Human Flourishing

Exploring Protestant Goods in Changing Contexts

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Guest Editorial

Human flourishing
Exploring Protestant goods in changing contexts

That "in the Netherlands, the days of close bonds between the individual and one single institution, i.e. one church, one company, one association and even one marriage are gone", is central to the contextual analysis of Henk de Roest and Herman Nordegraaf in their research project on the relations between social capital, religiosity and volunteering. These circumstances have long been critized by church delegations from the Third World visiting their western partners. Members of one of the Korean mega-churches would probably still utter that critique. Yet a closer look at the Korean context reveals that today it is also a multiple-choice society. Individualization and secularization are prevalent in the urban centres of Africa, Asia and Latin America as well. Protestantism is not growing any more in Korea and the rate of people with no official religious affiliation ranges around 50%.

That "the Netherlands is one of the few countries in which euthanasia and assisted suicide have been legalized" may also be shocking news to Christians from the global South – as the vivid discussion around Theo Boer's contribution already have demonstrated. How does his plea for premium palliative care sound to some youth in South Africa dying of Aids, because he or she cannot afford proper medication and is abandoned by the churches (see the contribution by Gerald West)?

The contexts in which we are church still differ, not only culturally and religiously but also socio-economically and politically. "Yet at the same time, we cannot divide the world in North and South any more, and somewhere on the crossroads we are called again to make choices in every rapidly changing context" (Jansen/Küster). *Glocalization,* constantly negotiating one's theology between the local and the global is the new mode of doing contextual theology.

What can Protestant goods contribute to human flourishing? That was the question under which the Protestant Theological University, The Netherlands, reviewed its research programmes. What kind of human flourishing are we talking about in the first place? Are we seduced by the globalized neo-liberal consumer capitalism or the gospel of wealth and health? Secondly, who are we as western academic theologians to claim to have to contribute something to the well-being of society and the world at large? Or in the words of John B. Cobb, Jr.:

"Theology as an academic discipline may be the last feature of the life of Christendom to cease to have its centre in the North Atlantic. [...] The 'objective' scholarship of the great tradition in fact reflects their cultural context in the university and in central Europe as well as the male dominance that has been taken for granted. By its very excellence it inhibits Christians in other situations from affirming the different understanding and wisdom gained through diverse situations."[1]

In order to overcome these obstacles we took two decisions from the outset:

(1) Our international partners should be present and respond from their particular contextual perspectives.

(2) We would approach our subject from the margins, from the perspective of "the other".

Depending on the different research projects carried out, this could be the "othering" of Christian Hebraism and how it has been perceived by the Jewish other (Houtman/Kirn) – a historical discourse that can easily be linked to late-modern identity discourses, migrant churches in the Netherlands (Jansen), or Third World liberation theologies (Küster/West). The last two contributions in this issue tackle the questions of how we relate to the other in need, be it from the perspective of the terminal cancer patient who is seeking euthanasia (Boer) or the regular churchgoer, who is performing voluntary work (de Roest/Nordegraaf).

Among the "three views of human flourishing – personal feeling of happiness, living a virtuous life, and living in *shalom*" (Jansen/Küster), the contributors deliberately chose the third option. A vision they want to share with the Reformed family.

Prof. Dr. Volker Küster

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[1] John B. Cobb, Jr., Minjung Theology and Process Theology, in: *An Emerging Theology in World Perspective.* Commentary on Minjung Theology, ed. by Jung Young Lee, Mystic, Connecticut 1988, 51-56, 51f.

Human flourishing contested

Mechteld Jansen and Prof. Dr Volker Küster

Abstract: Human flourishing seeks to promote health, wealth, happiness, hope, agency and wholeness. As theologians we may question the concept, however, when it tends to underline the individual's search for success and prosperity. This article aims at finding an understanding of human flourishing that includes human vulnerability, failure and disappointment. In the case of the post-conflict situation in Korea as well as in the case of migrant Christians in the Netherlands, we found that concepts of individual success and prosperity are abounding in globalizing Pentecostal/charismatic movements. At the same time, as a crosswise movement, communal aspects of human flourishing and inclusion of the experience of suffering are being brought from the South to the North. Among the three understandings of human flourishing that are identified in this article – personal feeling of happiness, living a virtuous life and living in shalom – the last proves to be the most adequate from the perspective of the marginalized, the poor and oppressed.

What's in a word?

Dutch children are the happiest children in the rich world, according to a recent UNICEF survey.[1] And yet, we have not seen any theologian spread the news about the happiness of our youth, nor have we heard of any missionary bringing the Dutch recipe for happiness to other parts of the world. Why can't we just accept this joyful news and give glory to God for this happiness? Have we, as academics, grown sour because we know of too many cases of child abuse, youth delinquency, school dropouts and addiction? Are we obsessed with bad news or, as theologians, are we afraid that our core business will be taken from us once the people around us declare themselves happy?

This paper intends to indicate that

(1) the pursuit of happiness is just one way of defining human flourishing and other proposals might be considered;

(2) one of those alternative voices is already to be found in Augustine, who puts empathy, other-centredness and vulnerability on the credit side of the account of human flourishing;

(3) in line with these thoughts, we find further important clues for a theologically sound reasoning about human flourishing in the context of the struggle of the poor and oppressed.

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[1] UNICEF, *Child poverty in perspective: An overview of child well-being in rich countries*, Innocenti Report Card 7, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence 2007.

1. Three possible ways of understanding human flourishing

We are not the first to take up the theme of human flourishing and we will gratefully pick and borrow from recent conferences and papers on the topic.[2] What we have learnt thus far is that the dominant view of human flourishing equates it to happiness as an experientially satisfying life.[3] This view is employed by most social scientists and economists and the UNICEF report cited above neatly fits this view. Most Dutch children enjoy food, health, wealth, education and freedom, and they *experience* happiness. This view, however, has been criticized for being too individualist and too passive. It takes happiness as something that *happens* to us as persons, without consideration of our actions or of the happiness of the neighbours we live with.

Critics of the dominant view point to a second option, based on the long tradition of *eudaimonism*. This tradition links human flourishing to a life that is lived well, that is, a virtuous life. Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, in their capabilities approach, have translated the Aristotelian meaning of *eudaimonia* as human flourishing.[4] Many Christian thinkers have followed this path,[5] the trace of which brings us back to classical philosophers long before the origins of Christianity. Eudaimonism is about making choices and acting in a way that will contribute to living one's life well. Real happiness is actively pursuing virtues that are good in themselves, such as friendship and courage. Health and wealth, being neither virtues nor activities, are not a part of such eudaimonism.

[2] InterVarsity's conference "Following Christ 2008" on human flourishing; the WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism's missiology consultation "Toward the Fullness of Life" London, April 2002; Yale Center for Faith and Culture's 2008 consultation "God's Power and Human Flourishing". The Boston Theological Conference 2010, planned deliberately in the light of the centennial of the Edinburgh Mission Conference in 2010, will also feature the theme of human flourishing prominently. Human flourishing may be taken as a theme that crosses religious and secular worldviews, challenging Christian theologians to make it more than a trendy issue.

[3] Nicolas Wolterstorff, "God's Power and Human Flourishing", paper presented at the Yale conference 2008. Examples of happiness research in this line may be found in Luigino Bruni and Pier Luigi, *Handbook on the Economics of Happiness*, Cheltenham 2007. Positive correlations have been found between happiness and income, marriage, employment, friendship, religion and voluntary work. Happiness in this research is understood as something that happens to a person and is experienced inside a person. Also see Michael Argyle, *Psychology of Happiness*, London 2002.

[4] Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (eds.), *The Quality of Life*, Oxford 1993; M. Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*, Cambridge 2000; Amartya Sen, "Development as Capability Expansion", in Sakiko Fukuda-Parr and A.K. Shiva Kumar (eds.), *Readings in Human Development Concepts*, Oxford 2003. The capabilities approach explicitly rejects the Stoic doctrine and points instead to Aristotle's treatment of pity *(Retorica II,* 1385b10-1386b10) in order to take account of human vulnerability, see M. Nussbaum, "Compassion: The Basic Social Emotion", in *Social Philosophy & Policy*, 13, 1, 1996, pp. 27-58.

[5] Eudaimonism is not identical with hedonism or with any kind of sheer egoism asking "what is in it for me?" Christian thinkers like C.S. Lewis defended eudaimonism, because it brings us to a much deeper level of happiness than the usual thin layer of feeling happy. We contend ourselves too easily with only a small portion of happiness. See David A. Horner, *The Problem with Happiness: C.S. Lewis, Selfishness and Christian Eudaimonism*, http://www.theresurgence.com/david_horner_2005-07_the_pursuit_of_happiness accessed on May 1, 2009.

A third possibility of defining human flourishing takes its starting point from God's relationship to human beings as creatures. It links human flourishing to living in *shalom,* meaning a life rightly related to God and to fellow creatures.[6] This definition is not directed toward desire satisfaction or toward development of our skills in order to live a successful life, but it takes into account that God takes delight in us as creatures no matter how much we feel unhappy or fail in our attempts to live our lives well. This third option is in accordance with those representatives of the eudaimonist tradition who allow for weakness, trespasses and pity. Yet it is less agent-oriented than eudaimonism.

In what follows we will put these three views of human flourishing – personal feeling of happiness, living a virtuous life and living in *shalom* – to the test by asking whether any of these views can account for concrete issues in the lives of people we meet and work with as missiologists. We will take two examples, the one being daily life of Christian immigrants in the Netherlands, the other being the struggle of Korean people as reflected upon in Minjung theology.

2. Human flourishing in theological perspective

Many theologians refer to Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD), for whom real happiness lays in the appearance of God. It means that human flourishing is not the ultimate purpose of human life. Human flourishing may be helpful as fitness for the journey that ends at the glory of God. Only God, the fountain of all happiness, is capable of bestowing real happiness upon us. Of course, Augustine's ontology draws a sharp demarcation line between soul and body, sharper than most of the theologians are comfortable with today. His idea of genuine happiness (*beatitudo perfecto*) is related to the soul and only to be found in eternal rest of the soul after death. Then there will be nothing left to desire. But in the meantime, we could prepare for that eternal rest or true peace, by cultivating imperfect happiness (*beatitudo imperfecto or felicitas)* by struggling against sin. Christians should not worship God the way Romans are worshipping their gods. Roman worship, according to Augustine, is directed toward a stable enjoyment of wealth, health, power, success and honour.[7] Christians should worship God for God's glory alone.

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[6] According to Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age,* Cambridge and London 2007, pp. 16, 17, Jewish and Christian religious traditions underline that the final goal of human life is something other than human flourishing. There is even a call to renounce one's own flourishing when the fruit of this renunciation is the flourishing of others, because the ultimate goal of human life is loving and worshipping God. The prayer "thy will be done" is not to be equated to "let humans flourish", though God wills human flourishing.

[7] Thomas W. Smith, "The Glory and Tragedy of Politics", in John Doody et al. (eds.), *Augustine and Politics,* Lanham 2004, 191ff.

Augustine can be said to have stayed within the eudaimonist tradition in that he saw the good life as a life that is lived well. Yet, we pay special attention to him, because he gave his own twist to this tradition. According to Nicolas Wolterstorff, Augustine breaks with classical eudaimonism in two ways. First, he renounces the agent-orientation of eudaimonism that was aimed at enhancing one's own well-being. In Augustine's view, Christian love is *other-centred*. One can perform actions directed to the well-being of others and those actions can be good in themselves, meaning that they do not need the eudaimonist legitimation of self-love. Secondly, and related to that, Augustine allows for empathy, something the Stoic eudaimonists were not very good at. In the *Confessiones*[8] he can rejoice over the good and grieve over the bad moral and religious conditions of others. In *De Civitate Dei*[9] he argues against the eudaimonist Stoics, who scorned compassion, that compassion should be displayed, for it compels us to help a fellow human being whose misery we feel in our hearts. Thus Augustine did not only call for empathy with those who failed morally or religiously, but also with those who suffered from violence and disasters. Augustine points to the need to include *vulnerability* in our conception of human flourishing. We will return to that in the sections on Christian immigrants in the Netherlands and Minjung theology in South Korea.

One of the most prominent modern theologians who refers to Augustine is Jürgen Moltmann. With his new political theology he is a western *alter ego* for contextual theologians of the Third World. Moltmann has reversed Augustine's perspective that is focused on God for the secular age.[10] After the death of God "as a *helper in need*, a *fill-in* and a *problem solver*" one can "use the world to enjoy God" (p. 69.). Human beings are the first "released" of creation. They have to learn how to celebrate this freedom. Yet it will be a rejoicing that has gone through the experience of suffering and pain. It does not neglect the cross. Nevertheless Moltmann explores play as a possibility to celebrate this freedom. In doing so he already shifts the emphasis from being *for* others to being *with* others. "That Christ died *for* us has its goal and future in the fact, that he is *with* us and that we will live, laugh and reign *with* him. [...] Being-with-others is the redeemed, free life itself" (76).

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[8] Book X, 4 "sed [animus] fraternus ille, qui cum approbat me, gaudet de me, cum autem improbat me, contristatur pro me, quia sive approber sive improbet me, diliget me."

[9] Book IX, 5 "nam et misericordiam Stoicorum est solere culpare (...) quid est autem misericordia nisi alienate miseriae quaedam in nostro corde conpassio, qua utique si possumus subvenire conpellimur?"

[10] Jürgen Moltmann, *Die ersten Freigelassenen der Schöpfung. Versuche über die Freude an der Freiheit und das Wohlgefallen am Spiel*, München 1971. Page references in the text.

Human flourishing, vulnerability and sin

Putting it in theological perspective may help to prevent the concept of human flourishing from undergirding the widespread belief that there is an inherent right for every human being to be free from illness, pain and disability. When, in spite of this right, there is sickness, disease and pain, someone is to blame. This belief, which is a mere fantasy according to Leslie Newbigin,[11] makes us avoid and hide weakness, disabilities, grief, pain and death.

In order to break with this fantasy, our concept of human flourishing has to take into account that we are vulnerable. This vulnerability has to be distinguished from our wrongdoing.[12] With "frailty" we refer to our finitude and the many pains we fear and suffer: cold, heat, hunger, thirst, tiredness, loneliness. In many ways people resist these primary forms of vulnerability, in a defensive as well as offensive attitude. And here is where the possibility of "sin" comes in. We have *never enough security* to protect our frail existence and possessions; we have *never enough power* to carry out our plans; we have *never enough esteem* to satisfy our desire of recognition. Where does this end?[13] For many in our time, believers and non-believers, it is also the question when explanations and actualizations of the concept of sin are at stake. One goes astray when it *does not end*, when one cannot stop and knows no limits. Then, without limitation, we try to defend ourselves with weapons of mass destruction, with terror, with bribery and corruption, with degrading other people's achievements and even denying other people's right to exist.

However clarifying and convincing, this explanation may still be taking the concept of sin as only applying to the individual. How to talk about human sin in the context of poverty and oppression? At the World Mission Conference in Melbourne (1980) the Urban Industrial Mission representative Raymond Fung from Hong Kong introduced the concept of "sinned againstness".[14] This does not neglect individual sin but emphasizes that there are people

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[11] Lesslie Newbigin, "Human Flourishing in Faith, Fact and Phantasy", in *Religion and Medicine*, 7, 1988, pp. 400-412.

[12] This approach of vulnerability is based on Paul Ricoeur, *Le Volontaire et l'Involontaire*, Paris 1950, p. 103: "Et ainsi la douleur, *avant* d'être éprouvée, règne dans ma chair; (...) la crainte (...) développe une anxiété qui peut aller jusqu'à cette terreur qui précède les grandes épreuves corporelles de souffrance et de torture." For the missiological discourse cf. Hans Jochen Margull, "Verwundbarkeit. Bemerkungen zum Dialog", in *Evangelische Theologie*, 34, 1974, pp. 410-420.

[13] Ricoeur, *Le Volontaire et l'Involontaire,* 142. "Où se terminent en effet les requêtes de possession, de domination, d'opinion ? (...) Quand aurai-je assez? Quand mon autorité sera-t-elle assez assise? Quand serai-je assez apprécié, reconnu? Où est, en tout cela, la 'suffisance'?"

[14] Cf. Raymond Fung, "Good News to the Poor – A Case for a Missionary Movement", in *Your Kingdom come: Mission Perspectives*, Report on the World Conference on Mission and Evangelism, Melbourne, Australia 12-25 May 1980, Geneva: WCC 1980, pp. 83-92.

who are also affected by the sin of others. Latin American liberation theology speaks in this regard of "structural sin".[15] The socio-political and economic structures are sinful because they do harm to the people. At the same time the oppressors need to be liberated as well. This is what postcolonial feminist theologian Musa Dube calls today "liberating interdependence".[16] It takes both the colonizers and the colonized or their descendants to overcome the status quo and to create space for reconciliation.

The risk is that this works in favour of the affluent and powerful. Johann Baptist Metz, Moltmann's companion in new political theology, has pointed out that in Christian tradition it seems to be easier to forgive the perpetrators than to comfort the victims and relieve them from their traumas.[17] Yet the dangerous memory of the cross of Jesus Christ includes the memory of the suffering of the people under poverty and oppression throughout the ages. The compassionate God suffers *with* them on the cross.

Latin American feminist liberation theologian Elsa Tamez has reread Paul's concept of justification in her context of poverty and oppression.[18] She refers to Fung's concept of "sinned againstness" to break through the traditional interpretation of justification as forgiveness of sins. Paul wrote his letters in the context of poverty and oppression under the Roman Empire. Even though as a craftsman he did not belong to the absolute poor, Paul experienced material hardships and was arrested by the authorities several times, leading finally to his death sentence. In this context justification cannot but be understood as restoring justice. The goal of justification is to create space for the poor and oppressed to live in human dignity.

3. Struggling, suffering and a theology of human flourishing

Human flourishing in migrants' churches: community thinking

Immigrant Christians in the Netherlands have been establishing mono-ethnic and multi-ethnic churches ever since they came from other European countries (French Huguenots, Scandinavian, British and Scottish seamen) and other continents (Chinese, Indonesian and Moluccan). Political developments, social and economic constraints and deprivation, wars and famine, persecution, but also longing for adventure and seeking educational and

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[15] Cf. José Ignacio González Faus, "Sin", in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental concepts of Liberation Theology*, Maryknoll, NY 1993, pp. 532-542.
[16] Cf. Musa Dube, *Postcolonial feminist interpretation of the Bible*, St Louis 2000.
[17] Cf. Johan Baptist Metz, *Memoria Passionis: Ein provozierendes Gedächtnis in pluralistischer Gesellschaft*, Freiburg etc. 2006; Volker Küster, *Gott/Terror. Ein Dipthychon*, Frankfurt am Main 2009.
[18] Cf. Elsa Tamez, *The Amnesty of Grace: Justification by Faith from a Latin American Perspective*, Nashville TN 1993.

professional opportunities have been push factors behind immigration. Apart from "knowledge migrants" freely moving from their home countries to their adopted lands, many migrants are willing to work for minimum wages, following seasonal markets or seeking their fortunes as undocumented refugees. Christians from Suriname and the Dutch Antilles, Vietnam and Korea, Saudi Arabia and Iraq, Ghana and Nigeria, Chile and Brazil have founded new church communities.[19] Within the scope of this paper we cannot go into the details of their history and recent developments, but we will focus on their experience of and longing for human flourishing.

First of all, this experience and longing is embedded in a strong sense of *community*. Those who come from traditional societies are brought up as group-centred people or individuals-in-community. Relational categories are the basis for living, and group loyalty, self-sacrifice, sharing and hospitality are of vital importance.[20] Personal achievements are less important than making others feel good. For modern Dutch people this group-centredness is one of the most difficult features to understand. The sense of community can easily be criticized when it becomes a petrifying tool to keep people from research, change and emancipation in the name of harmony in the group. Second and third generations in immigrant churches must come to grips with two different worldviews and constantly negotiate among the expectations of their parents and the demands of Dutch schools, companies, business, neighbourhoods and entertainment.[21]

We consider the sense of community of crucial importance for any genuine human flourishing and for any future church life in the Netherlands. It is worthwhile to learn from newly established churches how to eat, read, party, share, care, comfort and challenge one another. Human flourishing cannot be but communal flourishing.[22] Most immigrants' churches provide shelter, day care for children, homework assistance, help with finding jobs, housing and documents. Some of them specialize in reaching out to drug addicts, prostitutes and victims

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[19] The estimated number of immigrant churches in the Netherlands, based on an inventory in 2004, is 1,100, including Roman Catholic parishes with foreign language services, see Hijme Stoffels, "A Coat of Many Colours", in Mechteld Jansen and Hijme Stoffels (eds.), *A Moving God: Immigrant Churches in the Netherlands,* Zürich 2008, p. 19. Also see Jorge Castillo Guerra, Frans Wijsen and Moniek Steggerda, *Een gebedshuis voor alle volken: Kerkopbouw en kadervorming in rooms-katholieke allochtonengemeenschappen,* Zoetermeer 2006; André Droogers et al. (eds.), *Fruitful in this Land: Pluralism, Dialogue and Healing in Migrant Pentecostalism,* Zoetermeer 2006.
[20] Though Paul Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change,* Grand Rapids 2008, p. 110, relates these features to small-scale tribal societies, we recognize them in immigrant churches in the Netherlands as well.
[21] Cf. Alma Lanser, "Rap and Roots: Youth and Music in Immigrant Churches", in Jansen and Stoffels, *A Moving God,* pp. 160, 170.
[22] A striking example of this human flourishing through community can be seen in Ans van Keulen et al.: *Sharing Talents and Resources: An African Experience of Promoting Solidarity in the Community,* Nairobi 2005.

of human trafficking.[23] The churches are identified as a hub in which relations of trust and compatibility generate bonding social capital; from this base, a wide range of personal and social services is provided, significantly aiding co-ethnic members to adapt to their new conditions. In a neo-liberal era, the state is facilitating such activities as part of a policy of contracting-out its own former in-house functions. The capacity of the immigrant church to serve both its own members and adherents and also a broader expanded constituency beyond its co-ethnic clients is important.

This brings us to a second feature of human flourishing as it is experienced in migrants' churches. The dreams of a flourishing life have to be understood as revealing – not as covering up – the vicissitudes and vulnerabilities of people with a more or less recent migration experience. In general, migrants' churches do not preach nor practise indulgence in vulnerability, but they seek to emphasize God's help and their own strengths to overcome their obvious difficulties. Biblical narratives of migrating people and testimonies of brothers and sisters who succeeded in finding satisfying work, a driver's license, higher education for their children and (self) esteem in the Dutch society abound. Nobody is entirely weak. Nobody is entirely strong. Those who feel strong and blessed are called to share time, talents and knowledge.

Human flourishing and the gospel of health and wealth

In most migrant churches, as in many churches in Asia, Africa and Latin America, it is taken for granted that the church is a healing community and healing is an integral part of the Christian programme.[24] The members frequent western physicians, but remain convinced that God is the ultimate healer and have healing services aimed at the well-being of the sick and the afflicted.[25] Yet, they widely differ in concepts and practices of healing. Faith healing is practised in churches with many members of Surinamese, Dutch Antillean and African descent. Some practices raise serious questions and opposition, like the healing of HIV-

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[23] Marten van der Meulen, "Being Illegal is like Fishing without a Permit: African Churches, Illegal Immigration and the Public Sphere", in Jansen and Stoffels, *A Moving God*, pp. 49-60. Cf. David Ley, "The Immigrant Church as an Urban Service Hub", in *Urban Studies*, 45, 2008/10, pp. 2057-2074, who signals a transition from bonding to bridging social capital; Aad van der Maas and Tom Marfo, "Pastor to Migrants in Dutch Society", in Kwame Bediako and Mechteld M. Jansen (eds.), *A New Day Dawning: African Christians Living the Gospel*, Zoetermeer 2004, pp. 150-155.

