kaller aldri ild fra skyen». I stedet tilbyr Gud «den sanne hvile, gavnlige åk og byrde lett».<sup>28</sup> En slik adferd – med respekt for medmennesker – har bred støtte i viktige bibeltekster.

27 “Codes of conduct – Retningslinjer for norske misjonsorganisasjoner med internasjonalt engasjement: Codes-of-Conduct-NORME\_no\_ny\_design.pdf.

28 *Landstads reviderte salmebok* nr. 476. Se ellers Peter Olsen, «Tvang til tro er dårers tale. Luther og Grundtvig om religionsfrihed.» *eMissio* 5 (2000), i: 127-Article Text-626-1-10-20201218.pdf.

# Interdenominational Co-operation contra Lutheran Orthodoxy?

## The National Christian Council of China and the Norwegian Lutheran Mission

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**Abstract:** In the history of twentieth-century global Protestantism, causative relationships have often been seen in the cooperation of missionary organisations and the subsequent development of ecumenical relations between their sponsoring denominations. A key example is the World Missionary Conference of 1910, from which numerous such ties sprang. One of these was the National Christian Conference in Shanghai, which attracted representatives of well over 100 agencies and gave rise to the National Christian Council of China and it, in turn, to the Church of Christ in China. However, owing in large measure to theological differences, that composite denomination failed to attract numerous missionary agencies in China. However, that body failed to attract and retain many of the denominations which then existed in the land. Various strains of post-orthodox theology had been brought to China, where the strife continued. Many conservatives refused to participate in ecumenical ventures. One such organisation which only briefly participated was the Norwegian Lutheran Mission. It was involved in the National Christian Conference in 1922 and briefly in the NCC but soon cut its ties to that organisation. This article explores reasons for the brevity of this participation and places it into the context of Norwegian Lutheranism early in the 20th century.

**Sammendrag:** I den globale protestantismen i det 20. århundre har ofte de grunnleggende relasjoner vært å finne i samvirket mellom misjonsorganisasjoner og den etterfølgende utvikling av økumeniske forhold mellom kirkesamfunn som støttet dem. Et nøkkeleksempel er the 1910 World Missionary Conference i Edinburgh, som førte til mange slike bånd. Ett av disse var National Christian Conference (NCC) i Shanghai, som tiltrakk seg representanter fra godt over 100 virksomheter, og som



var opptakten til National Christian Council of China og etter hvert til Church of Christ in China. Men på grunn av et stort antall teologiske forskjeller, som gjerne preger et kirkesamfunn, mislyktes man med å trekke til seg tallrike misjonsinitiativ og opprettholde kontakten med mange av kirkesamfunnene som da eksisterte i landet. Forskjellige spenninger av post-ortodoks teologi var blitt brakt til Kina. Mange konservative nektet å delta i økumeniske satsinger. En slik organisasjon, som bare var med en kortperiode, var Norsk Luthersk Misjonssamband, som sa nei til å ta del i opprettelsen av Union Lutheran Theological Seminary i 1913. Lederne i denne misjonsorganisasjonen både i Norge og på kinesisk mark var skeptiske og svært kritiske til teologisk modernisme. En tok del i NCC i 1922 men etter kort tid skar en over båndene til denne institusjonen. Denne artikkelen undersøker grunnene til denne korte deltakelsen og analyserer det som skjedde i lys av konteksten som preget norsk lutherdom tidlig i det 20. århundre.

Keywords: Norwegian Lutheran Mission, National Christian Council of China, Church of Christ in China, Bible Union of China, ecumenism, orthodoxy, liberal theology

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Within the broad scope of global Protestantism, interdenominational co-operation became a prominent and at times efficacious feature in numerous mission fields in several parts of the world during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Indeed, since at least the 1950s the twentieth-century phase of the “ecumenical movement” has commonly interpreted as stemming to a significant degree from the World Missionary Conference which took place in Edinburgh in June 1910 and the “Continuation Committee” appointed to carry its work further.<sup>2</sup> In China, where dozens of foreign Protestant agencies were then evangelising and conducting other forms of ministry, this led to the formation of the National Christian Council in 1922. After five additional years, the Church of Christ in China was founded. It

1 A significant part of the research for and the writing of this article were done at Fjellhaug International University College in Oslo, where I was privileged to be a Visiting Scholar for three months in 2022. I wish to express my gratitude to archivist Håkon Bakken, former archivist Erik Kjebekk, and librarian Tom Erik Hamre for their assistance in my quest for the diverse historical sources on which this article rests.

2 The standard history is Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009). See also Kenneth Scott Latourette, “Ecumenical Bearings of the Missionary Movement and the International Missionary Council”, in Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill (eds.), *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), 355-362.



linked the ongoing efforts of numerous affiliates but encompassed only a minority of the nation's Protestant agencies and their members within the nation's overall Protestant population.

How does one explain the limited nature of ecumenism in the challenging Chinese mission field? Interdenominational co-operation and aloofness therefrom have generally not been a particularly fertile field of research in the history of Norwegian foreign missions. Generally speaking, the endeavours of both Lutheran and other missionary agencies have been described without considerable reference to their relations with other organisations. This has certainly been the case with regard to the annals of Norway's largest organisation in China, the Norwegian Lutheran Mission, or NLM, which during most of its six decades of evangelisation and other forms of ministry chiefly in the provinces of Hubei and Henan was known as *Det norske lutherske Kinamisjonsforbund* (literally The Norwegian Lutheran China Mission Alliance). This noteworthy dimension of missions history in the 1920s has remained largely unexplored for a century. Although the lack of enthusiasm of numerous other missionary agencies and denominations for the ecumenical endeavours of that decade is commonly mentioned in the relevant scholarly literature, that of the NLM is not. One will search Kenneth Scott Latourette's groundbreaking *A History of Christian Missions in China* in vain for any mention of it apart from an acknowledgment that Lutherans, Anglicans, and certain other Protestants were absent from the first General Assembly of the Church of Christ in Shanghai.<sup>3</sup> In the twenty-first century, this absence from scholarly literature has continued. R.G. Tiedemann's useful summary published in the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* sheds no light on this Norwegian non-participation.<sup>4</sup> Much the same can be said of Daniel H. Bays's *A New History of Christianity in China*.<sup>5</sup> Even Erik Kjebekk's forthcoming and eminently readable popular history of the NLM's endeavours in Henan and Hubei reveals nothing in this regard.<sup>6</sup> By contrast, Silje Dragsund Aase's recent doctoral thesis, "Negotiating Church in China's Red Province: A Lutheran Church in Hunan 1902-1951", provides

3 Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1929), 800.

4 R.G. Tiedemann, "Comity Agreements and Sheep Stealers: The Elusive Search for Christian Unity Among Protestants in China", *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 36, nr. 1 (2012), 3–8

5 Daniel H. Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China* (Malden, Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

6 I express my gratitude to Lunde Forlag in Oslo and to Erik Kjebekk for allowing me to read his as yet unpublished book manuscript. As of April 2023 it bore the imprecise provisional title *Et glimt av Kinas kirkehistorie i provinsene Hubei og Henan*.

at least basic information about the participation of the Norwegian Missionary Society in certain ecumenical ventures.<sup>7</sup>

The NLM occupied a distinctive place in the spectrum of Norwegian Lutheranism. It is generally regarded as standing historically at the most staunchly conservative pole, a position which goes far towards explaining its marked hesitancy to engage in ecumenical ventures. With its headquarters in the Norwegian capital, Kristiania (since 1925 called Oslo), its leaders, especially general secretary Johannes Brandtzæg, viewed the theological strife in the Church of Norway at very close range and frequently crossed verbal swords with liberal theologians at the country's sole university. This was particularly the case during the first half of the 1920s when the NLM and other Christian organisations resolved not to co-operate with agencies that they regarded as doctrinally questionable. The Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS) was also rooted in Norwegian pietism to an appreciable degree but tended to be less strident in its hostility to what were widely regarded as deviations from Lutheran orthodoxy.

### **The National Christian Council and the Norwegian Lutheran Mission**

The story of the NLM's hesitancy begins well before the 1920s. Like its counterparts in the legacy of Martin Luther, early in the twentieth century the NLM was more orientated towards co-operation with Lutheran than non-Lutheran missionary agencies, but even in this regard it remained somewhat isolated. It did not, for example, participate in the creation and early maintenance of the Union Lutheran Theological Seminary, which was established at Shekou, near Hankou (now part of Wuhan) in March 1913. (The NMS, by contrast, did so.)<sup>8</sup> Neither was the NLM involved in the establishment of the Lutheran Church of China, which came into being in August 1920, although it joined that loose federation of synods in 1944, *i.e.* during the dark days of the Japanese occupation of much of the country.

On a broader Protestant scale, the National Christian Council came into being after a period of incubation which was characterised by unifying forces in international Protestantism but also bedevilled by heightening doctrinal strife in numerous denominations. Eventually these two trends, the one favouring doctrinal flexibility and toleration of differences, the other affording staunch resistance to and an unwillingness to participate in co-operative ventures with Christians who were perceived as sacrificing crucial doctrines on the altar of modernism, proved incompatible. An awareness of both is essential to an understanding of the stance of the NLM *vis-à-vis* ecumenical relations in China.

7 Silje Dragsund Aase, "Negotiating Church in China's Red Province: A Lutheran Church in Hunan 1902-1951" (Doctor of Philosophy thesis, VID Specialized University, 2022), 75-76, 117-119.

8 "The China Field" i: *The Chinese Recorder*, 56. nr. 8 (1925), 547-548.

Within the broad scope of global Protestantism, interdenominational co-operation became a prominent and at times efficacious feature in numerous mission fields in several parts of the world during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Indeed, what is sometimes loosely called the twentieth-century “ecumenical movement” is commonly interpreted as stemming to a significant degree from the previously mentioned World Missionary Conference of 1910. In China, where dozens of foreign Protestant agencies were then evangelising and conducting other forms of ministry, this led to the formation in 1927 of the Church of Christ in China.

A National Christian Conference was held in Shanghai in May 1922. At that time approximately 130 Protestant agencies in numerous countries and representing a relatively broad spectrum of denominations were sponsoring missionaries in China. Representatives of most of these organisations and churches attended; a majority of the delegates were Chinese. Foreshadowing the doctrinal disputes that would soon emerge, Paul Hutchinson, a Methodist pastor from the USA who edited the *China Christian Advocate* in Shanghai, acknowledged the rapid numerical growth of Protestant denominations in the Middle Kingdom but added words of caution: “China is seething with all sorts of radical ideas, but the missionary body is being agitated by the fears of conservative workers that the Christian message is becoming too ‘modernistic.’”<sup>9</sup>

These assembled Christians elected to create the National Christian Council (the NCC) that year as an amalgamation of foreign missionary organisations and Chinese churches. Its leaders expressed a vision of founding an inclusive Protestant Chinese body. The NCC would hold its first general meeting in May 1923. What emerged as the Church of Christ in China (the CCC) went through a protracted gestation period, however, owing to such factors as disagreement about what its polity should be, political discord and civil war in China, budgetary woes, and theological disputes. This fairly broadly defined denomination finally came into being in 1927, but by then interchurch ventures had fallen on hard times, and it failed to include such major bodies as the China Inland Mission, most Lutherans, and the Southern Baptists. As Daniel H. Bays noted in his *A New History of Christianity in China*, most of the delegates to its First General Assembly in October 1927 were affiliated with two American denominations, namely the Northern Presbyterians and the Congregationalists (through the latter’s American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions). Only sixteen of the several dozen mission boards then operating in China joined the CCC. They represented not more than a third of the country’s total Protestant population.<sup>10</sup>

9 “Protestant Gains in China Great”, *The New York Herald*, 23 April 1922, Section Two, 12.

10 Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China*, 110-111.

The failure of the CCC to encompass most of its natural constituencies stemmed to a considerable degree from the doctrinal discord then rampant in the country. Bays's unsubstantiated assertion that "the world-wide 'Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy' began in China in the summer of 1920" is untenable; in fact, the disputes about theological modernism that came to the surface at missionary conferences at that time did little more than echo debates that had raged among North American, British, and continental European Protestants of various denominational identities for many years and had already reached as far as Australia. Even the semantically problematic and connotatively charged noun (and subsequently adjective) "fundamentalist" was far from new when it was supposedly coined by the Baptist editor Curtis Lee Laws in 1920 (an error made by the eminent church historian George Marsden in his *Fundamentalism and American Culture*<sup>11</sup> and uncritically reproduced in countless books and journal articles) was current on both sides of the Atlantic by the middle decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Defensor Fidei: The Bible Union of China***

That the NLM was repelled by the theological discord in China becomes readily understandable when one considers that other agencies also reacted against it in the 1920s. The formation of the Bible Union of China serves as a particularly lucid example. Its founding in 1920 was a reaction to doctrinal strife in several countries, among them Norway, where Protestant bodies had commissioned missionaries to China.

The Bible Union sprang from the concerns of numerous missionaries, initially chiefly Southern Presbyterians from the United States of America where doctrinal strife had become quite strident and indeed newsworthy. Its genesis was summarised by one of them, the physician L. Nelson Bell, who had been in China since 1916 and whose daughter Ruth would marry Billy Graham in 1943. At one of the many conferences which missionaries representing a spectrum of denominations arranged at the missionary centre at Kuling in Jiangxi province in 1920, eighteen participants, fifteen or sixteen of whom were Southern Presbyterians, held a private meeting at which they decided that "the time had come for making an open stand in defense of the faith once for all delivered to the Saints." Several hundred people attended a "general meeting" a few days later at which the desirability of doing so was discussed. The Bible Union of China was established at a third meeting that summer in which

11 George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelism: 1870-1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 107.

12 This will be amply demonstrated in the present writer's forthcoming semantic history of the words "fundamentalist" and "fundamentalism". A synopsis of the findings is given in Frederick Hale, "Fundamentally flawed words: Fundamentalists, fundamentalism and semantic change", *Babel: The Language Magazine*, no. 26 (February 2019), 9-13.

approximately 500 people participated. Bell emphasised in his recollection of this development that the “great mass” of missionaries in that country were “loyal to the Scriptures” but nevertheless declared the “known fact” that “Modernism is invidiously and openly being propagated in China.”<sup>13</sup>

A fellow Southern Presbyterian, Donald W. Richardson, conceded in 1922 that in the earliest stage of the Bible Union’s history “some” of its members “seemed to desire it to degenerate into a heresy hunting organization pure and simple”. He insisted, however, that those inquisitors were not representative and that within two years those who “set themselves in violent and unalterable opposition to all union institutions and organizations for co-operative work in building up the Kingdom of Christ in China” represented a minority position. Richardson also professed that “the prevalence of modernism and the presence of modernists in the mission body of China has been very much magnified.”<sup>14</sup> As will be seen below, however, leaders of the NLM, both in Norway and in China, perceived theological liberalism as a major obstacle to continued participation with Christians, especially non-Lutherans, whose views did not mesh well with their own. In his study of what he termed “the fundamentalist movement” among missionaries in China during the 1920s and 1930s, Kevin Xiyi Yao concentrated much of his analysis on the history of the Bible Union and its spirited criticism of the spectre of theological modernism.<sup>15</sup> In *A New History of Christianity in China*, Bays attributed the delay in the establishment of the Church of Christ in China and the unwillingness of many denominations and mission agencies to join it in large measure to “the constant sniping of the conservatives from the Bible Union of China and other theological critics” in the 1920s.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Foe on the Home Front: Liberal Theology in Norway**

The limits of the NLM’s participation in these truncated developments in interdenominational co-operation and its leaders’ severe indictment of the alleged theological shortcomings of the NCC cannot be understood part from what is known in Norwegian church history as *kirkestriden*. Literally translated as “the ecclesiastical strife”, this noun is an inclusive signifier that refers to the protracted series of disputes that shaped much of the theological history of Norwegian Lutheranism from the 1880s until approximately the early 1930s. A consideration of *kirkestriden* is in accordance with but extends a generalisation made by the eminent historian of missionary Christianity

13 Nelson Bell, “The Bible Union of China”, *The Presbyterian of the South* (Richmond, Virginia), 8 November 1922, 3.

14 Donald W. Richardson, “Modernism on the China Mission Field”, *The Presbyterian of the South*, 30 August 1922, 2-3.

15 Kevin Xiyi Yao, *The Fundamentalist Movement Among Protestant Missionaries in China, 1920-1937* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2003).

16 Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China*, 110.

in East Asia, Kenneth Scott Latourette, in his *A History of Christian Missions in China*. Himself both a first-person observer of and participant in some of the developments outlined above, this American Baptist noted that by the 1920s striving for “cooperation and union” had yielded sufficient fruit as to nurture expectations that they would result in “some sort of consummation”. Militating against its attainment, however, was *inter alia* the clash of “fundamentalism” and “modernism” which was driving ever-deeper wedges into British and North American Protestantism. Disputes over the inroads which caused either *de facto* or formal schisms in Baptist, Presbyterian, and other denominations in those North Atlantic countries which were still sending large numbers of missionaries to East Asia and other parts of the world in the 1920s were thus transplanted to Chinese Protestantism. “The conflict was early carried to China,” Latourette explained, “and there became even more divisive than in the Occident.”<sup>17</sup>

In Norway, the so-called “breakthrough of modernity” during the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century had permanently altered the once predominantly orthodox Lutheran landscape, although the transformation occurred relatively slowly and was never complete. Conservative Lutheranism continued to exist side by side with liberalising cultural and theological trends throughout not only the nineteenth but also for several decades of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, by the 1880s it was evident that a new era had begun. Such Norwegian writers as Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson and Arne Garborg began to shoot volleys across the bow of the church, and the Dane Georg Brandes did likewise from Copenhagen in works which were widely read in Norway and also in his lectures in the Norwegian capital Kristiania. The works of the evolutionary prophet Charles Darwin, particularly his *Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man*, became known in Norway, where, as elsewhere, they challenged long-accepted notions about the Biblical account of creation. The views of other cultural radicals also became known in Norway as the century of scientific discovery, democratisation, and other modernising trends proceeded towards its conclusion. It became increasingly evident among educated Norwegians, including many in positions of responsibility in the Lutheran establishment, that a new era of challenges to the church was at hand.

As the eminent church historian Einar Molland pointed out, a subsequently published lecture by Fredrik Petersen, a professor of theology at the university in Kristiania who had spent several years at German universities during the 1860s, heralded its advent more than any other single event. Speaking at a diocesan meeting on “How Should the Church Meet the Infidelity of Our Times?”, he addressed the relationship between Christianity and culture. Keenly aware that the mounting tensions between the two, long evident in numerous other European countries, were being felt in Norway as a hallmark of things to come, Petersen declared that a pivotal task of Christians was to demonstrate “that Christianity was not at all in an unfriendly

17 Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929), 794-795.

relationship to the progress of enlightenment; on the contrary, it stands at the forefront in desiring a positive one.” This did not mean, he insisted, that the essential doctrinal content of Christianity must adapt to the modern world. On the contrary, it was eternal. However, it was necessary, Petersen believed, to embrace modern science as well as democratising tendencies while retaining the core of the Christian faith.<sup>18</sup>

During the following decade the old guard in conservative Lutheran theology began to pass from the scene. After Petersen’s death in 1903, the government appointed as his successor Johannes Ording, a Norwegian pastor then in his mid-thirties who had declared his respect for the eminent German liberal theologian Albrecht Ritschl. His candidature was stiffly resisted by conservative Lutherans who presciently predicted that his appointment would cause an irreparable breach in the established church. The controversy over Ording’s nomination was the core of the so-called *professorstrid*, or *professorsak*, which more than any other event stimulated the *kirkestrid*. One highly consequential result of the dispute at the university was the resignation of the conservative professor Sigurd Odland who, more than any other theologian there, had resisted the appointment of Ording. He and like-minded orthodox Lutherans established Menighetsfakultetet in 1907 as an alternative institution for educating clergymen for the Church of Norway.

### **The Norwegian Lutheran Mission *contra* Liberal Theology in the 1920s**

It was on this disputatious doctrinal landscape that the NLM came into being and spent its early decades. The theologically conservative spirit in which it commissioned its first missionaries to China in the 1890s remained normative in the NLM three decades later. Perhaps this was most clearly demonstrated by the participation of Secretary Johannes Brandtzæg in the national meeting of approximately 950 orthodox Lutherans representing some twenty-five organisations in January at the Calmeyergatens Mission House in the capital in January 1920. In the historiography of Norwegian Lutheranism, this highly publicised “national meeting” is interpreted as a crucial event in which the allied forces of orthodoxy took a decisive stand against “liberal” theology and vowed not to interact with theologians who were its spokesmen. Brandtzæg was elected one of its two vice directors. In an essay published a fortnight later in the NLM’s generally weekly periodical *Kineseren*, he expressed his unalloyed confidence that the assembly would be “a beneficial and necessary battle cry against liberal theology and modernism in general”. Its ripple effects, he predicted, would

18 Einar Molland, *Norges kirkehistorie i det 19. århundre*, II (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1979), 134-135.



wash across Norway from Nordkapp in the far north to Lindesnes on the southern coast.<sup>19</sup>

### **A Contrastive *Imprimatur* on Chinese Buddhism: Kristian Schjelderup**

The zeal of the NLM in evangelising Chinese people in what it understood to be orthodox Lutheran Christianity and its reluctance to co-operate with any Christian agency of whose orthodoxy it was not convinced stand out in bold relief when juxtaposed with the attitude of a young Norwegian in the 1920s whom Brandtzæg openly criticised and who eventually became one of his country's most notorious liberal theologians—and eventually a controversial bishop in its state Lutheran church—Kristian Schjelderup. A brief consideration of this compatriot is particularly relevant because of his explicit endorsement of non-Christian religious practices in China which the NLM opposed. Born in Dypvåg in 1894, this later bishop's son graduated from what was eventually redubbed the University of Oslo in 1918 and spent most of 1922 in China, India, and Japan studying Eastern religions, especially Buddhism, in those lands. He then returned to the Norwegian capital and earned a theological doctorate with a thesis about comparative spirituality in various religions. During his months in East Asia he served as a special correspondent of the daily newspaper *Aftenposten* and filed numerous reports about religious, political, and other topics.<sup>20</sup>

In April 1922 Schjelderup attended the World Student Christian Federation assembly at Tsinghua University in Beijing and reported on how the general anti-missionary sentiment that plagued large numbers of missionaries in China for several years in the mid-1920s was apparent among many of the Chinese and other Asian participants.<sup>21</sup> Rejecting as simplistic accusations that it was inspired by Bolshevism, he perceived it as “a quite natural reaction to a hasty Christianising of China”. Schjelderup also explained the campaign as a defensive reaction to “the West's efforts to insinuate itself and impose hegemony over China's ancient culture and way of thinking”. He did not veil his sympathies: “The Chinese have seen so many of the faults of European and American Christianity, its alliances with militarism, capitalism, and much else, that

19 Johannes Brandtzæg, “Landsmøtet”, *Kineseren* 30, nr. 5 (1 February 1920), 39. For details of, including speeches delivered at, the four-day sequel, see Joh. M. Wisløff (ed.), *Landsmøtet i anledning av kirkestriden avholdt i Calmeyergatens Missionshus 15.–18. februar 1920* (Kristiania: Lutherstiftelsens Boghandel, 1920).

20 Schjelderup's journey to the Far East is briefly sketched in Pål Repstad, *Mannen som ville åpne kirken. Kristian Schjelderups liv* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1989), 97-100.

21 For this dimension of hostility to Christianity, see Ka-che Yip, *Religion, Nationalism and Chinese Students: The Anti-Christian Movement of 1922-1927* (Bellingham, Washington: Center for East Asian Studies, 1989).



they believe they have every right to take a stand against its further intrusion into the lands of the East.”<sup>22</sup>

Two months later Schjelderup openly expressed his sympathy for Chinese Buddhism in the same series of articles. After spending nearly three weeks as a guest at the Buddhist monastery on Mount Putuo in Zhejiang province, he wrote an article lauding the revered *bodhisattva* Kwanyin as “Chinese Buddhism’s Virgin Mary” and declaring that one sensed the same worshipful love and “moving moment” for her that pious Catholics evince when adoring the Holy Mother of God. Schjelderup launched a frontal attack on missionary Christian attitudes towards Buddhism. Whoever visits one of its centres, he declared, soon learns that religious life in China is not only still strong and alive, but also *partly* deep and correct. “To be sure, Christian missionaries often claim that the opposite is true,” Schjelderup admitted, but “that is because they have never thought it worth the trouble to immerse themselves in the life and faith of ‘the heathens.’” He acknowledged that “much superstition” and “mechanical religion” existed among Buddhists; moreover, he had met “many” Buddhist priests “whose morals and education are below non-existent”. Nevertheless, he found a great deal to be admired in more enlightened devotees and, returning to Kwanyin, concluded that “in the final analysis she represents one side of the eternal God’s infinite being!”<sup>23</sup>

The NLM never approved of Schjelderup and his post-orthodox theology and at times explicitly distanced itself from him. In 1924, for example, its organ *Kineseren* expressed the agency’s displeasure that this “extremely modern” theologian had been elected president of the Norwegian Christian Student Society, defeating the well-known and theologically conservative Professor Ole Hallesby for that position.<sup>24</sup> This illustrates the anti-liberal mind-set that militated against what the leadership of the NLM perceived as a challenge to its endeavours to promote in China the exclusive claims of orthodox Christianity as it understood it.

### Initial Participation in the National Christian Council

The NLM was never a totally isolated entity in China. Despite the great distance of Shanghai on the Pacific coast from its mission field in two central provinces of the country, the NLM sent a five-person delegation to the NCC in May 1922. It included two seasoned Chinese pastors, Ma Bao-geng and Liu Dao-seng. The three Nordic delegates were Olaf Lie, Even Staurseth, and Ingeborg Haakonson. They joined approximately 1,200 counterparts from some 130 missionary agencies for meetings held chiefly in the city’s Town Hall. Lie filed a lengthy report of the proceedings, interlaced with his sometimes quite critical comments, which was published serially

22 “Den store internationale studenterkonference i Kina”, *Aftenposten* (Kristiania), 3 June 1922, 1.

23 “Kwanyin Pusa”, *Aftenposten*, 26 August 1922, 1, 3.

24 “Nyt kristelig studenterforbund”, *Kineseren* 34, nr. 12 (23 March 1924), 3.

in three issues of *Kineseren* that summer.<sup>25</sup> Read in the context of Norwegian missions history, his recorded observations and opinions are particularly valuable and harmonise well with what colleagues in the NLM would continue to write about interdenominational relations in China during the 1920s. They illuminate concerns that continued to reverberate in the reports which Lie and his colleagues sent from the field to Norway throughout that decade.

Lie's accounts of the proceedings in Shanghai incorporated several of the forebodings which he perceived there. They offer one seasoned missionary's perspective on how much of Protestantism in China was then evolving in directions which were unacceptable to the NLM's leadership. To be sure, missionaries who stood at different points of the theological compass could be more accommodating of what Lie perceived as too far removed from what his agency stood for, but his recorded perceptions harmonised with the positions which the NLM had taken in Norway and help to illuminate its subsequent reluctance to engage in ecumenical undertakings in China. To begin with, he had misgivings about the frequent use of the terms "the Chinese church" and "China's church", apparently because they suggested the legitimacy of a geographical and cultural segment of Christianity which could differ significantly from what he regarded as normative. To Lie, "the Christian church in China" would have been preferable, and indeed that would emerge as the official name of the ecumenical Protestant denomination which was founded five years later. Even more consequentially, he reported that young Chinese Christians were most enthusiastic about "social work", *i.e.* "elevating the land and its people up from ignorance, illness, falsehoods, and poverty to the state which the currently civilised countries now have – and indeed they dream of even more." It seemed to Lie that "a considerable part of the Anglo-Saxon church" (a vague concept referring to *inter alios* Anglicans, Congregationalists, Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and others whose roots were in the British Isles) "have precisely the same programme".<sup>26</sup> The primary emphasis, he clearly believed, should be on evangelism and eternal salvation, not on social reforms.

Shifting his focus from social ethics to theology, Lie cited Dr. Timothy T'ingfang Lew, an *alumnus* of Yale Divinity School who had earned a doctorate at Columbia University before becoming a lecturer in theology at the University of Beijing and editor of the periodical *Life Journal*, as a lucid example of what seemed ominous in the younger generation of Chinese Christians. He acknowledged that Lew was intellectually gifted and an eloquent orator but warned that he was also a theological modernist whose views were anathema to "older, orthodox" Christians. Furthermore, Lie commented acidly, Lew's views of the Bible as indicated in his publications left no doubt that "he does not stand with both legs in the ranks of the pietists." He added that "several" of the young Chinese Protestant leaders had studied at "semi-rationalistic

25 Olaf Lie, "Kinas kristelige landsmøte" i *Kineseren* 32 (16 July 1922), 1.

26 Olaf Lie, "Kina's kristelige landsmøte" i: *Kineseren* 32, nr. 28 (16 July 1922), 4.

universities in America” but did not adduce specific examples of individuals or institutions to substantiate this assertion.<sup>27</sup>

Lie expressed scepticism about the envisaged NCC because “strife and unrest” had resulted when many delegates proposed that it not have a confession of faith, something they feared could prove divisive. Rather, to his dismay, they argued that it should be anchored in “Christian work” rather than doctrine. He was relieved, however, when Dixon Edward Hoste, who had served for twenty years as the director of the China Inland Mission, demanded that the proposed council profess belief in the sovereignty of God, Jesus as God’s son and salvation in his blood, and the Bible as the true, infallible Word of God. This had been approved. Had it not been, Lie believed, all of the Lutheran delegates would have joined the CIM in declining to participate in the planned council.<sup>28</sup>

Lie’s published interpretation of the National Christian Conference left no doubt that he was wary of co-operation with many of those Christians whom he loosely called “Reformed”, especially those whom he thought were purveying the poison of theological modernism. However, this NLM emissary had no illusions that his fellow Lutherans were entirely free of that doctrinal virus. Lie reported that he and the other Lutheran missionaries from several countries had held “unity meetings” outside the programme of the conference “to make our voice and authority heard against the Reformed”, adding that one Biblical motto of the conference was “that they all may be one” (John 17:21), not that “*all* must be one”. Indeed, he conceded, even when from the larger, international Lutheran faction a select group “who could generally be called ‘low-church’” met secretly, it was difficult to achieve unanimity. This remained the case even after some “Lutheran dinners”, but what the stumbling blocks were Lie did not specify. Foreshadowing the NLM’s eventual attitude towards the NCC and its withdrawal from that body, he found it gratifying to hear at one of the Lutheran meetings outside the conference that “we are doing well as we are; we have enough work to do and seek to maintain that as well as we can. We feel no need for affiliations, so if you will come to us, you are welcome, [but] if you demand that we come to you we feel no need to do so.”<sup>29</sup>

Finally, Lie’s commentary foreshadowed a point of contention that reverberated in the NLM’s later critiques of the NCC. Discussions about an envisaged ecumenical Protestant denomination revealed that its would-be architects thought in terms of creating an ecclesiastical body that would be “far too much of a *worldly* factor”. “It should be social, intrude into all conditions and make its influence and authority felt on both the municipal and state levels,” he feared. Lie believed that all the emphasis would be on institutions, especially schools, and on medical ministry and other forms

27 Olaf Lie, “Kina’s kristelige landsmøte” i: *Kineseren* 32, nr. 29 (30 July 1922), 1, 2.

28 Olaf Lie, “Kina’s kristelige landsmøte” i: *Kineseren* 32, nr. 29 (30 July 1922), 2.

29 Olaf Lie, “Kinas kristelige landsmøte” i: *Kineseren* 32, nr. 29 (30 July 1922), 2.

of benevolence. He found support for his concern in a speech delivered by his fellow Lutheran Siegfried Knak, the director of the Berlin Missionary Society, who had urged the delegates to distinguish between the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of the world. The church, this German cleric reminded his audience, had often suffered when it became heavily involved in secular activities. Lie agreed wholeheartedly and remarked that in the discussions “a so simple and undemanding person as Jesus Christ was nearly ignored.”<sup>30</sup>

Misgivings about the creation of an NCC were by no means exclusively Lutheran. To cite but one example from a quite different denominational tradition, the personnel in the Southern Presbyterian’s North Jiangsu Mission (in which Absalom Sydenstricker, the father of the later Nobel laureate Pearl S. Buck, had served) declined by a wide vote not to participate. “Our Church already has abundant agencies to do all the work Providence has entrusted to us,” they explained. “Our commission is to preach the gospel, heal the sick, teach the ignorant and relieve the distressed; and accordingly we have chapels, hospitals, schools [and] orphanages and have done more than our share of famine relief work.” They added that many of their Chinese pastors agreed and quoted one of them indirectly: “Far better spend these thousands in preaching the gospel and saving souls.”<sup>31</sup> Perhaps the underlying response of the NLM personnel in central China was “ja og amen”, but they nevertheless chose to co-operate for the time being.

### **The NLM vs. Liberal Theology in the 1920s**

Meanwhile, in Norway the protests of the orthodox against the rising tide of liberal theology continued apace. Prominent men in the NLM joined other theologically conservative Norwegian Lutherans in criticising the appointment of post-orthodox compatriots to influential ecclesiastical and theological positions. The controversial naming of Jens Gleditsch as bishop of Nidaros (Trondheim) in 1923, for example, drew their ire. The editor of *Kineseren* quoted at length an opinion piece in *Luthersk Kirketidende*, then one of the periodicals of the orthodox group within the Church of Norway, decrying the consecration of Gleditsch, “one of our most consistently liberal theologians”.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the NLM had never endorsed Johannes Ordning’s appointment as a professor of theology in 1906 and unabashedly rejoiced at his resignation two decades later. How the conservative government of Prime Minister Christian Michelsen could have named “the most radical of applicants” to that post seemed

30 Olaf Lie, “Kinas kristelige landsmøte” i: *Kineseren* 32, nr. 30 (6 August 1922), 2.

31 “Why the North Kiangsu Mission Declined to Approve of a National Christian Council in China” i: *The Presbyterian of the South* (Richmond, Virginia) 17, nr. 50 (13 December 1922), 3.

32 “Omkring bispestriden” i: *Kineseren* 33, nr. 255-26 (24 June 1923), 2.

inexplicable to a writer in *Kineseren*, who expressed hope that the nation's politicians might have learned a lesson from the consequences of that "blunder".<sup>33</sup>

Part of the salvation of orthodoxy seemed to come from overseas. As early as 1924, one of the editors of *Kineseren* called readers' attention to a theological movement in the United States of America which he erroneously believed was quite new and centred at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. He defined this "fundamentalism" as a swiftly advancing campaign "for a whole Bible, and open Bible, and a literally accepted Bible". This writer was confident that "fundamentalism" would soon flow from American shores to other countries and hoped that it would awaken Norwegian Christians to join in a seriously defined front against every movement that violated the Holy Scriptures.<sup>34</sup>

The infamous and internationally publicised "Scopes monkey trial" which took place in Dayton, Tennessee, in the summer of the following year also caught the attention of the NLM. Particularly the theologically orthodox Presbyterian lawyer William Jennings Bryan, who staunchly rejected Darwinian evolution as unbiblical, drew praise. After the trial concluded, one of the NLM editors found humour in the efforts of the former chancellor of Stanford University, David Starr Jordan, to raise \$5,000 to defray the cost of John Scopes's postgraduate studies at the university of his choice. "Yes, declaring that one is related to apes has its advantages," wrote Gustav Nielssen with no mean sarcasm.<sup>35</sup>

On the home front, Kristian Schjelderup remained one of the NLM's principal targets after his appointment to the Faculty of Theology at the University of Oslo in 1921. Going far beyond a previous generation of liberal theologians' questioning of various conventional doctrines, his dismissal of much that orthodox Lutherans regarded as foundational theology scandalised some of his opponents, including those within the NLM. This opposition came to a head in the autumn of 1924 when Schjelderup crossed verbal swords with a colleague, the liberal New Testament scholar Lyder Brun. Writing in the Kristiania daily newspaper *Dagbladet*, Schjelderup declared, "Most of what one has learned to regard as central in Christianity does not stem from Jesus!" Among the doctrines which he professed to have arisen later in the early church were the divinity, atonement, and physical resurrection and ascent to heaven of Christ. Such beliefs, Schjelderup insisted, were products of history and thus have "no claim to validity in scientific consciousness of our time".<sup>36</sup> An alarmed anonymous writer in *Kineseren* reported these shocking assertions *verbatim* and found scant consolation in Brun's challenges to them. On the contrary, that NLM journalist

33 "Ording" i: *Kineseren* 36, nr. 9 (28 February 1926), 1.

34 "Utlandet" i: *Kineseren* 34, nr. 22-23 (Pentecost, 1924), 6.

35 "Utlandet" i: *Kineseren* 35, nr. 33 (13 September 1925), 4.

36 Kristian Schjelderup, "Kristendommens oprinnelse i religionshistorisk belysning", *Dagbladet* (Kristiania), 13 September 1924), 1.

cautioned readers that Schjelderup's radical position was essentially "an extension of the view which Brun and other moderately liberal theologians represent".<sup>37</sup>

## Leaving the National Christian Council

The misgivings which Olaf Lie expressed about the ecumenical co-operation and the lack of commitment to what he regarded as theological orthodoxy at the National Christian Conference in 1922 clearly foreshadowed the waxing dissatisfaction of the NLM with the NCC during the next three years. There is abundant documentation that both the Norwegian personnel in the field and at its headquarters in Norway soon began to regard further participation in the Council as incompatible with the NLM's staunch opposition to theological modernism and doctrinal diversity. Furthermore, as will be seen below, at least some of these Lutherans echoed the suspicion of prioritising social reform and willingness to become involved in political activism that had been expressed at the Shanghai conference in 1922.

Olav Espegren, then the superintendent of the NLM field, laid bare the depth of his concern about the theological state of much missionary Christianity in China against a backdrop of civil unrest when he drafted his annual report for 1924. That the country was in turmoil was obvious to this seasoned missionary, but he opined that "the revolution in spiritual life was stronger than and more consequential than the civil war, the terror of banditry, and financial hardship." China's national awakening was a powder keg waiting to explode, Espegren feared, and as one component of this broad development students had come under the sway of what he called "the New Civilisation movement".<sup>38</sup> A Darwinist conceptualisation of nature and communist social philosophy were eroding conventional beliefs and social relations.<sup>39</sup>

Turning directly to religious dimensions of the shifting sands, Espegren did not veil his alarm at what he termed "the devastation of rationalism among missionaries in China". As stealthily as tuberculosis bacteria, he lamented, it had infected most institutions of tertiary education in the country. Espegren quoted one unidentified writer "from the quarters of the old faithful" who had declared that rationalism was

37 "Ny-teologer i kamp", i: *Kineseren* 34, nr. 46 (14 December 1924), 2, 4.

38 Presumably meant is actually the New Culture Movement, which arose during the early years of the Republic of China and was advancing notably in the 1920s. In brief, it criticised much in traditional Chinese culture and called for national revitalisation through emphasis on natural science and democracy. See Chow Tse-tsung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1960), and Svera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

39 Olav Espegren, "Aarsmelding 1924" i: *Det norske lutherske Kinamissionsforbund Aarbok 1925* (Bergen: A/S Lunde & Co.s Forlag, 1925), 17-18.

being taught at every one of the universities which missionaries had founded and that of thirteen theological faculties and seminaries for the training of pastors only four were free of rationalism. Moreover, of nearly fifty Bible schools, perhaps only nine or ten remained uninfected. Espegren's hope lay partly in the fact that four years earlier "those who were faithful to the Bible began to raise their voices" by founding their own "ring" and publishing a periodical. This was undoubtedly a reference to the Bible Union which had been established in 1920. Espegren was confident that at least the voice of theologically orthodox protest would remain audible, but he regretted that some unidentified people were trying to muffle it in the interest of "unity". Such co-operation, Espegren explained, was superficially being maintained by the NCC in Shanghai, but departures from it were already underway. "And one fine day the entire unity hysteria will collapse," he predicted.<sup>40</sup>

By then Espegren had corresponded disharmoniously with Edwin C. Lobenstine of the NCC, indicating his displeasure with the course that body was following. The Norwegian's side of the correspondence does not appear to be extant, but the gist of his dissatisfaction is readily discerned from that official's responses. An American Presbyterian who had served as a missionary in China for more than two decades beginning shortly before the eruption of the Boxer Rebellion,<sup>41</sup> Lobenstine rejected Espegren's complaint in August 1924 that the NCC was inviting theologically questionable speakers to China. This was a "total misapprehension", he insisted, for the Council did not invite evangelists or lecturers from abroad, but used personnel from its member organisations.<sup>42</sup>

By that time, however, Espegren may have nearly washed hands of the NCC. He seems to have chosen not to reply to Lobenstine, who sought to keep a channel of communication with him open by writing again in early November. Lobenstine lamented that he had not heard from the disgruntled Norwegian superintendent and admitted that the NCC hoped to serve numerous foreign missionary agencies by developing an extensive body of Christian literature in Chinese. This had been possible in India, he noted, but not yet in China. A thorny underlying problem, according to Lobenstine, lay in "the difficulty . . . in satisfying the varied elements of the Christian constituency", an explanation which no doubt was meaningful to the disgruntled personnel in the NLM.<sup>43</sup>

40 Espegren, "Aarsmelding 1924", 20-21.

41 "Training Missionaries", i: *The New York Times*, 18 June 1898, 5.

42 E.C. Lobenstine (Shanghai) to Olav Espegren, 12 September 1924, Box Da - 0003, Folder National National Christian Council in China, Feltarkiv, NLM Archives, Fjellhaug International University College, Oslo.

43 E.C. Lobenstine (Shanghai) to Olav Espegren, 5 November 1924, Box Da - 0003, Folder National National Christian Council in China, Feltarkiv, NLM Archives, Fjellhaug International University College, Oslo.