[24] June Beckx, "Heling en verzoening in Athene", *Wereld en Zending* 2005, no. 4, pp. 89-101.

[25] Daniel Himmans-Arday, "Healing Power in the True Teachings of Christ's Temple: A Personal Witness", in Droogers et al., *Fruitful in this Land*, pp. 153-158.

positive patients and the urge to change from homosexual into heterosexual.[26] Deliverance prayers are ministered as a treatment of the problems behind physical and mental illness, mainly through the power of words repelling malevolent forces.[27] Both healing and deliverance are complementary to conventional medicine. Both practices presume that health is not an individual matter and illness is not an individual disorder, but a disturbance in relationships that affects bodies, hearts, minds and spirits.

In all practices it might be helpful to distinguish *care, cure* and *holistic healing.*[28] Care alone can easily forget that *healing* matters. When only cure is emphasized, relating God to suffering and pain as merely a new medicine, it does not mirror a *shalom* understanding of human flourishing though it might bring happiness. Holistic healing encompasses health, security and salvation as in *shalom.* One other aspect of the view of immigrant churches on health is worth mentioning. Generally speaking, in these churches *ageing* is considered to be human flourishing. Becoming old does not diminish the flourishing of a person.

The risk of emphasizing human flourishing is the equation of flourishing with prosperity. Human flourishing comes with success and success is measured by financial prosperity. This is part of the prosperity gospel that blends Pentecostal revivalism with elements of positive thinking.[29] Christians should decide what they want, believe that it is theirs and claim it by faith. Poverty is considered to dishonour God's name and to violate God's will.

When, for example, in a sermon on human flourishing the name of Bill Gates is mentioned several times, while the name of Jesus Christ is "by accident" forgotten, it may be that our longing for human flourishing has gone astray. According to Paul Gifford,[30] this type of prosperity preaching is the most common feature of African Pentecostal churches. It may emerge through the emphasis on the motivation of believers to live a life of abundance: God desires to bless those who take up their business plans and start their enterprises. It may emerge in the message that Christians can and should share in Christ's victory over sin, sickness and poverty. In many cases this message is followed by or linked with the idea of

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[26] Elleke Bal, "Jesus makes you hetero and free of AIDS", in *Nieuw Amsterdams Peil,* 17 October 2008, based on the health service of the Mustard Seed Full Gospel Church in Amsterdam.

[27] Mechteld Jansen, "Deliver Us from Evil: Deliverance Prayers in Three African Christian Communities in Amsterdam", in Jansen and Stoffels, *A Moving God,* p. 205.

[28] Tammy R. Williams, "Is there a Doctor in the House? Reflections on the Practice of Healing in African American Churches", in Volf and Bass, *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life,* pp. 94-120.

[29] Dan Lioy, "The Heart of the Prosperity Gospel: Self or the Savior?", in *The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary,* 4, 2007, pp. 41-65; cf. Isabel Phiri and Joe Maxwell, "Gospel riches: Africa's rapid embrace of prosperity Pentecostalism provokes concern and hope", in *Christianity Today* 2007. Accessed from *http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/july/12.22.html* on 1 May 2009.

[30] P. Gifford, "Expecting miracles: The prosperity gospel in Africa", *The Christian Century Magazine,* July 2007, retrieved from *http//www.christiancentury.org* on 1 May 2009. Also see P. Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalising African Economy,* London 2004. In this book Gifford does not use the label of neo-pentecostalim to characterize these new churches, but he labels them "charismatic".

seeding and reaping. When you seed faith, meaning that you give tithes, you will reap blessings, meaning that you will succeed materially. According to Gifford, all charismatics do nothing but build their own kingdoms, fill their own pockets and leave the larger political and cultural structures unchanged. Here, Gifford is at odds with other specialists of the field[31], who claim that the prosperity gospel does have an impact on the wider society. It fosters a renewed sense of hope for Christians who feel marginalized in many ways and it sometimes leads to large contributions to faith-based charity.

It would not be fair, however, to highlight this type of theology only in African Pentecostal preaching. While the origins of the prosperity gospel can be traced to the United States, it has crossed denominational as well as geographical and political borders and migrated to Asia, Africa and Latin America.[32] The same type of thinking can be found in a lot of almost classic therapies and self-help literature, based on the dogmatic ideas that you can become anything that you want to become and that positive thinking leads to success. When in the Netherlands today we are confronted with this type of prosperity thinking, we tend to link it to migrants' churches alone. Regarding the gospel of wealth we notice that some traits of the prosperity gospel can be found in some charismatic and Pentecostal migrant churches in the Netherlands. We have witnessed church services and ways of preaching that limit the biblical blessedness to money and *material happiness*. Christians in Dutch mainline churches and more traditional migrant churches may consider this prosperity gospel to be embarrassing, simplistic and possibly heretical. Moreover, the scarce literature and personal interviews also reveal that leaders of immigrant churches are well aware of the dangers of prosperity preaching and teaching.[33] We are actually witnessing the intersection of two developments. Western concepts of the individual pursuit of happiness have reached the masses in the Southern hemisphere, while the communal aspects of human flourishing are brought from the South to the North. Yet at the same time, we cannot divide the world in North and South anymore, and somewhere at the crossroads we are called again to make choices in every rapidly changing context.

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[31] Cf. Birgit Meyer, *Translating the Devil,* Amsterdam 1995, as well as Gerrie ter Haar, Stephan Ellis, Cephas Omenyo, Elom Dovlo.

[32] Simon Coleman, *The globalisation of charismatic Christianity: spreading the gospel of prosperity*, Cambridge 2000, starts from a Swedish example.

[33] Mechteld Jansen, paper for the European Society for Intercultural Theology and Interreligious Studies, Salzburg, 15-18 April 2009, cites Korean evangelical pastor Jaekyeong Ahn saying that individualism and capitalism are becoming strong influences in his church, causing many Christians to cling to a prosperity gospel, and Sudanese Pentecostal pastor Dralle admitting that the prosperity gospel is popular in migrant churches, but in the west some kind of "prosperity gospel" is alive and kicking as well on Sundays and feasts like Ascension Day: the shops celebrate their own gospel, while the churches stay empty. The west is thus living a prosperity gospel.

South Korean Minjung theology revisited

In South Korea the theology of glory and the prosperity gospel have been prevalent even in the mainline churches, Presbyterian or Methodist alike, for a long time. Under the military dictatorship in the 1970s and 80s, Minjung theology,[34] a Korean-made liberation theology emerged. Even though a minority in the church as well as in the *minjung* movement at large, it gained Christianity a lot of credibility. Minjung theologians spoke up for human rights, social justice and democratization and for both national self-determination and reunification of the divided country. They facilitated the establishment of labour unions, night schools for workers etc. As a consequence they were interrogated, tortured and expelled from their university positions. Their students shared in the plight of the urban poor, the workers and farmers, by going into the factories to work and starting farming themselves to sustain their living. Their salaries were often under the poverty line.

The proponents of this "Protestant theology of passion" encountered the suffering Christ in the suffering and oppressed Korean people (*minjung*). The discovery of Christ among the *minjung,* among their sufferings and hopes, reconstituted their human dignity. They formulated a *corporate theology of the cross* in a cultural-religious context where a God who suffers seemed to be unthinkable. The theology of the cross is the litmus test for any theology of human flourishing. If it does not take seriously into consideration the experience of poverty and oppression to which large parts of the world population are still exposed, it commits heresy. Nevertheless human flourishing in the sense of *shalom* is envisioned also by liberation theology. It comes about through God's intervention in history and our participation in the work for the kingdom to come. God's justice and compassion is overcoming poverty and oppression.

Today the Korean context has changed tremendously. The country has become affluent, secularized and multi-cultural. Still the gap between rich and poor is widening under the influence of globalization and neo-liberal consumer capitalism. Migrant workers, local contract workers and farmers are at the bottom of the social system. Japanese colonization, the military dictatorships and the division of the country have left deep rifts in Korean society. Next to social justice and reconciliation, ecology and sustainability are generative themes for theology to wrestle with. In the new civic society former *minjung* activists have founded NGOs, many of which are engaged for ecology and sustainability. Life-thought (*salim*) has

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[34] Cf. *Minjung Theology: People as the Subjects of History,* Maryknoll NY 1983; Volker Küster, *A Protestant Theology of Passion: Minjung Theology Revisited,* Leiden 2009 [forthcoming].

become an important concept. Traditional cultural resources are activated to celebrate a feast of life.

Conclusion

In the highly secularized and individualized western societies the view of human flourishing as an experientially satisfying life is prevalent. Wealth and health are among the highest goods. Interestingly enough, in Neo-Pentecostalism and the charismatic renewal in the Third World this view gets a theological superstructure: "Give much and you will receive much", wealth as well as health. These churches have comparably less success in the secularized west. The widespread confrontation between western individualism and Third World community centredness gets challenged. There seem to be elements in some African, Asian and Latin American contexts that are prone to the pursuit of happiness. Third World theologians sometimes utter their frustration that they wanted to bring the people liberation, but the poor and oppressed rather followed the insinuations of the prosperity gospel. Yet a closer look reveals that there is also variation within Pentecostalism, parts of which supported liberation theology in Latin America or the struggle against apartheid in South Africa.

Contextual theologies have been a minority position in the overwhelmingly conservative Third World churches, which are still under the spell of 19th-century missionary theology. Yet theologically they had quite an impact by challenging the traditional western theologies. With the concept of *sinned againstness* or a *corporate theology of the cross* they sharpened the awareness of the vulnerability of human life as well as of God's presence among the poor and oppressed. Human flourishing is understood here in the sense of the fulfilment of the basic needs of the people – a decent income through their own work, stable food supply, health care and education for their children, to name a few. Not overflowing prosperity but sustainable life in its fullness is the realization of God's *shalom*. Visitors from outside are sometimes surprised to see the poor and oppressed celebrate life amidst all their destitution. The migrant churches for their part represent the community centredness that has been widely ascribed to Third World societies in the west. At the same time, however, they can serve as examples for the transformation processes that the whole concept of contextualization is undergoing under the influx of globalization. Contexts have become deterritorialized and hybridized. At the same time the concept of community is challenged by multiple belongings.[35]

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[35] Cf. Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Local and the Global*, Maryknoll, NY 1997; Volker Küster, "Von der Kontextualisierung zur Glokalisierung. Interkulturelle Theologie und postkoloniale Kritik", in *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, 134, 2009, pp. 261-278.

Of the three basic understandings of human flourishing the *shalom* understanding can most appropriately account for the experiences, laments and joys of the poor and oppressed. The *shalom* understanding of flourishing life is not always the experientially satisfying life, but the life that is rightly related to God, fellow human beings and the whole of creation. Human flourishing is communal flourishing. The *shalom* understanding of human flourishing can entail suffering for others. Becoming and staying committed to human flourishing in the sense of *shalom* makes us sensitive to the many forms of human failing and suffering. It spurs us to nurture that quality of life that Jesus, according to John 10:10, alluded to: "I have come in order that they might have life in abundance." Neither happiness nor classic eudaimonism can account for the need of God's justice and compassion.

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Human flourishing and social transformation: Bringing embodied theology into the public realm

Gerald West

Abstract: The primary argument of this essay is that the public theologies of the church must be transformed by ongoing recognition of and engagement with the marginal theologies of millions of marginalised Christians. While there is some resonance between public theologies and marginal theologies, much of public theology is the product of ruling elites. The essay argues that a liberation hermeneutic has the capacity to provide the methodologies necessary for such a transformation of public theology. Having outlined the key components of a liberation hermeneutic, the essay goes on to give examples from South Africa where a liberation hermeneutic has been used to provide an interface between the details of the Bible and the lived realities of marginalised communities. This dialogical engagement, the essay argues, allows for a recognition and owning of local, often inchoate, marginal theologies, and provides the resources for incorporating these recovered local theologies into the public theologies of the church.

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they might have life, and have life abundantly", so says Jesus in John's Gospel (10:10, NRSV). In the latter part of the 1980s those of working within the framework of liberation theologies began to explore other ways of talking about 'liberation'. While the term 'liberation' was still of immense rhetorical importance to us, given its rich heritage[1], the terrain from within which the term had arisen was shifting. There was not the same hope that imagined socialist forms of political liberation would materialise. The collapse of the Soviet Union, of course, had much to do with this, as did the failure of socialist-inclined movements and parties to secure political office in Latin America, Africa and Asia. So we had to re-imagine what 'liberation' might look like, both in terms of what liberation was 'from' and what liberation was 'to'. One way of talking about 'liberation' which began to emerge during this time was to speak of the 'God of life' and 'idols of death'.[2] What liberation theology was about, we said,

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[1] José Miguez Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, Philadelphia 1975.
[2] Franz J. Hinkelammert, *The Ideological Weapons of Death: A Theological Critique of Capitalism*, Maryknoll, New York 1986.

was taking sides with the God of life against the forces of death. The call and task of the Christian was to 'read the signs of the times', discerning where God was already at work bringing life in the midst of death, and then to become co-workers with God.

Liberation theology was to be done, within this terminology, in the context of the struggle for life in the midst of death. The determination that the notion of 'struggle' (the ongoing process of God's project) rather than the notion of 'liberation' (the end goal) is the appropriate emphasis in liberation theologies was the conviction of South African forms of liberation theology.[3] The advantage of this formulation has been that there is a place for liberation theologies after political liberation, as is the case in South Africa. As long as the God of life is engaged against the idols of death, whether these be the idols of neo-liberal capitalism in our government's macro-economic policy, or the idols of patriarchy within our cultures and religions, or the idols of moral and medical discrimination in the context of HIV and AIDS, there is a need for forms of liberation theology which work with and proclaim the God of life.

While we may hope for the fullness of liberation, what John calls "abundant life" and what we might call 'human flourishing', we recognise that for millions of people in our country and many more millions on our continent and around the world the reality is a daily struggle for survival, for basic life. 'Struggle' is the reality of life for many. Implicit in the notion of 'struggle' in South African liberation theologies (and my use of the plural is deliberate)[4] is its systemic nature. 'The struggle' is not primarily an internal struggle within individuals, though it does include this; the primary struggle within liberation theologies is, to rephrase Ephesians, against systems and structures which bring death (Ephesians 6:12). The struggle is fundamentally against structural sin.[5] Given its systemic nature, the fundamental commitment of liberation theologies is the taking of sides. There is no neutral position in the contestation between the God of life and the idols of death. There may be more than one choice, as in the case of the landmark theological formulation of the *Kairos Document*[6], but there is always a choice.

In this essay I will explain the fundamental choices which characterise liberation theologies, and then I will go on to reflect on how the theologies that emerge from 'the victims'[7] of the

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[3] Albert Nolan, *God in South Africa: The Challenge of the Gospel*, Cape Town 1988; Itumeleng J. Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa*, Grand Rapids 1989.

[4] Gerald O. West, Liberation Hermeneutics after Liberation in South Africa, in: *The Bible and the Hermeneutics of Liberation*, Pablo R. Andinach and Alejandro F. Botta (eds.), in *Semeia Studies*, Atlanta [forthcoming].

[5] Gerald O. West, Structural Sin: A South African Perspective, in *Ung Teologie* 1, no. 05, 2005, pp. 15-26.

[6] *The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church*, Revised Second Edition (ed.), 1986, which distinguished between 'State', 'Church', and 'Prophetic' theologies.

[7] Matthew L. Lamb, *Solidarity with Victims: Toward a Theology of Social Transformation*, New York 1982.

idols of death should come to partially constitute the public theologies of our churches. My focus throughout this essay will be on the biblical dimensions of liberation theology[8], namely biblical liberation hermeneutics.

The contours of biblical liberation hermeneutics

Biblical liberation hermeneutics has at its core five interrelated emphases, which can be found across a range of liberation theologies. These five areas of emphasis include, according to Per Frostin, "the choice of 'interlocutors', the perception of God, social analysis, the choice of theological tools, and the relationship between theory and practice".[9] I use Frostin's analysis of liberation theologies because it draws on a wide range of related liberation theologies in dialogue with each other. The data Frostin uses is drawn substantially from the self-constituted dialogue of Third World theologians working together in forums such as EATWOT, the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians.

With respect to the first and fundamental emphasis, the choice of interlocutors, the emphasis in biblical liberation hermeneutics has been on social relations, not ideas or techniques, as has been the tendency in post-Enlightenment western theology and biblical studies. This emphasis leads to the central question in biblical liberation hermeneutics, namely, "Who are the interlocutors of biblical interpretation?" Or (to use the language used by Musa Dube and I)[10], "Who are biblical scholars reading 'with', when they read the Bible?" To these questions liberation criticism gives a decisive answer: "a preferential option for the poor".[11] This choice of interlocutors is more than an ethical commitment, it is also an epistemological commitment, requiring an interpretive starting point within the social analysis of the poor themselves. The other four emphases of liberation criticism each flow from this first, which is why biblical liberation hermeneutics must always be more than an interpretive technique. The actual presence and participation of the poor in any interpretive act is pivotal.

As Frostin goes on to say, turning to the second emphasis of biblical liberation hermeneutics, the choice of interlocutors "has important consequences not only for the interpretation of social reality but also for the understanding of God".[12] As the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) so aptly expressed it, "The question about God in the

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[8] One might argue that one of the 'Protestant goods' which this essay explores is the detail of Scripture. Protestantism was in part a reminder of the importance of the detail of the Bible over against ideo-theologically driven dominant theologies. Protestantism has, of course, succumbed to the same 'dumbing down' of Scripture it protested against.

[9] Per Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa: A First World Interpretation*, Lund 1988, p. 6.

[10] Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube, (eds.), "'Reading With': African Overtures", in *Semeia*, Atlanta 1996.

[11] Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa*, p. 6.

[12] Op. cit., p. 7.

world of the oppressed is not knowing whether God exists or not, but knowing on which side God is".[13] Echoing the words of Gustavo Gutiérrez, we can say that while the primary interlocutor of Western biblical scholarship is the educated unbeliever, the primary interlocutor of biblical liberation hermeneutics is the uneducated believer.[14]

The third emphasis, that of social analysis, also derives from the first, for the option for the poor as the chief interlocutors of biblical liberation hermeneutics is based on a conflictual perception of social reality, affirming that there is a difference between the perspectives of the privileged 'from above' and of the poor 'from below'.[15] EATWOT reports characterise the world as "a divided world", where doing theology and biblical interpretation can only be done "within the framework of an analysis of these conflicts".[16] The poles of conflict or 'struggle' (to use the term common in South African liberation theologies) include: rich-poor (economics), capitalists-proletariat (class), North-South (geography), male-female (patriarchy), white-black (race), dominant-dominated culture (ethnicity),[17] abled-disabled (normality), heterosexual-homosexual (sexuality), HIV-negative/ignorant-HIV-positive (morality), etc.[18] While EATWOT consistently stressed the interrelatedness of these struggles, different contexts give priority to different aspects of oppression.

The fourth emphasis in Frostin's analysis of the methodology of biblical liberation hermeneutics has to do with the choice of interpretive tools. "With a different interlocutor and a different perception of God, liberation theologians need different tools for their theological reflection".[19] Using contemporary "eyes that are hermeneutically trained in the struggle for liberation today to observe the kin struggles of the oppressed and exploited of the biblical communities"[20] is the starting point, with socio-historical tools being used to interrogate past and present power structures.[21] While socio-historical modes of reading

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[13] Op. cit., p. 6.
[14] Ibid., cf., Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, Maryknoll, New York 1973, p. 241.
[15] Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa*, pp. 7-8.
[16] Op. cit., p. 8.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Liberation theologies since Frostin's work would add these to Frostin's list.
[19] Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa*, p. 9.
[20] Itumeleng J. Mosala, "The Use of the Bible in Black Theology", in *The Unquestionable Right to Be Free: Essays in Black Theology*, ed. by Itumeleng J. Mosala and Buti Tlhagale, Johannesburg 1986, p. 196.
[21] Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 B.C.*, Maryknoll, New York 1979; Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, London 1983.

have been the preferred choice in liberation criticism, literary and semiotic modes of reading have also found a place within biblical liberation hermeneutics.[22]

Given that power relations are central to biblical liberation hermeneutics, Marxist modes of analysis have been particularly significant, though "the actual use of Marxist analysis differs from group to group", depending on the form of oppression which is the focus of a particular liberation struggle.[23] So, for example, even though the relationship between capital and labour is clearly one dimension of the African struggle, African biblical liberation hermeneutics adopt a multi-dimensional analysis of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed, which includes race, gender and culture.[24] Furthermore, while classical Marxism maintains that material production conditions human thought, African liberation criticism emphasizes the creativity and capacity of the oppressed in a way that differs fundamentally from classical Marxism.[25]

Frostin's fifth and final emphasis is the dialectics between praxis and biblical interpretation. In biblical liberation hermeneutics, biblical interpretation is "a second act".[26] The first act is the praxis of action and reflection. The action is actual action in a particular struggle; integrally related to this action is reflection on the action; and integrally related to this action-induced reflection is further action, refined or reconstituted by the reflection on and reconsideration of theory (and so the cyclical process continues). Out of this first act of praxis second order liberation biblical interpretation is constructed. How liberation interpretations are constructed and by whom is the subject of ongoing debate? Frostin favours a strong role for middle-class theologians and organic intellectuals in assisting the poor to break their silence "and create their own language"[27], but others, including myself, argue for a much more prominent place for the poor and marginalised themselves.[28]

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[22] Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*, Philadelphia 1984; J. Severino Croatto, "Biblical Hermeneutics in Theologies of Liberation", in: *Irruption of the Third World: Challenge to Theology*, Virgina Fabella and Sergio Torres (eds.), New York 1983; J. Severino Croatto, *Biblical Hermeneutics: Toward a Theory of Reading as the Production of Meaning*, New York 1987; Gerald O. West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Context*, Second Edition ed., Maryknoll, New York and Pietermaritzburg 1995; Sarojini Nadar, "A South African Indian Womanist Reading of the Character of Ruth", in *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*, ed. by Musa W. Dube, Atlanta and Geneva 2001, pp. 159-75.
[23] Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa*, p. 9.
[24] Op. cit., p. 182.
[25] Cornel West, "Religion and the Left: An Introduction", in *Monthly Review* 36, 1984, pp. 9-19: 17; Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa*, pp. 182-83, Gerald O. West, *The Academy of the Poor: Towards a Dialogical Reading of the Bible*, Pietermaritzburg 2003, pp. 15-45.
[26] Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa*, p. 10.
[27] Ibid.
[28] West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Context*; id, *The Academy of the Poor: Towards a Dialogical Reading of the Bible*; id., "The Not So Silent Citizen: Hearing Embodied Theology in the Context of Hiv and Aids in South Africa", in *Heterotopic Citizen: New Research on Religious Work for the Disadvantaged*, Trygve Wyller (ed.), Göttingen 2009, pp. 23-42.

Doing theology and reading the Bible 'from below'

In my analysis, following the work of James Scott[29], the constraint on the poor and marginalised is not language but the social space in which to act. The poor already have a language, though the social space in which they can use their language is constrained by the structures of domination. But the *organised* poor, working class and marginalised do have their safe sequestered sites in which their dignity is given voice and where a thick and resilient "hidden transcript" is constructed.[30] They have their heterotopias in which "all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted".[31]

And as James Cochrane argues, incipient forms of theology are "not absent from this base insofar as ordinary Christians reflect upon their faith in the light of their daily experiences, their suffering, their struggle for existence, and their hopes for healing and comprehensive well-being".[32] "Their reflection may be", Cochrane continues, "and usually is, that of the theologically untrained mind. It may be naive and pre-critical; it may be unsystematic and scattered; it may draw incongruently on a range of symbols, rituals, narratives, and ideas that express the encounter with the sacred". It may be all these things, but it is there! And it does have a voice! And while "the theology present in communities of ordinary Christians may be seen as incipient rather than overtly articulated", "it remains", Cochrane insists, "theology".[33]

The role of the socially engaged biblical scholar in such *organised* contexts is that of the facilitator or animator, one who comes alongside those who are struggling to assert their dignity and its concomitant ideology/theology. Among *unorganised* individuals, the role of the intellectual may appear to be more interventionist, though it remains, I would argue, fundamentally facilitatory.[34] Similarly, among those in poor and marginalised communities who have been atomized or kept under constant surveillance, it may appear that their human dignity has been so damaged that a 'false-consciousness' has enveloped them. But, I would argue, this apparent silence is not the silence of a consent to hegemony, but the silence of an embodied but yet to be articulated ideology.

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[29] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts,* New Haven and London 1990.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Michel Foucault, Of Other Spaces: Heterotopias, cf. http://foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/ foucault.HeteroTopia.en.html.
[32] James R. Cochrane, *Circles of Dignity: Community Wisdom and Theological Reflection,* Minneapolis 1999, p. 63.
[33] Ibid.
[34] There is an ongoing debate about the role of the socially engaged and/or organic intellectual in contexts of struggle; in the South African context, see for example Sarojini Nadar, "Beyond the 'Ordinary Reader' and the 'Invisible Intellectual': Shifting Contextual Bible Study from Liberation Discourse to Liberation Pedagogy", in *Old Testament Essays* [forthcoming 2009].

But what is the precise contribution of the socially engaged *biblical scholar* who remains connected to particular political and social struggles and who is invited by a particular social group to work with them? Our central contribution, I think, is in enabling lines of connection to be established between embodied theologies and the detail of the Bible. The tool that the Ujamaa Centre has evolved to enable this connection is the Contextual Bible Study process. Using a Contextual Bible Study process that has developed in the ongoing praxis cycle of action/reflection, the Ujamaa Centre for Community Development and Research (formerly the Institute for the Study of the Bible & Worker Ministry Project) works with the Bible in a way which facilitates community and individual transformation.

In most cases the Contextual Bible Study takes place within an already secured site. Here Michel Foucault's notion of the heterotopia is of some use, for he identifies a heterotopia as a "counter-site", a site in which "all the other real sites that can be found within the culture … are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted". "Places of this kind", Foucault continues, "are outside of all places".[35] This captures rather nicely the particular sites forged by the Siyaphila Support Groups in the context of HIV and AIDS in South Africa.

Siyaphila is a community-based organization established as a support group for people who had tested positive for HIV. It was formed in 1997, as a project of the Ujamaa Centre, in response to a vacuum in our healthcare system. Bongi Zengele, a staff member of the Ujamaa Centre and a Graduate Assistant doing her Masters degree at the time, led the initiative, working together with another two Ujamaa Centre staff, Mzwandile Nunes and Chris Mbude. Siyaphila is now independent of the Ujamaa Centre, having established its own institutional structures, but we continue to work closely with them, particularly in the area of Contextual Bible Study.[36] In the midst of the multitude of stigmatised sites Siyaphila members inhabit, whether their family homes, the church, the clinic, their work place or even the cemetery, these groups of HIV-positive people construct alternative sacred and safe heterotopias in which to meet and live positively.

In Foucault's language, which has its limitations, these heterotopias occupy "the borderline between the heterotopia of crisis and the heterotopia of deviation"[37], since being HIV-positive is both a crisis, from the infected person's perspective, and a deviation, from society's perspective. While, as I have said, most of these HIV-positive heterotopias are constructed

[35] Foucault, Of Other Spaces: Heterotopias.
[36] Gerald O. West, "Reading the Bible in the Light of Hiv/Aids in South Africa", in *The Ecumenical Review*, 55, no. 4, 2003, pp. 335-44; Gerald O. West and Bongi Zengele, "The Medicine of God's Word: What People Living with Hiv and Aids Want (and Get) from the Bible", in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 125, 2006, pp. 51-63.
[37] Foucault, Of Other Spaces: Heterotopias.

by the HIV-positive themselves, the socially engaged biblical scholar may also assist in securing less likely sites. So, for example, Bongi Zengele, the Coordinator of the Ujamaa Centre's Solidarity Programme for People Living with HIV and AIDS, and I approached the local municipal clinic near the University in which the Ujamaa Centre is located, asking the medical sister in charge if we could use the clinic as a site for our work. She consented, and within a six month period the clinic, usually a deeply ambiguous site, both providing treatment for the HIV-positive but also stigmatising them (by the very act of providing them with antiretroviral treatment and by pious lectures about moral behaviour), has become a HIV-positive heterotopia. Our University status clearly had an impact on the medical sister in charge of the clinic, which enabled us to carve out heterotopic space within a previously contested site. Similar strategic interventions within churches and other contested sites have had similar results.

The Contextual Bible Study process itself, it could be argued, is itself a form of heterotopia. The Bible study form we follow uses community consciousness questions (which draw directly on the resources and experiences of the community) to frame the Bible study, beginning and ending with these kinds of questions. In between, we use critical consciousness questions (which draw directly on the resources of biblical scholarship) to engage with the biblical text. This middle set of questions attempts to give the biblical text a voice by offering additional resources to ordinary 'readers' (whether literate or illiterate) to engage with the biblical text in, first, its literary context, and then, second, in its socio-historical context, before shifting back into community consciousness questions which facilitate an appropriation of the text to the theme the community has identified. In our view, the resources of biblical scholarship, together with the resources a community already has, enable lines of connection to be established between embodied theologies and the detail of the Bible.[38]

And if the Contextual Bible Study itself does become a sacred heterotopia, embodied theologies may be articulated by the community participants and, if what is articulated resonates with the group, owned. Often what is embodied is difficult to articulate, both because it has been suppressed and because it is inchoate. So embodied theologies find their way into the safe Contextual Bible Study site in fragments and in disguised form, waiting for a resonance with and the recognition of others in the group. When this is found, the collective energy in the group becomes focussed, as do their collective resources, often leading to a preliminary articulation and ownership of an embodied theology. Here struggle

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[38] Gerald O. West, "Contextual Bible Reading: A South African Case Study", in *Analecta Bruxellensia,* 11, 2006, pp. 131-48.

gives way, at least for a moment, to celebration of the God of life in the midst of the ravages of the idols of death.

Some examples may be useful at this point, so instead of pursuing more theoretical discussion,[39] the remainder of my essay attempts to show the ongoing presence and preliminary articulations of embodied theologies and hence the demand upon us to in/ corporate them. Three case studies will be used to do this; each of them emerges out of our current South African context. The cases are each based on work done by the Ujamaa Centre.

Case study 1: Violence against women

Given the reality of violence against women in our context, the Ujamaa Centre has since 1996 used a Contextual Bible Study on the story of Tamar (2 Samuel 13:1-22) as a resource for the articulation, owning and mainstreaming of the embodied theologies that are constructed out of contexts of abuse.[40] Through a careful reading of Tamar's story (using the following questions: Who are the main characters, and what do we know about them?; What is the role of each of the male characters in the rape of Tamar?; and What does Tamar say and do?) participants draw on the resources of biblical scholarship (particularly literary resources) and in so doing engage more closely with the text than is their usual practice. Having done this, and having shared their readings with one another, participants then bring their corporate reading/s into dialogue with their reality – their experience (using the following questions: Are there women like Tamar in your church and/or community? Tell their story; What is the theology of women who have been raped/abused?; What resources are there in your church and/or community for survivors of rape?).

The dialogue between text and context enables participants to find and forge lines of connection between their embodied theologies and the Bible. Because the Bible is a sacred text and because Christians locate themselves in relation to it, establishing such lines of connection can be enormously empowering, particularly when the resources of biblical scholarship enable unfamiliar texts (such as 2 Samuel 13) to be read, and familiar texts to be read in unfamiliar ways (see Case study 3 below). In this case, women (mainly, but

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[39] See also Gerald O. West, "Articulating, Owning and Mainstreaming Local Theologies: The Contribution of Contextual Bible Study", in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 122, 2005, pp. 23-35; id., "The Not So Silent Citizen".
[40] Id., 1 and 2 Samuel, in *Global Bible Commentary*, Daniel Patte (ed.), Nashville 2004, pp. 92-104; West and Phumzile Zondi-Mabizela, The Bible Story That Became a Campaign: The Tamar Campaign in South Africa (and Beyond), *Ministerial Formation*, 103, 2004, pp. 4-12, West et al., "Rape in the House of David: The Biblical Story of Tamar as a Resource for Transformation", in *Agenda*, 61, 2004, pp. 36-41.

occasionally also men) who have been raped discover that they are not alone. Not only do their stories connect with Tamar's story, they also discover that other women in the Bible study group have similar stories. In Cochrane's terms, drawing on the work of Jürgen Habermas, the Bible study generates the potential for participants to tap into "the intersubjectively shared background" that is their "life world".[41] And so embodied theologies might be given voice and become owned, provided that the site is secured and safe and that there is sufficient trust for experiences to be exchanged and engaged.

But the Bible study does not end here. There remains one final question: What will you now do in response to this Bible study? While groups plan various kinds of creative actions, including tackling social structures (such as making sure that the local police station has the capacity to receive and then counsel survivors of abuse), in many instances groups plan actions that will take the products of their Bible study into the church, whether through a drama or a song or a liturgy or through the setting up of church-based counselling or similar resources. Here we have, then, attempts at in/corporating the embodied theologies that have been articulated and owned.

There is a deep yearning among survivors of abuse, whatever its form, for the church to be a safe place for them to share their lived theologies and a place where their embodied theologies are affirmed, articulated, engaged and enacted. The very presence of 2 Samuel 13 in the Bible – a text women often feel has been hidden deliberately from them – is a massive factor in the move towards potential in/corporation. The careful and close reading facilitated by the Bible study described above provides additional momentum towards mainstreaming, particularly when women have 'shared' their embodied, inchoate theologies and in so doing have together constructed the vocabulary that has brought them into articulation.

Case study 2: HIV and AIDS

Well intentioned, affected, but non-infected people imagine that infected people would want to do Bible study on texts about leprosy. They are wrong. Through Ujamaa's work with the Siyaphila network of groups – an organised network of support groups of people living with HIV and AIDS – we have been taught that the texts they choose are texts in which Jesus takes an overt stand with the victims of social and religious discrimination and stigma and against the social and religious status quo.[42] In a situation where the predominant message

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[41] Cochrane, *Circles of Dignity: Community Wisdom and Theological Reflection*, p. 127.
[42] West, *Reading the Bible in the Light of Hiv/Aids in South Africa*.

they hear proclaimed from the churches concerning people like them is bad news, their hope is that this is not all there is to the Christian message. Indeed, their own personal and corporate experience and lived theology affirm otherwise; they know that God is with them. So they dare to believe that what they hear from the churches is not the full gospel and turn in hope and trust to the Bible to hear the good news of Jesus Christ.

The texts they choose are those texts where the good news for them is clearest; texts in which Jesus takes a clear stand against prevailing social perspectives and dominant theologies in favour of those who have been pushed to the margins by these perspectives and theologies. In declaring another perspective and another theology, the texts they choose articulate their incipient sense of God's presence with them. Remarkably, despite the almost constant assault from the church, these young women and men remain resolute in their belief that God is with them. Their embodied theology, though inchoate and incipient, is that God is on their side.

And yet, as a Bible study on the stilling of the storm in Mark 4:35-41 articulated, though they know that God and Jesus stand with them (in the boat) against the dominant discriminating theology of the church (which surrounds them like the storm), they also experience a Jesus who is in some senses asleep. "It is time for Jesus to wake up", they said![43] Here is the beginnings of a profound theology of both God's presence and absence in the context of HIV and AIDS! Would that the church had ears to hear.

In another Bible study with a Siyaphila group we explored together a fuller reading of Job than their churches have allowed them. Confronted weekend after weekend, at funeral after funeral with the compliant words of Job: "the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (1:21), we interpreted together those parts of Job denied them by their churches. Together we read Job chapter 3.[44]

Job, we all know, accepts "the bad" from God, remaining silent, refusing to "sin with his lips" (2:10) by questioning God or the dominant theology. As he silently sits, his friends come among him, to "console and comfort him" (2:11). And we know what they will say; they will each explain to him how he must have sinned, in some sense, for how else can he (or, more importantly, they) explain his suffering. By looking at the destroyed and diseased Job they can tell that God must be punishing him in some way for something he has done – this is

[43] West and Bongi Zengele, "'It Is Time for Jesus to Wake Up': Reading Mark 4:35-5:1 from the Epistemological Privilege of the Hiv-Positive", in *The Stilling of the Story in Mark*, John Vincent (ed.), Sheffield 2006.
[44] Id., "Reading Job 'Positively' in the Context of Hiv/Aids in South Africa", in *Concilium*, 4, 2004, pp. 112-24.

how their theology works (as does the prevailing theology of HIV and AIDS). What you sow, you reap; or, more aptly, what you seem to have reaped must indicate what you have sown![45]

But before they can say anything, and to their credit they do not immediately 'counsel' Job, Job speaks. Having struggled theologically in silence for seven days and seven nights (Job 2:13) with his wife's question – "Do you still persist in your integrity?" (Job 2:9) – and his own question – "Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?" (Job 2:10) – Job now takes the risk of following her advice – "Curse God and die!" (Job 2:9). If being righteous and blessing God brings about such havoc, then what damage can cursing God do? If God is unjust, should the righteous person remain silent? Having earlier refused to "sin with his lips" (2:10) he now lets rip (with his lips)! Perhaps reluctant to follow his wife's theological proposition the whole way, Job at first curses God indirectly, cursing "the day of his birth" (3:1) and by implication God's creation. Prose is no longer adequate for what Job is about to say, and so the text shifts into poetry (3:2). This shift is more than a shift from prose to poetry, however, it is also a shift in theology!

Here is the beginning of another theology; here is a cry of rage and pain; here is an incipient and inchoate theology. Here is an attempt to undo what God did in Genesis 1! God says, "Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3); Job counters with, "Let the day be darkness!" Here Job struggles with how to speak of God – how to do theology – in the context of immense suffering and loss. Would that we read this text at the countless funerals of our people who have died from AIDS-related illnesses. Would that Job 3:3-26 would be read rather than Job 1:21: "the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

Reading Job 3 together in the Siyaphila Contextual Bible Study generated a frighteningly embodied theology of anger, pain, rejection, desolation and despair. So much so that I feared that we had made a grave mistake in taking this text to the group. But the wise counsel and experience of my colleague, Bongi Zengele, encouraged me, and we persisted with the Bible study, which, some hours later, produced not only profound corporate and individual articulations but also signs of healing and hope.[46]

We concluded the Bible study with each person writing their own version of Job 3. We have collected these laments and have begun to offer them (with the support of the participants)

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[45] Cf. Gunther H. Wittenberg, "Job the Farmer: The Judean *Am-Haretz* and the Wisdom Movement", in *Old Testament Essays*, 4, 1991, pp. 151-70.

[46] Gerald O. West, "The Poetry of Job as a Resource for the Articulation of Embodied Lament in the Context of Hiv and Aids in South Africa", in *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Cultural Contexts*, Nancy C. Lee and Carleen Mandolfo (eds.), Atlanta 2008, pp. 195-214.

to the churches so that their liturgies and life may be enriched. We have also used the wisdom of the HIV-positive to assist us in constructing other similar Contextual Bible Studies.[47]

Case study 3: Land and food security

This final case study is an example of a Bible study in process and emerges from work the Ujamaa Centre is doing with the Church Land Programme in Pietermaritzburg. In addition to their core work of assisting churches with an audit of their church-owned land, the Church Land Programme works to facilitate theological reflection on land and land ownership and use. Together with a facilitator from the Church Land Programme, a team of community-based activists and I are constructing a series of Bible studies on land issues. One of the topics we have been asked to address is that of land and food security.

As we brain-stormed about possible texts for such a Bible study, one of the participants in the planning group suggested that the Lord's Prayer was a good example. Puzzled at first, we all nodded in affirmation when he quoted the familiar "Give us today our daily bread". Clearly, he said, this was about food security.

I must confess that at this point in the planning I became rather distracted. I had never thought of this prayer in this way, but having been prompted by this person's observation – based as it was on his very real experience of the need for bread each day – I began to reassess my previous understandings of this text and my many careful exegetical studies of it. I had been taught by the Ilimo Community Project in Amawoti, an informal settlement near Durban, that this particular petition was about actual bread for an actual day, and not some metaphorical (middle-class) 'bread'. But I had not yet followed this thought to its logical conclusion and reflected on what this implied about the prayer as a whole. What, I began to ask myself (while talk went on around me), if this sentence was the beginning of a series of petitions on food security?

This is how my preliminary perambulations went. Given the now obvious observation that the first petition has to do with food security for each day – "Our bread for this day, give us today" (Matthew 6:11) – how do the other petitions then follow? Here is a community that Jesus' knows does not have food security, and yet he knows that God's good news for these people is that they should have food for each day. The next clause, perhaps then, could be read as a development of this recognition of the absence of food security and the need for bread for each day. "And release us from our debts", read in the context of food security might then explore the reasons for a lack of food security. The reason, this next petition

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[47] Ibid.

indicates, is that their indebtedness has led to the loss of their land – a common problem in the time of Jesus.[48] Peasant farmers under the monarchy and later the temple-state system often became victims of the debt cycle.[49] The centralised state taxed (in various ways) the produce and resources of the peasant farmers (see 1 Samuel 8), which often led (particularly in less productive years) to peasant farmers having to borrow against their land. When they were unable to pay, they forfeited their land, and they then became tenant farmers or (worse) day-labourers on the land they once owned.

To have food security, Jesus implies (via the prayer he teaches) not only means food for each day, but also access to land. So those praying this prayer, many of whom would have belonged to the peasant class, needed to be released of their debts and so allowed to return to farm their land if they were to have bread for each day. However, the logic of the prayer continues, if the community of God's kingdom (to use Matthew's phrase) is to be a just one, then not only must those who follow him be released from their debts (and so reacquire their land), they too must they release those indebted to them! Hence the next clause in the prayer: "as even we have released our debtors". The use of the aorist here signals a completed action, indicating an act that has been completed by the community making the prayer. Once having released their compatriots from their debts, they too are entitled to cry out to God to be released from their indebtedness.

Taking the initiative and releasing those who owe them a debt is no easy thing, and so Jesus urges them to pray, "And do not allow us to be dragged into temptation", for the temptation is not to release the debts of others, but to benefit from them. Collaboration and solidarity are required from the poor, the peasant class and the marginalised in order for them to survive and to have food security. This is certainly a plausible reading of Jesus' prayer and its connected petitions.

The prayer does not end here, however. It continues to its conclusion (in Matthew's version) with a final petition: "Rescue/deliver the vulnerable from evil (or the evil one)".[50] The final deliverance, it could be argued, to ensure food security must be a deliverance from the evil of systems like structural indebtedness. The world and its systems need to change radically if there is to be food security for all. Which is perhaps what Jesus meant by the beginning of the prayer, when he teaches his disciples to pray that the kingdom of God will come "on earth" (Matthew 6:10).

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[48] Herman C. Waetjen, *A Reordering of Power: A Socio-Political Reading of Mark's Gospel*, Minneapolis 1989.
[49] Norman K. Gottwald, *A Hypothesis About Social Class in Monarchic Israel in the Light of Contemporary Studies of Social Class and Social Stratification*, Atlanta 1993, pp. 139-64; Marvin L. Chaney, "Bitter Bounty: The Dynamics of Political Economy Critiqued by the Eighth-Century Prophets", in *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics*, Norman K. Gottwald and Richard A. Horsley, Maryknoll, New York 1993, pp. 250-63.
[50] This is my translation.

All this was beginning to buzz around in my head as we prepared the Bible study on food security. After we had discussed some other texts, I then shared the above preliminary thoughts with the group, who became very excited about the possible connections between the various petitions and food security. And so we began to workshop this biblical text into a Contextual Bible Study.

What this case study illustrates rather nicely is the sharing of resources and the collaborative endeavour that Contextual Bible Study is capable of. Biblical scholarship here serves the insights and experience of community-based activists, providing additional resources for the articulation and owning of embodied theologies. Reading this familiar text in this unfamiliar way generates fresh and potentially empowering resources.

The potential in this particular case for mainstreaming or in-corporating a theology from the margins into the dominant public theology is massive, for each time we pray this prayer we participate performatively in public theology. Bible study on this prayer may enable the prayer itself to be a site where embodied theologies are expressed alongside extant theologies within the public realm.

From the body of the poor to the public theology of the Church

This article is not arguing for an uncritical acceptance of embodied theologies. Implicit in the process of articulation, owning and in/corporation is, as Cochrane has so eloquently argued, a communitarian and critical component. First, embodied theologies, as "symbolic structures", arise out of, and are situated in, the strongly communitarian life world of the community, including both the living and the living dead. Second, the discourses of the Bible study, particularly the constructive engagement between local and scholarly reading resources, "bring to the group's attention selected aspects of the taken-for-granted, shared background knowledge of its life world. These aspects [now] move to the foreground, becoming conscious". Third, "this move to the foreground of previously unreflected elements of the life world introduces the possibility of questioning and probing", that is, a critical component. Fourth, the mode of discourse in the Bible studies, including both the facilitation and the interaction between contextual and textual questions, promotes and establishes "a process of communication that allows for open argument and counterargument as the basis for testing claims made". Fifth, this process makes possible "an encounter between traditions (biblically transmitted tradition, local group tradition, and more generally, aspects of African tradition) in the context of a social environment shaped by severe negative imbalances in material resources and access to power". Though the emphasis in the articulation and owning of embodied theologies is corporate, included in this encounter

between traditions are also the "personal dimensions in both tradition and everyday life". Sixth, it is this encounter between the personal and the corporate, Cochrane argues, that establishes potential links "between the cultural, social, and personal elements of the life world" as participants in the Bible study endeavour "to understand what a claim made in one sphere, for example, concerning personal responsibility for theft, might imply for another sphere, for example, the struggle against poverty".[51]

Underlying this entire process, then, is what Cochrane refers to as the "communicative rationality" of local knowledge and theologies.[52] Embodied theologies that have been articulated and owned are a form of corporate communicative rationality, and as such can be and, I am arguing here, must be communicatively shared. "A public theology that does not take the perspective of local communities of the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized seriously loses its seminal sources of insight and correction".[53]

I have leaned heavily on Cochrane's work because it is the most pragmatically suggestive and theoretically coherent account I know of; that it emerges from the South African context increases its potential usefulness for the problem I have identified. The Ujamaa Centre will continue to use the Bible – and to train others to use the Bible – as a resource for the articulation and owning of embodied theologies. We will also continue to urge that Christian activists remain cognisant of and connected to their embodied theologies, even though they lack the resources for giving coherent articulation to them. We will do this while we wait for those theologically better equipped than we are to come alongside us 'to do theology'[54], both at the local and at the public level.

Just as I am not advocating an easy acceptance of embodied theologies, so too I am not denigrating all the theology we find in the public realm. There is much there of value, fashioned and forged as it has been by centuries of action and reflection. What I am calling for is the transformation of the public theology of our churches by the theologies of struggle of many of its members, so that the church will have the theological capacity to return to its prophetic task of working with the poor and marginalised for the transformation of our society.