In January 1925 Lobenstine made what may have been a final effort to woo Espegren out of his *incommunicado* state by writing to him yet again. However, he may have undermined his case and further alienated the NLM superintendent by emphasising in detail what he believed were the NCC's beneficial efforts on behalf of Chinese Christianity and the numerous foreign agencies that were supporting it. Lobenstine stressed *inter alia* the major effort to organise throughout China "an effective Anti-Opium campaign". This had already led to the organisation of more than 230 local societies, most of which were under the supervision of Christians in Shanghai. Lobenstine emphasised that "the bulk of this work falls upon the National Christian Council" and was led by a member of its staff, K. T. Chung.<sup>44</sup> Presumably unbeknown to this enthusiastic American, underscoring such a social ethical dimension of ministry confirmed what Espegren and at least some of his colleagues in the NLM found objectionable in the NCC.

There is also evidence that the NLM perceived what it regarded as unacceptable *de facto* recognition of Buddhism on the part of many non-Lutheran missionaries in China. On Easter Sunday, 12 April 1925, Thubten Choekyi Nyima, the Ninth Panchen Lama of Tibetan Buddhism, who had trekked from Tibet to Beijing, was welcomed by nearly 1,000 Chinese and foreign representatives of numerous Christian and other religious bodies. The event had been arranged by Gilbert Reid, an ecumenically inclined American Presbyterian missionary who had been in China since the 1890s. As reported by the Associated Press, he welcomed the Panchen Lama warmly in an introductory address and expressed his hope that the occasion might enable the represented churches "to unite in their effort to attain the object which all had in view, namely the betterment of the world".<sup>45</sup>

Peder Simonsen Eikrem, who had served the NLM for many years in China before returning to Norway, was incensed at this meeting. Disparaging it in *Kineseren*, he relied heavily on and included a lengthy excerpt from an account published by Arie Kok, who was the chancellor of the Dutch Embassy and an unabashed Christian.<sup>46</sup> This diplomat had found it scandalous that on Easter, of all days, large numbers of Christians had thus honoured a man who was venerated as a modern incarnation of the Buddha. Eikrem concurred and urged readers of *Kineseren* to draw a lesson from the occasion at a time when missionaries of the Gospel were sailing against a brisk headwind. "The only thing we can and must do is to keep our own flock clean, and

44 E.C. Lobenstine (Shanghai) to Olav Espegren, 10 January 1925, Box Da - 0003, Folder National National Christian Council in China, Feltarkiv, NLM Archives, Fjellhaug International University College, Oslo.

45 "Foreigners See Spiritual Ruler in Peking Meet" i: *The Humboldt Times* (Eureka, California), 19 July 1925, 10.

46 "Arie Kok, 67, Dies At Collingswood; Church Leader" i: *Courier-Post* (Camden, New Jersey), 10 January 1951, 4.



then not have fellowship with those who deny [Christianity],” he asserted. “And if we can succeed in keeping the light of the Gospel shining in the little area of China which we call our own, that would be more crucial than ever. May we hold out until the end!”<sup>47</sup> Eikrem’s advocacy of such aloofness from more liberally minded Christians was, of course, in full harmony with the decision not to continue in the NCC.

When Secretary Brandtzæg from the NLM headquarters arrived in China in the autumn of 1926, missionaries warned him yet again of the potentially grave situation in which the country found itself and how serious the implications of the domestic tensions could be for the future of Christianity there. However, he believed those undeniable woes were of secondary importance. The greater danger, this dogmatically inflexible pastor asserted, was that the gospel of Christ was being eclipsed, especially by “modernism” in preaching, educational work, and “many other hidden and underground ways which cannot be traced and controlled”. Brandtzæg was certain that other missionaries shared his perception and pointed to a recently published book, *The Red Theology in the Far East* by Charles H. Coates of the China Inland Mission to corroborate his opinion. He assured readers that he could fill many issues of *Kineseren* with details of “modernism” and its dilatory effects on the missionary enterprise. Brandtzæg granted that in China, as elsewhere, one could find many “outstanding people” who were diligently promoting “Christianity as they understand and proclaim it”. Nevertheless, he thought that the consequences of theological modernism were “so sad that one could shed tears of blood over them”.<sup>48</sup>

By and large, the NLM did not evince regret that it had chosen not to continue to walk hand-in-hand with many other Protestant agencies in China. A lengthy review of the country’s spiritual state published in *Kineseren* in 1926 reflected its perception of it as far from conducive to sustaining a pietistic Lutheran position if such close ties had been maintained. Its author, veteran missionary Lars Fleisje who had gone to China in 1908, had returned to Norway in 1925 because of failing health but embedded in his survey insights gleaned from his last few years in the field. He noted that in accordance with nationalistic tendencies, Christianity was being Sinaicised in some quarters, *i.e.* adapted to fit Chinese culture and attitudes towards life. Fleisje refrained from passing explicit judgment on that tendency, but not on “the wave of rationalism which in the form of a one-sided scholarly wisdom has washed over China”. He consoled readers by asserting that it seemed to have reached its apex and might be in recession. Fleisje was also pleased to report that the China Inland Mission, along with a number of other societies, had cut its ties to the NCC because of the latter’s “rationalistic tendencies”.<sup>49</sup>

47 P. S. Eikrem, “Uten fæste. Et tidsbillede fra Kina” i: *Kineseren* 35, nr. 26 (28 June 1925), 2.

48 “Stillingen i Kina”, 2.

49 Lars Fleisje, “Aandsretninger i nutidens Kina” i: *Kineseren* 36, nr. 37, nr. 37 (17 October 1926), 3-4.

## The Church of Christ in China

The quite limited denominational scope of participation in the initial general assembly of the Church of Christ in China, held in Shanghai during the first eleven days of October 1927, may have given the NLM personnel vindication for their refusal to participate. To be sure, 1927 was an *annus horribilis* for missionaries in China generally, many of whom had to abandon stations in the interior of the country and take shelter from the paroxysm of violence that shook the land at that time. Their resumption of responsibilities after many months' absence preoccupied them; ecumenical endeavours were necessarily surpassed in the hierarchy of priorities. The NLM remained largely silent about the constitution of the Church of Christ in China.

In the absence of these Norwegians as well as Lutherans from several other countries, delegates representing chiefly denominations of Reformed ancestry gathered in Shanghai. In what may have struck some as an anomalous but gracious act, His Grace Frederick Rogers Graves, who had served as the bishop of the Anglican diocese of Shanghai since 1893, offered the campus of the prestigious St. Mary's Hall, an exclusive girls' school, as the venue for this parley. However, there was no Anglican involvement *per se* in the formation of the Church of Christ in China.

One of the participants, Andrew Weir, sought to paint a moderately roseate picture of the birth of this interdenominational denomination while tactfully acknowledging the absence of large numbers of foreign missionaries and Chinese church members from it. Filing a report in *The Chinese Recorder*, Weir gratefully recognising the role of Bishop Graves in providing a "beautiful" site for the proceedings, Weir asserted that "The meeting brought joy to many hearts both as the realization of the hopes of years and as an earnest expectation of even better things to come." At the same time, this ecumenist could "rejoice in the consummation of a union that include about one-third of the Protestant Christians of China and in the expansion and enrichment of our common life." Without going into extensive detail, he expressed hope that Anglicans, Lutherans, and Methodists who had "developed better than we some elements in the Christian way of life" would someday join the new denomination to create "a still wider and richer union".<sup>50</sup> Weir did not record the reasons underlying their decision not to join in 1927.

In his annual report for 1927, superintendent Olav Espegren did not even mention the Church of Christ in China. The NLM personnel under his supervision were preoccupied with reconstructing their temporarily vacated ministries and seeking to protect their flocks from the continued threats of banditry and warfare. Simultaneously, the NLM was busy implementing a new system of administration in its Chinese field which transferred more responsibility from the Norwegian personnel to indigenous church leaders. Revealingly, Espegren asserted that the greatest threat to the church in

50 Andrew Weir, "The First General Assembly of the Church of Christ in China" i: *The Christian Recorder* 59, nr. 11 (November 1927), 712-714.

China was “the modern denial of Christ and the Bible”. He judged that the Chinese people, with their “tolerant national character in matters of religion, were naturally predisposed to the liberal-rationalist infection”, against which, he thought, there was no impenetrable immunity. One could only “vaccinate” Christians against heresy, Espegren believed. In the same breath, this superintendent lamented the “friendly” relationship between the “modern” Chinese church leaders and the “modern” political authorities. Consequently, to maintain fidelity to “its first love”, the church must maintain its distance from politics.<sup>51</sup>

### **Retrospective Vindication in 1930**

The NLM remained steadfast in its unwillingness to compromise its Lutheran confessional foundations, and its leaders perceived continuing evidence in the course of Christianity which confirmed their conviction that they had acted prudently in cutting their ties with movements that they regarded as misdirected or unambiguously heterodox. As late as 1930, for example, veteran missionary Johannes Karstad lamented what he described as the partial secularisation of the Young Men’s Christian Association in China. He marshalled the misgivings of David Z.T. Yui, a Chinese-born but Harvard-educated educator and churchman who had been elected chairman of the NCC in 1922 and headed his country’s YMCA for many years, in describing what he regarded as a loss of spiritual vitality in that organisation owing to the expansion of its programmes that were not conventionally religious. “Clearly defined lines are absolutely essential in all Christian work, and especially in missions to the heathens,” Karstad asserted. “If the foundation, namely the Word of God, is shaken by doubt and modernist interpretations, we soon become helpless, and otherwise sensible people can come up with incredible madness and heathendom.”<sup>52</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The NLM’s brief involvement in interdenominational endeavours thus largely drew to a close in 1925 “not with a bang but a whimper”, to borrow a well-known line from T.S. Eliot’s endlessly quoted poem “The Hollow Men”, which coincidentally was also published that year. Perhaps it was nearly doomed from an early stage, if not from the outset. As noted above, there had been some unquantifiable measure of enthusiasm for co-operation with other Lutheran as well as non-Lutheran missionary agencies in China quite early in the century, as evidenced by the NLM’s participation in the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910, and as late as 1922 several representatives trekked to Shanghai to join hands with counterparts in a large number of other agencies in forming the NCC. However, before either of these events certain

51 Olav Espegren, “Arbeidet på misjonsmarken” i: *Det Norsk Lutherske Kinamissionsforbund. Årbok 1928* (Bergen: A/S Lunde & Co.s Forlag, 1928), 14-15.

52 Johannes Karstad, “Klare linjer” i: *Kineseren* 40, nr. 41 (9 November 1930), 2.

leaders of the NLM, both in Norway and in the central Chinese field, had nailed their orthodox doctrinal colours to the mast and made known their fervent opposition to organisations which in their eyes were theologically controversial. In retrospect, it seems almost ironic that the NLM participated in the NCC as long as it did, considering the stance against co-operation with modernists that its leaders, particularly Brandtzæg, had already taken at the Calmeyergaten convention in 1920. It should be emphasised that the widening cleft between the NCC and the NLM between 1922 and 1925 was not merely a matter of the former not meeting the latter's criteria for theological orthodoxy, but also entailed the former's vigorous programme of social ministry, including such matters as its campaign against opium, that alienated these conservative Norwegian Lutherans whose unabashed emphasis on conventional evangelism and ecclesiastical life left little room for such supposedly secular movements.

This conscious choice to concentrate its personnel and other resources on evangelistic efforts and conventional Christian religious life at its stations rather than engaging with other agencies in an amalgam of religious and social endeavours, such as the sorely needed movement to check the proliferation of opium in China, is also understandable when one considers the pietistic origins of the NLM and its stance against any degree of theological liberalism in Norway. To be sure, almost from its inception the NLM had conducted medical ministry at some of its stations, and in 1923 a qualified physician, Olaf Olsen, arrived from Norway to strengthen this dimension significantly. Moreover, in April 1928 it dedicated the Frøyland Memorial Hospital at its large compound in Laohekou.<sup>53</sup> However, social ministries always held lower positions on the NLM's hierarchy of priorities. Furthermore, even when the *kirkestrid* seemed to be waning in some respects in the 1920s, men like Kristian Schelderup with his accommodation of Buddhism reminded the NLM that their efforts to maintain doctrinal orthodoxy could not be abandoned. The hostility of such leaders as Eikrem to the reception given the Panchen Lama in 1925 reinforced this unwillingness to continue in a co-operative mode that now smacked not only of theological modernism but also syncretism that apparently contradicted the NLM's purpose of living in accordance with the Great Commission and bringing the historic Christian faith as its emissaries knew it to China.

53 "Da 'dr. Frøylands Minne' blev innviet" i: *Kineseren* 38 nr. 25 (17 June 1928), 2.

# The Mission Play of Santa Clara

## A Historically Contextualised Study in Historical Representation

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Abstract: The chain of more than twenty Franciscan missions established in Alta California, then part of Mexico, between the 1760s and 1820s became the target of many critical historians and other writers at least as early as the 1850s, *i.e.* a few years after California was annexed by the USA in 1846. Their accounts of meaningless pseudoconversions and conditions of virtual slavery at the stations became standard features in much of the historical writing by *e.g.* Theodore H. Hittell and Hubert Howe Bancroft well before 1900. In response to such criticism, and at the behest of a retired president of Santa Clara College, Martin Merle crafted a drama in which life at the Misión Santa Clara de Asís was portrayed in primarily idyllic terms in the 1840s. The present article is an exploration of that positive presentation of Santa Clara. Merle's play is juxtaposed with earlier writing about the Franciscan missionary endeavours. It is argued *inter alia* that his portrayal of the head of the mission, Padre José María del Real, as a heroic, morally upright figure diametrically contradicts earlier criticism of him as a womanising despot. Furthermore, Merle accepted the closure of this mission after the annexation but interpreted appreciatively its legacy as incorporated in the Catholic educational, cultural, and spiritual fruits which were in full accord with its historical purpose.

Keywords: Milton V. Merle, Franciscan missions, California, Santa Clara University, Mexican-American War, religious drama, *The Mission Play of Santa Clara*.

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The establishment of Roman Catholic missionary endeavours in various Spanish and Portuguese colonies was a seminal development in the proliferation of Christianity in the Americas, and the closure of many of the Jesuit, Franciscan, and other *reducciones*, or model communities, has been represented in a considerable number of literary, dramatic, and cinematic productions.<sup>2</sup> Many of these have illuminated the confrontations of Jesuit missionaries with governmental authorities. The suppression of the Society of Jesus beginning in the 1750s with the expulsion of its missionaries from the Portuguese colonies in 1759 and those of France and Spain, respectively, in 1764 and 1767, culminated in the papal dissolution of the order in 1773. It would not be revived until 1814 by decree of Pius VII, after which Jesuit missionaries gradually returned to some of their previous mission fields. The consequences of this series of political and ecclesiastical actions stimulated the creative imaginations of writers from Voltaire, who incorporated the matter as a theme in *Candide*, through Fritz Hochwalder in his drama *Das heilige Experiment*,<sup>3</sup> to Robert Bolt, who crafted the script for the internationally renowned film of 1986, *The Mission*, which can be readily interpreted as vivid advocacy of liberation theology when that phenomenon was being criticised by Pope John Paul II and Joseph Ratzinger, who succeeded him as Benedict XVI.<sup>4</sup> Less well known outside specialised circles, however, is the secularisation and closure of the famous chain of twenty-one Franciscan missions in the vast Alta California province of Mexico before its annexation by the United States of America in 1846.

Like the fate of the Jesuit stations, that of their Franciscan counterparts became the subject of both heated debate and artistic representation for the public. The present article is an analysis of a key development in the dramatisation of this latter closure, namely Martin V. Merle's celebratory *The Mission Play of Santa Clara*, which premiered in 1913. Specifically, this study focusses on that portrayal of the threatened termination of a major Franciscan station and its place in the history of writing about the Franciscans' disputed endeavours in California. The emphasis will be on how that Catholic dramatist's commitment to the undergraduate college (and subsequently university) which arose from the ruins of that mission station and where he earned his master's degree as well as his desire to interpret the consequences of the American

- 1 This article was written while I was a Visiting Scholar at Fjellhaug International University College in Oslo. I express my gratitude to its obliging library staff for assistance in my research.
- 2 Frederick Hale, "Literary Images of Jesuit Missions to the Guaranı" in *Missionalia* 22, no. 1 (April 1994), 42-60.
- 3 Frederick Hale, "Appropriating the Closure of Jesuit Missions: Fritz Hochwalder's *Das heilige Experiment*" in *Acta Theologica* 28, no. 1 (June 2008), 58-75.
- 4 Frederick Hale, "*The Mission* As the Cinema of Liberation Theology" in *Missionalia* 23, no. 1 (April 1995), 72-91.

annexation of California positively profoundly shaped the thematic impulse of his play.

Extremely little of a scholarly nature has heretofore been published about Merle's *Mission Play*. In his commendable survey of the history of Santa Clara University published nearly half a century ago, Gerald McKevitt devoted a single sentence to it and misleadingly described the work as thematically about the secularisation of the Franciscan missions.<sup>5</sup> More recently, Lee M. Panich, a professor of anthropologist at Santa Clara, noted in an article about the place of Native Americans at the antecedent Franciscan mission that themes of European and Christian enlightenment of Native Americans were present in the *Mission Play* and included a photograph of an early performance on the campus of that institution.<sup>6</sup>

In the present article it is argued that Merle's scenic representation of the Santa Clara mission placed this piece unambiguously on the laudatory side of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century debate over the upliftment or enslavement which the Franciscan enterprise in California brought to Native Americans. Furthermore, it led him to interpret the American annexation of 1846 as a benign and eventually propitious historical development for California and Catholicism there. A pupa in the cocoon of war soon become a butterfly of Catholic educational endeavour, particularly as manifested in the establishment of Santa Clara College as the immediate and unmistakable heir of the mission.

## **The Historical Context of Franciscan Missions in California**

The general history of the Franciscan missionary undertaking in California is well known and does not require detailed recapitulation here. In brief, although Alta California had been part of the massive Spanish colony of New Spain, the colonial administration did little with it until the eighteenth century, and even then not a great deal. In the 1760s Spanish Franciscans under the leadership of Junípero Serra began to undertake evangelisation of Native Americans in California. They quickly established a string of stations extending from the first, San Diego de Alcalá at what is now the city of San Diego, in 1769, to a small number in and slightly north of present-day San Francisco. The seventh in this series was Misión Santa Clara de Asís, which was founded near the southern end of San Francisco Bay in 1777. By 1823 there were twenty-one such stations, chiefly very near the Pacific coast. At these stations, regular religious life was amalgamated with agricultural and other forms of labour, leading to the development of settled communities with *inter alia* herds of cattle, flocks of sheep, and field crops.

5 Gerald McKevitt, *The University of Santa Clara: A History, 1851-1977* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1979), 143.

6 Lee M. Panich, "Archaeology, Indigenous erasure, and the creation of white public space at the California missions" in *Journal of Social Archaeology*, 22, no. 2 (June 2022), 159-160.



The attainment of Mexican independence as a sovereign country in 1821 marked the end of Spanish colonial administration but did not immediately spell the termination of this chain of missions. They continued to function along familiar lines for more than a decade, their Franciscan religious personnel largely though not exclusively Spanish. However, in 1833, apparently fearing a possible attempt by Spain to recover Mexico and return it to some sort of colonial status, the Mexican Congress elected to secularise and nationalise the missions (the loyalty of whose Spanish personnel to the new country was suspect) in California, a measure that began to become effective the following year. Demands made by migrants from further south in Mexico for agricultural land also contributed to the forced surrender of mission property. Franciscan priests from Spain were replaced by Mexican-born counterparts. By 1836 nearly all of the missions had been removed from Franciscan control. Grazing land was generally divided into *ranchos*, thereby accelerating the development of private agriculture in Alta California.

But the final chapter in this episode of missions history had not yet been written. In the early 1840s several of the missions were restored to the Franciscans, and most of these were still functioning, albeit on a drastically reduced scale, at the time of the American annexation of California in 1846. Among them, Santa Clara was secularised in December 1836. Seven years later its ownership was returned to the Franciscans. According to the historian Engelhardt, Santa Clara had been among the wealthiest of the missions in California, but its decline had been “remarkably rapid” after its secularisation.<sup>7</sup>

An empirically demonstrable and utterly germane element in the history of the Franciscan missions during the tumultuous time with which Merle’s play deals is the assurance given by Commodore John D. Sloat, the American commander who raised the Stars and Stripes in Monterey on 6 July 1846 to signify the annexation of California, that ecclesiastical and other property would be fully respected. His proclamation, which was widely circulated that year and published in numerous American newspapers, was also reproduced *verbatim* in the London press, not surprisingly, because the United Kingdom briefly showed interest in adding California to its empire.<sup>8</sup> Sloat’s reassuring, unqualified words contrasted with the Mexican law of thirteen years earlier that had allowed the expropriation of the missions: “All persons holding titles of real estate, or in quiet possession of lands under color of right, shall have their titles and rights guaranteed to them. All churches, and the property they contain, in possession of the clergy of California, shall continue in the same rights and possession they now

7 Zephyrin Engelhardt, *The Franciscans of California* (Harbor Springs, Michigan: Holy Childhood Indian School, 1897), 334.

8 “Proclamation. To the Inhabitants of California”, *The Morning Post* (London), 27 October 1846, 3.

enjoy.”<sup>9</sup> As this assurance obviously supported the Franciscans’ claim to perpetual possession of their vast holdings, Engelhardt quoted parts of it in the fourth volume of his history of the order’s missionary endeavours in California.<sup>10</sup> As will be seen below, the eventuality that not all of the Yankee conquerors of California would respect even documented property rights looms large as a pivotal theme in Merle’s *Mission Play*.