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[51] Cochrane, *Circles of Dignity: Community Wisdom and Theological Reflection,* p. 128.
[52] Op. cit., pp. 28, 132.
[53] Op. cit., p. 124.
[54] See also a similar call and an exploration of the role of the socially engaged theologian in Albert Nolan, "Work, the Bible, Workers, and Theologians: Elements of a Workers' Theology", in *Semeia,* 73, 1996, pp. 213-20.

Conclusion

This essay has argued that the detail of Scripture, a product of Protestantism, has the potential to provide life-lines of connection between the lived experience of the poor and marginalised and the Bible. The Bible has become monovocal in the ideo-theologically driven domain of public theology. But in the bodies of many ordinary Christians there beats an-other theology, a theology that has been forged by their struggle to survive and flourish in the midst of structures of domination and destruction. While the poor and marginalised can and do find points of resonance between their lived theology and the public theology of their churches, they yearn for a fully representation of their embodied theologies in the public realm of their faith. Contextual Bible Study is one resource for enabling lines of connection to be constructed between lived theology and the particular detail of Scripture. The collaborative reading of unfamiliar biblical texts and the re-reading of familiar biblical texts provides, potentially, the vocabulary with which to articulate and own the inchoate lived theologies of the margins.

The task that then remains is to in-corporate – bring into the body – these theological resources into the public theology of our churches so that, first, the Church will become the kind of safe and sacred space where women, people living with HIV and AIDS, those marginalised and abused by society, and the poor are fully at home, and, second, so that the church will become the prophetic Church Jesus called it to be, working for the transformation of our societies until all flourish, until God's kingdom has come "on earth".

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Christian interest in Jewish religious works: two sides of a coin.
An enduring challenge for Jewish-Christian dialogue

Hans-Martin Kirn and Alberdina Houtman

Abstract: In the Renaissance and Reformation periods Christian interest in Jewish religious works increased. Christian Hebraists prepared the way not only for the Reformation movement, but also for a new era of philological examination of rabbinical literature. Although this interest was primarily motivated by apologetics, the interaction in the production of Hebrew grammars and polyglot versions of the Bible also led to changing visions of the "other". In this way Christian Hebraism became a catalyst in the development of confessional identities, especially in Protestantism. This development will be evaluated critically in the context of the history of ambivalent "Protestant 'goods'" and its meaning for Jewish-Christian dialogue.

Christian interest in Jewish religious works reached unprecedented heights in the 16th century due to a combination of religious, cultural and economic factors. Europe stood on the threshold of the modern era. The Renaissance in Italy was peaking, the printing press helped to spread the humanistic ideals throughout Europe since the second half of the 15th century and the economy was growing. In short, it was a time of great human flourishing, in science and art, in trade and voyages of exploration, but also in religious life. At the same time social tensions grew stronger and the monolithic power of the Roman Catholic Church staggered under the influence of the new Protestant movement.[1] This is the cultural background of Christian interest in Jewish religion works, also called Christian Hebraism. In

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[1] For a broader orientation on the period, consult e.g. Salo Wittmayer Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews: Late Middle Ages and Era of European Expansion, 1200-1650, vol. 13: Inquisition, Renaissance and Reformation,* New York 2nd, rev. and enl. 1969; Thomas A. Brady et al. (eds.), *Handbook of European History, 1400-1600: Late Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation, vol. 1: Structures and Assertions,* Grand Rapids (MI) 1995; *Idem, vol. 2: Visions, Programs and Outcomes,* 1996; Robert J. Bast and Andrew C. Gow (eds.), *Continuity and Change: The Harvest of Late Medieval and Reformation History.* Essays presented to Heiko A. Oberman on his 70th Birthday, Leiden and Boston 2000; Cornelis Augustijn, *Humanismus,* Göttingen 2003; David Ruderman and Guiseppe Veltri (eds.), *Cultural Intermediaries: Jewish Intellectuals in Early Modern Italy,* Philadelphia 2004; Dean P. Bell, *Jewish Identity in Early Modern Germany: Memory, Power and Community,* Aldershot 2007; Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, *Reform and Expansion, 1500-1660,* Cambridge (UK) and New York 2007. Recently the multicultural impacts on the European Renaissance has been stressed by Arun Bala, *The Dialogue of Civilizations in the Birth of Modern Science,* New York 2006. Especially the Arabic influences are unthinkable without Jewish mediation.

this article we will discuss this phenomenon from both Christian and Jewish perspectives. We will conclude with a short statement about the relevance of our theme for Jewish-Christian dialogue.

1. Christian perspectives

"Christian Hebraism" normally means the study of Hebrew, especially of the Hebrew Bible, by a small intellectual elite of non-Jews in medieval and early modern times. The term "Christian" is unspecific because we find Christian Hebraists in different religious camps and cultural contexts. The most influential phase of Christian Hebraism started in Renaissance Italy in the late 15th century and heavily shaped the Reformation movement and the confessionalization of European Christianity in the 16th and 17th centuries.[2] Especially for Protestants, Christian Hebraism became an important instrument to develop and express their specific religious interests on the basis of the scripture alone principle (*sola scriptura*). Therefore it is a point of particular interest within our research.

The essence of Hebraism was the search for the "Hebrew truth" (*hebraica veritas)* of the Bible text, criticizing the traditional authority of the Latin Vulgate of Jerome.[3] Although the Roman Catholic Church of course did not agree with this approach, Christian Hebraism also flourished among its scholars, but then as an instrument to prove the reliability of the Vulgate instead of doubting it.

Christian Hebraism cannot be characterized exclusively as a specifically Protestant good. In fact we are dealing with humanistic concepts of language, history and education, which gained a foothold in the curricula of universities and other institutions, integrated in the making of different confessional identities. These concepts had much impact on the development of theological, philological and historical criticism. Christian Hebraism not

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[2] On biblical humanism and Christian Hebraism in the context of Renaissance-Humanism, cf. Augustijn, *Humanismus,* esp. H101-H123; on Christian Hebraism and the science of language, cf. Guiseppe Veltri and Gerold Necker (eds.), *Gottes Sprache in der philologischen Werkstatt: Hebraistik vom 15. bis zum 19. Jahrhundert,* Leiden and Boston 2004; on "translation" as cultural activity in a broader context, cf. Peter Burke and Robbie Po-chia Hsia, *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe,* Cambridge 2007.

[3] For a concise overview on Bible translations, scriptural interpretation and the role of the *hebraica veritas,* see Magne Saebø (ed.), *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation,* vol. I: *From the Beginnings to the Middle Ages (until 1300);* I.1: *Antiquity,* Göttingen 1996; *Idem,* I.2: *The Middle Ages,* 2000, *Idem,* vol. II: *From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment,* 2008. Also Allison P. Coudert and Jeffrey S. Shoulson (eds.), *Hebraica Veritas? Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe,* Philadelphia 2004; Albert van der Heide, *Hebraica Veritas: Christoffel Plantin en de christelijke Hebraïsten.* Catalogus bij de tentoonstelling: Hebraica Veritas. Sprak God Hebreeuws? 16 mei-17 augustus 2008, Antwerpen 2008 (exhibition catalogue, also in English). On Jerome, cf. e.g. Paul B. Decock, "Jerome's turn to the Hebraica veritas and his rejection of the traditional view of the Septuagint", in *Neotestamentica,* 42/2, 2008, pp. 205-222.

only challenged ecclesiastical and dogmatic traditions but also practical piety, mainly by producing new Bible editions and translations into the vernacular.[4] We remember the humanistic ideal of the *homo trilinguis*, the scholar well educated in the "holy languages", Hebrew, Greek and Latin. The ideal of "back to the sources" (*ad fontes*) revealed the somewhat nostalgic desire to revitalize the forgotten primordial truths of antiquity in order to renew Christianity, partly in critical distance from medieval scholasticism, ritualistic approaches to religion and formal church-authority.[5]

These humanistic goods were adopted in great variety by the different branches of the Reformation movement. They were transformed into specific instruments of apology in the emerging orthodox camps of Protestantism, but they also sustained the consciousness of shared values by a scholarly elite. Finally, these humanistic goods helped to overcome the rivalries of orthodox Protestant theologies and their exclusive truth claims in the European Enlightenment movement.[6] This movement developed its own ambivalences, especially with regard to Judaism, but nevertheless in the long run humanism in general, and Christian interest in Jewish literature in particular, proved helpful for the socio-political concept of confessions and religions coexisting peacefully in one society.

Within Christianity, Hebraists were always suspected of being involved in Judaism too much. The accusation of "Judaizing" in fact became a standard formula to denunciate deviant belief and behaviour in all confessional camps, even without any real connection to Jews. Christian Hebraism therefore played a catalytic role as an intra-Christian power of re-affirmation against "the other" on the level of antagonistic confessional cultures, as well as in harmonizing or overcoming confessional polarization by appealing to shared biblical values beyond traditional dogmatics.

More or less the same was true for Christian Hebraism in the context of Jewish-Christian relations. Christian Hebraism on the one hand fostered social contacts with Jews and encouraged scholars and theologians to get a broader horizon and a more authentic knowledge of Jews and Judaism. On the other hand, as far as is known, the interest in Jewish literature rarely if ever changed collective perceptions of "the Jews" as belonging to a false religion. Quite the contrary, even for Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522), one of the great early Christian Hebraists north of the Alps, it was clear: the knowledge of Jewish literature was,

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[4] For the Greek New Testament, see Erasmus' *Novum instrumentum*, 1516.
[5] On the role of normative sources for the construction of religious identity in the history of Christianity, see e.g. Judith Frishman et al. (eds.), *Religious Identity and the Problem of Historical Foundation: The Foundational Character of Authoritative Sources in the History of Christianity and Judaism*, Leiden and Boston 2004.
[6] E.g. Adam Sutcliffe, "Hebrew Texts and Protestant Readers: Christian Hebraism and Denominational Self-Definition", in *JSQ*, 7, 2000, pp. 319-337.

next to an intellectual competitive adventure, an instrument to fight the Jews and their faith with their own weapons.[7] Renaissance Christian Hebraism to some extent remained a religious and cultural colonization project, directed against Judaism and not much interested in the intrinsic values of Judaism. For Heiko A. Oberman the recovery of the *hebraica veritas* was "one of the noteworthy factors in the late medieval intensification of anti-Semitism."[8] On the basis of our research we think that this bold statement cannot be substantiated in general, but for parts it certainly is true. In this respect, humanistic and Protestant values of learning Hebrew and interpreting Jewish sources were in fact questionable.[9] Comparative research on these values remains therefore essential for a better understanding of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism, but also for a better understanding of the medieval concept of coexistence and its pragmatic elaboration.[10] Therefore, next to research on the history of a partly shared holy text, its translations and its interpretations, a more careful investigation of social interactions, religious and cultural frontier crossings, the ambiguous imaginations of "the other" and the complexity of mutual attraction and repulsion should be carried out. In this respect Jewish converts also deserve special attention

[7] On Reuchlin, cf. e.g. Hans-Martin Kirn, *Das Bild vom Juden im Deutschland des frühen 16. Jahrhunderts: Dargestellt an den Schriften Johannes Pfefferkorns*, Tübingen 1989 (esp. ch. 4.3); Arno Herzig, *Reuchlin und die Juden*, Sigmaringen 1993; Charles Zika, *Reuchlin und die okkulte Tradition der Renaissance*, Sigmaringen 1998; Stefan Rhein, "Johannes Reuchlin (1455-1522): Ein deutscher 'uomo universale'", in Paul G. Schmitt (ed.), *Humanismus im deutschen Südwesten: Biographische Profile*, Stuttgart 2000, pp. 59-76; Erika Rummel, *The Case Against Johann Reuchlin: Religious and Social Controversy in Sixteenth-Century Germany*, Toronto 2002; Peter Schäfer (ed.), *Reuchlin und seine Erben: Forscher, Denker Ideologen und Spinner*, Ostfildern 2005; Wolfgang von Abel and Reimund Leicht, *Verzeichnis der Hebraica in der Bibliothek Johannes Reuchlins*, Ostfildern 2005.
[8] Heiko A. Oberman, "Discovery of Hebrew and Discrimination against the Jews: The 'Veritas Hebraica' as Double-Edged Sword in Renaissance and Reformation", in Andrew C. Fix and Susan C. Karant-Nunn (eds.), *Germania Illustrata: Essays on Early Modern Germany Presented to Gerald Strauss*, Kirksville 1992, 19-34, esp. 30f.; cf. *Idem*, *The Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Age of Renaissance and Reformation*, Philadelphia 1984. Andreas Osiander (from the "Lutheran" Wittenberg camp) and Wolfgang Capito (from the "Reformed" Strasbourg/Basel/Zurich camp) did not foster anti-Jewish sentiments by polemics against rabbinic or post-biblical Judaism as many of the other Hebraists did. On Capito, cf. Martin Heimbucher, *Prophetische Auslegung: Das reformatorische Profil des Wolfgang Fabricius Capito ausgehend von seinen Kommentaren zu Habakuk und Hosea*, Frankfurt am Main 2008.
[9] For leading Protestant reformers and their view on Jews and Judaism, cf. Hans-Martin Kirn, "Israel als Gegenüber der Reformatoren: Zur christlichen Sicht von Juden und Judentum im 16. Jahrhundert", in Folker Siegert (ed.), *Israel als Gegenüber: Vom Alten Orient bis in die Gegenwart. Studien zur Geschichte eines wechselvollen Zusammenlebens*, Göttingen 2000, pp. 290-321; Achim Detmers, *Reformation und Judentum: Israel-Lehren und Einstellungen zum Judentum von Luther bis zum frühen Calvin*, Stuttgart 2001; Dean P. Bell and Stephen G. Burnett (eds.), *Jews, Judaism and the Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Germany*, Leiden and Boston 2006; Kenneth G. Appold, "Early Lutheran attitudes toward Jews", in *Lutheran Quarterly*, 20/2, 2006, pp. 170-189; Rolf Decot and Matthieu Arnold (eds.), *Christen und Juden im Reformationszeitalter*, Mainz 2006.
[10] Cf. Gavin I. Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism*, Berkeley 1990; Robbie Po-chia Hsia and Hartmut Lehmann (eds.), *In and Out of the Ghetto: Jewish-Gentile Relations in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany*, Cambridge 2002; Jonathan M. Elukin, *Living Together, Living Apart: Rethinking Jewish-Christian Relations in the Middle Ages*, Princeton 2007; Wolfram Kinzig and Cornelia Kück (eds.), *Judentum und Christentum zwischen Konfrontation und Faszination: Ansätze zu einer neuen Beschreibung der jüdisch-christlichen Beziehungen*, Stuttgart 2002; Jeremy Cohen and Murray Jay Rosman, *Rethinking European Jewish History*, Oxford and Portland OR 2009.

in our research.[11] Not much has been done until now in this area, where church history (in the broader sense of a history of Christianity), Jewish history and Judaica can contribute to a more comprehensive picture.[12] It is for this reason that we started our present research project, "A Jewish Targum in a Christian World", where church historians and Judaic scholars work closely together. Within this project we intend to contribute amongst other things to the theoretical and historiographical adaptation of recent social theories on the relation between (narrative) identity construction, recognition and tolerance.[13]

2. The two main motivations of Christian Hebraism: the search for the "hebraica veritas" and the "prisca theologia"

2.1 Hebraica veritas

Although Jerome (ca. 347-419/420) had already propagated the concept of *hebraica veritas* for his final translation of the Psalms,[14] it only became prominent in the age of Renaissance humanism. The Protestant movements generally strengthened the study of Hebrew as a prerequisite to realizing the principle of *sola scriptura*.[15] But in spite of the Erasmian ideal of literacy in the three "holy languages", for the majority of humanists the study of Hebrew never gained the same status as Latin and Greek. The search for the "Hebrew truth" had always to be defended against the prejudice that Hebrew in relation to Greek and Latin was a barbaric language, and that it enticed Christians to Judaism as Erasmus among others pointed out.

Martin Luther (1483-1546), for example, highly appreciated the study of the Hebrew language of the Bible for the sake of its translation to the vernacular, but he considered the study of rabbinical Bible commentaries a waste of time.[16] In his eyes they were full of secondary grammar questions and haggadic "stupidities", distracting the interpreter from Christ as the

[11] Cf. e.g. Elisheva Carlebach, *Divided Souls*, New Haven and London 2001; Jörg Deventer, "Konversion und Konvertiten im Zeitalter der Reformation und Konfessionalisierung: Stand und Perspektiven der Forschung", in *Aschkenaz*, 15/2, 2006, pp. 257-270.
[12] Cf. Hans-Martin Kirn, *Identität im Widerspruch: Das Verhältnis von Christentum und Judentum als kirchengeschichtliches Thema*, Kampen 2002.
[13] Cf. e.g. Hartmut Rosa, *Identität und kulturelle Praxis: Politische Philosophie nach Charles Taylor*, Frankfurt am Main 1998; Axel Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung: zur moralischen Grammatik sozialer Konflikte*, with a new Afterword, Frankfurt am Main 2007.
[14] Cf. Hieronymus, *Psalterium iuxta hebraicam veritatem*, ed. H. de Sainte-Marie, Rome 1954 (basis for the improved text in modern Vulgate editions, e.g. *Biblia sacra iuxta Vulgatam versionem*, 5th edn, Stuttgart 2007).
[15] Still helpful is the study of Jerome Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony: Sixteenth-century Christian-Hebraica in the Age of Renaissance Nostalgia*, Athens OH 1983.
[16] Cf. e.g. Kirn, "Israel als Gegenüber", pp. 293-302; Thomas Kaufmann, "Luther and the Jews", in Dean Phillip Bell and Stephen G. Burnett (eds.), *Jews, Judaism and the Reformation*, pp. 69-104.

hermeneutic key figure of exegesis. Constitutive parts of Luther's later pamphlets warned against the study of the Jewish Bible interpretation and the Jewish esoteric tradition (*kabbalah*), which he considered dangerous.[17]

This strong anti-rabbinic attitude was also evident in the exegetic schools of Strasbourg, Basel and Zürich, although less fervent and aggressive. The commentators there treated the medieval Jewish sources positively, but in a restrained sense: namely, as far as "the rabbis" could help to clarify the literal meaning of the text and its historical context.[18] The basic unity of the Old and the New Testament and therefore the main points of christological interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, were never doubted. Next to the rabbinical commentaries the interest in the Targumim, the Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Bible, gained in importance.[19] Among others, John Calvin (1509-1564) learned from these exegetical traditions during his stay in Strasbourg.

To mention Calvin in this year of commemorating his 500th birthday may be welcome: often he was seen as a forerunner of the modern Christian-Jewish dialogue, mainly due to his covenant theology. In our view this is, however, wishful thinking. Actually Calvin shared with almost all Christian theologians of his time a clear supersessionism or "replacement theology", which regarded the Church as the only "true Israel" (*verus Israel*). Consequently, post-biblical Judaism was treated with suspicion and contempt, including the old charge that the rabbis had forged the text of the Bible in several places to the detriment of the Christian faith.[20]

It remains true that Martin Luther's fierce anti-Jewish writings of the 1540s widely exceeded the polemics of Calvin and other contemporary writers of the Reformation. But only now are we beginning to see more clearly that these writings in fact are part of an intra-Protestant conflict around the hermeneutics of Christian Hebraism, connected with specific items such as the superiority of the Septuagint or the Masoretic text.

One more aspect has to be mentioned, drawing on recent research on the Swiss Orientalist and theologian Theodor Bibliander (1505-1564).[21] Among Bibliander's publications are a Hebrew grammar book, an edition of the Latin translation of the Quran from the 12th

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[17] "Von den Juden und ihren Lügen", 1543; "Vom Schem Hamforas und vom Geschlecht Christi", 1543 (WA 53, 412-552; 573-648).

[18] Cf. Sebastian Münster's annotated Hebrew Bible of 1536 and Robert Estienne's Hebrew Bible of 1539-1544, with David Kimchi on the Minor Prophets.

[19] Cf. Saebø, *Hebrew Bible*, vol. 2 (Index of topics: Targum).

[20] Hans-Martin Kirn, "Christus in het Oude Testament? Enkele opmerkingen over de visie van Johannes Calvijn op joden, jodendom en de joods-christelijke dialoog", in Rinse Reeling Brouwer et. al. (eds.), *Het calvinistisch ongemak: Calvijn als erflater en provocator van het Nederlandse protestantisme,* Kampen 2009, pp. 57-71.

[21] Bibliander was the successor of Huldrych Zwingli as professor of the Septuagint in Zurich and colleague of Heinrich Bullinger, the main figure of the Reformation movement in Zurich after the death of Zwingli (1531).

century and a book on the different languages of mankind.[22] In this last book, which is currently being edited for scholarly publication, he traced back the different languages to Hebrew as the primordial language. His research was based not only on philological and theological reflections, but also on empirical philological studies of existing languages. Christian Hebraism obviously played an important part in the foundation of modern comparative linguistics. Moreover, the assumption of one primordial language of mankind, Hebrew, also led to pre-Enlightenment reflections on one common ("natural") religion of mankind, which was regarded as the "mother" of all positive religions. The edition of his book on the languages will help us to reconstruct among other things the distribution of literary resources that Bibliander and his colleagues had at their disposal.

In short: the concept of *hebraica veritas* and the interest in Jewish literature gained influence on the understanding of the general concept of religion. Indirectly it also influenced other sciences, such as philology, philosophy, law and politics. The authors, especially in the sphere of the so-called "Hebrew republic", which attempted to reconstruct a constitution based on Mosaic law, mostly referred to the Bible and to Josephus, but sometimes also to rabbinical sources.[23] The search for the *hebraica veritas* in realm of law and politics was subject to the same ambivalences as traditional Christian Hebraism: on the one hand Judaism was regarded as source of primordial law of mankind, while on the other hand it was regarded as abrogated. In any case it led to an intensified questioning of the Bible for different areas of society, such as architecture, education and daily life. This ended with the radical Enlightenment, when the ideals of a "Hebrew republic" were denounced as the invention of priests and the instrument of priestly tyranny and new ideas about natural law came forth.

The fascination for the *hebraica veritas* among Christian humanists in the 16th century was reflected in the intensified production of grammar books and dictionaries, as tools to learn

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[22] Cf. briefly (with lit.), Hagit Amirav and Hans-Martin Kirn, "Notes on the Reformation, Humanism and the Study of Hebrew in the Sixteenth Century: The Case of Theodore Bibliander (1505-64)", in *Church History and Religious Culture*, 87/2, 2007, pp. 161-171; for the Quran, cf. Hartmut Bobzin, *Der Koran im Zeitalter der Reformation: Studien zur Frühgeschichte der Arabistik und Islamkunde in Europa*, Stuttgart 1995.

[23] For politics (in a broad sense), see the works on the Mosaic "Hebrew Republic" or "The Commonwealth of the Hebrews" (*De Republica Hebraeorum*) with their utopian and anti-dogmatic implications. Among them B.C. Bertram, 1574 (new edn. by Constantijn l'Empereur, 1641), C. Sigonius, 1582, and P. Cunaeus, 1617 (new edn. 1996), Engl. transl. 1653, Dutch transl. 1685; cf. Sina Rauschenbach, "De Republica Hebraeorum': Geschichtsschreibung zwischen 'hebraica veritas' und Utopie, in *Zeitschrift für neuere Rechtsgeschichte*, 26(1/2), 2004, pp. 9-35. The genre became widespread in the 17th century. For the development of (international and national) law, cf. the study of rabbinical law (Talmud, Maimonides) by John Selden, *De iure naturali et gentium iuxta disciplinam Ebraeorum*, London 1640. A modern overview can be found in Gordon Schochet et al. (eds.), *Political Hebraism: Judaic Sources in Early Modern Political Thought*, Jerusalem 2008.

the languages. Next to Hebrew, the knowledge of Aramaic also took on greater significance.[24] There was a growing interest from the Christian side in the Aramaic Bible translations as a means of coming closer to the true meaning of the Bible text, which led to ambitious multilingual Bible projects, the so-called Polyglots.[25] We mention only the Polyglot Bible of Alcalá, the so called *Complutensian Polyglot*, printed between 1514-1517 and the voluminous *Antwerp Polyglot* or *Biblia Regia*, which was printed by Christophe Plantin (ca. 1520-1589) in Antwerp between 1568 and 1573.[26] This last work became one of Plantin's most famous books, equally important for Protestant and Roman Catholic biblical scholarship. Jewish scholars and converted Jews played an important role in establishing the Hebrew and Aramaic texts of these Polyglots. This specific inter-religious and intercultural cooperation in a dominantly Christian society is one of the themes of our research project, "A Jewish Targum in a Christian world". By studying the textual and codicological variants of the Western Targum manuscripts and editions in relation to their historic and cultural contexts, we are trying to trace any possible influences – either positive or negative – of the Christian environment. We hope and expect that this will shed new light on the complicated relationships between Jews and Christians in the Middle Ages and early modern period.

2.2 Prisca theologia

The term *prisca theologia* means "ancient" or "primordial" theology.[27] In the first place it referred to a concept of allegedly pre-Christian, Greek and Egyptian esoteric wisdom, as it could be found in the Hermetic literature, traditionally attributed to Hermes Trismegistos.[28] It was seen as an early pagan testimony of the truth of basic Christian doctrines, such as monotheism and salvation by the *logos*. Therefore it must be interpreted as a specific form of apologetic theology, strongly influenced by Neoplatonism. As such it had some affinity to the concept of the *philosophia perennis*,[29] the "ongoing, eternal philosophy", which also

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[24] E.g. in 1527 the first Aramaic grammar, *Chaldaica Grammatica* from the hand of Sebastian Münster, was published. In 1541 Elia Levita wrote the first Aramaic dictionary titled *Meturgeman*.

[25] Cf. Saebø, *Hebrew Bible*, vol. 2, 286-291, pp. 775-780 (see also in the index of topics: Polyglot Bibles).

[26] Cf. e.g. Robert J. Wilkinson, *The Kabbalistic Scholars of the Antwerp Polyglot Bible*, Leiden and Boston 2007.

[27] Cf. Daniel P. Walker, *The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century*, London 1972; Michael J.B. Allen and Valery Rees (eds.), *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*, Leiden etc. 2002; Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, *Philosophia Perennis: Historical Outlines of Western Spirituality in Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Thought*, Dordrecht 2004.

[28] Parts of this Greek literature, which already was used by Tertullian, Lactantius and Augustine, became widely known among humanists through the Latin translation of the so-called *Corpus Hermeticum* by Marsilio Ficino in 1471.

[29] The term was first used by Agostino Steuco in his book *De perenni philosophia libri X* (1540); for later developments cf. Hermann E. Stockinger, *Die hermetisch-esoterische Tradition: Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Einflüsse auf das Denken Johann Christian Edelmanns (1698-1767)*, Hildesheim etc. 2004.

included Jewish traditions. Such outstanding Christian humanist scholars as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) and Johann Reuchlin found the hermetic, unintentionally pro-Christian testimony in Jewish esoteric teaching too, that is in the *kabbalah*.[30] The affinity to neoplatonic thinking in the Renaissance made this tradition interesting. In Jewish terms the *kabbalah* intended to investigate the "inner" hidden meaning (Hebr.: *sod*) of biblical and Talmudic texts, based on an oral tradition handed down from generation to generation since Moses.[31] After the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 it became more and more messianic. For Christian kabbalists especially the Trinity and the divinity of Christ were regarded as prefigured in kabbalistic teachings. Christian kabbalists primarily intended to strengthen their own identity by means of the Jewish traditions and to convince Jews of the hidden truths in their own history. Although they interpreted these traditions contrary to their original context, they widened the horizon of Christian engagement in Jewish literature.[32] Texts of other "religions" (*sectae*) could be edited and translated within the limits of a superior Christian revelation. Philology in fact commended itself as a method to preserve theological truths in different religious contexts.[33] Moreover, these Christian kabbalists contributed unintentionally to the transformation of the traditional understanding of "true religion" (*religio vera* contra *religio falsa*) as Christian piety and devotion to a broader notion of the term, embracing different systems of belief. "Religion" became more and more an abstract term to denote a common human good. Neoplatonic traditions from late antiquity, which were adopted by both Jewish thinkers and Christian theologians, sustained this development.[34]

Most of the Protestant reformers and Roman Catholic theologians remained suspicious of, or even rejected, these forms of Christian *kabbalah* as ridiculous nonsense, hubris, or

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[30] Cf. J. Reuchlin, *De verbo mirifico*, 1494; *Idem, De arte cabbalistica*, 1517 (Facsimile edn. Wien 1997; Italian transl. 1995). For Ficino, cf. Burkhard Gladigow, "'Religio' docta bei Marsilio Ficino: Religion, Erfahrung, Wissenschaft", in Walter Haug, *Religiöse Erfahrung. historische Modelle in christlicher Tradition,* München 1992, pp. 275-285.

[31] E.g. Sefer Ha-Bahir, Sefer Yezirah.

[32] For the Christian kabbalah in the early 16th century, see Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, who was heavily influenced by J. Reuchlin; the Jewish convert Paulus Ricius, who translated kabbalistic texts for Latin readers (*Portae lucis*, 1516); and Egidio da Viterbo (*Libellus de litteris hebraicis*, 1517, ed. 1959; *Scechina*, 1530, ed. 1959); kabbalistic influence on Reformation theology can be found in Andreas Osiander; for the 17th century "Christian kabbalism", see Abraham Frankenberg and his circle; also see the Cambridge Platonists (Henry More et al.) and Christian Knorr von Rosenroth (*Kabbala denudata* I. II, 1677/86). At the end of the 18th century, the Swabian pietist Friedrich Christoph Oetinger made use of the kabbalah for Christian purposes. Cf. Otto Betz, "Kabbala Baptiza: Die jüdisch-christliche Kabbala und der Pietismus in Württemberg", in *Pietismus und Neuzeit*, 24, 1998, pp. 130-159.

[33] On the general development, see Ilana Zinguer (ed.), *L'Hébreu au temps de la Renaissance*, Leiden 1992; Veltri and Necker, *Gottes Sprache*; Daniel Tollet, *Les Églises et le Talmud: Ce que les Chrétiens savaient du judaïsme (XVI. - XIX. siècles)*, Paris 2006.

[34] Cf. Walker, Ancient Theology and Allison P. Coudert, *The Impact of the Kabbalah in the Seventeenth Century: The Life and Thought of Francis Mercury van Helmont (1614-1698)*, Leiden and Boston 1999.

superstition. In this respect there was not much difference between, for instance, Erasmus (1466/69-1536) and Luther. Nevertheless Christian *kabbalah* stimulated the development of modern thinking, especially in the realm of the mystique of nature, the metaphysics of language, and poetics, with clear manifestations at least till the Romantic period.[35] As far as we can see, Christian kabbalism shared the ambiguities of Christian Hebraism with regard to Jews and Judaism. But we are far from a good understanding and a comprehensive history of these ambiguities and their effect on the making of modernity.

3. The reactions of the Jewish communities

As already indicated above, considered from the Jewish point of view, Christian Hebraism was to some extent a religious and cultural colonization project, at best exploiting the Jewish heritage for the benefit of Christianity and at worst using it in the polemic against Judaism. There was hardly any attention to, or interest in, the intrinsic values of Judaism, apart from a general curiosity that was characteristic of the *Zeitgeist*.[36] Therefore it is not surprising that the reactions of the Jewish communities to the renewed interest in their religious works were not unanimously jubilant, but rather ranged from recognition to suspicion and downright disapproval. Let us look at some of these reactions, starting with recognition.

3.1 Recognition

Firstly we may note that of course the Jewish scholars of the 16th century did not live on an island and therefore it comes to no surprise that some of them were influenced by the humanistic spirit of the time. This is known especially from Renaissance Italy.[37] For that region we can certainly speak of the existence of a Jewish humanist movement. One need but be reminded of great scholars like David ben Judah Messer Leon (ca. 1465-ca. 1536) and Azariah de Rossi (ca. 1513-1578), who were truly Renaissance gentlemen.[38] This humanistic attitude was, however, not generally accepted in the Jewish communities. The

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[35] Cf. Andreas B. Kilcher, *Die Sprachtheorie der Kabbala als ästhetisches Paradigma: Die Konstruktion einer ästhetischen Kabbala seit der Frühen Neuzeit*, Stuttgart 1998; Eveline Goodman-Thau et al. (eds.), *Kabbala und die Literatur der Romantik: Zwischen Magie und Trope*, Tübingen 1999. In theological contexts Jewish mysticism still was regarded as a proto-religion of mankind.

[36] Cf. e.g. Carlebach, *Divided Souls*, pp. 201-203.

[37] Cf. Robert Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*, Berkeley etc. 1994, pp. 153-54, 168-69; Fabrizio Lelli, "Jews, Humanists and the Reappraisal of Pagan Wisdom Associated with the Ideal of the *Dignitas Hominis*", in Coudert and Shoulson (eds.), *Hebraica Veritas*, pp. 49-70.

[38] On David ben Judah Messer Leon, cf. e.g. Hava Tirosh-Rotschild, "In Defense of Jewish Humanism", in *Jewish History*, 3/2, 1988, pp. 31-57; for an introduction to the work of Azariah de Rossi, cf. Azarya ben Moshe dei Rossi and Joanna Weinberg, *The Light of the Eyes*, New Haven 2001, xiii-xliv.

opponents of this outlook deemed classical literature incompatible with, indeed subversive of, Jewish religious society.[39] In one of the works of Messer Leon he defends himself against the critique of what he calls the "rabbanites". Some of the arguments he uses there are remarkably similar to those used by the Christian Hebraists when accused of "Judaizing". For instance, in response to the charge that the study of literary sources from other traditions dangerously exposes the reader to heretical views, Messer Leon argues as follows: First, one must become acquainted with possibly false opinions in order to be able to reject them. Secondly, the foreign works may well contain useful information. And apart from these essential reasons, he also simply praises the eloquence of the works.[40] So, we know for sure that, at least in Italy, there was a certain positive reception of the humanist body of ideas amongst Jewish intellectuals. These scholars will certainly have appreciated the effort of their Christian colleagues to immerse themselves in the Jewish traditional literature.

Another form of recognition arose from personal contact between Jewish and Christian scholars. The Christian scholars who wanted to learn Hebrew and be initiated in the post-biblical Jewish literature were in need of Jewish teachers. Sometimes this led to good relations and even friendships. Well known in this respect is the fond relationship between Elia Levita (1469-1549) and his patron Cardinal Egidio da Viterbo (1469-1532).[41] When Levita was reprimanded by the rabbis for his close contact with Christians and for teaching them Hebrew, Levita rejoined that Christian Hebraists tend to defend Jews and the Jewish community from physical violence. In his view this Christian interest and the connected interconfessional relations should therefore be cherished rather than condemned.

As mentioned above, among the Jewish works studied by the Christian Hebraists, the *kabbalah* was especially popular. The study of the *kabbalah* among these scholars came to great heights. This started already in the 15th century with Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and continued in the 16th century with Johann Reuchlin. The genre was, however, also quite popular among the Jews at the same period, emanating from Tsefat in Palestine and from there spreading throughout Europe.[42] Some Jewish scholars even started to study the works of Christian Hebraists on the subject. For example Ludovico Carretto[43] was so convinced of

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[39] Tirosh-Rotschild, "In Defense of Jewish Humanism", p. 38.

[40] *Shebach ha-Nashim,* fol. 104r, as cited in Tirosh-Rotshild, "In Defense of Jewish Humanism", p. 56 n. 65.

[41] Cf. Geìrard E. Weil, *Élie Lévita humaniste et massorète (1469- 1549),* Leiden and Boston 1963; Francis X. Martin, *Friar, Reformer and Renaissance Scholar: Life and Work of Giles of Viterbo 1469-1532,* Villanova PA 1992.

[42] Cf. e.g. Jonathan I. Israel, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism 1550-1750,* Oxford 1985, pp. 78-81; Dean P. Bell, *Jews in the Early Modern World,* Lanham 2008, pp. 155-159.

[43] Tentatively identified by Bonfil as Todros ha-Kohen. Robert Bonfil, "Who was the Apostate Ludovico Carreto?" (Hebr.), in Aharon Mirsky et al. (eds.), *Exile and Diaspora: Studies in the History of the Jewish People Presented to Professor Haim Beinart,* Jerusalem 1991.

the truths expounded by Reuchlin that he made them the basis of his conversion to Christianity, as becomes clear from a missionary epistle from his hand.[44] Meanwhile there were also Jewish scholars who warned against Reuchlin's method because they considered his interpretation a threat to the purity of the Jewish faith.[45]

Finally, it can be mentioned that the humanists' quest for the *prisca theologia* led not only to a greater appreciation of Hebrew texts but also to the belief that all traditions shared part of one primeval truth, which began with Judaism.[46] And although it had no direct positive consequences for the way Jews were treated and looked upon, it was still an improvement as compared to the older doctrine of Judaism as a totally false religion.

So far some of the more positive reactions. Let us now turn to another, quite natural, reaction, namely suspicion.

3.2 Suspicion

The 16th century interest in post-biblical Jewish literature was not new. In the Middle Ages there was already a lively tradition among the Dominicans as well as the Franciscans of studying rabbinic literature.[47] The study of the Dominicans was exclusively directed at mission and polemics.[48] An important representative of this movement was the Spanish Orientalist Raymond Martini (ca. 1220-ca.1285) who was well versed in rabbinic literature.[49] He used this knowledge especially for his magnum opus *Pugio Fidei,* "the dagger of faith", the main missionary writing of the Middle Ages, the title of which is eloquent of its purpose.[50] Due to the negative experience with this kind of scholarship, it is not surprising that the 16th century Jews were distrustful of the motives of the contemporary Christian Hebraists.

This suspicion expressed itself amongst other things in the reluctance to assist Christian scholars in acquiring knowledge of Hebrew, Aramaic and rabbinic hermeneutics. This

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[44] Ludovicus Carretus, *[...] Epistola [...] ad Iudaeos, quae inscribitur liber visorum diuinorum. qua eos ad resipiscentiam invitat, validissimisque rationibus Christianam asserit veritatem, una cum Latina interpretatione,* Paris 1554. Cf. Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy,* p. 174.

[45] Bonfil, Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy, p. 174.

[46] Coudert and Shoulson, *Hebraica Veritas,* p. 5.

[47] E.g. Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages,* Oxford 1983, 3rd ed., pp. 329-355, 360-366.

[48] Berthold Altaner, "Die fremdsprachliche Ausbildung der Dominikanermissionare während des 13. und 14. Jahrhunderts", in *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft,* 23, 1933, pp. 233-241; Gilbert Dahan, *Les intellectuels chrétiens et les juifs au Moyen Age,* Paris 1999 (first print 1990); Robert Chazan, *Daggers of Faith. Thirteenth-century Christian Missionizing and Jewish Response,* Berkeley 1989.

[49] cf. Syds Wiersma, "The Dynamic of Religious Polemics. The Case of Raymond Martin (ca. 1220-ca. 1285)", in M. Poorthuis et al. (eds.), *Interaction Between Judaism and Christianity in History, Religion, Art and Literature,* Leiden and Boston 2009, pp. 201-217.

[50] Raymundus Martini, *Pugio Fidei adversus Mauros et Judaeos,* Leipzig 1687; Facsimile edition, Farnborough 1967.

reluctance had two main reasons. First, there was the apprehension that the newly acquired knowledge would be used against them in one way or another as it had always been. Secondly, the rabbis resisted too close contact with Christians, fearing that the latter would misuse the opportunity to try to convert their teachers.[51]

Once the Jewish religious works were in Christian hands, there was also the possibility of corruption. On the one hand the emergence of Christian publishing houses specialized in the publication of Jewish traditional literature was advantageous to the Jews. The beautiful printed editions of the *Mikraot Gedolot* (1517-1518) and the Talmud by the Christian publisher Daniel Bomberg, for instance, were sought after by Jews and Christians alike. However, there was always some danger that the texts were corrupted in the process, either in consideration of the Christian patronage or readership or as a wilful adjustment by a Christian editor.[52]

This could happen to printed editions and manuscripts alike. In our study of Targumic textual variants we encountered for instance a gloss in a manuscript to a text in Targum Obadiah 21 that says "This addition is counterfeit and it seems to me that a heretic [probably meaning here a Christian] or an apostate made it."[53] Another example comes from our present research project where in 1 Sam. 2:5 in some Italian versions the word "Rome" is turned into "guilty Rome". The adjective "guilty" is omitted in the Roman Catholic Polyglots of Antwerp and Paris, while in the Anglican London Polyglot the entire threatening reference to Rome is turned into a threat against Aram.

3.3 Disapproval

Besides recognition and suspicion there was also plain disapproval. As pointed out above, 16th century Christian Hebraism also served polemical goals, where even leading Hebraists like Reuchlin used their knowledge as an instrument to fight the Jews and their faith.[54] This use was of course disapproved of by the Jews and in response two sorts of literature emerged. The first sort was apologetic and meant to dissuade converts (*marranos*) from Christianity and keep doubters within the fold. To this literature we may reckon for instance Leone Modena's (1571-1648) *Magen va-Herev*.[55] The name of this treatise, meaning "shield and

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[51] The example of Gianozzo Manetti, who led his Jewish teacher to the baptismal font, is exemplary in this regard; cf. Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*, p. 175.

[52] Ammon Raz-Krakotzkin, *The Censor, the Editor and the Text: The Catholic Church and the Shaping of the Jewish Canon in the Sixteenth Century*, Philadephia 2007, esp. pp. 148f.

[53] Rimon Kasher, *Targumic Toseftot to the Prophets* (Hebr.), Jerusalem 1996, p. 206.

[54] Cf. further e.g. Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony*, pp. 212-254.

[55] Israel, *European Jewry*, p. 83. For a description of *Magen va-&erev*, cf. Alessandro Guetta, "Leone Modena's *Magen va-Cherev* as an Anti-Catholic Apologia", in *JSQ*, 7, 2000, pp. 296-318.

sword", clearly reveals its intention: it is not enough to protect oneself against the Christian "dagger of faith", one should also launch a counterattack. The second sort was fiercely polemic and directed against Christianity. Part of this literature was written in vernacular, in order to make it accessible to non-Jews. But even polemics that were written in Hebrew circulated more widely than might be supposed. An example of the latter is the work *Hizzuk Emunah* ("strengthening of faith") by the Lithuanian Karaite Isaac of Troki (ca.1533-ca.1594). This book circulated in numerous translations all through Europe and became an important part of the polemical debate.[56]

Disapproval of the Christian interest in Jewish literature also became apparent in another way. Aside from the general distrust of the motives of Christians who wanted to study Hebrew, there were also more fundamental objections against teaching non-Jews. Rabbi Solomon Luria (1510-1574), one of the great Ashkenazi teachers of his time, sharply reproached "the Jews of Spain, Italy and Turkey" for teaching non-Jews Torah for their own benefit and profit.[57] This probably refers to people like the earlier mentioned Elia Levita. Other rabbis, following Maimonides who had permitted teaching Torah to Christians,[58] attempted to seek a compromise by allowing the teaching of Hebrew, while forbidding instruction in post-biblical literature.[59] Let us consider for a moment the case of Elia Menachem Chalfan. This Venetian scholar was asked towards the end of 1544 to issue a rabbinical opinion on the question of teaching gentiles. In his formal answer (*responsum*) he showed, on the basis of numerous Talmudic quotations and with great wit, that tradition unconditionally allowed the instruction of Hebrew to non-Jews and that in fact, there never was a period in history when the rabbis didn't have some non-Jewish pupils. He distinguished, however, between the teaching of the Hebrew language as an instrument of reading the Hebrew Bible on the one hand and the teaching of the oral tradition – and certainly the *kabbalah* – on the other.[60] This distinction between written Torah and oral tradition is ancient and widespread and at times it served a role in Jewish-Christian polemic. The following text from the early medieval *Midrash Tan'uma* may serve as a clarifying example:[61]

[56] Israel, *European Jewry*, pp. 83-84; Rosemarie Sievert, *Isaak ben Abraham aus Troki im christlich-jüdischen Gespräch der Reformationszeit*, Münster 2005.

[57] Hirsch J. Zimmels, *Ashkenazim and Sephardim: Their Relations, Differences and Problems, as Reflected in the Rabbinical Responsa*, London 1958 (Repr. 1969) at p. 276 refers to Luria's commentary Yam shel Shlomo on Baba Qamma iv, no. 9.

[58] Zimmels, *Aschkenazim and Sephardim*, p. 277, refers to the *responsa* edition of Freimann, no. 364.

[59] Eric Zimmer, "Jewish and Christian Hebraist Collaboration in Sixteenth Century Germany", in *JQR*, 71, 1980, pp. 69-88, at p. 71 n. 5.

[60] The full text of the *responsum* can be found in David Kaufmann, "Elia Menachem Chalfan on Jews Teaching Hebrew to Non-Jews", in *JQR (OS)*, 9, 1897, pp. 500-508.

[61] Tanchuma Ki Tissa 34.

When the LORD said to Moses "write down these words", Moses requested that also the Mishnah might be in writing. But because the Holy One Blessed be He anticipated that the nations would in the future translate the Torah and read it in Greek and would say "we are Israel" – and until today the balance is perverted – said the Holy One Blessed be He to them, that is to the idolaters, "you say that you are my children. I do not know otherwise then that they who have my secret are my children." And what is that? That is the Mishnah that was given orally.

The word used here for "secret" is *mysterion*, the Greek loanword that was employed by the church fathers for the hidden spiritual meaning of the Bible as well as for the ritual presentations of the mysteries of salvation. The author of this text in *Tan'uma* may well have had these two meanings in mind. On the one hand the oral Torah is meant to convey the meaning of the written Torah so that it is properly understood. On the other hand it is a symbol for the secret bond between God and His chosen people, comparable to the sacraments of Christianity. And just as it was, for instance, forbidden for non-Christians to partake in the *mysterion* of the Holy Communion, equally the non-Jews should not be enabled to appropriate the *mysterion* of the oral Torah.[62] According to the view articulated in this text the oral tradition should be preserved from the fate of *Tanach*, which the Christians had been able to misappropriate because it was available to them in written form.

Let us finally see what our observations, and especially this last image of the exclusive mystery, can mean for Jewish-Christian dialogue.

4. In what way is the study of Jewish religious works an enduring challenge for the Jewish-Christian dialogue?

Christians in general and since the Reformation the Protestants in particular have always studied Jewish texts,[63] but the motives for so doing are according to today's standards of inter-religious dialogue disputable to say the least. We should therefore seriously analyse the motives of our predecessors for their study of Jewish texts and evaluate their work in the light of new paradigms of thinking and believing. It is imperative to recognize clearly what has hurt this dialogue and what has furthered it, in order to learn from former mistakes and develop a respectful and meaningful interaction. The most important lesson seems to be that while studying Jewish religious texts, either for our own benefit or in view of inter-

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[62] Simon Schoon, "De ander als geheim: *Over mogelijkheden en grenzen van de joods-christelijke dialoog"*, in Alberdina Houtman (ed.), *De ander als geheim: Over mogelijkheden en grenzen van de joods-christelijke dialoog, Delft 2007, pp. 99-122,* at p. 99.

[63] For a short overview, cf. Alberdina Houtman, *Juwelen in een mestvaalt of parels voor de zwijnen: over de waarde van joodse bronnen voor christelijke theologen,* Kampen etc. 2007.

religious dialogue, it is crucial to guard and respect the borders between the religions in order to avoid intrusion or illicit appropriation.