## Nineteenth-Century Critical Observations of the Missions

Critical contemporary and retrospective commentary of the Franciscan missions, generally focussing on alleged maltreatment of their Native American communities but in some cases also highlighting sexual immorality among the priests who led them, became a fixture in Anglophone accounts at least by the 1850s, *i.e.* the decade following the American annexation of California. This historiographical development coincided with the “Know Nothing” party and other anti-Catholic nativist movements elsewhere in American society.<sup>11</sup> One of the severest of these testimonies came from the pen of Hugo Reid, a young Scottish immigrant who arrived in the Los Angeles area in the early 1830s and married a *Gabrieleña* or Tongva woman. He published his critical remarks about Franciscan malfeasance in a series of twenty-four “letters” which were published in 1859 in the *Los Angeles Star*, where he was identified as “an educated man” and “a person of great honesty and worth”.<sup>12</sup> Reid’s comments were subsequently issued as a privately published book. Excerpts from the latter appeared from time to time in the California press during the latter half of the nineteenth century. A sample of Reid’s denigrating comments about the shape of missionary work and relations between the indigenous people of the Los Angeles area and the Franciscans who sought to evangelise them richly illustrates the tone of his perceptions.

The “conversions” effected among the evangelised residents of southern California Reid dismissed as essentially a sham. In his blanket indictment, priests were accompanied by what he labelled “vagabonds, under the name of soldiers” to bring

9 “Proclamation of Com. Sloat. To the Inhabitants of California”, *The Pittsburgh Daily Gazette and Advertiser*, 8 October 1846, 2.

10 Zephyrin Engelhardt, *The Missions and Missionaries of California*. IV. *Upper California*. Part III. *General History* (San Francisco: The James H. Barry Company, 1915), 554.

11 Ted C. Hinckley, “American Anti-Catholicism During the Mexican War” in *Pacific Historical Review* 31, no. 2 (May 1962), 121-137; John C. Pinheiro, “‘Religion without Restriction’: Anti-Catholicism, All Mexico, and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo” in *Journal of the Early Republic* 23, no. 1 (Spring 2013), 69-96; Peter Guardino, “‘In the Name of Civilization and with a Bible in Their Hands’: Religion and the 1846-48 Mexican-American War” in *Mexican Studies / Estudios Mexicanos* 30, no. 2 (Summer 2014), 342-365. For the broader history of hostility to the Roman Catholic Church and its adherents in ante-bellum America, see Maura Jane Farrelly, *Anti-Catholicism in America, 1620-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

12 “The California Indians”, *Los Angeles Star*, 23 July 1859, 4.

the local people to Christianity. They managed to snare “some few”, he asserted, by offering them “cloth and ribbons” and teaching them to utter the Spanish phrase *Amar a Dios* (“To love God”), after which such individuals were baptised and put to work at the mission. Their superficial conversions to the religion of their Spanish overlords, however, caused them to lose status within their tribes and left them powerless to resist subjugation. Reid presumed to judge that there was simply no spiritual change of heart: “They had no more idea that they were worshipping God than an unborn child has of Astronomy.” Moreover, this Scotsman believed that their “religion, as Catholics, consisted in being able to cross themselves, under an impression it was something connected with hard work and still harder blows.”<sup>13</sup>

In other cases, according to Reid, conversions were simply forced. He recounted, again without indicating the source of his information, how on one occasion “soldiers” from a mission had ventured to what he called “Rancho del Chino” (perhaps meaning the Rancho Santa Ana del Chino in the Pomona Valley), where they “tied and whipped every man, woman, and child” before driving some of the terrorised people back to their mission. There these captives were simply forced to accept the imposition of the colonialist religion: “On arriving home the men were instructed to throw their bows and arrows at the feet of the priest, and make due submission.—The infants were then baptized, as were also all children under eight years of age; the former were left with their mothers, but the latter kept apart from all communication with their parents.” Under such duress, the displaced women accepted baptism, and the captured males did likewise as a means of maintaining some degree of family unity. Christian marriage vows were then said among many of these involuntary converts, and the superficial result was that these members of a “contaminated race” became what Reid described with no mean irony as “followers of Christ (?)”.<sup>14</sup>

Reid was not alone in the severity of his comments about the spiritual ineptness and exploitative authority of the Franciscans. In 1882 the novelist and historian Frances Fuller Victor, who would subsequently serve as one of Hubert Howe Bancroft’s ghostwriters in his works about the American West, contributed a very lengthy, tripartite article, “Studies of the California Missions”, to the monthly periodical *The Californian*. She did not mince words in assessing the mixed harvest of fruits of the missions, combining condescension with castigation and contempt. Victor acknowledged that the agricultural ventures had enjoyed considerable success but judged that despite impressive “temporal results” the Franciscans in question did not really grasp “how much of a failure was the spiritual part of it”. She granted that Junípero Serra and his *confrères* were sincere but myopic, a band of brothers “willing to devote their lives to benefiting a portion of the human race whom they considered

13 Hugo Reid, *The Indians of Los Angeles County* (Los Angeles: Privately printed, 1926), 47-48.

14 Reid, *The Indians of Los Angeles County*, 49.

most unfortunate in not possessing a knowledge of the Saints of the Romish Church, and for a ruler, the King of Spain". The first generation of Franciscan missionaries passed from the scene "before they fully realized that even the next generation of Indians would not be capable of citizenship". The subsequent Franciscans in California were even more blatant parasites in Victor's construction of the region's history; they lived like

absolute lords each of an extent of country equal to a European state, with one, two, or three thousand slaves subject to his will, and an army of soldiers at his bidding to maintain this subjection, or at any time to increase the number, if desired, by capture of more gentiles; with rapidly increasing herds, growing orchards, ripening harvests, and a commerce requiring a fleet of coasting vessels, all under the sanction of both Church and State—these Franciscan friars, raised to poverty and self-abnegation, were actually able to live like kings.<sup>15</sup>

Victor's evaluation of the Native Americans who failed to thrive under the patronage of the Franciscans was sympathetic but hardly respectful. "We are not honest if we lament very greatly over the extinction of the Indians," she confessed.

Victor quoted approvingly an unidentified source who had asserted that "we might as well lament over fossils of a species which has passed away, as to become sentimental at the decadence of the barbaric types of humanity that refuse to rise and assimilate with the new order of things, but retreat before the advancing light of progress, and seek unavailing refuge in the darkness of an era that is passing away." To this historian, the demise of the Native Americans in California seemed inevitable: "There was nothing in the system to infuse new life in the veins of a barbarian race, doomed from the creation to that passing away which the missionaries, however unintentionally, hastened."<sup>16</sup>

Among the principal Anglophone founders of historical writing about California, Theodore H. Hittell concentrated a considerable amount of his attention on the convoluted saga of the Franciscan missions. A transplanted Pennsylvanian, he launched his career as a lawyer in San Francisco and became known for his multivolume *History of California*, published in the 1880s and 1890s. Its critical evaluation of the Franciscan missions was one of the targets of clerical resentment at Santa Clara, and Merle's laudatory construction of the endeavour there was a crystal-clear example of rhetorical counterpunching.

15 Frances Fuller Victor, "Studies of the California Missions – II" in *The Californian* 5, no. 30 (June 1882), 524.

16 Francis Fuller Victor, "Studies of the California Missions—III" in *The Californian* 6, no. 31 (July 1882), 26.

According to Hittell, within a few years of the closure of the Franciscan missions, virtually nothing of the order's endeavours remained apart from "crumbled and crumbling walls, rotten timbers and heaps of broken tiles". He granted that "some" of the missionaries had been men of "admirable character" who were devoted to "their unswerving belief that they were accomplishing good" and the importance of their efforts to harvest the "immortal souls" of the indigenes. But their legacy was nil. Hittell contrasted this with the accomplishments of ancient Greece and Rome and, despite his unabashed anti-clericalism, included "the chapels of the early church" in his brief catalogue of artifacts of the ancient world. At least "their influence survives in civilization," he acknowledged. He thought that all great works "in the right path" bear fruit and make a "beneficent impress" on the future. But the Franciscan missions in California were simply "not of this kind". Their founders "looked only to the aggrandizement of a system and dominion that had long outlived their usefulness", Hittell judged. "It did not contemplate or in any proper sense regard the progress of true civilization. It evolved no germs out of which were to spring higher and better forms. It was barren and unprofitable."<sup>17</sup>

Far more renowned in the general annals of California historiography was Hubert Howe Bancroft. An Ohioan who relocated to booming San Francisco in 1852, he established himself as a book publisher but in the 1880s began to publish detailed volumes under the collective title *History of California*, some of which are known to have been penned by associates. Broadly speaking, Bancroft was less severe than Hittell in his indictment of the Franciscans. However, he could record that in the 1830s Native Americans in the Monterey district took a lengthy document to the Mexican authorities in that coastal city listing grievances at their mission. It represented the indigenous "neophytes" as "living in slavery, being grossly ill-treated, starved, and overworked, naming several instance where women had died or want of a little atole". In the same paragraph, however, Bancroft acknowledged that several Natives had come from San Luis to Monterey to testify that the charges were "false".<sup>18</sup>

## The Defensive Franciscan Historiographical Reaction

Before the end of the nineteenth century, a Franciscan historian had mounted a spirited historiographical defence of the order's endeavours among the Native Americans

17 Theodore H. Hittell, *History of California*, volume I (San Francisco: Pacific Press Publishing House and Occidental Publishing Co., 1885), 508. For a more detailed synopsis of Hittell's anti-clerical attitude towards the Franciscan missionaries as an autocratic lot who virtually enslaved the indigenes, see Robert W. Righter, "Theodore Henry Hittell: California Historian" in *Southern California Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (September 1966), 296-297.

18 Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of California*. III. 1825-1840 (San Francisco: A.L. Bancroft & Company, Publishers, 1885), 682.

of California. Born in Germany in 1851 but having resided in the United States since childhood, Zephyrin Engelhardt had become a Franciscan in the 1870s and served as a missionary to various tribes since early in his vocation. His hefty tome of 1897, *The Franciscans in California*, offered a wealth of factual information (much of it derived from the works of Bancroft) but very little objective authorial detachment from its subject. Indeed, the book was dedicated “To Father Junípero Serra and his [*sic*] Band of Seraphic Laborers on the Pacific Coast”.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, in his Preface Engelhardt lamented that although a great deal had already been published about the “noble pioneers” who had borne both Christianity and civilisation to California, “very little that is reliable” had hitherto appeared in print. It was history written in a counter-celebratory mode: “Ignorance and malice, through exaggeration and misstatements, have succeeded in making the old Fathers appear in so strange a light that even their friends fail to recognize them.” Engelhardt did not mention Hittell in this book but highlighted his own partial disdain for Bancroft, despite his necessary reliance on the latter’s works in the absence of other sources. He urged readers to take Bancroft’s accounts *cum grano salis*, for “his bigotry and his ignorance of Catholic affairs at times make his statements extremely doubtful.”<sup>20</sup>

Like Bancroft, Engelhardt believed that the roots of the eventual secularisation of the missions in California lay in the late eighteenth century. He acknowledged that there had been tensions between missionaries, including Serra, and Spanish colonial officials from the early years of the Franciscan endeavour, but he attributed them to the ineptness and myopia of those bureaucrats. However, Engelhardt credited Governor Pedro Fagés for rejecting proposals by Adjutant Inspector Nicolas Soler as early as 1787 for drastically reducing the number of Franciscans in California and opening more of that province to Spanish settlement. From Engelhardt’s perspective, such suggestions were “absurd” and, had the governor implemented them, would have had dire consequences for the missions. He quoted Bancroft as suggesting that the “pity” for the indigenes which Fagés professed to have may have been either “real or affected” in response to “excessive severity on the part of the missionaries toward their neophytes”. At any rate, Engelhardt asserted that the affection which converts had for the *padres* at the mission stations disconfirmed claims of mistreatment. “Very likely there were Indians at the missions too lazy to work who invented cruelties, or exaggerated the punishments received for idleness and other vices, in order to revenge themselves on the Fathers,” he judged by way of rationalisation. “Whoever has lived among Indians will understand the situation very well.”<sup>21</sup>

19 Zephyrin Engelhardt, *The Franciscans in California* (Harbor Springs, Michigan: Holy Childhood Indian School, 1897), unpaginated dedication.

20 Engelhardt, *The Franciscans in California*, i.

21 Engelhardt, *The Franciscans in California*, 108-112.

Engelhardt subsequently wrote historically about *The Missions and Missionaries of California*, the third volume of which, covering the Franciscans there, was published in 1913, *i.e.* the year when Merle's *Mission Play* had its premiere at Santa Clara University. He quoted approvingly and at considerable length an early nineteenth-century observer who had defended the restrictions on the converted indigenes' liberties. The Franciscans "came to make sociable men and, above all, Christians of savages devoid of every kind of law and government," this writer had reasoned. Without having the discretion to impose some measure of restraint on the Native Americans at their stations, they never would have been able to accomplish what they had. Because of this benevolent authoritarianism, "the wealth was produced upon which now some eyes are gazing with envious cupidity, and which without that license would never have been produced." What would have been made by the converted indigenes, he asked rhetorically, "who are now about to be incorporated into civil and Christian society, if they had been left to their full liberty, which according to their character and national bringing-up is nothing but abject idleness?"<sup>22</sup>

In 1908 Engelhardt contributed the article titled "California Missions" to *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. This piece is particularly revealing with regard to his eagerness to shape its content to fit his strategy of portraying his fellow Franciscans' endeavours positively but the Native Americans under their aegis significantly less so and in need of paternalistic guidance. Engelhardt granted that young women were accommodated in the *monjério*, or "nunnery" at the mission, even though they were not actually nuns, while young men had their living quarters elsewhere. He defended this strict segregation of the sexes, calling the *monjério* an "important" component of the mission system made necessary by "the carnal propensity of the Indians". Otherwise, his depiction of the Franciscan missionaries was quite benign. Through their "extreme kindness", Engelhardt explained, "the natives were won by means of presents in the shape of food, clothing, and trinkets of which the Indians were very fond." He acknowledged that "once baptized, the neophytes were not permitted to leave the mission for the purpose of going back to their pagan homes for any length of time without permission from the missionary" but clearly did not perceive this as a form of incarceration. Rather, it was ostensibly a matter of group harmony, as "the neophyte community was like one great family at the head of which stood the *padre*, under which title the missionary was universally known." Within this paternalism, "the Indians looked for everything concerning their bodies as well as their souls." Engelhardt was not it doubt about the beneficence of this system. In support of his judgment, he adduced a quotation gleaned from a popular history of California that had been published in London in 1839 and penned by a Scotsman, Alexander Forbes, who had lived in what is now Mexico (*nota*

22 Zephyrin Engelhardt, *The Missions and Missionaries of California*. Volume III. *Upper California* (San Francisco: The James H. Barry Company, 1913), 423.



*bene* not the state of California).<sup>23</sup> Engelhardt quoted that Protestant's verdict that "the best and most unequivocal proof of the good conduct of these Fathers" lay in the "unbounded affection and devotion invariably shown towards them by their Indian subjects. They venerate them not merely as friends and fathers but with a degree of devotedness approaching to adoration."<sup>24</sup>

A close reading of Forbes's book, however, indicates how through selective citation it could be exploited rhetorically in a tendentious effort to construct a favourable image of the Franciscan missions. On the page of Forbes's book opposite that in which he had lauded the diligence and benevolence of these chiefly Spanish religious personnel, that Scotsman had presented a scathing indictment of their missionary endeavour and linked it to a critique of the propagation of Christianity generally. Forbes had posed a rhetorical question: "In the first place, what have the natives of California gained by the labours of the missionaries?" Little that was commendable, he thought. "They have transformed the aborigines of a beautiful country from free savages into pusillanimous, superstitious slaves," he averred; "they have taken from the enjoyment of the natural productions of a delicious country, and ministered to them the bare necessities of life, and that on the condition of being bondsmen forever." Rather than remaining "free as the wind" in their natural habitat, those who had entered mission life had joined a "wretched herd of human animals which are now penned in the missionary folds."<sup>25</sup>

Forbes had then presumed to discern the emotional stage of these two-legged beasts of burden. He declared that "the natives in this part of America were and are very low in the scale of even savage happiness" but judged their state as "domesticated animals" and not even as "civilized men" as they resided on missions to lie even below that natural level.<sup>26</sup> But about this, as well, Engelhardt remained silent. He chose to ascribe credibility to those segments of Forbes's account that bolstered his rhetorical strategy for defending the Franciscan missionaries and neglect those which countered it.

### **José María del Real: The Anti-hero as Hero**

As discussed below, Merle's construction of Padre José María del Refugio Suárez del Real as a calmly heroic character who more than nearly any other individual prevented the Santa Clara mission and its property from falling into the hands of land

23 Zephyrin Engelhardt, "California Missions", *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Volume III (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908), 180-181.

24 Alexander Forbes, *California: A History of Upper and Lower California from Their Discovery to the Present Time* (London: Smith, Elder and Co. Cornhill, 1939), 231.

25 Forbes, *California: A History of Upper and Lower California from Their Discovery to the Present Time*, 231-232.

26 Forbes, *California: A History of Upper and Lower California from Their Discovery to the Present Time*, 232.

speculators is a lucid example of how a playwright, when crafting a play in a celebratory mode, could overlook the oft-alleged shortcomings of that historic individual in order to focus attention on his supposedly heroic role. Well before 1913, accounts of this priest's moral weaknesses had surfaced, and the Franciscan historian had been informed of them by an eyewitness. Bancroft, for example, had written in 1886 that del Real, no less than his brother and fellow Franciscan Antonio, was a "black sheep in the fold" but more adept at "concealing his irregularities".<sup>27</sup>

When Engelhardt published his *Franciscans in California* in 1897, however, he chose not to mention del Real's indiscretions—if he was aware of them, and it is conceivable that at that time he was not. However, in 1905 James Alonzo Forbes, a son of the previously mentioned Scottish immigrant James Alexander Forbes, a layman who helped to administer the mission at Santa Clara, enlightened him in detail. The younger Forbes had spent much of his early life at that station and indeed been baptized by del Real in 1850. He recalled that priest as being "a man of fine appearance and very popular with the fast set". Furthermore, Forbes alleged that while in Monterey that Franciscan, together with clerical colleagues, "led beastly lives reeking with concupiscence". After being transferred to Santa Clara, del Real had cohabited with a woman who bore several of his children, three of whom—two sons and a daughter—Forbes knew. That unofficial family had resided in a house opposite the mission church. After the girl's death, her father arranged to have her buried in the sanctuary of the church and have a plaque in her memory mounted on one of its walls. However, at some point Father John Nobili, his Italian Jesuit successor at Santa Clara, ordered the removal of the plaque and had the remains of del Real's daughter exhumed and re-interred in the mission's cemetery. Turning to a no less serious offence, about which Forbes presumably did not have first-hand knowledge, he asserted that "people who ought to know" had accused this wayward priest of being an "accessory" to the murder of two men, one of whom had arrived at Santa Clara to celebrate his first Mass and succeed del Real as its leader. Without attempting to provide details of the alleged crime, Forbes suggested that the motive for it could be found in del Real's attachment to Santa Clara and particularly his common-law wife there.<sup>28</sup>

### **The Genesis of *The Mission Play of Santa Clara***

Apparently Robert Kenna, the Jesuit Irish-American president of Santa Clara College, conceived the idea of including a historical play about the Franciscan missions in the festivities commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of that institution's founding in

27 Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of California*. Volume V. 1846-1848 (San Francisco: The History Press, Publishers, 1886), 689.

28 Maynard Geiger, *Franciscan Missionaries in Hispanic California, 1769-1848: A Biographical Dictionary* (San Marino, California: Henry H. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, 1969), 251.

1851. In July 1900 he wrote to a friend and former fellow student at the College, Clay M. Greene, who had become a moderately well-known playwright in New York, and broached his vision of a dramatic piece which he believed could challenge the negative writing which Hittell and others had published for more than a decade. Writing in a celebratory vein from a perspective vastly different from those which both Native Americans and critical historians would take half a century and more later, Kenna waxed almost eloquent: “In the heroic lives of the early missionaries there were stirring scenes, glorious deeds, wonderful self-sacrifice, and [unintelligible word] fidelity etc etc.,” adding that to his regret there might not be “plot enough for a sound play”. Nevertheless, this priest maintained an idealised vision of his professional forebears at Misión Santa Clara de Asís: “These marvelous men founded 21 missions, and brought most of them to a great perfection: and they saw them surrounded by large fields of rich grain, and vast herds of many kinds of cattle, while thousands of the children of the forest docile to their trusting gave promise of a new civilization – many of them were trained mechanics, skilled musicians + good farmers etc.” He accused especially Hittell of being “unjust, biased and even brutal in his work”.<sup>29</sup>

However, Greene rejected the idea. With the decennial performances of the internationally renowned *Passion Play* at Obeammergau in Bavaria fresh in his memory, he proposed instead that something akin to that Easter drama be staged at Santa Clara College and offered to write and direct it himself. This was done in the late spring of 1901, and the effort, titled *Nazareth*, received enthusiastic reviews.<sup>30</sup> It was revived in 1903 under the direction of Martin Merle, who was then a student at Santa Clara College,<sup>31</sup> and for decades it continued to be offered to the public there.