Despite its ambiguities, Christian Hebraism can be regarded as one of the prerequisites of modern dialogue.[64] No dialogue can be started or maintained without a mutual interest in, and fascination by, the world of the other. Certain knowledge of the language and the basic principles of the dialogue partner are necessary. It is, however, essential that even the semblance of colonization should be avoided. In our view, dialogue should help to stabilize and strengthen identities rather than weaken them. That would mean that each partner tries to understand himself better by looking in the mirror of the other and to understand the other better as a result of genuine interest in his or her traditions and ways of thinking and believing. In this process we have to accept differences, breaks and obstacles between religions and cultures, that cannot and need not be bridged. There always remains a mystery in the religion of the other that has to be respected.

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[64] For contemporary analyses, see e.g. Tikva Frymer-Kensky et al. (eds.), *Christianity in Jewish terms*, Boulder etc. 2000; Micha³ Bron (ed.), *Jews and Christians in Dialogue II: Identity, Tolerance, Understanding*, Stockholm 2001; Wolfram Kinzig and Cornelia Kück, *Judentum und Christentum zwischen Konfrontation und Faszination: Ansätze zu einer neuen Beschreibung der jüdisch-christlichen Beziehungen*, Stuttgart 2002; James Aitken and Edward Kessler, *Challenges in Jewish-Christian relations*, New York 2006; Jonathan Magonet, *Talking to the Other: Jewish Interfaith Dialogue with Christians and Muslims*, New York 2003; Michael Wyschogrod and R. Kendall Soulen (eds.), *Abraham's promise: Judaism and Jewish-Christian relations*, Grand Rapids MI 2004; Michael S. Kogan, *Opening the Covenant: A Jewish Theology of Christianity*, Oxford and New York 2008; Judith Frishman and Staf Hellemans (eds.), *Het christendom en de wereldreligies: Dialoog en confrontatie*, Utrecht 2008.

Between flourishing and withering
A theologian's impressions from the
Dutch euthanasia review procedure

Theo A. Boer

Abstract: This paper is based on an ethical analysis of 1,200 reports submitted to one of the five Regional Review Committees on Euthanasia in the Netherlands in the years 2005-2009. Despite legal and professional safeguards with regard to euthanasia, and despite the overall high quality of care, the Dutch euthanasia practice still is not unproblematic. This paper identifies some important ethical issues: the sometimes obscure meaning of "patient autonomy"; inferior quality of care that aggravates a patient's suffering; insufficient spiritual, social, and psychological care; fears for a terrible death on the basis of outdated experiences in the past; and undue pressure from relatives. Despite these concerns and despite the fact that euthanasia in itself remains a "problematic" death, however, the Dutch euthanasia practice can be described as morally solid.

"Grant us, omnipotent and powerful God, a good night and a holy death."
<div align="right">German evening prayer</div>

The Netherlands is one of the few countries in which euthanasia and assisted suicide have been legalized. From the early 1980s through the mid-1990s, euthanasia was formally illegal but informally tolerated under a set of well-defined due care criteria.[1] In June 1994 euthanasia gained legal status. Physicians had to report a euthanasia case to the Public Prosecutor who would assess whether or not the criteria were met. In 1998 this task was taken over by five Regional Review Committees. These committees, consisting of a lawyer, a physician and an ethicist, assess the reported cases in the light of the law, medical practice and medical ethics. Only if one or more of the criteria are not met, a committee notifies the

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[1] When dealing with a patient's request for euthanasia, a doctor must:
1. be convinced that the patient's request is voluntary and well considered;
2. be convinced that the patient's suffering is unbearable and that there is no prospect of improvement;
3. inform the patient of his or her situation and further prognosis;
4. discuss the situation with the patient and come to the joint conclusion that there is no other reasonable solution;
5. consult at least one other physician with no connection to the case, who must then see the patient and state in writing that the attending physician has satisfied the due care criteria listed in the four points above;
6. exercise due medical care and attention in terminating the patient's life or assisting in his or her suicide.

Board of Procurators General and the regional health care inspector of its findings. The Public Prosecution Service determines whether an offence has been committed that could result in prosecution. The inspector decides whether or not the case should come before a disciplinary tribunal.[2]

From the onset of the Dutch euthanasia practice, the vast majority of euthanasia cases occurred in a context of terminal cancer a few days or weeks before a natural death was expected. (These cases are also known as traditional euthanasia cases.) Since about 1995, Dutch hospitals and physicians have gradually updated the quality of palliative care so as to match standards found in the UK and the Scandinavian countries. The growing availability of palliative sedation in particular is likely to be a major factor behind the dramatic decrease of 30% or so in the numbers of euthanasia performed annually, as was the conclusion from a nationwide anonymous survey in 2007.[3] During the same period sedation became an increasingly popular alternative to euthanasia, not only because it may be the best kind of care, but also because it saves the doctor both the paperwork and the emotional stress related to performing euthanasia. On the basis of a comparison between anonymous surveys and the number of reported cases, it is safe to assume that the reporting rate is somewhere between 80% and 100%.[4]

The five review committees together receive about 2,300 reports a year.[5] This paper is based on an analysis of 1,200 reports submitted to one of the five review committees in the years 2005-2009.[6] The region from which they are taken comprises both urban and rural areas and has a religiously diverse population.[7] Of the 1,200 people who died, there was

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[2] Cf. *http://www.minvws.nl/en/folders/ibe/euthanasia_the_netherlands_new_rules.asp.*

[3] The survey was presented in May 2007 and concludes that the number of voluntary euthanasia cases performed by a physician went down from 3,500 in 2001 to 2,300 in 2005, a decrease of 34%. The assisted suicide rates went down even more sharply: from 300 in 2001 to 100 in 2005. The number of requests for euthanasia or assisted suicide dropped from 9,700 to 8,400. The number of non-voluntary euthanasia cases went down from 950 to 550. Gerrit van der Wal et al., *Evaluatie van de Wet toetsing levensbeëindiging op verzoek en hulp bij zelfdoding: praktijk, melding en toetsing,* Utrecht 2007; *Idem,* "End-of-Life Practices in the Netherlands under the Euthanasia Act", in *New England Journal of Medicine* 356, 2007, pp. 1957-1965.

[4] Depending on which definition of euthanasia is adopted in the anonymous surveys, the percentage could well come close to 100%. Cf. John Griffiths, "Arts liegt niet over euthanasie: Gebruik juridische definitie toont ware aantallen", in *Medisch Contact* 62, 11, 2007, pp. 466-8.

[5] In the years 2007-2008, the number of reported cases has increased from 1,923 in 2006 to 2,331 in 2008. Cf. Regionale toetsingscommissie euthanasie, *Jaarverslag 2007,* Den Haag 2008; Regionale toetsingscommissie euthanasie, *Jaarverslag 2008,* Den Haag 2009; see also *www.toetsingscommissie.nl.*

[6] This concerns the region "Midden Nederland", consisting of the provinces of Overijssel, Flevoland, Gelderland, and Utrecht. About 30 cases originate from other regions.

[7] The reports occasionally contain references to the patients' religious backgrounds. In the analysed cases, there were indications of humanistic, Protestant, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Jewish, and western versions of Hindu and Buddhist spiritualities, but no allusions to Islam, despite the fact that Muslims are believed to represent about 6% of all citizens.

only one person under 21: a 17-year-old boy. The remaining cases consisted of patients between 22 and 94.[8]

Most physicians make use of a standard reporting document.[9] The questions have an open character and cover the medical condition of the patient, the nature of the suffering, the reasons why this suffering is experienced as unbearable, the nature and the history of the patient's request, the doctor's assessment of the mental competence of the patient and the role of other players in the field – health care professionals, relatives. Physicians need to have consulted a second, independent doctor, who must have seen the patient at least once and who gives his or her own assessment with regard to the due care criteria. The reports of these SCEN (Support and Consultation on Euthanasia in The Netherlands) doctors are even looser. But although questionnaires with closed questions might better serve the aspirations of the social scientist, the looseness of the reports has the advantage of providing all the more personal, and some-times compelling, impressions from the doctors involved.

The analysis given here is primarily a collection of impressions through the eyes of an ethicist. My purpose is to raise some questions on the basis of the materials reviewed. Despite my profession as a theological ethicist, this is not a theological analysis, let alone critique, of the Dutch euthanasia practice. This will have to wait until further research with a more theological scope has been done.

Details from quotations have been changed so as to protect the privacy of those involved. Although I will occasionally draw some empirical conclusions concerning the main reasons behind a euthanasia request and the main reasons why physicians can sympathize with a request, these conclusions need to be seen against the background of the fact that in almost all reported cases there are no prospects of recovery, the suffering of a patient is severe, and the request is informed and voluntary. Although one physician at a hearing told the committee that he had performed euthanasia at least 20 times, that he felt good about it, and that he brings up the possibility of euthanasia in every new case of terminal cancer, most of his colleagues are less eager to do so.[10] One of them writes: "I have to mention that this euthanasia has been emotionally very burdensome. I do not regret having done it, but I do hope I will never have to do it again." Several doctors indicate to their patients that euthanasia will only be carried out if the physician himself has no doubt left in his or her

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[8] Of a sample of 162 patients, 3% were aged 20-40, 31% 40-60, 48% 60-80, and 18% 80 or more. 55% of the patients were females, 45% males.

[9] Of this document, there exist older and newer versions.

[10] These 1,200 cases were reported by a total of 825 physicians. 590 doctors reported once, 213 doctors two or three times, 17 doctors four to five times and 5 doctors between six and eight times.

mind. One doctor writes: "I strongly reject the suggestion that performing euthanasia becomes a mere technical procedure. For me and others, it continues to be extremely burdensome."

When a committee has second thoughts about a case, a physician and/or the consulting doctor may be asked to provide additional written information or may be invited for an interview. To some physicians such procedures add to the burden. A doctor writes: "The comments of your committee put a damper on this otherwise so serene process." A physician, who was asked to clarify some ambiguities in his report, writes: "This procedure gives me sleepless nights. Still, I would do it again, if I had to." The many checks and balances that surround the Dutch euthanasia practice, in part prescribed by law, in part developed in the review procedure and in part developed by the Dutch Physician's Organization KNMG and their SCEN networks, justify some confidence that the review procedure effectively prevents euthanasia from becoming normal medical practice.

1. Euthanasia and autonomy

It goes without saying that the great majority of patients requesting euthanasia consider their condition as incompatible with what they conceive to be a life of flourishing. In this article we roughly distinguish two overlapping conceptions of flourishing. The first is that to flourish implies the capacity to exert full autonomy, the second, to which we will return in section 3, is that flourishing means to be free from suffering.

Autonomy language expressing suffering

The Dutch euthanasia law only permits euthanasia if the patient makes a request that is informed, lasting and voluntary. This does not mean that loss of autonomy (or the prospect of it) in itself constitutes a reason for a euthanasia request. For many patients it is rather the suffering from pain, nausea, distress and other physical discomfort that is basic to their request. Given this suffering, patients use all their powers of persuasion to have their request honoured and this implies the use of strong autonomy-related language.

In the (rather frequent) case that a physician mentions some form of pressure from the patient, this may be the doctor's way to preclude any doubts regarding the voluntary character of the request. However, sometimes the pressure from the patient and his relatives can be so hard that the opposite question arises: how free was the doctor to make his own assessment about the severity of the suffering and the lack of perspective? Was there no undue pressure from the side of the patient or his family? "He tells me that if I do not help him, he will hang himself," a doctor writes, and another doctor: "This man is demanding. He has attempted to commit suicide twice and a third attempt would have huge repercussions for the whole

ward." In about one out of a hundred cases a patient lends weight to a request by mentioning the possibility of ending his own life or by mentioning earlier plans to do so. Occasionally reference is made to the way animals are euthanized: "We don't even allow dogs to suffer like this. Why me?" Sometimes relatives bring up this point too.

Relatively frequent are references to a patient's earlier thoughts about euthanasia. This often implies a long-time membership of a "Right to Die" society.[11] "Since she can remember," a physician writes about a woman in her early forties, "she has been preoccupied with finding the right way to die." "This is the way he is," another doctor writes, "making arrangements is all he ever does." "This patient is a medical engineer and is used to thinking two steps ahead. In the same manner he now seeks to prevent the complications and the pain." "Patient is a scientist and meticulously manages every one of his fears."

Sometimes there is some cynicism between the lines. "Her wish has always been everyone's command," a doctor writes about a former high school director. Another physician observes, almost aloofly: "If things don't go the way Mother wants them to go, this stirs Mother's irritation." "This man has been in the military for thirty years," writes another doctor. "If he says, 'Fire!' he expects his men to do just that." A colleague writes: "When I suggest her to wait a week or two, she gets furious: 'In that case, I will come after you with my gun.'" Doctors normally refer to such pressure as proof of the severity of the suffering and of the firmness of a request. (In cases of *un*due pressure the physician is not likely to grant the request and the committee will not see the report.)

Two additional remarks may be in order. First, the question needs to be asked whether the doctor provided sufficient information about the palliative treatment options. Insufficient knowledge of, or access to, the full range of palliative options may explain why some patients and their relatives put so much pressure on a physician to perform euthanasia. In this respect, the *Assisted Dying for the Terminally Ill Bill,* submitted by Lord Joffe to the British House of Lords in 2004 (and rejected by the House), could serve as an example for a future revision of the Dutch law. Amongst other things the Bill included a requirement for a discussion with patients seeking euthanasia about the option of palliative care.[12] Secondly, despite the signals sent by a seemingly permissive euthanasia law and by the advance directives issued by some right to die societies, euthanasia is neither a patient's right nor normal medical practice. When a doctor takes her time before making a decision whether

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[11] This membership is a complex issue. Although the Dutch law does not require an advance directive, ninety-nine out of a hundred patients do provide such a document. The most common document, however, can only be downloaded by members of the largest Right to Die Society in the Netherlands.

[12] House of Lords Select Committee on the Assisted Dying for the Terminally Ill Bill, *Assisted Dying for the Terminally Ill Bill,* 3 vols, London 2005.

or not to grant a request, some patients and their relatives feel bitterly disappointed. This may explain part of the emotional pressure put on physicians.

Loss of autonomy as a reason in itself

For about 60% of the patients the irreversible loss of autonomy *itself*, which is typical of many situations of terminal cancer, is a reason underlying a euthanasia request: being bound to home, having become entirely care-dependent or bed-ridden, not being able to go to the bathroom or to plump up one's own pillow. "Being totally dependent of others does not match the person he used to be," a physician writes, "He was co-director of a big company for years and was used to having things go his way. Every request for help was an agony for him." Obviously dependence upon others for one's daily needs for many patients is irreconcilable with their idea of flourishing. "I am no longer a full human being," one patient explains, "my friends only visit me out of pity." "An object of care," another patient complains, "is all that is left of me." Often the contrast between flourishing in days long gone and the present situation constitutes an important part of the suffering: a sportswoman who is bed-ridden, a company director who has become care-dependent, a motorcyclist who feels stuck between the four walls of his room, a once very talkative man who can no longer speak as a consequence of laryngeal cancer, a policeman who always sought to assist others who now has to beg for help, a woman with a passion for hiking now bound to a wheelchair.

Dependence in the case of terminal cancer does not come alone, of course. For some it may rather be the combination with other elements of physical suffering – pain, anxiety, nausea – that makes being dependent intolerable. Being dependent also symbolizes the irreversible process of bereavement and dying that lies ahead. Moreover, dependence implies a lack of control that was a natural part of one's previous life and that became constitutive for one's career, relationships, even the kind of person one has become. It leads to alienation from the person one previously was. Relatively frequently – in about one out of fifty cases – patients refer to a medical or nursing career. "She has been a nurse all her life," writes a physician, "but having others take care of *her* is the last thing she would accept." "An important part of her self-esteem has always consisted in taking care of others. Now that she can no longer care her life lacks meaning." Some of these patients may not find dependence in itself intolerable; their rejection of dependence rather stems from a personal incapacity to make the switch from one role into another. But for others the aversion may be part of a broader worldview in light of which not only one's own dependence and not only dependence in the limited context of a terminal disease is rejected, but rather dependence *in se*. Such a general rejection may be present when, e.g., admittance to a

nursing home in itself is said to equal unbearable suffering. A sturdy rejection of dependence may emanate into contempt of all relations of dependence, a contempt that in turn raises theological and philosophical questions. Protestantism may have become known for its individualizing effects. Still, Christian faith is all about learning to conceive oneself as part of a network of interdependence with other humans and with the world. The relationship between humans and God is even one of complete dependence. If the mere fact of dependence, rather than the physical and psychological inconveniences coming with it, constitutes the suffering, there is reason for theological criticism of the anthropology underlying such euthanasia requests.

2. Suffering

In a way it can be said that to patients with a euthanasia request, life is withering rather than flourishing. The remaining opportunities for flourishing are considered minor compared to the all-prevailing and ever present suffering. People describe their situation primarily, if not exclusively, in terms of suffering. In the great majority of cases the physical discomfort leading to a euthanasia request consists of pain, nausea, dyspnea, loss of autonomy, dependence on the care of others, cachexia (extreme loss of weight), extreme fatigue and a loss of bodily functions.[13] Some reports are especially compelling. "Her sister vividly explains her predicament. There is nothing left she can do; she can't even wipe away the tears from her own eyes." A doctor writes about a patient with metastases in the bones. "Last week he broke two ribs when he was assisted in going to the bathroom. The next day he sneezed and broke another rib. Now he won't let anyone touch him, not even his own wife." A special category of patients is those suffering from cancer in the face and mouth. The cancer and surgical procedures to remove or halt it can have a severely disfiguring effect on the patient's face. To many a committee member the sheer announcement on the front page of a euthanasia report of the presence of facial cancer suffices to finish off a case as correct. Heartbreaking is the report of a woman with facial cancer who has small children. "She wants euthanasia before her children start avoiding her and no longer show affection to her." For this woman the help she wants comes too late. A week before the euthanasia her six-year-old daughter stops exchanging signs of affection and avoids visiting her own mom.

Given the severity of the suffering many patients expect euthanasia to be a good death. A doctor writes that he has never seen his patient in such a mood of relief. A man describes

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[13] A sample of 134 reports from the total 1,200 reports shows the following figures. Pain is mentioned in 43% of the cases, nausea in 41%, dependence on others for daily care in 48%, a loss of autonomy in a wider sense in 18%, dyspnoea in 29%, extreme fatigue in 22%, anxiety in 22% of the cases, a loss of body functions (incontinence, a loss of speech) in 11%, and meaninglessness (including loneliness) in 11% of the cases.

the appointed day of euthanasia as a "day of celebration". "When I tell her that I will fulfil her request," another doctor writes, "she becomes very emotional: a mix of laughing and crying, she claps her hands and starts hyperventilating from emotions." "When I tell her that the criteria have been met," a consulting doctor writes, "she insists on hugging me." Given these emotions it is hardly astonishing that some patients ascribe their doctor priestly qualities.

In a considerable number of cases – it is hard to give any numbers here – the real suffering lies beneath the physical discomfort. As a lady of 92 describes: "I've wanted to die for years. Why must I have a serious disease before I may ask to be euthanized?" Her primary problem is not her health, but problems connected with her age. "The pain and the nausea are under control," a doctor writes, "but the real problem is that we haven't succeeded in finding a meaningful activity during his last weeks. He bluntly refuses every suggestion we make." "She rejected home care. She doesn't tolerate the hands of strangers to her body." "Patient has a tan and gives a vital impression. What really causes her suffering is that she can no longer make any essential contribution to the lives of others." "It's like floating in space," another patient describes his suffering, "there is no goal, no fixed points, just uncertainty and lack of meaning." "I am bored all day," a 70-year-old man complains, "The only thing I notice are cars parking in and out." "Lying in bed and staring at the ceiling all day makes no sense," a patient tells a consulting physician. About another patient a physician remarks emphatically: "All this respectable and once active lady can do is sit at the window and chase away the crows with her cane."

Not only does the degree of suffering vary from patient to patient, but also his or her tolerance level. One doctor is confused about these differences. "How can the suffering of this patient be unbearable? Another patient, who suffers more than she does, has not asked for euthanasia!" A physician describes how his patient can handle more than he had expected: "Earlier on this man had believed that once he would be unable to read, life would become meaningless. Quite unexpectedly, however, his stamina kept pace with his suffering."

In about 10% of the reports patients with a euthanasia request still enjoy some things in life: smoking a cigar, playing cards, watching television, having the grandchildren over, doing a crossword puzzle. "His wife and he enjoy every day that is left and try to make every day into a little party," one doctor writes. In some cases, reference is made to positive side effects of the terminal illness or of the waiting: "Patient wanted to have euthanasia months ago, but is happy to have waited some time. This difficult period has brought the family closer together." "Over the years she has learned to accept her increasing dependence. Some of her friends wash and bathe her and she is comfortable with it." One doctor writes: "Patient was a member of the Right to Die Society from its very beginning. Three months

ago she insisted on having euthanasia. In hindsight she is happy I didn't satisfy her request. She has had many meaningful experiences since." "Patient was a construction worker for most of his life. During the two years of his sickness he finally learned to talk. He and his wife and kids have become a lot closer since." Amidst a process of physical withering the terminal phase thus provides opportunities for flourishing as well. Theologically, Paul's words come to mind: "but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day" (II Cor. 4:16, *KJV*). It is of course questionable whether a text like this can serve in a moral argument against euthanasia. But within a framework of spiritual terminal care, this text, alongside with other texts about God's presence in suffering, may well help patients to make their own decisions whether or not to make a euthanasia request.

In some cases a patient's euthanasia wish is hard to feel sympathy for. "The patient vividly tells me about the 'surplus value' of euthanasia. He had a fantastic life and the way he dies should not spoil this." "Patient is known to be a true *bon vivant*. Being bed-ridden is not compatible with his conception of a good life." "I would prefer euthanasia as soon as possible," an elderly man says, "my grandson will start a bachelor programme in physiotherapy next week and his father intends to walk the New York marathon on Saturday".[14] Remarks like these sometimes lead to doubts within a Review Committee whether the suffering can be classified as unbearable. In practice, however, I do not know of any single case being sent to the Board of Procurators General by any of the five committees in the period 2005-2009 merely on the basis of the argument that the suffering was unbearable. After all, even the more "dubitable" cases take place within a context of a terminal disease. More importantly, a committee lacks the instruments to check the severity of a patient's suffering. It is hard, if not impossible, to rule against the testimonies of at least two physicians plus one or more advance directives of a patient.

3. Past experiences and concern for relatives

The well-being of a patient is often closely interconnected with that of others. More specifically, two kinds of connections can be identified: *previous* experiences with the deaths of others and concern for the suffering of the *present* bystanders.

We start with the former. In an estimated 15% of the cases a euthanasia request is in part motivated by previous traumatic experiences from the dying of parents, siblings, partners,

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[14] For more on issues of "timing", cf. Theo A. Boer, "Is euthanasie een maakbare dood? Een bijdrage vanuit het perspectief van de meldingsprocedure", in *Neder-lands Theologisch Tijdschrift*, 63, 2009, pp. 154-163.

or, if the patient was a health care worker, experiences with former patients.[15] "I've seen these kinds of deathbeds in the hospital I worked in," a patient motivates her request. "Patient has seen his father die in agony and pain," "Patient has witnessed the absolutely horrifying deathbed of his father and is determined to avoid a situation like that," "The image of his own father dying in agony has haunted him ever since," "Patient had witnessed her mother die and had therapy for years in order to come to terms with what she saw," "I still remember my father before he died. He was a wreck. The image of my real father got clouded" – all these remarks are only some of the many references to agonizing deathbeds witnessed in the past. Although the majority of those connections cannot fail to impress the reviewer, sometimes such connections are less plausible. A patient with two weeks left at the most desires euthanasia because his uncle was kept in an artificial coma for 20 years; a patient requests euthanasia because he has witnessed his father's murder in Bosnia; or the death of a loved one to which a patient refers took place decades ago, when palliative care was not developed as fully as it is nowadays. The impression from the reports is that doctors do not always correct such mistaken associations.