In the meantime, Merle continued his meteoric career as a dramatist in California. Some of his plays handled secular themes, but his *The Light Eternal*, which dealt with the Diocletian persecution of Christians in the early fourth century, received enthusiastic reviews when it opened in San Francisco in 1905.<sup>32</sup>

Kenna did not abandon his vision, and as a retiree he approached Merle, who accepted his proposal to craft a historical play about the Franciscan missions. According to an account published in the *San Jose Mercury and Herald* a fortnight

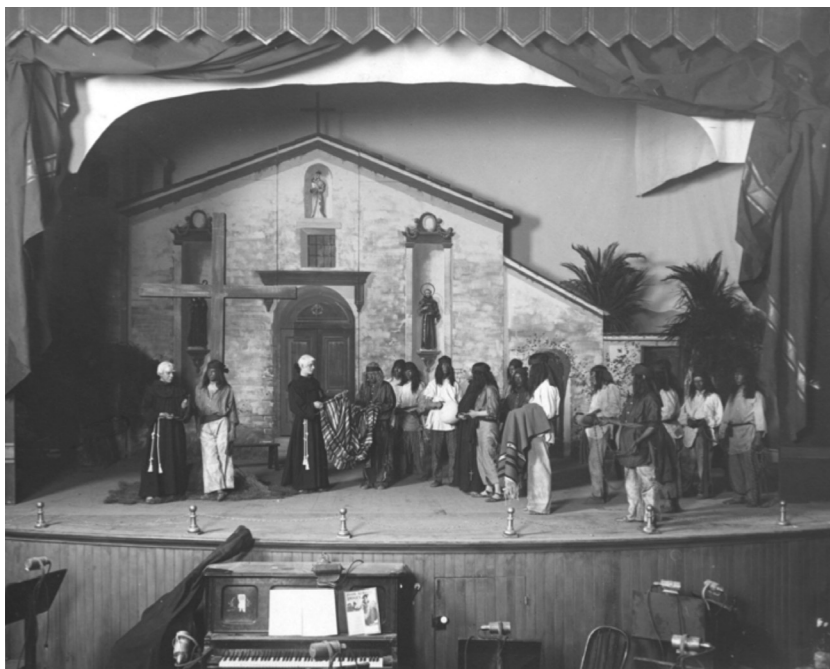
29 R.E. Kenna (Santa Clara College) to Clay M. Greene, 11 July 1900 (Clay M. Greene Collection, MSS.2016.01.11, Archives & Special Collections, Santa Clara University).

30 See, for example, “Successful Presentation Sacred Drama ‘Nazareth’”, *San Jose Mercury*, 1 June 1901, 8; “Rich in Its Scenic Effects and Striking Situations Is Santa Clara’s Passion Play”, *San Francisco Call*, 1 June 1901, 9; and “Passion Play Again Produced with the Greatest Success”, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 4 June 1901, 3.

31 “Will Revive Passion Play”, *The San Francisco Call*, 16 May 1903, 14.

32 “The Majestic”, *The San Francisco Call*, 14 November 1905, 9; “College Man and His College Play Are Hits”, *San Jose Daily Mercury*, 15 November 1905, 12; and “Light Eternal to Come Back”, *Oakland Tribune*, 20 November 1905, 10.

before the premiere of *The Mission Play*, in 1907 that Jesuit and Merle attended another revival of *Nazareth* and the following morning discussed Kenna's desire to have such a drama written, in the first instance for the college. Merle accepted this proposal, but other obligations prevented him from fulfilling his commitment for several years. In the meantime, Kenna retired and his health deteriorated. He gave up the ghost in May 1912.<sup>33</sup> Shortly before doing so, however, in his "feeble hand" and writing in a "faint and hardly intelligible scrawl" Kenna reminded Merle of his promise. The young dramatist reportedly rearranged his priorities and prepared to compose such a historic play. "Old musty books were perseveringly studied; dust-covered manuscripts conned; and the tedious mission chronicles patiently read," wrote an anonymous journalist, presumably relying on Merle's testimony. "Only when his imagination was flooded with scents and pictures of those romantic times, and his memory master of the historical incidents of the period, did he enter upon the actual composition of "Santa Clara, the mission play."<sup>34</sup>



An early twentieth-century performance of *The Mission Play of Santa Clara* in the theatre of Santa Clara University. Courtesy of Archives & Special Collections, Santa Clara University.

33 "Death Ends Career of Noted Catholic Educator", *The San Francisco Call*, 27 May 1912, 3.

34 "'Santa Clara' the Fulfillment of Rev. Father Kenna's Deathbed Request", *San Jose Mercury and Herald*, 4 May 1913, 15.

## Synopsis of *The Mission Play of Santa Clara*

Merle's dramatic interpretation opened in the voluminous theatre at Santa Clara University on 14 May 1913 and received enthusiastic reviews.<sup>35</sup> Its plot in three acts with an epilogue unfolds entirely on the grounds of the Santa Clara mission in July 1846, *i.e.* in the immediate wake of Commodore John D. Sloat's proclamation in Monterey that the United States of America has annexed Alta California. The mission is under the leadership of a Franciscan *padre*, José María del Real, who serves as a sagacious voice of Christian fidelity and acceptance of the American conquest, despite his initial dismay. His interest is in preserving his mission's viability, regardless which flag flies over California. Other *Californios*, however, express different and conflicting opinions about the imposition of American hegemony. Don Fernando Castanares, a local *grandee*, adamantly insists that the takeover will be resisted to the death. However, his clever son, Don Luis, is of a more compliant mind. After assaulting Don Fortunio Altimirano, an aide to the Mexican *commandante* in Monterey, he flees to Santa Clara, where his nationalist father expresses intense dismay at both his son's impertinence in striking a political official and that young man's willingness to subordinate himself cheerfully to Yankee rule. A veteran military official from Monterey, Don Antonio Alvarado, pursues Don Luis to the mission, where he is outfoxed by his elusive prey with the cunning co-operation of Padre José.

The American annexation is portrayed as a mixed blessing. One of the American land agents, Jack Mosely, appears at the mission, whose acreages and buildings he covets. Countering Padre José's assurance that the Franciscans hold title to the property, this conniving Yankee declares that American rule will invalidate such historic claims. The villainous Mosely bribes a mentally ill Native American, Soquel, to steal the land grant document from under the altar, thus depriving the Franciscans of evidence of ownership. In the meantime, a heroically portrayed American army officer, Captain Harry Mallison, arrives at Santa Clara, befriends Padre José as well as Don Luis, and expresses a deprecating opinion of Mosely and his ambitions.

Soquel succeeds in stealing the land grant and giving it to Mosely, who briefly absconds with that document. However, Don Luis, determined to support the continuation of the mission under American rule, rides swiftly to Monterey to register the property with the new American authorities. In the meantime, while a parching drought rages, Mosely has convinced the starving Native Americans to besiege the mission. He is taken captive but escapes. Don Luis returns with a unit of the United States cavalry. With Padre José praying fervently for relief from the drought, heavy rain

35 For a representative sample of the critical acclaim, see "Drama Produced in Mission City Is Picturesque", and "Artists Give Mission Play", *The San Francisco Call*, 15 May 1913, 11; "Santa Clara Mission Play Is Given With Great Success", *The San Francisco Examiner*, 15 May 1913, 7; and "Mission Play a Great Triumph", *San Francisco Chronicle*, 15 May 1913, 2.

begins to fall, thus ending the hunger and alienation of the indigenous population. Mallison and Padre José are on very cordial terms at the curtain falls on the final act, a microcosm of the continuing prosperity of the Santa Clara mission in the United States of America.

At the end of his two-page summarising Preface, Merle professed that the work offered historical verisimilitude. Without identifying his particular sources, he assured readers that he had woven “the main facts” of the mission’s history at the time of the American annexation into “a play of more or less historical accuracy”. Merle added, perhaps tongue in cheek, that the events reproduced on the stage “may have occurred and the persons existed – we have no evidence to the contrary.”<sup>36</sup> At any rate, his portrayal of the mission before annexation is explicitly crafted to highlight the idyllic life enjoyed by its community. Before the curtain is raised for the first act, a suave, young *caballero* identified as *El Prologo* appears on the stage and invites the audience to enter the “golden days” of yesteryear, a “light-hearted, careless, and free-swing” era that offered “old-world peace and calm” before “the Gringos” arrived and “with ruthless hand” brought that halcyon age to an abrupt end.

### **Portrayal of Life at the Santa Clara Mission**

Merle’s depiction of quotidian life at the mission before the American conquest is an amalgam of romanticised idyll and unalloyed ethnic stereotyping. The *Prologo* invites the audience to leave their “restless” lives and enter the “golden days” of the mission when “laughter and dancing and song” prevailed. The past was a time of “drowsy old-world peace and calm” when the inhabitants of Santa Clara “laughed” and, with all of California “young and gay” had “never a care”.<sup>37</sup>

Within this nearly paradisiacal setting, however, the evangelised Native Americans are portrayed as enjoying an undemanding life of ease while evincing certain characteristics associated with stereotypes of their ethnic group. According to Merle’s stage directions, they project an image of “lazy, idle careless life” which pervades the first scene. As the curtain rises on Act I, a cluster of “Mexican, Indian and Half-breed idlers” loiter on the veranda. Others squat nearby on the ground gambling. Wearing “bright and gaudy” attire, most smoke long cigarettes which they have rolled. One of the indigenes crouches before a dried skin stretched across a “rude, primitive easel” and explains to a child the meaning of the “crudely drawn figures and pictures” on that medium.<sup>38</sup>

It is immediately acknowledged, however, that there is a gap between faith and life. When a young Franciscan priest, Padre Felipe, emerges from the chapel together with

36 Martin V. Merle, “Script “The Mission Play of Santa Clara”” (typescript), Milton V. Merle Collection, Special Collections, Santa Clara University, unpaginated Preface.

37 Merle, “Script “The Mission Play of Santa Clara””, 1.

38 Merle, “Script “The Mission Play of Santa Clara””, 3-4.



several Mexicans and three Native Americans, the gamblers hastily conceal their dice and cards and bow their heads as he blesses them. Moreover, immediately thereafter, a trio of “fashionably dressed” *cabelleros* who approach the chapel condescendingly toss coins to the impoverished souls in front of it who join a “wild scramble” for the lucre. Those who are not sufficiently fortunate to get any of it shout “Caramba!”, an interjection conveying the approximate meaning of “Damn it!” Immediately thereafter, an aged Native American beggar, dressed in “rags”, approaches several groups in the shadow of the church asking for alms. He is not only rejected but subjected to “jeers, laughter, rebuffs and curses”.<sup>39</sup>

Absent from the text of Merle’s play is any reference to enslavement and captivity. The only explicit comment on how the Franciscans acquired vast tracts comes with Padre José’s insistence that members of his order had sacrificially toiled to create “a land of peace and prosperity for the Indians to whom God gave this land of plenty”. This remark counters Mosely’s accusation that the missionaries “came in here and stole the land from them”. The construction of the dialogue carefully distinguishes Spanish colonialism from the Franciscan evangelisation that followed in its wake. In the same exchange, Padre José explains that members of his order have “made a stand on the rim of a civilization that has taken much from the Indian – and repaid him with nothing in return!”<sup>40</sup>

Apart from the pitifully created Soquel, the Native Americans in Merle’s play then disappear almost entirely. In their absence, that mentally ill and opportunistic member of the flock becomes a quasi-Judas figure, a morally debased man who is willing to sacrifice the judicial autonomy of the mission for the paltry sum of five *pesos* but who ultimately repents and begs Padre José for forgiveness. However, at the same time Soquel faults Mosely for tricking him and begins to assault that Yankee before Padre José intervenes.<sup>41</sup> In the Epilogue, the same cleric assures Mallison that “the Indians are going about their duties peacefully and with faith – as before.”<sup>42</sup> Again, however, there is no hint of slavery or other forms of captivity to trigger negative impressions of the Franciscan undertaking. The collective portrayal of Native Americans and *mestizos* established early in the first act is not developed further or nuanced by the creation of individuals. In short, the representation of this component of the ethnically pluralistic population of Santa Clara erodes more than it confirms the idyllic promises of the *Prologo*.

39 Merle, “Script “The Mission Play of Santa Clara””, 5.

40 Merle, “Script “The Mission Play of Santa Clara””, 33.

41 Merle, “Script “The Mission Play of Santa Clara””, 126.

42 Merle, “Script “The Mission Play of Santa Clara””, 142.



## Constructing the Clash of Civilisations – Or of Values?

The foundational misdeed in the *Mission Play* is Mosely's efforts to deprive the missionaries of their property and thereby unethically terminate the golden era to which the *Prologo* refers. To a considerable degree, Merle constructed his defence of the Santa Clara mission (and by implication the Franciscan enterprise in California generally) in the dialogues between characters—*Californios* and Yankees, *Californios* and other *Californios*, and Yankees with other Yankees. Especially those involving Padre José, Mallison, and Mosely highlight the moral dichotomies which carry the ideational content of this historical drama. It must be emphasised that this is not primarily a matter of pitting one nationality against another or justifying the American annexation of Alta California. Rather, the lines demarcating morality from immorality run through both national camps, not between them. A consideration of the principal characters and their verbal interaction with each other underscores this essential point.

In the opening conversation between Padre José and the elegantly attired *grande* Don Fernando Castanares, it is evident that both of these *Californios* are dismayed by the news of Sloat's proclamation in Monterey annexing California. The Franciscan is clearly alarmed, presumably because of the uncertainty this may entail for his mission's future. Don Fernando evinces both nationalistic resentment at this humiliation and extreme disappointment in the willingness of his son, Don Luis, to welcome the annexation by socialising with the Yankee military personnel, whom he calls "heretics" and "accursed Gringos". Adding to Don Fernando's anguish, of course, is the fact that the "insolent" Don Luis has immersed himself in hot water by striking Don Fortunio Altimirano in the face.<sup>43</sup> By oblique contrast, Padre José's reply to the young man's worried father evinces equanimity and evenhandedness. "I side with no one," he assures Don Fernando. "I only suggest that we look at both sides of the wall." Moreover, this priest's memories of Don Luis are heartwarming from an ecclesiastical perspective. He recalls how the lad was baptised as an infant in the mission church. "One hundred candles lighted in the Church, and the dancing and feasting at the rancho! ... Never has a king received greater homage than the christening of Don Luis!" Moreover, Padre José responds to Don Fernando's threat to disown his son by shaking his head disapprovingly. Even more revealingly to Merle's judgment of the outcome, in the same early conversation the priest counters Don Fernando's threat to spit on the Stars and Stripes by calmly suggesting, "It may come to pass that these americanos are not so bad as we think. They may even allow us to go on in the future as we have in the past – in quiet and peace – undisturbed."<sup>44</sup>

Padre José's conversation with Don Luis shortly after the latter's return to Santa Clara underscores further complexities of *Californios'* supposed attitudes towards the annexation. The young fugitive describes Don Antonio Alvarado as "fat", "*pomposo*",

43 Merle, "Script "The Mission Play of Santa Clara"", 6.

44 Merle, "Script "The Mission Play of Santa Clara"", 8-9.

and a “bag of wind”. He insists he has no fear of the “*bobos*” (fools) who are chasing him from Monterey. Don Luis predicts that a Yankee influx will be welcomed in that port, where female *Californias* will soon flirt with and marry migrants from the United States. Further ahead, he believes, American rule will end petty rivalries among the local residents, promote greater agricultural productivity, and – three years before the influx of Forty-niners got underway – he professes that in the new era California would yield its gold. Finally, in an unveiled if implicit reference to a common stereotype of the *mañana* attitude towards work supposedly prevalent among Hispanics, Don Luis declares, “The Americanos give us the kick — and wake us up!”, a boot for which he professes gratitude.<sup>45</sup>

This optimistic idealism, initially dismissed summarily by Don Luis’s defiantly patriotic father, is immediately juxtaposed with the cynical portrayal of the dastardly Jack Mosely and his accomplices, Risdon and Andrews. Wearing black clothing as a sign of his evil nature, and with a “rascally face” from which protrudes a long, black cigar, Mosely exudes vulgarity. “Damn this heat!” he exclaims. His ungrammatical speech reinforces his uncouth image. “I don’t trust no Indian,” Mosely informs Andrews. Not surprisingly, Mosely sneers at Soquel and pressures him rhetorically into co-operating with the attempted dispossession of the Franciscan land by stating that unless that recalcitrant Native American’s son received food and water soon he will die, and he again echoes vulgarity by uttering “Then be damned to you – and your kid!” To the unchristian use of that verb is added a disingenuous promise as Mosely, raising his right hand, assures Soquel that “So help me, God!” he has come only to “look over the land grants”, not to deprive the mission of its land. No less insincerely, he swears “by the saints” that he will pay Soquel when he receives the document.<sup>46</sup>

In a different mode, some of the villainous Mosely’s character also comes to the fore in his initial encounter with Padre José. The former attempts to present himself as a gentleman but is no match for the hospitable and nearly debonair Franciscan. He informs his host that thousands of Americans can be expected to enter California in the short term. Mosely then refers to “our new possessions” and, before extracting another black cigar from his pocket, states that the missionaries will “have to give up this place”. When Padre José reminds his guest of Sloat’s assurance that ecclesiastical property rights would be fully respected, Mosely dismisses that as “a little joke of Uncle Sam’s”. The two men’s attitudes are contrasted intimately when the Franciscan asks him whether he “dare threaten the Church” and Mosely responds with a curt “O hell! There’s no use arguing with a Greaser!” and, spitting, strides out of the residence.<sup>47</sup>

The encounter of Captain Harry Mallison with Padre José is, of course, vastly different in terms of the American’s personality and moral standards as well as the

45 Merle, “Script “The Mission Play of Santa Clara””, 15, 17, 18.

46 Merle, “Script “The Mission Play of Santa Clara””, 19, 20,23, 24, 25, 27.

47 Merle, “Script “The Mission Play of Santa Clara””, 29, 30, 31, 32, 35.

ethical stance which Merle sought to highlight in his interpretation of the mission's history. The result of their harmonious interaction is foreshadowed by the Franciscan's urging the still defiant Don Fernando to suspend his resistance to the annexation. Referring to the *Californios* residing nearby, Padre José informs him, "I will advise them to accept the inevitable," adding that "in our hour of trial we must not forget we are a law-abiding people."<sup>48</sup>

When Mallison arrives with a cavalry troop shortly thereafter, he is described positively as a "young man of open, frank and honest manner". To his surprise, he finds Don Luis at Santa Clara to herald his advent. Padre José echoes this welcome and offers him a portion of the mission's wine, despite Don Fernando's unveiled hostility to this visitor. In contrast to his unscrupulous compatriot Mosely, Mallison assures the Franciscan head, apparently sincerely, that he and the American military forces have come to "give protection to you and your children, and those who will come after you". Reinforcing the contrast in Mosely's and Mallison's motives *vis-à-vis* the mission, Padre José informs the young cavalryman that a certain "insolent bandit" among the American government's land agents had already threatened to seize the mission. Mallison responds by calling Mosely a "skalliwig" [*sic*] who lacks a conscience but is powerless to do anything that is "not within the law".<sup>49</sup>

Whatever slight subtlety there might have been in the respective portrayals of Mosely and Mallison in their initial encounters with Padre José disappears when the two Americans then meet at the mission in the Franciscan leader's presence. The captain informs the unconscionable land agent that he is wise to his ways and that he would be held accountable for anything "nasty" that happens in his dealings with the personnel at Santa Clara: "I mean to see that people get a square deal." Mosely refuses to take this warning seriously and replies with his trademark vulgarity to Mallison that it is "none of your damned affair" and that he is "carrying your authority too damned far".<sup>50</sup>

### **The Annexation and the Ultimate Fruition of Santa Clara**

With the benefit of hindsight two-thirds of a century after the annexation of Alta California, the loyal Anglophone American Merle portrayed that development as a thoroughly beneficial historical development. That it would be a blessing for the Spanish-speaking population of the area is never in doubt, despite the deep misgivings of Padre José and some of his secular compatriots who did not share the enthusiasm of the youthful Don Luis. Well before the conclusion of *The Mission Play*, the recalcitrant nationalist Don Fernando undergoes an ethno-political *metanoia* which presages the eventual outcome. In his earlier defiance, this *grandee* was eager "to desecrate the

48 Merle, "Script "The Mission Play of Santa Clara"", 37.

49 Merle, "Script "The Mission Play of Santa Clara"", 40-45.

50 Merle, "Script "The Mission Play of Santa Clara"", 48-50.

American flag” as a sign of his resistance to the annexation. After the United States military forces drive out the evil Mosely and eliminate his threat to the mission, Don Fernando can shake hands with the uniformed Captain Mallison.<sup>51</sup>

The Epilogue is replete with symbolism which points to the fruition of the mission as the planting of Christianity in the area, *i.e.* the evolution from missionary endeavours to religious life indefinitely embedded in society but still evincing the legacy of the missionary ideal which planted the seed. The stage directions emphasise the rebirth of Santa Clara. An adobe wall is bedecked with vines and flowers, while poppies and mustard grow profusely along the nearby road leading out from the gate. The garden is full of roses and other flowers “blooming in a tangled profusion”, while the green turf is also “studded with flowers”. In an unmistakable symbol, the atmosphere of quietude and tranquillity is interrupted only by the splashing water of the fountain; the waters of life flow in the Misión Santa Clara de Asís. Even Soquel, now forgiven and noticing Padre José asleep, respectfully removes his hat and drops to one knee in a sign of apparently sincere gratitude.<sup>52</sup>

When Padre José awakens and enters into another conversation with the convalescent Captain Mallison, he comments on the Native American residents of Santa Clara. In an unveiled counter to the assertions cited above about the insincerity of their conversions to Christianity, this Franciscan assures the military man, “The Indians are going about their duties peacefully, and with faith – as before.”<sup>53</sup>

The dialogue between these two quite different characters confirms the integration of Santa Clara after the annexation with the life of larger American society. Padre José assures Mallison that he is welcome to remain at the mission, whose ongoing purpose is apparently compatible with American authority. Though wounded, and despite his feeling of attachment to Santa Clara (where an attractive *señorita* has caught his eye), that military man believes he must return to active duty in his profession. Before departing, however, he assures Padre José that California is “destined for a golden future”. In it, Santa Clara “will ring in History’s pages”. The mission there will be a “sign-post of Western civilization”.<sup>54</sup>

This final theme of the legacy of the Misión Santa Clara de Asís becoming embedded in the cultural landscape of the United States was especially poignant at that time and place, not least with regard to the metamorphosis of Santa Clara College into Santa Clara University the previous year. This was reflected most graphically in the architectural emphasis of the campus. The mission church, having survived the devastating 1906 earthquake, remained intact. Furthermore, in May 1912 the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that new buildings at the university had purposefully

51 Merle, “Script “The Mission Play of Santa Clara””, 99-100.

52 Merle, “Script “The Mission Play of Santa Clara””, 141.

53 Merle, “Script “The Mission Play of Santa Clara””, 142.

54 Merle, “Script “The Mission Play of Santa Clara””, 143-144.

been designed to reflect the Santa Clara's historic roots.<sup>55</sup> This was undoubtedly a conscious architectural fruit of the missionary legacy of the campus. Moreover, it was in full accord with the emerging popularity of the Mission Revival style in California and related styles in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona.

## Conclusion

For all its acknowledged artistic strengths, *The Mission Play of Santa Clara* is arguably most valuable today as a lucid example of celebratory history, missionary rhetoric, and selective historical interpretation. The extent to which Merle was familiar with the empirically demonstrable testimonies of several critics of the Franciscan missions does not emerge from the extant documentation of this play's archivalia. Robert Kenna's desire to promote the creation of a dramatic counterweight to the scathing indictment by Hittell is rhetorically understandable, but he appears to have been oblivious to the fact that it was not an artefact of that historian's imagination but had decades of precedents in the observations of eyewitnesses to the Franciscan missionary endeavours. Considered within the nineteenth- and twentieth-century historical context of critical and laudatory writing about the conveyors of Christianity and their relations with Native Americans, *The Mission Play* sheds light not only on the proclivities of men like Merle in shaping historical writing but also on the willingness of contemporary drama critics to endorse such efforts.

55 "Group of Handsome Buildings for Santa Clara University", *San Francisco Chronicle*, 26 May 1912, 30.

# Friendship and Conversion in Interreligious Contexts

## Exploring Perspectives Beyond Religious Orthodoxy

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**Abstract:** This academic paper explores how friendships between Christians and Muslims in Norway influence their views on conversion. Christian participants grapple with the tension between their desire to convert their Muslim friends and maintaining genuine friendships. Muslims show less interest in converting Christian friends, but some express happiness at the prospect. The article also highlights creative approaches to conversion, such as incorporating elements of the other's faith. Ultimately, it underscores the primacy of friendship and love over conversion, emphasizing how close relationships can transform religious perspectives.

**Keywords:** Christian-Muslim relations, Norway, interviews, interfaith friendships, Great Commission, conversion, challenges in interfaith relationships.

**Sammendrag:** Denne vitenskapelige artikkelen utforsker hvordan vennskap mellom kristne og muslimer i Norge påvirker deres syn på konvertering. Kristne deltakere viste en ambivalens mellom ønsket om å konvertere sine muslimske venner til den kristne tro og opprettholdelse av ærlige vennskap. Muslimer viste mindre interesse for å konvertere kristne venner, men uttrykte også glede over muligheten for at deres venner kunne bli muslimer. Artikkelen avdekker også kreative tilnærminger til konvertering, som å integrere troselementer fra den andre religionen. Til slutt understreker den viktigheten av vennskap og kjærlighet framfor konvertering, og hvordan nære relasjoner kan endre religiøse perspektiver.

**Søkeord:** Kristen-muslimske relasjoner, Norge, intervjuer, interreligiøse vennskap, Misjonsbefalingen, omvendelse, utfordringer i interreligiøse relasjoner.

## Introduction

This academic paper delves into a pivotal aspect of my doctoral thesis, “Transforming Friendships”,<sup>1</sup> which investigates the impact of friendships on the perceptions of religion within an interreligious context. Drawing upon interviews with a cohort comprising eight Muslims and eight Christians residing in Norway, this study explores the extent to which their interfaith friendships have influenced their religious outlooks. Notably, the theme of conversion emerged as a salient issue, eliciting profound responses from both Christian and Muslim participants. This paper begins by elucidating the distinctive ways in which Christian and Muslim respondents approached the subject of conversion, subsequently highlighting the intersections and similarities in their perspectives.

## Christians Grappling with the Issues of Friendship and Conversion

The Christian respondents displayed a penchant for extensive contemplation on the concept of conversion, which manifested in two principal paradigms. Initially, a majority of Christian interviewees admitted to harboring an inclination to convert their religiously different friends, especially at the onset of their interfaith relationships, as evidenced by their narratives. However, as these relationships deepened, many found themselves grappling with the tension between this desire for conversion and the authenticity of their friendships.

For instance, *Hilde*<sup>2</sup>, a former missionary with experience in Africa, found herself entangled in what she termed a “missionary dilemma”<sup>3</sup> when considering her wish to convey the Gospel to her Muslim friend. She felt that using her Muslim friend solely as a vessel for her faith rendered the friendship disingenuous, saying that “the friendship is not real”<sup>4</sup> as it implied an underlying agenda beyond the pure camaraderie. Hilde’s struggle lay in reconciling the objective of nurturing genuine friendship with her inclination to share the Gospel with her friend. Similarly, *Berit*, a member of an international interfaith women’s group, expressed similar reservations. She conveyed the notion that befriending Muslims “only so they can be saved”<sup>5</sup>, which she considered

1 Torstein Try, *Transforming Friendships: Christian-Muslim Friendships and Religious Change*, PhD Dissertation (Stavanger: Totaltrykk AS, 2020).

2 To maintain the anonymity of my interviewees, I have changed their names. However, for transparency purposes, their exact ages are provided in the footnotes. Since the quotes are taken from my unpublished PhD monograph, the paragraph headings are given as references instead of page numbers.

3 *Hilde* 57 in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Conversion as an Obstacle to Interfaith Friendship”.

4 *Hilde* 57 in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Conversion as an Obstacle to Interfaith Friendship”.

5 *Berit* 50 in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Conversion as an Obstacle to Interfaith Friendship”.



an external motivation for proselytizing, would be ethically misguided. She viewed it as “completely wrong” to perceive friendships in such instrumental terms.

In an article on friendship between Christians and Muslims, Alex Hughes articulates a fear that Muslim friends may unwittingly only become tools for Christians’ self-interest. Interfaith friendships, he posits, could potentially devolve into investments of time aimed at securing conversions. Hughes further contends that friendships predicated upon the expectation of religious conversion are fundamentally flawed.<sup>6</sup> Significantly, my own research yielded parallel insights concerning the intricate interplay between friendship and conversion among several Christian informants.

Secondly, in addition to the concern that their friendships might become instrumental in advancing their conversion agenda, several Christian informants harbored apprehensions that revealing their intentions to convert their Muslim friends could jeopardize these friendships. *Kristin*, for instance said that she did “not want to push her away because of this”<sup>7</sup>, pointing to her eagerness to convert her Muslim friend. She feared that broaching the subject might put a strain on their relationship. *Harald* also worried that any perceived pressure to convert could ultimately “be a thing that destroys our friendship”<sup>8</sup>, potentially leading to the avoidance of contentious religious discussions. Across the board, Christian respondents grappled with the challenge of reconciling their interfaith friendships with their fervent desire to convert their Muslim acquaintances. *Kristin* and *Harald*, in particular, were troubled by the prospect that their efforts to persuade their Muslim friends to embrace Christianity could ultimately erode the foundations of their friendships.

*Berit* addressed the conversion dilemma by emphasizing that a friendship could not be considered genuine if it was primarily employed as a vehicle for promoting one’s faith. Through her reasoning she admitted that she had, to some extent, utilized her friend as a subject of her religious convictions. Similar to *Berit*, *Hilde* acknowledged that her initial motivations during the inception of her friendship with a Muslim were driven by missionary zeal. Despite the ethical dilemmas posed by this missionary impulse, it remained a compelling force among many of the Christian respondents.

### **Solving the “Missionary Dilemma”**

Nevertheless, while grappling with these challenges, several informants found ways to navigate the complex issue of conversion without forsaking their zeal altogether.

6 Alex Hughes, Fear and Friendship: Conversation or Conversion. In Frances Ward and Sarah Coakley, eds. *Fear and Friendship. Anglicans Engaging with Islam* (London: Continuum, 2012), 14-15.

7 *Berit* 50 in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Conversion as an Obstacle to Interfaith Friendship”.

8 *Harald* 26 in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Conversion as an Obstacle to Interfaith Friendship”.

For example, *Kristin* had decided to, after developing a deeper understanding of her Muslim friend *Inaam's* unwavering faith, recalibrated her approach. Getting to know her Muslim friend *Kristin* had come to realize that “to her it is very important to have great security in her own faith”,<sup>9</sup> redirecting her proselytizing efforts toward “other, more secular Muslims, who are more rootless”<sup>10</sup> lacking a secure faith. Her evolving perspective, shaped by insights gained through her friendship, led her both to try to convert other Muslims and to pray for her friend to convert later, because as she told me: “I do believe that Jesus works in many ways”.<sup>11</sup> prioritize prayer for future opportunities to discuss matters of faith with *Inaam*, rather than immediate conversion attempts.

*Berit*, on the other hand, drew inspiration from the biblical account of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well,<sup>12</sup> saying that “it is not only me who is to give something, but I can experience those whom I meet giving something to me as well. And maybe start with just that”.<sup>13</sup> She recognized the need for reciprocity in her interfaith friendship, understanding that if she wished to offer her Muslim friend “the living water” of Christianity, she, too, needed guidance and assistance from her friend. This reciprocity, according to *Berit*, epitomized Jesus' “real love”<sup>14</sup> for the religious other.

*Tore* took a similar subtle approach to his Muslim friend *Hamid*, by saying that “I pray that they should experience Jesus entering their lives, this is my prayer, I admit” (...) “However, I am not at the stage that if they do not become believers (I would abandon them)”.<sup>15</sup> By entrusting the matter to God, he could approach his efforts to convert his Muslim friends with greater ease and relaxation.

*Signe* had a comparable attitude, hoping “that those things about Christianity come gradually”,<sup>16</sup> an attitude that helped her to prioritize friendship above all else. She hoped that by fostering a strong and enduring friendship with her Muslim friend *Jasmin*, Christian faith would naturally permeate their relationship over time.

The various responses from Christian informants reflected a desire to mitigate the urgency of proselytization within interfaith friendships, opting instead to embrace their Christian faith as a means of accommodating and enriching their relationships

9 *Kristin* 30 in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Subtler Efforts to Convert the Other”.

10 *Kristin* 30 in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Subtler Efforts to Convert the Other”.

11 *Kristin* 30 in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Subtler Efforts to Convert the Other”.

12 See John 4:5-43

13 *Berit* 50 in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Christians Inspired by Christianity to Befriend Muslims”.

14 *Berit* 50 in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Christians Inspired by Christianity to Befriend Muslims”.

15 *Tore* 56 in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Subtler Efforts to Convert the Other”.

When relating to “they” and “them” *Tore* talks about *Hamid* and his family.

16 *Signe* 65, in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Subtler Efforts to Convert the Other”.

with their Muslim friends. These instances underscore how interfaith friendships can transform the perspectives of Christian respondents, prompting them to seek alternative ways to engage with their Muslim friends that go beyond mere conversion.

## Muslims and the question of conversion

In contrast to the Christian respondents, most of my Muslim participants did not seem to face the same level of difficulty regarding the issue of conversion within their friendships. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that potential biases may have arisen due to my Christian background as the researcher, possibly influencing the way Muslim respondents contemplated the issue of conversion. Additionally, being immigrants in what they perceived as a predominantly Christian country, some Muslims may have considered themselves newcomers and thus exhibited restraint in adopting missionary stances towards Christians. This restraint may be evident in the way several Muslims responded by stating that they did not give the issue much thought. However, it is also possible that their lack of extensive reflection on the issue stems from genuine disinterest.

Nonetheless, some Muslim respondents did express nuanced views on the topic. For instance, *Inaam* put it like this: “No, I do not think about it. But if *Kristin* were to become a Muslim, I would be happy”,<sup>17</sup> so even if she did not attach much importance to conversion, she would be pleased if her Christian friend *Kristin* converted to Islam. Similarly, *Basiima* expressed a comparable sentiment, emphasizing her happiness if her friend chose to convert.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, numerous Muslim informants, including *Basiima*, expressed the sentiment that converting their Christian friends to Islam would be highly beneficial for them. *Basiima* stated, “It would have been very good for me, it is a good thing if I do it.”<sup>19</sup> It will be written on my good side if I do it.” This underscores the belief among these informants that such conversions would result in spiritual advantages in the afterlife.

Another recurring perspective among Muslim interviewees was the idea that people cannot be forced to believe and must think for themselves, as *Hamid* put it: “everybody knows their own way, we cannot force them”.<sup>20</sup> *Hamid* added another interesting dimension talking about the lack of knowledge in connection to the question of converting their Christian friends: “And I cannot invite someone to become a Muslim.

17 *Inaam* 41, in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Muslim Respondents’ Views on the Relevance of the question of Conversion”.

18 *Basiima* 39, in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “The Act of Converting the Other as Merit, Obligation and Hospitality”.

19 *Basiima* 39, in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “The Act of Converting the Other as Merit, Obligation and Hospitality”.

20 *Hamid* 46, in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “The Implication of Religious Knowledge for the Question of Conversion”.

No! It is too much, and I am too ignorant. I do not have enough knowledge”,<sup>21</sup> a sentiment shared by several other Muslim informants. Like the Muslim couple, *Warda* and *Talal*, who thought that they were “not clever enough ... to explain all about Islam”,<sup>22</sup> or *Jasmin* who answered that she “didn’t have a strong grasp of religion”.<sup>23</sup> Several Muslim informants felt that they lacked significant religious knowledge to effectively convert their Christian friends to Islam. They appeared to view the task of converting a Christian friend to Islam as daunting and beyond their capacity as ordinary Muslims.

Notably, among the Christian interviewees, *Kristin* was the only one who shared a similar view about her lack of knowledge concerning converting the religious other: “I wish I could use words to argue in such a way that she would come to understand and know Jesus, but I can’t do that.”<sup>24</sup> However, she expressed trust in divine guidance in such matters, when she later uttered that she got “wisdom to follow what the Holy Spirit tells you in such situations”.<sup>25</sup> The Muslims may have held similar views, or as indicated by *Jamila*, who instead advised me to talk to an imam about the religion of Islam.<sup>26</sup> It may be that they believed that such religious delicate matters as conversion should be handled by Islamic specialists in their mosque.

Interestingly, some among their Muslim acquaintances expressed suspicion that their Christian friends may harbor ulterior motives and merely sought to convert them. In all instances, however, these suspicions were countered by their personal knowledge of their Christian friends, as affirmed by *Talal*: “we did not listen to them, because we started to get to know them, and we discussed religion and culture and that kind of thing in a very good [way]”.<sup>27</sup>

## Comparative Analysis

From the presented findings, notable differences emerged in how most Muslim respondents discussed conversion compared to their Christian counterparts. Firstly, Muslims emphasized conversion as a religious duty and a means to accumulate good deeds, while Christians contemplated conversion more complexly. Secondly, Muslims

21 *Hamid 46*, in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “The Implication of Religious Knowledge for the Question of Conversion”.

22 *Warda 47 and Talal 45*: *Talal*: “But we are not clever enough to...” *Warda*: “...explain...” *Talal*: “...explain all about Islam.” *Warda*: “It is hard to explain very well.”

23 *Jasmin 41*, English translation from the original transcribed interview.

24 *Kristin 30*, English translation from the original transcribed interview.

25 *Kristin 30*, English translation from the original transcribed interview.

26 *Jamila 55* firstly misunderstood the aim of my interview, thinking that I wanted to discuss religious matters with her, in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, in the presentation of the informants.

27 *Talal 45*, in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Muslim Respondents’ Objections to Suspicion from Other Muslims”.

frequently downplayed the issue of conversion, suggesting it was of minimal concern to them. Thirdly, they perceived themselves as lacking the necessary knowledge to convert others effectively. Fourthly, many Muslims affirmed the idea that individuals must make their own choices regarding faith and religion, and thus, they refrained from pressuring others to convert.

However, two noteworthy similarities occurred between Christian and Muslim respondents. Firstly, both groups expressed happiness at the prospect of their friends converting to their respective faiths. Secondly, neither group believed in pressuring or forcing their friends into conversion.

### **The Primacy of Friendship Over Conversion**

Despite the challenges posed by the issue of conversion in the context of interfaith friendships, certain findings suggest that various aspects associated with the intimacy of these relationships served as effective countermeasures against the complexities of conversion, both for Christian and Muslim participants.

To illustrate the impact of interfaith friendship on the intricate issue of conversion, I will present a dialogue between *Berit* and *Basiima*. Throughout most of the interview with *Basiima*, *Berit* was present. When the topic of conversion was broached, *Basiima* expressed her viewpoint that she couldn't compel *Berit* to convert, but she would naturally be delighted if *Berit* chose to do so. *Berit's* response shed light on how intimate friendships could alter perceptions and clarify challenging religious matters:

*Berit*: “Yes, I am also thinking like that ... faith in Jesus means so incredibly much to me, so naturally I would have wanted all my friends, including you, to believe in Jesus as the path to salvation or eternal life. ... Because you want to share the best you have with those you love. But I also believe that you can never force anyone to do something.”

*Basiima*: “No.”

*Berit*: “And I want to be your friend no matter what.”

*Basiima*: “No matter what, yes, yes!”<sup>28</sup>

*Berit's* reflection on this matter, in the presence of her Muslim friend *Basiima*, indicated that the existence of a close friendship could potentially bring about transformations and clarifications in the realm of intricate religious controversies. Importantly, *Berit's* discussion on conversion in the company of her Muslim friend diverged from her previous discussions with me. Firstly, *Berit* associated her desire for *Basiima's* conversion with her love for her friends. Secondly, she reiterated her commitment to maintaining their friendship regardless of whether *Basiima* embraced Christianity or not. In turn,

28 *Berit* 50 and *Basiima* 39, in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Conversion and Religious Dialogue”.

*Basiima* strongly affirmed that she held similar sentiments regarding the issue of conversion. Their friendship was founded on a basis beyond shared faith.

When *Hamid* discussed conversion, he articulated the essence of interfaith friendship. He interlinked concepts of love, charity, and conversion while distinguishing between friendship and the religious labels of “Christian” and “Muslim”:

*Hamid*: “Oh ... I am contemplating love, how do we find love? Love, the Bible talks about it, we have to act on it! Find it! It isn't enough if I said I was a Christian, or I became a Christian, or if I am a Muslim, it is not enough! We have to be helpful, we have to help each other, we have to show the way, we have to explain.”<sup>29</sup>

*Hamid* emphasized that religious identity alone was insufficient to sustain a meaningful friendship. He turned to the Bible to underscore the significance of love in their interactions. His depiction of love as a countermeasure to unilateral conversion efforts echoed *Harald's* perspective that Christians were not “called to love people because they are to convert” but “called to love people just to love people”.<sup>30</sup> *Hilde* also shared this religious motivation, highlighting that her primary incentive for spreading the message of Jesus was rooted in His love for her and all humanity.<sup>31</sup>

Several Muslim respondents extended their discussions on conversion to incorporate themes of hospitality towards those from different religious backgrounds. *Warda*, for instance, recounted her warm reception of *Elisabeth* in this way: “If you can, you are welcome to become a Muslim!”,<sup>32</sup> inviting her to consider converting to Islam and thus becoming part of the Muslim community. *Basiima* drew inspiration from a narrative portraying the Prophet Muhammad's hospitable treatment of a Jewish neighbor who ultimately converted to Islam due to the Prophet's kindness during times of need.<sup>33</sup> These accounts aimed to underscore how their friendships had inspired them to embrace love and hospitality, transcending religious boundaries. They depicted a vision in which hospitality, love, and friendship superseded religious affiliations to become universal traits.