Secondly, there is a connection between a euthanasia request and the well-being and preferences of a patient's relatives. First, in a relatively low percentage of cases, the concern for one's relatives tends to keep a patient from requesting euthanasia. Family members dislike the idea of a prompt and unnatural death or insist that they can go on caring for a while longer. "Her son knew about her view on euthanasia, but now that she has picked out a date, he gets very emotional." "Her 24-year-old son bursts into tears. He and his father are not ready for this yet. But at the end of our conversation they give in. 'We have no right to keep mama from having what she wants'." A man suffering from Alzheimer's postpones his euthanasia request for almost a year "due to the enormous grief this causes for his children." Another physician writes: "She wants the euthanasia for herself. Her husband protests: 'Think about the grandchildren. They love to pay you a visit.' But she can no longer summon the courage to go on." In some cases a pastor assists a patient to reach the decision to have euthanasia despite protests of the family. In some cases the euthanasia is kept a secret from relatives and a death is presented as a natural death.

More frequently than being reluctant, relatives welcome the possibility of euthanasia. (Of course, the committees do not see cases of patients in which euthanasia was *not* given due to protests from relatives or friends.) In an estimated 5% to 10% of the reported cases concern for the well-being of relatives is explicitly mentioned as one of the reasons for a

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[15] Occasionally a patient's wish for euthanasia is based less on earlier traumatic experiences than on downright positive experiences from an earlier euthanasia: "Patient has witnessed the euthanasia of one of her neighbours and finds it a beautiful way to die when suffering gets the upper hand."

euthanasia request. Given the general presumptions against the influence of family members on the process, which will tend to make physicians hesitant to make any reference to family pressure, this percentage may in reality be higher. One advance directive reads: "I want to protect myself and my family from more suffering." A doctor writes about a teacher and mother of three grown-up children: "Part of her suffering was caused by the fact that her children saw her go downhill." A consulting doctor writes: "The last five minutes of our conversation, when his wife has left the room, the patient confides to me that his wife can no longer handle the situation and that this indeed is one of the reasons for his request." "Both her husband and her children have seen enough suffering now," a doctor writes. Sometimes the family pressure is less subtle than that: "Put this situation to an end, doctor," a 73-year-old husband exclaims, "the cancer is destroying the whole family."

When a report contains remarks such as these, we might want to ask additional questions with regard to the voluntariness of the request. The Dutch are well aware that concern for the feelings of the relatives never constitutes a reason in itself to terminate the life of a patient. One exceptional case in which the relatives forced an inexperienced doctor to perform euthanasia on their mother who had been sedated – "Mother is suffering!" – was classified as "negligent" by the committee. But despite this resolve not to let the feelings of bystanders rule a case, health care workers and pastors need to realize that having to see one's beloved suffer without being able to intervene may constitute a form of true and severe suffering in its own right. Traumas collected at the deathbed of a beloved may cause anxiety, stress and insomnia for weeks, months or years to come. In turn such experiences may predispose people to make a euthanasia request when they themselves are diagnosed with cancer. Palliative care should imply concern for the patient *and* his relatives.

4. Religion

The medical and legal character of the review procedure explains why references to religious views are found in only 5% of the reports. In most of these references religion features as a support for a decision to resort to euthanasia or as a comfort that death may not be the end. This positive role of religion is hardly surprising. In the 1980s renowned Dutch theologians such as Heleen Dupuis and Harry Kuitert, as well as the synods of the two largest Reformed denominations at the time, presented theological arguments in favour of euthanasia.[16] Besides, those with a religious presumption *against* euthanasia are not likely to make a request. In about 1% of the cases a pastor is present at the moment of the actual

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[16] These synods later withdrew their support. Cf. *Samen op Weg-kerken pleiten voor nadere bezinning euthanasiewetgeving,* Utrecht 1999.

euthanasia, saying a prayer, performing a liturgy, lending emotional and pastoral support. "I have spoken to the pastor," one patient says, "and she says that the gift of life may be returned to God when it becomes too hard." "The impression she got from her pastor is that there are no religious objections to her decision." "He prays the Lord every day that he may go to heaven soon, if necessary through euthanasia."

Still, many a patient has ridden a roller coaster of emotions and second thoughts. Given the traditional religious objections against euthanasia, it is hardly astonishing to see patients and physicians engage in a complex dialogue with this rejection. "Patient is convinced that the good Lord will forgive her this decision," a doctor writes about an elderly lady. "Her strictly Reformed pastor, just as one would expect from a strictly Reformed pastor, was not delighted to hear about her euthanasia plans. Yet she is determined that she can square this both for herself and for God." "Patient is religious but does not see euthanasia as something offensive to her God."

Some of those involved have quite unexpectedly changed their minds. "As an observant Catholic," one doctor writes, "I have always been against euthanasia. However, the predicament of this patient forces me to make one exception to the rule." "Patient has been a nurse for many years," a physician writes, "during which she was firmly opposed to euthanasia on religious grounds. Being in her present state of pain, however, she is amazed how easily she has adopted a more liberal attitude towards euthanasia." "Patient is a conservative Christian with a strong aversion against euthanasia. But now that he is suffering from cancer, everything is different." "This observant Jehovah's Witness who has recently rejected a blood transfusion quite surprisingly has no hesitations to request euthanasia."

Rather frequently doctors seem to assume that the only objections against euthanasia are religiously motivated. "These are bright people, not impeded by their religion," a physician remarks, leaving in the middle the exact relationship between brightness and religiousness! "The patient is no longer religiously involved," a colleague writes, "so nothing or nobody will keep him from having euthanasia."

Religious objections are also known from other worldviews. There is a patient with a deep aversion of regular medicine; even at the most burdensome stage of her illness she takes only half a tablet of Tylenol (paracetamol) a day. Her husband is confused about her euthanasia request: "How does this go together with our holistic spirituality?" he asks.

Sometimes the decision to have euthanasia itself has religious dimensions. A woman refuses all kind of palliative care: "It belongs to the aesthetic of her being," her physician writes, "she is part of the cosmos, to have euthanasia when the time has come." "Patient no longer finds comfort in his faith. Instead, it is the decision to have euthanasia that gives him peace of mind." "One would not expect this from a former crane operator," a doctor writes with some

amazement, "but he has an almost Buddhist view on life and death. For eight years now, he has considered to end his life."

In as many as 10% of the cases allusions are made to the expectations of patients or their relatives about what comes after death. Many patients expect a kind of shared flourishing together with loved ones who have deceased. A patient writes in her advance directive: "What do I have? What is there left to do? I want to go to the Good Lord, to Henk, Ellen and Gerda." "Patient is no longer religious, but still expects to meet her daughter and her husband." "Those at the other side, who have guided her through this life, will meet with her after her death." "Patient has no ties to any church; still he believes that he will be reunited with his aunt, with whom he had a special relationship." "Patient has a strong faith. Life is a big feast and when it ends, he may come back as a baby." In one case a physician himself takes the role of comforter. "What will come now," he says minutes before administering the lethal injection, "we don't know, but I'm sure you will experience a lot of good."[17]

The trained theological eye finds many hints that a patient might have been better off receiving more spiritual or psychological coaching. One physician writes about the last weeks of a talented physics professor. The physician observes that the relationship between him and his children may need some healing. But the professor refuses: "I had a beautiful life. This is it." Another physician writes about a lady in despair because she has not seen her son for eight years. The physician makes no attempt to bring up the option of reconciliation. A physician describes a patient in agony: "Patient is crying and hyperventilating the whole time." From the report it does not become clear whether the anxiety may be related to her death, or perhaps even to the euthanasia itself. The woman dies from euthanasia in a mood of anxiety. "She is a firm believer," another doctor writes, "but not knowing what comes after death makes her frightened," and a colleague: "Although he cannot go on living like this and wants to die, he is fearful of what comes after." Again no spiritual help was given. "Patient is very afraid of dying," an oncologist writes when referring an elderly lady back to her home doctor, "I recommend you to bring up the possibility of euthanasia in due course." Upon reading these and other records one gets drawn into the tragic of existential anxieties and unsettled family conflicts. Shouldn't palliative care not only have to consist of fighting the physical discomfort, but also of arranging spiritual or psychological care?

5. Euthanasia and quality of care

About one out of ten reports contains a reference to the quality of care. In a good deal of these cases there is gratitude on the side of the patient and his relatives for the efforts made

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[17] The wordings of this case were also taken from the television documentary Rob Hof 2003.

by the caregivers. One advance directive adds to the euthanasia request: "P.S. I would like to thank the doctor and all the other professionals for the excellent care they provided." "Patient feels at home and comfortable in this nursing home," a doctor writes, "but even the most excellent care cannot take away the suffering." "Patient was enthusiastic about the quality of hospice care," another doctor writes, "but still wants euthanasia."

But there are also reports of insufficient care and they are more than exceptions. A first category of patients consists of those who refuse to accept care. "Palliative care could be better," a doctor writes, "but the patient rejects the alternatives. Euthanasia is all she wants." "This proud lady rejects being admitted to a nursing home. For her this equals unbearable suffering." "Tinkering with embroideries in some room, singing songs to keep up our spirits, I don't want all that," another lady is quoted; and an elderly man: "My bare bottom washed by a young girl, never!" "Patient finds the idea of someone else taking care of her horrifying." "On my question what makes her suffering unbearable," a physician writes, "she replies that it is the having to ask others for help. 'Asking, asking, asking, I can't and I won't!'" Some people live in total social isolation. They lack knowledge on how to get access to care and are too tired or disillusioned to change that. "Patient is lonely, so lonely," a consulting doctor observes almost dryly. A doctor writes about a fifty-year-old man who is handicapped after a motorcycle accident: "He deserves better care than he gets, but refuses. Getting washed and dressed takes hours. The severity of his suffering is related to a total lack of a social network." Some doctors describe patients who refuse better care as "antisocial" but nevertheless – albeit hesitantly – grant the patient's request.

Sometimes part of the suffering seems to have been caused by too *much* treatment. The slightest perspective of healing is seized with both hands, but when all treatment has turned out to be futile, some patients are regretful. A doctor writes: "All in all, patient received chemotherapy three times. There was no effect whatsoever, except that it ruined what was left of his well-being." Other reports contain no explicit allusions to the burdens of too much treatment, but some of the underlying medical records impress the reader by an excess of invasive treatment. "I wonder whether all that treatment had much effect," a patient confides to his doctor, "but I have to blame myself. I consented." The question thus arises whether some of the suffering may have been aggravated by medical treatment. If that was the case, would it not have been better to resort to palliative care? But then, of course, others have survived cancer exactly thanks to invasive treatment.

A disturbing observation is that some patients might not have requested euthanasia if they had received adequate palliative care. We already pointed to the poor level of spiritual care. Some physicians even contribute in their own manner to the patient's anxiety instead of providing reassurance. "His oncologist had told him that the rest of his life would be nothing

but pain, pain, pain," a doctor writes. A colleague writes: "His pneumonologist sent him home with the warning that there is a real chance of suffocation." "Patient lives at home and a home health nurse visits him twice a day. Since he is incontinent, he sometimes lies in his own faeces for a long time." "Patient hardly gets any help," another doctor writes, "and when he does, it is always someone different. In two weeks he has seen 20 new faces." One doctor describes his dilemma with a patient without a terminal sickness, but who has become addicted to the prescription painkillers of her late husband. Through a vicious circle she develops a kidney and a liver insufficiency. Her physician writes: "I tried to talk her into a detoxification program, but she quit with no success. In addition, she has a lot of social issues. She lost contact with her two sons and her only daughter visits her once a week and brings her some groceries." In this case there seemed to be one ray of hope: "Patient submitted an application to a nursing home two years ago and was looking forward to move there. Unfortunately her application got lost and she will have to wait for another couple of years. This is unacceptable to her." Instead of commanding access to a nursing home, this doctor then consents to performing euthanasia three weeks later. Another patient's suffering is described in terms of his inability to get out of his apartment: "Since there is no elevator this patient is home-bound all day long." One patient complains: "If I don't use my cane, I would fall and there is nobody to help. The fact that I live here alone is irresponsible." In this case, as presumably in some of the other cases, the apparent absence of any attempt to find proper care may have been motivated by the short life expectancy of the patient.

However, would the care in a hospital, nursing home, or hospice be that much better? The bad reputation of nursing homes, which is one of the reasons for qualifying a future transfer into such an institution as unbearable, at least in part goes back to real problems: shortage of staff, insufficient hygiene, lack of privacy, a socially untrained staff. A physician can hardly suppress his own evaluation of life in a nursing home: "I can sympathize with her request," a physician writes, "she is totally care-dependent and gets little personal attention." One patient in a hospital indicates that one of the motives for his euthanasia request is the fact that he never sleeps through the night. "Staying in a four-bed room, I am constantly being woken up by noises." "The institution he is in has a serious shortage of staff. Apart from the pain and the distress, he tells me he has lain in his own excrement a couple of times now and he does not want that to happen again." "The severe suffering of this man is intensified by the impersonal setting of his care institution."

There is a disturbing case concerning a patient who underwent her last, futile, cancer treatment in the hospital. The consulting doctor writes: "Patient never thought about giving up because she found her life worth living, despite everything. But that changed during her last hospitalization. For the duration of her six-day stay she received not half of the help she

needed. One afternoon she was stripped to the waist so she asked a nurse to help her arrange her pyjamas. The nurse refused. On the afternoon of her departure there was no one to help her. There was no wheelchair and she and her husband had to arrange their own taxi. At that moment something snapped. These six days were so dehumanizing that she blew a fuse. Her husband affirms this. 'On top of her physical condition,' he affirms, 'his wife's suffering was caused by the humiliation she underwent in the hospital'." This case report, and similar reports of cases in which part of the suffering was connected to bad care, was approved by the review committee. After all, the patient *did* suffer unbearably. Review committees are supposed to work within the framework of an overstrained health care system, not to criticize it.

A lack of adequate palliative care can in other cases be read between the lines. Whether this applies to 12%, 5%, or only 2% of the cases is an empirical question that belongs elsewhere. But the fact that poor quality of care sometimes adds to a patient's suffering is beyond doubt. Demographic developments in Western countries hardly provide much hope that the pressure on the already overstrained health care systems will decrease. The reports of these patients are heartbreaking and justify a public and political discussion that goes beyond traditional "pro" and "contra" euthanasia positions. In the highly polarized 1990s any allusion to bad quality of care as a reason for euthanasia was dismissed as anti-propaganda. Those times are over. Irrespective of where one stands in the euthanasia debate, each case in which the decision to terminate one's own life is based, wholly or in part, on poorly provided care, is one case too many. The availability and accessibility of premium palliative care, physical and spiritual, is in everyone's interest. A German evening prayer comes to mind: "Grant us, omnipotent and powerful God, a good night and a holy death." Given the conditions under which some people die in one of the most affluent societies of the world, this prayer has lost nothing of its relevance.

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"We learned it at our mothers' knees" Perspectives of churchgoing volunteers on their voluntary service

Hendrik Pieter de Roest and Herman Noordegraaf

Abstract: In this article the authors deal with the relationship between volunteering, faith communities and social capital in the Dutch context. If there is a positive relationship, then it can be stated that faith communities contribute to the human flourishing of society because voluntary work is important for the functioning of society.

First some theoretical reflections on this relationship and some findings of research done in the Netherlands are given. It becomes evident that churchgoing is an important "predictor" of voluntary service. In the second part the findings are given of a small exploratory inquiry that was carried out in two congregations. There was used a qualitative research method with two focus groups in two distinct congregations, one with a liberal Reformed, the other with a -conservative Reformed orientation. The main research question was: How do churchgoers who are active in voluntary service outside the church see the relationship – if they think there is one – between their churchgoing and their voluntary work? It was possible through this research to get a more precise view on the relationship and variables that are of relevance.

In this contribution we shall explore the relationship between the phenomena of volunteering, faith communities and social capital in the Dutch context. There is a strong connection between voluntary work and social capital, because it raises the quality of relations in society. With this it strengthens human welfare and in this way it contributes to human flourishing.

We start by sharing some theoretical reflections on the tri-dimensional linkage between religiosity, volunteering and social capital and give some findings from research done in this field in the Netherlands. It will be shown that churchgoing is an important "predictor" of voluntary service. In the second part we will share the findings of a small exploratory inquiry we carried out in two congregations. The project focused on how churchgoers interpret the relationship between their churchgoing and their voluntary service outside the church.

We explored one main research question: How do churchgoers who are active in voluntary service outside the church see the relationship – if they think there is one – between their churchgoing and their voluntary work?

The immediate goal of the research was to elicit the understanding of the participants about the relationship between churchgoing and voluntary service. A further aim was to

involve "experts from inside" in reflection on topics for future research. We hoped to improve our conceptualization by using a life-world approach, starting with the perspectives of the participants.[1] We hoped to attain a more complex and nuanced picture as a basis for exploring new possibilities for future research on the intricate relationship between the phenomenon of churchgoing and voluntary service and, at a later date, on the triangle between voluntary service, religiosity and social capital.[2]

We used a qualitative research method and conducted two focus groups in two distinct congregations: one with a liberal Reformed, the other with a -conservative Reformed orientation. Identifying these homogeneous but contrasting groups[3] was the first stage in our inquiry. We expected this selection to make it easier in the second stage to identify the common vocabulary shared by members of each group of stakeholders. We also expected the findings to assist us in identifying response categories and constructs we might not otherwise have considered.[4] The findings that we present should be taken for what they are – personal narratives – and not as comprehensive explanations.[5] The choice of this method was informed by the methodological claim that focus groups are one of the richest sources of knowledge about people's understanding of themselves and the life around them. They are often seen as best for giving insights of an exploratory or preliminary kind.[6]

The Dutch cultural context

We confine ourselves to two observations. First, in the Netherlands, the days of close bonds between the individual and one single institution, i.e. one church, one company, one association and even one marriage, are gone. Mobility and selectivity have widened the horizons. Lasting participation in one group, movement or institution no longer goes without saying. Long-term membership calls for an explanation. Research in the Netherlands demonstrates that a shift is taking place. "Secondary or face-to-face associations", with frequent member contact are shrinking, while "tertiary organizations" in which members

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[1] Hendrik Pieter de Roest, *Communicative Identity: Habermas' Perspectives of Discourse as a Support for Practical Theology*, Kampen 1998, pp. 248f.

[2] Anne Birgitta Yeung, "An Intricate Triangle: Religiosity, Volunteering, and Social Capital: The European Perspective, the Case of Finland", in *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 33, 2004, pp. 401-422.

[3] John Knodel, "The design and analysis of focus group studies: a practical approach", in David Morgan (ed.), *Successful Focus Groups*, Newbury Park 1993, p. 40.

[4] Sharon Vaughn et al., *Focus Group Interviews in Education and Psychology*, Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi 1996, p. 27.

[5] Jerry Wellington and Marcin Szczerbinski, *Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, London 2007, p. 91.

[6] Richard A. Krueger, *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*, Newbury Park 1994; Vaughn et.al., *Focus Group Interviews in Education and Psychology*, pp. 6, 24; Wellington and Szczerbinski, *Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, pp. 88f.

only share common interests or ideals are growing. In addition, membership is concentrated among people who are already engaged as members, and a growing number of people participate incidentally. The way one "connects" with an organization is changing. A "multiple-choice" society has emerged in which individual freedom of choice has acquired more and more significance in the structuring of people's daily lives.[7] The falling away of constraints imposes a bigger responsibility on the individual. Increased freedom of choice leads to greater risk of self-doubt and "burnout". Having more choices translates into doing more. The Netherlands has become a demanding society. *We may expect to find traces of this in our inquiry.*

Second, in the Netherlands as in many countries, there has been increasing attention in recent years to the meaning of religion for society, after a period in which religion was seen as a purely private matter that should be kept out of the public domain. There exists a negative evaluation of this role in the public domain, which has to do with views on Islam, especially after 9/11. However, there is also a positive evaluation. There is rising awareness that religious institutions can contribute to the solving of persistent social problems such as the lack of social cohesion. Furthermore, churches are involved in a lot of activities aiming to assist people in need. A new view of the role of government has emerged too: a belief that it should interact more with civil society organizations, that is to say the domain between government, the market and primary groups. Churches themselves are organizations that are part of this civil society, the intermediate layer or communication structure of public arenas between private households on the one hand and market and government on the other.[8]

Social capital, religiosity and volunteering

Numerous scholars have researched and published on the subject of social capital. The history of the concept goes back to the end of the 1970s, when 20 articles listed social capital as a key word. The number grew to 1,003 in 1999. Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam were important contributors to defining the concept.[9]

Healy defines social capital by emphasizing the role of networks and civic norms.[10] Other definitions talk in terms of social bonds, community networks and social resources, but it is

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[7] Koen Breedveld and Andries van den Broek, *De meerkeuzenmaatschappij,* Den Haag 2003.
[8] Jean-Louis Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory,* Cambridge 1992; Jürgen Habermas, *Faktizität und Geltung. Beiträge zur Diskurstheorie des Rechts und des demokratischen Rechtsstaats,* Frankfurt a.M. 1992; Robert Fine and Shirin Rai (eds.), *Civil Society: Democratic Perspectives,* London 1997.
[9] John Field, *Social Capital,* London/New York 2003, ch. 1.
[10] Tom Healy et al. (eds.), *The Role of Human and Social Capital,* Paris 2001.

hard to encapsulate the concept in a single sentence. One of the most prominent authors in the field is Robert Putnam, whose publications include *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Essentially, the theory underpinning this work can be stated in two words: "Relationships matter."[11] Social capital "refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them".[12] He asserts that the more networks between people are characterized by trust, shared norms, flows of information and reciprocity, the more social capital there is.[13]

For our project this implies, first, that our open coding should be sensitive to the importance of networks, both for recruitment and socialization; second, that we may find shared values and norms.

Putnam makes a distinction between two types of social capital:

- bonding social capital, which tends to reinforce exclusive identities and maintain homogeneity;
- bridging social capital, which tends to bring together people across diverse social divisions.

He makes it clear that not every type of social capital promotes social cohesion: bonding capital can even strengthen cleavages between groups within society. Some forms of social capital are inward looking and tend to reinforce exclusive "us" identities.

In our project we focus on linkages that create bridging capital. In our coding we will have to pay attention to words like "others", "these people" and other dualities for descriptions of social divisions and categories of people. Codes like heterogeneity or alterity could possibly be used.

In social capital theory, a third type of social capital, linking social capital, has been distinguished as well.[14] This is about "reaching out to "unlike people" in dissimilar situations, such as those who are entirely outside the community". Church activities for the homeless and addicts are named as examples of this type of social capital. *We may find examples of linking social capital in our focus groups. This may lead to a future differentiation in the research population, i.e. specific focus groups of churchgoers who are active volunteers in activities for "unlike people". This point was not yet taken up in this research.*

Of particular interest for us are Putnam's findings on religion. He argues on the grounds of research data that "religious people are unusually active social capitalists".[15] At this point in

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[11] Field, *Social Capital,* p. 1.
[12] Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community,* New York 2000, p. 19.
[13] *Ibid.,* pp. 18-21.
[14] Field, *Social Capital,* p. 42.
[15] Putnam, *Bowling Alone,* p. 67.