These examples collectively demonstrate how the intimacy and love inherent in friendship could mitigate potential challenges associated with differing faiths.

29 *Hamid* 46, in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Muslim Respondents' Views on the Relevance of the Question of Conversion”.

30 *Harald* 26, in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Subtler Efforts to Convert the Other”.

31 *Hilde* 57, in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “Subtler Efforts to Convert the Other”.

32 *Warda* 47, in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “The Act of Converting the Other as Merit, Obligation and Hospitality”.

33 *Basiima* 39, in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “The Act of Converting the Other as Merit, Obligation and Hospitality”.

Concerning the matter of conversion, some respondents even introduced innovative religious solutions to what can be termed the “missionary dilemma”.

## Conversion and Religious Creativity

Some respondents exhibited creative approaches to conversion, embracing the idea that religion and culture could be connected. *Tore*, for instance, put it like this: “when ‘Muslim’ is written in the passport it is about the whole life, in a way, it is like a cultural thing, and everything is intertwined.” He would be careful not to “remove something from them” by his eagerness to convert his friends. He proposed that Muslims could continue to identify as such while incorporating Christian beliefs about Jesus into their faith: “He may be a Muslim who is a Jesus-believer”.<sup>34</sup> Among Muslim respondents, similar innovative approaches emerged. *Warda* and *Talal* proposed that their Christian friends, *Elisabeth* (67) and *Hans* (75), might earn a place in heaven due to their dedicated care for a severely disabled foster daughter. *Talal* posited:

If you take in a handicapped individual, provide care for many years, especially when they have no parents, Islamic tradition states that you will enter heaven for such a noble act. However, I am uncertain about the status of Christians who engage in similar acts.<sup>35</sup>

These instances reflect how interfaith friendships can inspire religious individuals to seek alternative pathways for their friends’ salvation that do not necessitate a complete religious conversion.

The reflections of my informants highlight how interfaith friendships can significantly alter the perspectives of individuals regarding the issue of conversion. This unique way of viewing people of different religious backgrounds through the lens of friendship finds resonance in other narratives as well.

For instance, Peter C. Phan recounts a story of a young Buddhist student attending a Catholic school. His Catholic friends reassured him that he, assuring him that he need not worry about the prospect of going to hell because, as their friend, he was destined for heaven.<sup>36</sup> This anecdote underscores the idea that when individuals develop close friendships with those of different religious faiths, it becomes more challenging to reconcile the notion of a divine being who would condemn a close friend to eternal

34 All the quotes come from *Tore* 56, in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “The Respondents’ View on Conversion and Innovative Religious Solutions – some findings”.

35 *Talal* 45 in Try, *Transforming Friendships*, “The Respondents’ View on Conversion and Innovative Religious Solutions – some findings”.

36 Peter C. Phan, “A Friend and a Scholar” in James L. Fredericks and Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier (eds.), *Interreligious Friendship after Nostra Aetate* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 173.



damnation. In this context, individuals like *Tore*, *Talal*, and *Warda* seem to be actively seeking religious justifications for their friends' salvation without necessitating a complete conversion to their own faith.

The discussions surrounding conversion within the framework of interfaith friendships evoke the observations made by Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, who posits the existence of a missionary undercurrent in many interreligious friendships. Given that both Islam and Christianity lay claim to representing the universal truth, it is natural for adherents of both faiths to assume that eventually, all humans will come to understand and embrace this truth.<sup>37</sup> In her work Deanna F. Womack explores two contrasting approaches adopted by Christian churches in the United States when interacting with Muslims. One approach involves “embracing the objective of fostering Christian-Muslim friendships,” while the other entails “depicting Islam as a competitor”.<sup>38</sup> This discourse is not confined solely to the United States but resonates in various segments of the global Christian community. In the context of discussions surrounding interfaith relationships, Volf and McAnnally-Linz have identified a noteworthy challenge stemming from the Biblical ‘Great Commission.’ This commission, deeply embedded in Christian doctrine, calls for the conversion of all humanity to become disciples of Jesus, potentially complicating the maintenance of meaningful friendships between Christians and individuals of other faiths.<sup>39</sup> Consequently, as some of my informants have demonstrated, religious beliefs in general, and the concept of religious conversion in particular, can occasionally disrupt the harmony within these friendships.

On the other hand, certain interviewees presented evidence suggesting that friendship has the potential to reshape conventional missiological perspectives regarding individuals of different faiths. James L. Fredericks cites Louis Massignon, describing Christian-Muslim friendships as “sacred hospitality” characterized by the sole purpose of welcoming and serving, with no intention to convert the other party.<sup>40</sup> Although Massignon's concept is premised on a non-proselytizing stance, it is apparent from my own findings that there remains the possibility for transformation within interreligious friendships. Fredericks contends that it is impossible to remain

37 Rowan Williams, “Afterword”, in Frances Ward and Sarah Coakley, eds. *Fear and Friendship. Anglicans Engaging with Islam*. (London: Continuum, 2012), 147.

38 Deanna F. Womack, *Neighbors: Christians and Muslims Building Community* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2020), 118.

39 Miroslav Volf and Ryan McAnnally-Linz, “A Christian Perspective on Interreligious Friendship” in: Alon Goshen-Gottstein (ed.), *Friendship Across Religions: Theological Perspectives on Interreligious Friendship* (pp. 45-67) (London: Lexington Books, 2015), 51.

40 Louis Massignon quoted in James L. Fredericks, “Introduction” in James L. Fredericks and Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier (eds.), *Interreligious Friendship after Nostra Aetate* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 3.

unchanged in such relationships, as they are imbued with genuine love for the other.<sup>41</sup> However, the change that occurs is not an active attempt to alter the religious beliefs of the other but rather a personal transformation driven by a growing desire to receive and serve one's friend.

## Conclusion

Upon analyzing the experiences and resolutions related to the issue of conversion within interfaith friendships, it becomes apparent that ambiguity characterizes these relationships. While interfaith friendships may initially pose challenges concerning the desire for conversion, they simultaneously offer solutions to these challenges. Love, charity, intimacy, empathy and hospitality inherent in these friendships often supersede the urgency to convert the religious other. Consequently, respondents began to perceive friendship itself as the primary objective, with conversion becoming a secondary consideration. Nevertheless, they did not entirely abandon their hopes of conversion, holding onto the belief that their friends might eventually choose to convert. Furthermore, some respondents displayed religious creativity, suggesting alternative perspectives that allowed their friends to retain their religious identities while embracing elements of the other's faith. This demonstrates the transformative potential of interfaith friendships, where love and friendship take precedence over conversion, fostering greater understanding and harmony among individuals of different religious backgrounds.

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# The unintended church

## The movement for church unity and the establishment of the Kinki Evangelical Lutheran Church in Japan

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### 1. Introduction

When Norwegian Lutheran missionaries first came to Japan early in the 1950's, they had no plans of establishing a separate Lutheran Church. There was already a well-established Lutheran Church in Japan, and the intention was to become a part of this Church. This paper traces the history of the movement for Lutheran unity in Japan which ultimately led to the establishment of the Kinki Evangelical Lutheran Church as an independent church. What were the goals of the movement for church unity, and why did it not succeed?

This story has been told once before.<sup>2</sup> However, the relevant sources both in Japan and Norway have now been collected, presented, and discussed again in a master thesis recently submitted to the Asian Graduate School of Theology at Kobe Lutheran Theological Seminary in Japan.<sup>3</sup> This is a fascinating story which concerns both the development of Japanese Lutheranism and the history of Norwegian foreign mission. As the study of the thesis and its sources requires competence in Japanese, we have

- 1 In transcribing Japanese names, we follow the Japanese tradition of giving the surname first.
- 2 See Tor Berger Jørgensen, «Japan», in Torstein Jørgensen (ed.), *I tro og tjeneste: Det norske misjonsselskap 1842-1992* II, 229-292, her s. 248-255.
- 3 松田聖一、近畿福音ルーテル教会とは誰か〜ルーテル諸派合同運動の中で (Matsuda Seiichi, “Kinki Fukuin Ruteru Kyokai to wa dare ka – Ruteru Shohagodoundo no naka de” [Who is the Kinki Evangelical Lutheran Church – in the midst of the Lutheran union movement]), AGST/J 2023, 239 pp, quoted as Matsuda, “Ruteru Shohagodoundo”. The thesis has an appendix with a collection of sources both in Japanese, English and Norwegian. The authors of this article are the writer and supervisor of this thesis.

decided to make its main findings more easily accessible through this article.

## 1. The failed movement for Lutheran church unity in Japan

The Kinki Evangelical Lutheran Church was established and held its founding general assembly on November 3, 1961 (Showa 36).<sup>4</sup> It then consisted of eight congregations and mission centres belonging to the Norwegian Mission Society (NMS) (Rokko, Takarazuka, Higashi-Sumiyoshi (later Hirano Nishi), Minami Osaka, Izumisano, Wakayama, Nara and Sakurai) and 6 congregations and mission centres belonging to the Japan Mission of the Lutheran Free Church of Norway (LFCN) (Matsusaka, Tsu, Daio (Nakiri and Wagu), Yokkaichi, and Okutsu).<sup>5</sup> The Norwegian missionaries had first come to Japan around 1950 when they had to leave China after the Chinese Communist Revolution.<sup>6</sup>

The Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church (JELC) had then been in existence for several decades.<sup>7</sup> In 1941, this Church was forced to join the United Church of Christ in Japan (教団 [Kyodan]) which the Japanese authorities had established to be able to control the Protestant Churches in Japan during the war.<sup>8</sup> When the Lutheran

4 交わり(Majiwari [Fellowship], journal of the Kinki Evangelical Lutheran Church 17 December Showa 36, 1-4. 近畿福音ルーテル教会創立総会内案内 憲法規則草案起草委員会 (Kinki Fukuin Ruteru Kyokai Soritsu Sokai Annai Kenpo Kisoku Soan Kian Iinkai [Kinki Evangelical Lutheran Church Founding General Meeting Notice Constitutional Regulations Drafting Committee], October 11, Showa 36; 近畿福音ルーテル教会創立総会議事録 近畿福音ルーテル教会議長(Kinki Fukuin Ruteru Kyokai Soritsu Sokai Giji Roku Kinki Fukuin Ruteru Kyokai Gicho[Minutes of the General Conference of the Founding of Evangelical Lutheran Church Chairman of Evangelical Lutheran Church] Leif Salomonsen, December 31, Showa 36.

5 These congregations are all located in the Kinki area of Japan; hence the name.

6 Jørgensen, "Japan", 231-236.

7 福山猛「日本福音ルーテル教会史」ルーテル社(Fukuyama Takeshi, *Nihon Fukuin Ruteru Kyokaishi* [History of the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church], Lutheran Publishing Company, 1954.

8 See Knut Alfvåg, "Kirken og den shintoistiske stat. En framstilling og vurdering av et hovedproblem i japansk kirkehistorie," *Norsk tidsskrift for misjon* 1984, 25-45.

Church left the United Church after the war,<sup>9</sup> its leaders wanted to replace the forced Protestant union with a greater emphasis on Lutheran church unity. They therefore wanted to welcome the Norwegian missionaries and the congregations established through their work into a bigger Lutheran Church. This corresponds to the vision for church unity which is found in Article 7 of the Augsburg Confession, which insists that “to the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments,” explicitly rejecting that “that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike.” Article 7 does not speak of a union of Lutheran organizations, but understand unity as founded on the preaching of the pure gospel and the sacraments administered according to the gospel.

However, as the process for Lutheran church unity in Japan developed, one may question whether it developed according to the understanding of church unity which is defined in the Augsburg Confession. By and large, questions related to theological matters were overlooked. Discussions and negotiations concentrated on financial and organizational matters, and the progress of the movement for union was evaluated according to these criteria. It thus seems that one found that the most desirable way to evangelize Japan was to form a strong Lutheran Church, and the goal for the expansion of "Lutheranism" was that the Lutheran confession of faith was preserved as the formal foundation of the Church while not paying much attention to what this confession actually taught.

The wish for cooperation led to a number of joint efforts in the 1950's. Agreements between JELC and the United Lutheran Church of North America (UCLA) were revised to allow for Lutheran denominations to unite. Nishioka Kazuo and Takei Shogo, who were ordained in JELC, and Saiki Tanechika and Matsumoto Koji, who were educated at its seminary, were, with the blessing of JELC, employed by NMS and LFCN. Iwai Daizo, Fukui Toru and Tabata Takeshi, who were pastoral candidates from NMS congregations, were educated at the JELC seminary in Tokyo and returned to serve in the NMS congregations. Both NMS and LFCN had an urgent need for Japanese church workers, and human resource cooperation, which

9 ルーテル会誌(Ruteru Kaishi [Lutheran Journal] July 20, 1946. 日本福音ルーテル教会再建総会記録 日本福音ルーテル教会(Nihon Fukuin Ruteru Kyokai Saiken Sokai Kiroku Nihon Fukuin Ruteru Kyokai [Records of the General Conference for the Reconstruction of the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church], January 23-24, 1947. United Lutheran Church in America, Board of Foreign Mission Minutes, May12-14,1947, 124-127. 日本福音ルーテル教会臨時総会記録 日本福音ルーテル教会(Nihon Fukuin Ruteru Kyokai Rinji Sokai Kiroku Nihon Fukuin Ruteru Kyokai [Records of the Extraordinary General Meeting of the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church], November 13, 1947.

also included theological education, was seen as a stepping stone toward the future establishment of one Lutheran church.

But how were the relations with the overseas mission organisations to be maintained within the united Church? This was discussed in a report from the All-Lutheran Joint Liaison Committee (全ルーテル合同交渉委員会 [Zen Ruteru Godo Sessho Inkaï]) from August 30, 1956, which is contained in the minutes from JELC's 34<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in May 1957. This document says:

Concerning the preservation of the authority of the local church committees, some concessions at the beginning of the union cannot be avoided. But since a full preservation of the autonomy and authority of the local church committees with special relationships with different missions may hinder full union, this cannot be a long-term goal, even if some compromises due to special agreements may be acceptable in the beginning.<sup>10</sup>

The local church committees (地方部会[chiobukai]) are the representatives of the NMS and LFCN congregations. According to this document, these representatives' particular relationship with their Norwegian mission partners cannot be upheld in the united Church. The ultimate goal is a fully united, organizationally homogeneous Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the relation between parts of the Church and their foreign mission partners "may hinder full union." This shows the strong commitment of the JELC towards organizational unity. The organizational unity of the future Church is seen as more important than the autonomy of the overseas missions and their particular relationship with parts of the united Church.

However, other documents express a different attitude to this question. The report of the All-Lutheran Council from 1954, and the report of the All-Lutheran Joint Liaison Committee in 1955 do not signal a need for the abolishment of the relation-

10 日本福音ルーテル教会第34回総会記録 (Nihon Fukuin Ruteru Kyokai dai 34 kai Sokai Kiroku [JELC 34. General Assembly Minutes]) 1957.5.7-9, 58.



ship to the mission partners.<sup>11</sup> If there was a change in attitude, this does not seem to have been reported to NMS and LFCN. There is thus a discrepancy between the original position of the All-Lutheran Joint Liaison Committee, which was based on the Lutheran Confessions of Faith and advocated the expansion of Lutheranism through the evangelistic cooperation of Lutheran denominations, and JELC's goal of full organizational union. In spite of this contradiction, contact with each mission considered as steps toward the union of all Lutherans had already begun, and special agreements between the Lutheran churches and their respective missionary organizations were in place without the need for their dissolution after the union ever to be discussed.

There is a certain paradoxicality at play here. The goal of building a single Lutheran church may have occluded the theological issues constituting the Lutheran understanding of church unity. Organizational unity was considered more important than theological unity, and structures were created which came to promote this understanding of unity rather than the one we have in the Lutheran confessions.

The question of the education of the future pastors also complicated matters. JELC had its own theological seminary in Tokyo, and during the early years of cooperation the Norwegian missionaries sent their promising young men to be educated there. However, in 1957, Norwegian Lutheran Mission (NLM), which was never really a part of the JELC-centred movement for Lutheran church unity,<sup>12</sup> had established Kobe Lutheran Theological Seminary (KLTS), and candidates from the NMS/LFCN-congregations were being educated there. These congregations therefore wanted KLTS to be recognized as a theological seminary within the future united church in parallel with the JELC seminary in Tokyo. However, JELC insisted that only the seminary in

11 As a proposal regarding the organization in Japan the Evangelical Lutheran Liaison Committee (日本福音ルーテル接渉委員会 [Nihon Fukuin Ruteru Sessho Iinkai]) reported: "The constitution and supplementary provisions of the future Lutheran Church in the Japan should be appropriately established by the representatives of each local church (one lay person and one minister from each local committee), and a special agreement between the new Lutheran Church in Japan and the Lutheran Churches and the domestic and foreign missionary organizations cooperating for the evangelization of Japan should be expressed by the representative responsible for it. Therefore, we propose that the following points be considered in consultation and drafting in the future . . . (日本福音ルーテル教会第 32 回総会記録 [Nihon Fukuin Ruteru Kyokai dai 32 kai Sokai Hokoku], Proceedings of the 32nd General Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Japan May 3-5, 1955, 184-191)." What is then proposed is that the new Lutheran Church being promoted by the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church will respect the special agreements made with the separate Lutheran churches and their respective missionary associations, which will be united in the new Lutheran Church.

12 On NLM's attitude towards the union issue, see Matsuda, "Ruteru Shohagodoundo," 57-59.

Tokyo, Japan Lutheran Theological Seminary, was to be the place for the education of pastors in the united church. As a result, the Japanese representatives for the NMS/LFCN-congregations became quite sceptical towards the union project, while most of the missionaries continued to recommend unification.<sup>13</sup>

The outcome of these complications was that when the united Lutheran Church eventually was established, it was scaled down from what was originally intended. Only the Tokai Evangelical Lutheran Church, which was the result of the work of American missionaries and organized as a church body in 1960, joined the JELC as its Tokai Diocese (日本福音ルーテル教会東海教区 [Nihon Fukuin Ruteru Kyokai Tokai Kyoku]). When the Kinki Evangelical Lutheran Church (KELC) was established in November 1961, it was with the intention of becoming the Kinki Diocese of JELC. However, scepticism toward unification was now growing, and both the ordinary and an extraordinary General Assembly of the newly established KELC postponed the decision concerning unification. Eventually, the KELC General Assembly which took place on March 21, 1963, decided to not to participate in the scheduled Joint General Assembly of the united JELC. The single most important factor in that decision seems to have been the seminary issue.<sup>14</sup> This became a permanent solution in the sense that JELC and KELC are separate church bodies still today, and the KELC pastors are educated in Kobe. However, the two church bodies have maintained a positive and cooperative attitude towards each other both generally and in matters related to theological education.

Why did the KELC congregations decide not to join? There is no doubt that the movement for church union, which was developed based on the assessment that the most desirable way to evangelize effectively in Japan was to form a powerful Lutheran Church, wanted to uphold the Lutheran Confession of Faith and form a church based on it. However, in its emphasis on practical cooperation and joint work, it came to promote an understanding of church unity at variance with Article 7 in the Augsburg Confession. The central questions in the discussion with the NMS and LFCN affiliated congregations were not issues related to the theological understanding and implication of church unity, but how the affiliated churches could become achieve human and financial independence from NMS and LFCN. Seen in this perspective, the NMS and LFCN affiliated congregations did not meet the requirements to become a diocese of JELC.

13 The exception among the missionaries was Bjørn Alve from NMS. On his role in the final stages of the unification process, see Jørgensen, “Japan”, 253, Matsuda, “Ruteru Shohagodoundo,” 95-97.

14 近畿福音ルーテル教会 常議員会「教会合同準備に関する経過報告書」(Kinki Fukuin Ruteru Kyokai Jogiinkai, “Kyokai Godo Junbi ni kan suru Keika Hokokusho” [KELC Board, “Progress Report concerning the preparation for church unity]), 1963; Jørgensen, “Japan”, 253-254.

Why did the events develop in this direction, what are the consequences, and what can be learned from this process concerning the Lutheran understanding of church unity?

### **3. The background, impact, and implications of the church unity movement**

The Lutheran movement in Japan lasted for about a decade from the beginning of the 1950s to the beginning of the 1960s. However, it should be interpreted within a larger context. When JELC took the leading role in this movement, it was arguably influenced by its experience of being forced into the Kyodan in 1941 and of trying to regain its Lutheran identity when leaving the Kyodan after the war. Seen from this perspective, JELC wanted to regain what was lost by leaving Kyodan by working for organizational unity among the missionary groups that came to Japan after the war and the congregations they established. Central among these were NMS and LFCN with their congregations, and the goal of the work for church union was thus to organize these congregations as a diocese in JELC.