Putnam's work we observe special emphases on both volunteering and philanthropy. Involvement in religion, he writes, is a strong predictor of voluntary work and philanthropy, both inside and outside the church. Fifty to sixty percent of church members are volunteers, compared to thirty to thirty-five percent of non-members; about seventy to eighty percent of church members give to good causes, compared to fifty-five to sixty percent of non-members. There are indirect effects as well, because churches promote "civic skills" (organizing, public speaking and the like) that are also relevant in other domains than the church. Other examples of indirect effects are the encouragement of altruism and the transmission of moral values.

We wondered if we would find formulations of religious beliefs, religious values and norms in our inquiry.

Putnam's theory of social capital was further refined in studies by the William Temple Foundation in Manchester, which profiled the role of churches and religion. A distinction was made between religious and spiritual capital:

- religious capital is the *practical* contribution to local and national life made by faith groups;

- spiritual capital energizes religious capital by providing a theological identity and worshipping tradition, but also a *value system, moral vision* and *a basis for faith.* Spiritual capital is often embedded locally within faith groups, but is also expressed in the lives of individuals.[16]

In our open coding, again, value systems, moral visions and faith will be possible sensitizing concepts, demonstrating spiritual capital.

The Church of England made use of the concepts of spiritual capital and religious capital in its report *Faithful Cities: A call for celebration, vision and justice* (2006),[17] which deals with the involvement of churches in urban life, especially in the poor neighbourhoods of the cities. It makes clear that churches can make a particular contribution to urban life, with their practices and their views on life and language: recognition and acceptance of people, judgement and forgiveness, remembrance and hospitality, patience and persistence, lasting presence (even in the absence of apparent solutions), community building, bridge building, and so on.

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[16] Chris Baker and Hannah Skinner, *Faith in action. The dynamic connection between spiritual and religious capital,* Manchester 2006; Chris Baker, "The Dynamic Connection Between Spiritual and Religious Capital", in *Faith-based Organisations and Poverty in the City,* Antwerpen 2008, pp. 61-70.
[17] *Faithful Cities: A call for celebration, vision and justice,* Report of the Commission on Urban Life and Faith, London 2006.

For our inquiry in the future this leads to such research questions as:

- *Do churchgoing volunteers articulate worldviews when they reflect on the relationship between their churchgoing and their voluntary service?*

- *Do churchgoing volunteers use faith language, secular language, or a mixture in their perspective upon the relationship between their churchgoing and their voluntary service?*

With regard to religiosity and volunteering, many studies in the USA and UK have indicated a relationship.[18] This research has generally examined either a general population or the members of faith communities, rather than focusing on those who volunteer, let alone specifically on regular churchgoers who volunteer in non-church contexts. The work of Gill, based on several major British surveys, is important for our project.[19] Gill identifies the significance of churchgoing for beliefs, values and participation in voluntary activities of communities. He finds that "a surprisingly high proportion of voluntary workers do go to church and churchgoers are far more likely than other people to become voluntary workers". Gill also refers to US surveys suggesting that non-literalist non-fundamentalists are more likely to be active in voluntary service, while the more fundamentalist branches of Christianity give priority to internal matters. "A greater proportion of their organizational activities catered to their own members... maintaining the social fabric of the church". Gill also illustrates the formative influence of regular corporate worship on caring attitudes and practices. He looks at hymn singing and asserts that it may not be surprising, that "regular churchgoers who sing hymns together are likely to assimilate these distinctive features". All church practices contribute to "a specifically religious justifying reason to act morally". Lam[20] demonstrated that several factors, including religious participation and frequency of prayer, have a positive effect on volunteering.

In our coding, we attend first to specific religious justifications, second to the formative influence of churchgoing, and third to references to elements of worship.

Hodgkinson[21] asserts that churches inspire a desire to help that moves people beyond the church setting. She maintains that "religious institutions foster philanthropy and voluntarism,

[18] Susan Maizel Chambré, *Good deeds in old age: Volunteering by the new leisure class*, Lexington MA 1987; Frank M. Bernt, "Being religious and being altruistic: A study of college service volunteers", in *Personality and Individual Differences*, Vol. 10/6, 1989, pp. 663-669; Virginia Ann Hodgkinson et al., "From commitment to action: How religious involvement affects giving and volunteering", in Robert Wuthnow et al. (eds.), *Faith and philanthropy in America: Exploring the role of religion in America's voluntary sector*, San Francisco 1990, pp. 93-114; Pui-Yan Lam, "As the flocks gather: How religion affects voluntary association participation", in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 41/3, 2002, pp. 405-422.
[19] Robin Gill, *Churchgoing and Christian Ethics*, Cambridge 1999; John Atherton, *Marginalization*, London 2003.
[20] Lam, "As the flocks gather".
[21] Hodgkinson et al., "From commitment to action", pp. 93-114.

both within their own communities and generally for other causes, including community and public service". *In our open coding we were sensitive to words like "helping", "caring", "giving", etc.*

In contrast, Wuthnow's[22] analysis of the independent sector's 1994 giving and volunteering survey found that volunteering among evangelical Christians, concentrates *within* these congregations and is devoted to their maintenance. Uslaner[23] indicates that Americans with the most conservative religious values are far less likely than people with the most liberal views to engage in exclusively secular volunteer settings. They confine their volunteering primarily to their congregation or to church-based causes. Becker and Dhingra[24] also concluded that churchgoing predicts volunteering. They indicated that those churchgoers who consider congregation members as among their friends are more likely to volunteer. *This confirms the importance of "recruitment" as an open code.*

In the Netherlands, two types of empirical research have been done that indicate that churches are significant actors in the field of volunteering work.

The first type of research has used the social return on investment method, which was first developed and used in the United States. In this research, an attempt is made to calculate in financial terms the output of church-based activities, and the numbers of people involved in them. By means of interviews and questionnaires, an inventory is drawn up of church-based activities of kinds that are – or could be – offered by welfare, government, cultural or educational institutions. It is then calculated how much churches invest in these activities, both in the hours of volunteers and professionals and in money. The question is then: if churches did not do this work and other organizations did it instead, how much money would it cost government and other organizations?[25]

Let us give some data from the research done in 2007 in Rotterdam,[26] a city with about 300 Dutch and immigrant churches altogether. The total number of members is 200,000, more than one-third of the population. About a quarter of these attend church regularly: 50,000

[22] Robert Wuthnow, "Mobilizing civic engagement: The changing impact of religious involvements", in Theda Skocpol and Morris P. Fiorina (eds.), *Civic engagement in American democracy*, Washington DC 1999, pp. 331-363.
[23] Eric M. Uslaner, "Religion and Civic Engagement in Canada and the United States", in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 41/2, 2002, pp. 239-254.
[24] Penny Edgell Becker and Pawan H. Dhingra, "Religious involvement and volunteering: Implications for civil society", in *Sociology of Religion*, 62, 2001, pp. 315-335.
[25] Jaap van der Sar and Tom Schoemaker, *De Hofstad. Een cadeautje aan de samenleving*, Utrecht and Apeldoorn 2003; Jaap van der Sar, *Van Harte! Onderzoek naar het maatschappelijk rendement van de Protestantse Gemeente in Utrecht*, Utrecht 2004; Jaap van der Sar and Roos Visser, *Gratis en waardevol. Rol, positie en maatschappelijk rendement van migrantenkerken in Den Haag*, Utrecht 2006.
[26] Jorge Castillo Guerra, Marjolein Glashouwer and Joris Kregting, *Tel je zegeningen. Het maatschappelijk rendement van christelijke kerken in Rotterdam en hun bijdrage aan sociale cohesie*, Nijmegen 2008.

people. It is estimated that 25,000 do voluntary work, that is to say one in two regular churchgoers. Nearly 60% of these do voluntary work in churches for at least eight hours a week. This includes psychosocial care and assistance, caring for people in need, youth work, community building, inter-religious activities and the like. Nearly 500,000 people are reached (although it is not known how many may have been counted twice), and the estimated social return is between 110 and 133 million euros yearly. Of this, 86% is generated with voluntary input and 14% by professionals. The research report concludes that churches contribute to social cohesion both within churches themselves and between groups beyond them.

Another type of research has been done already for many years by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau). These are based on interviews and questionnaires. We give some results:[27]

- Regular churchgoers do more voluntary work than other members of the church and than non-church members.

- This is true inside the church, but also in voluntary work outside the church.

- The regular churchgoer gives more money, and more often, to good causes, even those of a secular character.

- Churches are a favourable setting for all kinds of social engagement. They use biblical values and norms, stories and examples to raise awareness of human needs and to mobilize people.

- This religious-moral motivation works through networks of friendships between church members. These face-to-face relations translate the religious-moral motivation into social action.

[27] Joep de Hart, "Religieuze groepen en sociale cohesie", in *Betrekkelijke betrokkenheid. Studies in sociale cohesie. Sociaal en Cultureel Rapport*, Den Haag December 2008, pp. 387-414; *Idem* (ed.), *Zekere banden. Sociale cohesie, leefbaarheid en veiligheid*, Den Haag 2002; *Idem, Landelijk verenigd. Grote ledenorganisaties over ontwikkelingen op het maatschappelijk middenveld. Civil society en vrijwilligerswerk IV*, Den Haag 2005; Paul Dekker and Joep de Hart, "'Het zout der aarde': Een analyse van de samenhang tussen godsdienstigheid en sociaal kapitaal in Nederland", in *Sociale Wetenschappen*, 45, 1/2002, pp. 45-61; *Idem*, "Kerken in de Nederlandse civil society: institutionele grondslag en individuele inspiratiebron", in Wim Van de Donk et al. (red.), *Geloven in het publieke domein. Verkenningen van een dubbele transformatie*, Amsterdam 2006, 139-169; *Idem*, "Kerkgangers, investeerders in de civil society", in *Investeren in vermogen. Sociaal en Cultureel Rapport*, Den Haag 2006, 318-338; *Idem* (ed.), *Vrijwilligerswerk in meervoud. Civil society en vrijwilligerswerk 5.* Den Haag 2009; Ester van den Berg and Joep de Hart, *Maatschappelijke organisaties in beeld. Grote ledenorganisaties over actuele ontwikkelingen op het maatschappelijk middenveld*, Den Haag 2008.

The implications of our conceptual framework for analysis

We summarize:

- The description of the Dutch cultural context leads us to keep our eyes open for "traces of a demanding society".

- Our analysis should be sensitive to the importance of networks, and it may well be that we find shared values and norms.

- In our analysis we will have to pay attention to possible sensitizing concepts like "heterogeneity", "alterity", "the other".

- In our coding, belief will be a sensitizing concept.

- Worldviews may be articulated by churchgoing volunteers when they reflect upon the relationship between their churchgoing and their voluntary service.

- Specific faith language, secular language, or a combination of both may be used.

- In our coding, we pay attention to religious justifications.

- We pay attention to the formative influence of churchgoing.

- We pay attention to the naming of elements of worship.

- In our open coding we are sensitive to words like "helping", "caring", "giving", etc.

Method

With regard to our method: two focus groups[28] were interviewed in two sessions of two hours each. The first group consisted of 12 respondents, the second group of 11. The sessions started with an introduction, after which the group was asked what kind of voluntary

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[28] A focus group is a small group made up of perhaps six to twelve individuals (Roger Gomm, *Social Research Methodology: A Critical Introduction,* Houndmills 2004, p. 170) with certain common features or characteristics, with whom a discussion can be focused on a given issue or topic. The facilitator focuses group discussion on an issue, rather than just asking questions (*Ibid.,* p. 173). The synergy of the group, the interaction of its members, is important; they can "spark each other off" (Wellington and Szczerbinski, *Research Methods for the Social Sciences,* p. 90). On the other hand, there are plenty of opportunities to influence each other, as to what is said. The group seems like a hopelessly uncontrolled environment (Gomm, *Social Research Methodology,* p. 171) and there is pressure to conform. Yet the hallmark of our method is the explicit use of group interaction to produce insights that would be less accessible without the interaction. Unlike most structured interviews or surveys, the participants had the opportunity to clarify, extend and provide examples (Vaughn et al., *Focus Group Interviews in Education and Psychology,* pp. 17f.). Most researchers agree that it is unwise to conduct only a single focus group. Conducting at least two groups allows the researcher to confirm the initial group's responses (*Ibid.,* p. 48). There are three threats to the validity of our results: compliance, when the respondent responds in a way that he or she thinks the facilitator expects; identification, when the responses are similar to those of someone the respondent likes, and conformity, when a respondent may desire to conform to group standards.

service they were involved in. Next, five to ten minutes of "airtime" was offered for reflection on a possible response to the research question and making some notes, in order to diminish the risks of compliance, identification and conformity. In addition, each respondent was asked to respond. After this round, the facilitator returned to the respondents with the question whether they wanted to add anything to their initial response. The session ended with an outline of the trajectory. The sessions were transcribed, assigned to ATLAS.ti, coded and analysed.

Report of results

Our report on the two focus groups will focus on recurrent verbal patterns, called themes or perspectives. It is inappropriate to present the results of focus groups by giving percentages and other statistics, so our report does not do so.

Preliminary remarks

- We did not introduce the distinction between formal volunteering (for an organization) and informal volunteering (helping out by running errands, doing yard work, etc., for people not living with you). The respondents applied the question to their service for an organization, but some also stretched the concept of volunteering to their service for relatives.

- Church-related volunteering was not explored. Yet the respondents in the more conservative congregation did mention engagement in church-related volunteering too and, strikingly, some confined churchgoing, beliefs ("I am called to do this') and faith experiences to this type of volunteering and established a causal connection here, while they did not see the same relationship with their service outside the church.

Here follows a summary of key patterns with regard to our research questions:

1. The respondents reframed our question. Respondents found it complicated to disentangle their motives, i.e. values and beliefs. The focus group stimulated reflection on the concepts and their complex and dynamic qualities. For example, churchgoing and faith are both distinguishable and intertwined. For these respondents both regular church attendance and their faith experiences stimulate their voluntary service. In fact, the respondents that do relate their churchgoing to their voluntary service outside the church connect their beliefs and faith experiences with it too. A second example is that some respondents hesitated to attribute any influence, particularly a causal relationship, to faith and churchgoing. Later, these respondents reconsidered the influence, asserting that faith and churchgoing do have a formative influence over the years. A third example is that the term "churchgoing" can denote either current church attendance or the

various elements of worship (i.e. prayer, Bible readings, sermons) and their formative influence. This brings us to the conclusion that future research should differentiate between these senses of "churchgoing".

2. Four open codes could be interrelated in one "family": the importance of being a member of networks for voluntary service. First, respondents relate the question to their recruitment in telling how other churchgoing volunteers asked them to participate (open code: recruitment). Second, the close connection with others in the voluntary service (open code: bond with other volunteers) is important to the respondents. Third, the social network during people's upbringing has a major influence on their later motivation to become volunteers (open coding: upbringing). Fourth, churchgoing volunteers find it important to be meaningful for others who are in need of guidance, care, support or practical help (open code: heterogeneity, alterity).

3. In the responses referring to childhood, there is a pattern of playing down the influence of churchgoing and playing up the influence of upbringing, asserting that this influence has become part of the respondent: "It is in my genes"; "I learned it at my mother's knee". This pattern is closely related to "being meaningful for another person" or "helping when asked". Growing up in a home where caring is expected is an important influence. Parents are interpreted as exerting a great influence and are portrayed as role models. In addition, their significance was heightened by the social fabric of the village or the neighbourhood. These findings are in accordance with a qualitative study of 21 Hispanic women active in their communities. Family members were seen to be role models that encourage service; mothers were particularly important, embodying community involvement and helping others.[29]

4. We found a contrast between the two group discussions. In the liberal focus group, the discussion evolved from an initial reluctance to connect churchgoing/faith with voluntary service to a gradual openness, via the perspectives of other respondents, to a theological interpretation and exploration of voluntary service, in which it is conceived to be an act of the Spirit of God working through the hands of human beings. In the conservative focus group, the discussion reflected a gradually increasing reserve and modesty with regard to theologically "loaded" perspectives and faith language. We observed a tendency to downplay an "us and them" dichotomy between "the world" and "the church".

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[29] Marceline M. Lazzari, Holly R. Ford and Kelly J. Haughey, "Making a difference: Women of action in the community", in *Social Work*, 41, 2/1996, p. 202.

5. Practically all the respondents said that they are motivated by the value of being meaningful to others – "others" being primarily those in need of guidance or practical support. The analysis indicates a pattern of heterogeneity regarding the "others" who are important for the volunteers, who want to serve, support or help the elderly, the youth, the disabled, the ill, the homeless.

6. Learning, gaining enrichment, an opportunity for impressive experiences, put one's own life in a new perspective, giving satisfaction and pleasure: together, these values form a distinct pattern. In several interviews in both focus groups, shortly after naming a value like "being meaningful" or a belief like "being called" or "assigned" the respondents add that they benefit from it as well. Indeed, voluntary service is also (!) a "serious leisure" activity[30] and a "lesson for one's own life". In both focus groups, albeit more distinctly in the conservative one than in the liberal one, the respondents were critical of "big words", "high values" and "faith" as exclusive sources of motivation.

7. With regard to the Dutch context, we found traces of a "demanding society" and it even seemed that the demands or "claims" are perceived to be harder or "heavier" precisely due to religious values: there is a perceived pressure to volunteer, several respondents have a strong sense of obligation and responsibility, are aware of it too, and find it hard to say "no" when they are asked to do voluntary work. Also, they find it difficult to withdraw after completing the work and they perceive combining several voluntary jobs with the demands of a family as a burden. This discussion came up in the more conservative focus group.

8. Several elements of church services are named explicitly, in particular prayers and Bible readings (e.g. teachings such as "love your neighbour", "give a cup of water to those who are thirsty").

9. With regard to the Dutch context, the respondents are well aware of a changing pattern of network formation. Particularly those respondents who see a causal connection between their upbringing and the social fabric of their youth and their voluntary service demonstrate concern and an accompanying hope that the new generation will be as caring and helpful...

10. An important religious belief related to churchgoing is "being called" or "being assigned". This belief was expressed only in the conservative focus group and, strikingly, was related to church-related voluntary work, but not to voluntary service outside the church. Future research is necessary here. It may be that one of the strongest motivating factors (believing that one is called by God to volunteer) only applies to internal volunteering and, thus, to bonding capital.

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[30] Cf. Robert A. Stebbins, "Volunteering: A serious leisure perspective", in *Nonprofit and Voluntary Action Quarterly*, 25, 1996, pp. 211-224.

Short discussion: How do the patterns summarized above relate to earlier research on volunteering?

Stebbins[31] indicated that volunteering is considered as a "serious leisure" activity. This is confirmed in the patterns of our research: respondents indicate that their volunteer service is enriching and rewarding, they learn from it, they make social contacts with other volunteers, and they enjoy doing it. Still, although most churchgoing volunteers assert that there is self-interest involved, this reward is a result of the service and not a motive for serving. There are always other motives for doing voluntary work. Indeed, churchgoing volunteers pursue more than one set of goals and values through their voluntary activities.

Mason indicates that voluntarism results from an overflowing of people's need to express themselves that compels them to act.[32] Clary, Snyder and Ridge distinguished six motivations that can be satisfied by volunteering: social, values, career, understanding, protective and esteem.[33] The most significant motivation for volunteers came from values related to humanitarian and altruistic concerns and a wish to serve less fortunate members of society. This was reflected in answers from our respondents too. Perry developed three measures of public service motivation: civic duty, compassion and self-sacrifice.[34] In their research on award winning volunteers, Perry, Goff, Littlepage and Brudney[35] added two more: religious beliefs and the conviction that one has an obligation to help others in need. What motivates the award-winning volunteers? The highest mean score (4.82) and the lowest standard deviation (0.38) were for values (measured by agreement with the statements: "I am genuinely concerned about the particular group I am serving", "I feel it is important to help others", "I can do something for a cause that is important to me, and I am concerned about those less fortunate than myself"): almost everyone strongly agreed with these items. The lowest level of motivation (2.90) and a high standard deviation (1.37) were found for the career motivation. These authors also found that "life-changing events" lead people to volunteer. In our project, a particular value (being meaningful to others who are in need of help) and the influence of one's upbringing in the transference of this value play an important and distinct role, yet a mention of this value is quickly followed by an expression of self-interest, suggesting that it

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[31] *Ibid.*
[32] David E. Mason, *Leading and managing the expressive dimension: Harnessing the hidden power source of the nonprofit sector*, San Francisco 1996, p. 18.
[33] Gil Clary, Mark Snyder and Robert Ridge, "Volunteers' motivations: A functional strategy for the recruitment, placement, and retention of volunteers", in *Nonprofit Management & Leadership* 2/4, 1992, pp. 333-350.
[34] James L. Perry, "Measuring public service motivation: An assessment of construct reliability and validity", in *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 6/1, 1996, pp. 5-22.
[35] James L. Perry et al., "Exemplary Volunteers: What is the Role of Faith?", in *International Journal of Volunteer Administration,* Vol. XXV, No. 1, July 2007.

is never an exclusive motivating factor. In both groups, a tendency to downplay a dichotomy between "the world" and "the church" can be observed. And even when churchgoers use biblical language to explain their motives for becoming involved in caring activities,[36] they link it with other motives.

Our respondents confirmed the finding that one of the main factors influencing people to volunteer is simply being asked to do so.[37] Having been personally invited by churchgoers to participate is a distinctive feature of volunteering churchgoers.

There are several variables that we have not yet included in our project: gender (although there was a 50:50 male-female ratio in the groups), socio-economic status (education), age and work status (retirement, full-time employment, or part-time employment) – although several respondents indicated that the first and second years following retirement are a period in which one is very open to participation in voluntary service. This result is in line with those of earlier inquiries.[38]

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[36] Robert Wuthnow, *Acts of Compassion: Caring for Others and Helping Ourselves,* Princeton 1991.
[37] Woods Bowman, "Confidence in Charitable Institutions and Volunteering", in *Nonprofit & Voluntary Sector Quarterly,* 33, 2004, pp. 247-270; Jerry Z. Park and Christian Smith, "'To Whom Much Has Been Given...': Religious Capital and Community Voluntarism Among Churchgoing Protestants", in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion,* 39/3, 2000, pp. 272-286.
[38] Francis George Caro and Scott A. Bass, "Receptivity to volunteering in the immediate post retirement period", in *Journal of Applied Gerontology,* 16, 1997, pp. 427-441.
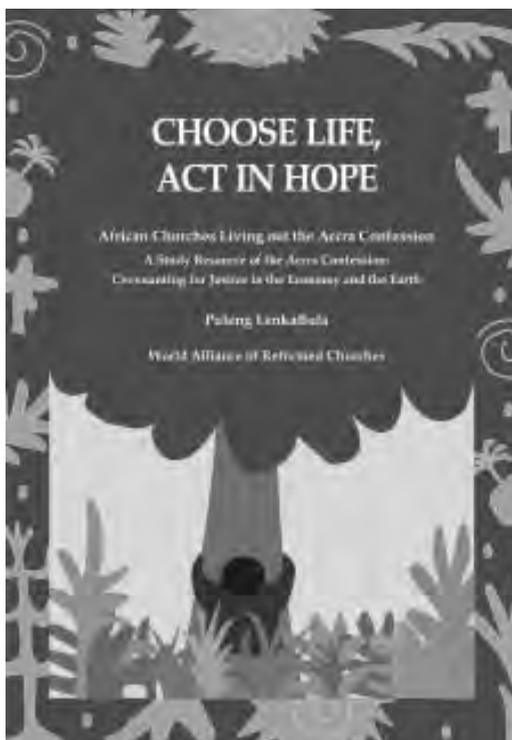
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