To achieve this goal, the NMS and LFCN missionaries met and held discussions, and in due time these discussions came to include the Japanese pastors and representatives of the congregations. However, when the Japanese were included, it was already concluded that the congregations would join JELC, and with this as the goal, KELC was founded in 1961. That KELC should be a part of the expanded JELC was considered decided, and the discussions were based on this decision. Theological issues were not a part of this discussion, which centred on issues related to independence from the missions. However, when the Japanese was involved, it became clear that there was no consensus.<sup>15</sup> Both the independence issue and the seminary issue became unsurmountable hurdles. The reason is that the Japanese found that the significance attached to these issues were incompatible with the understanding of church unity in the Lutheran confessions, notably Article 7 of the Augsburg Confession. One had not paid attention to questions related to this article during the unification process, but they suddenly appeared in the final stage of the discussion with JELC as a criterion for evaluating the planned church union.<sup>16</sup> The outcome was that KELC became an independent church body, not a diocese in JELC.

This emphasis on the theological foundation of church unity is of lasting significance. The union of the church is not established by a uniform church organization, but by the gospel being preached purely and the sacraments being administered according to the gospel. It is not an organizational union, but a unity of faith given through the means of grace. It is made manifest in worship founded on the gospel and

15 The significance of the involvement of the Japanese is emphasized also by Jørgensen, "Japan", 254.

16 See Matsuda, "Ruteru Shohagodoundo," 117-121.

the sacraments. If this union does not exist, there is no union irrespective of what is done on the organizational level. The church is only united when it conforms to the criteria in Article 7, and these criteria are sufficient.

**Veiens visdom og vandringens poesi: Fire japanske vandrepoeter**  
**Notto Reidar Thelle**  
**Verbum, 2023**  
**784 sider**

Anmeldt av Geir Hoas

Teolog og Østen-kjenner Notto R. Thelle, var misjonsprest i Japan i 16 år på 1970- og 80-tallet, og mangeårig leder ved Centre for the Study of Japanese Religions i Kyoto. Han var redaktør av Norsk Tidsskrift for Misjon i 8 år, 1988-95, og var professor i økumenikk og missiologi ved Det teologisk fakultet ved Universitetet i Oslo, 1996-2006. Han har skrevet flere bøker om japansk religion og filosofi, også lærebok om Buddhismen, og nå kommer hans mest monumentale verk «Veiens visdom...». Thelle står fram som en sjelden veileder og autoritet i det store og vide området av Østens filosofi, med særlig fokus på japansk kontekst. I norsk sammenheng et hans bidrag enestående.

Bokens innledningskapittel klargjør begreper og gir viktig bakgrunnskunnskap for å forstå de 4 poetene. De var pilegrimer som besøkte helligdommer, og var opptatt av å oppleve naturen, sammen med religiøs søken. Hvilke religiøse og filosofiske grunntanker lå under deres poesi? Hvorfor ble vandring en så viktig del av deres liv? Buddhismen fant sin plass ved siden av konfusianismen og daoismen, side om side, som uttrykk for en felles visdom, sammen med det store mangfold av japanske religiøse tradisjoner under fellesbetegnelsen Shinto, gudenes vei. Vandringen blir en åndelig praksis, tydeligst i Buddhismen, som hos Buddha selv!

Vandrepoetene var preget av buddhistiske munkeidealer, men de var ikke asketer eller botferdige pilegrimer. De nøt livets goder, vennskap og fest var viktige elementer. De var opptatt av skjønnhet og naturopplevelser. Mye formidles videre gjennom de korte og fyndige diktformenene Haiku (5-7-5 stavelser) og Waka (5-7-5-7-7). Her kommer spenningen klart frem mellom det buddhistiske asketiske idealet og emosjonelle bindinger til mennesker og natur. Forandring og forgjengelighet er det eneste uforanderlige. Poesien får en estetisk melankoli som taler til japansk mentalitet, samtidig som den gir en universell appell.

Hvordan formidle den knappe Haiku-formen på norsk? Thelle velger å gjøre det ved å bevare den poetiske stilen, men ved også å utfylle noe for å gi mening. Det lykkes han svært godt med. Boken er gjennomsyret av dikt i Thelles norske oversettelse, med den japanske originalen, i latinske bokstaver, like nedenunder. Et beundringsverdig bidrag til å vekke interesse for Haiku-diktet, men vi ser og den hengivenhet Thelle selv har til denne poesien. Hver av de fire dikterne presenteres med en grundig historisk

innledning som også inkluderer illustrerende eksempler fra poesien. Dernext kommer et fylldig utdrag av dennes diktning.

Første poet: Matsuo Bashō (1644-1694). Poesien ble i ung alder et kultivert tidsfordriv som godt kunne forenes med samuraikulturen. Men sorg preget deler av hans barndom og ungdom, som farens død da han var 12, og en nær venns død da han var 22. Muligens ble han da buddhistmunk og studerte i et kloster i Kyoto. Det er rimelig å anta at disse tragiske hendelsene ga hans poesi den melankolske stemningen som vi ser i begrepet *aware* (sorg, medlidenhet). Våren 1681 fikk han et banantre i gave da han flyttet inn i en hytte. Den japanske bananen heter *bashō*. Treet rives lett i stykker av vær og vind, det kan blomstre, men bærer ingen spiselig frukt. Treet blir et klassisk uttrykk for buddhistiske og daoistiske tanker om tingenes forgjengelighet og natures forandringsprosesser. Naboene begynte å kalle stedet for *bashō*-hytten og selv ble han omtalt som Mester Bashō.

Bashōs vandring blir en indre reise der poesi og religion blir ett – kropp og sjel finner rytmen i tilværelsens skapende forvandlingsprosesser. Bashōs diktning er inndelt i 8 avsnitt, hvor årstidene er klart det største. Mye dreier seg om oppbrudd og vandring. Bashō ønsket å følge naturen og vandre med årstidene. Avslutningen av gamleåret var en tid for tilbakeblikk. Man besøker buddhisttemplet nyttårsaften til bot og ettertanke, og shintohelligdommen første nyttårsdag med bønner om velstand og godt år. Vårstemningen får et markant fokus, hvor plommeblomstringen følges opp av kirsebærene, som i Bashōs diktning får en dominerende plass. Våren har et snev av melankoli og tristhet, den påminner om tingenes forgjengelighet. Våren står for oppbrudd og avskjed. Bashō foretrakk den ensomme tilværelsen, selv om han også likte å ha en følgesvenn på sine vandringer. Bashōs tankeverden og emosjonelle uttrykk var preget av buddhismen og daoismen, men han hadde lite å si om religion som rituell utøvelse eller trosforestilling. Det var poesien han dyrket, den estetiske åndstradisjonen, de poetiske forbildene og naturen.

Andre poet Kobayashi Issa (1763-1828). Issa vokste opp i en fattig fjellbygd i Nagano (forøvrig et kjent område for Thelle), men forlot hjemmet, hundset av stemor og halvbror. Poesien ga han språk for sin smerte, og skapte der et univers som ga rom for alle som følte seg kuet eller tråkket på. Selv om Bashō var hans forbilde, hadde de helt ulike poetiske verdener. Issa vokste opp i fattigdom, og kunne dermed betrakte egen og andres skjebne nedenfra. Fra de tidlige år med sorg og smerte, blir hans vandringer og poesi som et livslangt forsøk på å gjenerobre de gode ord og opplevelser. «Han huskes best for sin omsorg for de små og svake og foreldreløse...inspirert av Buddhas grenseløse medfølelse», s.219. Buddhismen var en helt sentral del av Issas hverdag. Uttrykket *anata-makase* «Du er min tilflukt», vitner om hans fromhet, men også om avslappet frihet overfor andre mennesker. Livsbejaende barneportretter røper Issas glede over barn som utfolder seg i lek og lystighet.

Issa hadde behov for å markere at hans diktning var naturlig og spontan, inspirert av hans egen folkelige buddhisme der lek og lærd, prester og vanlige folk befinner seg

på samme plan. Poesien må være noe alle kan glede seg over. «Issas popularitet skyldtes evnen til å holde humor og folkelighet sammen med filosofisk og religiøs patos», s.395.

Tredje poet Ryōkan (1758-1831) var både munk og Zen-mester, anerkjent som en av Japans fremste diktere og kalligrafer, men fant seg ikke til rette innen rammene for etablert religion og avsto fra alle titler. Hans lærdom og dannelse kom til uttrykk i hans folkelige enkelhet. Han ble en folkekjær helgenskikkelse, en religionskritisk humanist, med en grenseløs fascinasjon av naturens skjønnhet. Man merker gleden over vandringen og poesien, hengivenheten til lekende barn. Ja, barna elsket han! Da våren kom, kunne man høre «*Den tåpelige munken fra i fjor er endelig tilbake!*», s.474. Ball-leken stod høyt i kurs. Hans romantiske vennskap med nonnen Teishin, på 29 år, og han selv 69 år, får uttrykk i deres felles hengivenhet til poesi og skjønnhet. Ryōkans liv hadde vært preget av streng disiplin, søken etter innsikt i Zen-tradisjonen. Men det som preget hans buddhisme sterkest var nok den grenseløse barmhjertigheten han fant hos Amitabha Buddha. I Ryōkans lovprisning av det ensomme livet, merker man en melankolsk undertone av vemod og forlatthet. Han elsket å treffe vanlige mennesker, og satte stor pris på ektheten han fant hos barn, fattige bønder og landsbyfolk. Han var Zen-buddhist, men hadde også romslig sans for folkereligøse tradisjoner. Både han og hans far tok ansvar for det lokale Shintotemplet.

Ryōkan verdsettes og beundres også av mennesker med helt ulik religiøs og filosofisk bakgrunn, også av kristne. Kjærligheten sprenger alle grenser, sannheten forener øst og vest. Han kjente på sorg over tap og ulykker, alt liv er underkastet tilværelsens uforanderlige forgjengelighet, bare alderdommen er et uforanderlig faktum, illustrert i hans Waka: «*Hagens plommetrær / blomstrer på sitt heftigste / akkurat når jeg / endelig har innsett at / jeg er blitt en gammel mann*», s.573.

Fjerde poet Taneda Santōka (1882-1940). Han var traumatisert av sin oppvekst, og lengtet etter det barndomshjemmet som var blitt borte. Han klarte å overleve ved hjelp av poesien, vandringen og alkoholen. Buddhisnen skapte nye idealer og forventninger og forble en livsvarig impuls, men han valgte vandringen fremfor disiplinen i et Zen-kloster. Han var pilegrim, tilba ved templer og helligdommer, og gjorde sine rituelle plikter som tiggermunk. Oppveksten hadde også lyspunkter, noe som kommer til uttrykk i hans mange Haiku. Han skrev om årstidenes vekslinger, jakten på insekter, nærheten til husdyr, fugler og frosker, vennskap og omsorg, samt de religiøse markeringer av glede og sorg. Her er en kombinasjon av japansk sensitivitet og vestlig ekspresjonisme. I perioden 1932-40, publiserte han tusenvis av Haiku-dikt, og i tillegg artikler, essays og dagbøker, senere hans samlede verker i 10 bind.

Diktningen var og ble Santōkas liv. Venner kom på besøk, til felles diktsymposier. Fattigdommen ble en åndelig disiplin. Han håpet på en god død, uten plage for seg selv og andre. «*Grumset vann / klarner / når det renner*», s.651. Hele livet skrev han om lengselen etter barndomshjemmet, men oppdaget at hans egentlige hjem var selve vandringen. Til syvende og sist dreide det seg om overgivelse til et Du, *anata-makase*, til en større barmhjertighet enn den han kunne gi seg selv. Santōka viste en stadig



dypere fortrøstning til barmhjertigheten hos de buddhaene han satte aller høyest: Kannon (Barmhjertighetens gudinne), og Amida (Amitabha, den barmhjertige Lysets og Livets Buddha).

Thelle deler også litt av egen erfaring på sin vandring i Santōkas fotspor på Shikoku, i pilegrimsvandringen der. Han hadde lignende opplevelser også i Shinshu, hvor både Issa og Ryōkan hadde hatt sine røtter og omgang, et område Thelle kjente godt. Med «Veiens visdom...» har vi fått et enestående og betagende bidrag til å leve oss inn i japansk Haiku- og Waka-dikt, og den religiøse og filosofiske tradisjon som de fire svært ulike vandrerpoeter representerer. Dette er helt unikt formidlet til oss av Thelle!

**The Great Story and the Great Commission:  
Participating in the Biblical Drama of Mission**  
**Wright, Christopher J. H.**  
**Grand Rapids: Baker, 2023**  
**xiv + 156 sider**

Anmeldt av Sigurd Grindheim

Christopher Wright, tør være kjent for leserne av Norsk Tidsskrift for Misjonsvitenskap. Blant hans mer enn 30 bøker finner vi *The Mission of God* (2006), som gjerne nevnes sammen med David Bosch's *Transforming Mission* som et av standardverkene innenfor missiologien. Han var også hovedarkitekten bak Cape Town-erklæringen som ble tiltrådt ved Lausanne-bevegelsens tredje møte i 2009. For tiden er han leder for Langham International Partnerships internasjonale virksomhet.

I denne boken på litt over 150 sider gir han en lettfattelig og gjennomtenkt oversikt over sin forståelse av hva Bibelen er og av hva misjon er. Boken ble til på bakgrunn av tre gjesteforelesninger som Wright holdt ved Acadia Divinity College i Canada, og Wrights egenskaper som en engasjerende formidler gjør boken inspirerende å lese. Med sine grundige kunnskaper og omfattende, kristne erfaring gir han tankevekkende forklaringer på mange viktige bibelsteder og hjelper leseren til å se dem i den store sammenhengen.

Wright insisterer på at Bibelen i sin helhet skal leses som én sammenhengende, stor fortelling (kapittel 1), en fortelling som kan sammenfattes som skapelse, fall, forløsning og framtidshåp (s. 3). Wright foretrekker imidlertid å beskrive Bibelen som et drama i sju akter: skapelse, opprør, løfte, Kristus, misjon, dom og ny skapelse (kapittel 2).

Et sentralt poeng for Wright er at vi må se oss selv som deltagere i dette dramaet (kapittel 3). Her har han viktige ting å si om at Bibelen ikke skal anvendes på vårt liv, men at vi skal orientere vårt liv ut fra Bibelen og se på oss selv som en del av denne fortellingen (s. 13). Problemet er at vi har andre fortellinger som vi har lært av samfunnet omkring oss og som vi er mer tilbøyelige til å identifisere oss med (s. 50).

På bakgrunn av dette synet på Bibelen utfolder Wright deretter sin forståelse av misjon. Ifølge hans definisjon handler misjon om at "Gud driver hele universets historie framover med en følelse av en guddommelig hensikt og et endelig mål, en Gud som også kaller og skaper et folk som deler denne guddommelige misjonen, et folk med en identitet og en rolle innenfor Guds plan" (s. xi). I motsetning til det man er vant med fra norske lærebøker tar ikke Wright utgangspunkt i betydningen av det latinske "missio" (sendelse), men i betydningen av det engelske "mission" (hensikt).

Slik det har blitt vanlig etter David Boschs innflytelsesrike verk, understreker Wright også at misjon er Guds misjon, og han poengterer at det ikke først og fremst

handler om vår oppgave, men om at vi deltar i Guds misjon (s. 66). Det er ikke tilfeldig at det bibelverset han hyppigst vender tilbake til, i tillegg til Misjonsbefalingen (Matt 28,18–20), er Ef 1,10: “Han ville fullføre sin frelsesplan i tidens fylde: å sammenfatte alt i Kristus, alt i himmel og på jord i ham.”

I tilknytning til Lambeth-konferansens uttalelse fra 1984 identifiserer Wright fem kjennetegn ved Guds misjon, og disse fem organiserer han i tre kategorier: 1) menighetsbygging, som består av evangelisering og opplæring, 2) tjeneste for samfunnet, som består av barmhjertighetsgjerninger og arbeid for rettferdighet og 3) omsorg for skaperverket (kapittel 4).

Selv om han opererer med en vid forståelse av misjon, er Wright tydelig på at alt som kalles misjon ikke skal forstås på samme plan. Han bruker bildet av et hjul, og sammenligner navet med evangeliet. Det er evangeliet som holder alle de forskjellige elementene sammen (s. 81).

Kapitlene 5–8 inneholder den bibelske begrunnelsen for de tre kategoriene, der to kapitler er viet til den siste kategorien. Her får Wright fint fram at omsorg for skaperverket henger sammen med troen på Guds skapelse av verden som god og på håpet om at han i fullkommengjørelsen vil la den samme verden gå gjennom en nyskapsel.

Som skapt i Guds bilde har menneskene fått mandat til herske og tjene som konger og prester på jorden. Når de tar vare på skaperverket, oppfyller de dette kallet, samtidig som de foregriper den rollen de vil ha som konger og prester i den nye skapelsen (s. 139).

Med sitt syn på Bibelen som én sammenhengende, stor fortelling føyer Wright seg inn i en rekke av evangelikale bibelforskere. Jeg mistenker at denne trenden delvis må forstås som en del av motreaksjonene på Rudolf Bultmanns påstand om at historien ikke har noen betydning for teologien.

Jeg forstår motreaksjonene, men oppfatter at de har gått for langt. Når den ene forskeren etter den andre understreker at Bibelen er en fortelling (og ikke et systematisk teologisk verk, for eksempel), føles det mer og mer som en annen fortelling, nemlig Keiserens nye klær.

Hvis noen vil ta seg tid til å stoppe og spørre om det virkelig er slik, ligger svaret i dagen. For Bibelens 66 bøker utgjør vitterlig ikke én sammenhengende fortelling. Fortellingen som man viser til, enten man foretrekker fire eller sju akter, lar seg raskt oppsummere. Den er ikke uvesentlig; den utgjør hjerteslaget i Bibelens organisme. Den ligger som en forutsetning for alt som sies i Bibelen. Noen ganger alluderes det til den. Noen ganger gjenfortelles den i sin helhet eller i enkelte deler.

Men den foreligger ikke som en sammenhengende historie som strekker seg fra Bibelens begynnelse til dens slutt. De såkalte poetiske skriftene i Det gamle testamente og Bibelens mest leste bok, Salmene, lar seg ikke føye inn i noe narrativt mønster. Det samme kan sies om brevitteraturen i Det nye testamente.

Wright er selvfølgelig klar over dette, og hans forsøk på å forklare blir etter hvert ganske søkt. Når han gjennomgår Det gamle testamente, er det bare henvisningene til 1 og 2 Mosebok som utgjør en del av en fortelling (skapelse og forløsning), mens Wright omtaler resten av Det gamle testamente på basis av hvilken genre (narrativ, tekster fra eksilet og etter eksilet, visdom, tilbedelse og profeti) de forskjellige bøkene tilhører (s. 7–8). Senere understreker han viktigheten av at vi leser oss selv inn i fortellingen, ikke på et bestemt stadium av den, men på alle stadiene (s. 40).

Alt dette viser at fortellingen om skapelse og forløsning er helt grunnleggende for forståelsen av Bibelen, men vi forstår ikke Bibelen bedre hvis vi tenker på den som én sammenhengende fortelling. Snarere tvert imot. Bibelen er snarere å forstå med utgangspunkt i en metafor fra musikkens verden, som et tema med variasjoner.

Bibelen inneholder mange fortellinger. Blant dem finner vi Jesu lignelser, som vi kan lese som illustrasjoner på den store fortellingen. Den inneholder også mange tekster som ikke er fortellinger, men som forklarer og tolker den store fortellingen.

Når det gjelder forståelsen av hva misjon er, handler dette om et ord som ikke finnes i Bibelen, og hver enkelt forsker står i prinsippet fritt til å definere begrepet slik en finner det formålstjenlig. Med Wrights definisjon blir alt misjon, og gevinsten av dette er at han klarer å vise hvordan evangelisk arbeid, gode gjerninger og omsorg for skaperverket hører organisk sammen. Samtidig understreker han at han ikke vil nedtone viktigheten av at kirken sender misjonærer til de områdene der Jesu navn ikke er kjent, og han understreker at det er nødvendig å drive evangelisering og menighetsplanting både nasjonalt og internasjonalt (s. 145).

Jeg stiller meg likevel tvilende til om det er hensiktsmessig å bruke en så vidtfaavnende definisjon av misjon. Selv ville jeg nok holdt meg tettere til det Jesus løfter fram i Misjonsbefalingen. Wright bruker en del tid på å vise at hans omfattende forståelse av misjon springer direkte ut av Misjonsbefalingen, men det fordrer en slags “maksimalistisk” eksegesi, der omsorg for skaperverket ligger implisitt i Jesu henvisning til himmelen og jorden (s. 109).

En slik form for eksegesi mister fokuset på det som er poenget med Misjonsbefalingen. På gresk inneholder den ett verb i imperativ (“gjør disipler”) og tre partisipper som forklarer hvordan budet skal oppfylles (“gående”, “døpende” og “lærende”). Det sentrale oppdraget er å gjøre alle folkeslag til disipler. Dette gjør det nødvendig å gå ut i all verden. Derfor er det nærliggende å forstå misjon ut fra at det dreier seg om disiplenes grenseoverskridende oppdrag og at misjon består i å lede mennesker til å bli Jesu etterfølgere.

Derfor ville jeg foretrekke å kalle denne boken for noe annet enn en bok om misjon. Den fremstår helst som en bok om “alt det Gud har kalt og skapt kirken for”, slik Wright ved en anledning selv beskriver sitt emne (s. 145). Som en slik innføring kan boken varmt anbefales til alle interesserte.





