The Book of Hebrews in Toraja Context
Towards a Three-culture Hermeneutic

Andrew Buchanan

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Sydney

2016
Abstract

The growth of Protestant mission in the nineteenth century raised questions about the role of culture in appropriating the Christian gospel, questions that remain to this day. As the Bible was translated, and as congregations formalised their understanding of the faith, the hermeneutical problem of the gap between biblical and modern cultures expanded to include a third culture, that of the non-Western local church. Between translation and theology lies the task of interpreting the Bible, where the same issues apply. This project seeks to provide an account of the Bible as a hermeneutical object that provides both for a constant identity, namely the gospel of God’s saving action in Christ, and for its varied appropriation in local contexts. Since the project is non-foundationalist, this is developed not in the abstract, but in conversation with a particular Protestant Christian tradition, as expressed in Kevin Vanhoozer’s theodramatic account of Scripture, and a particular traditional culture, that of the Toraja in the highlands of South Sulawesi, whose local Protestant church was begun by a Dutch mission just over a hundred years ago.

Contextual interpretation has received little attention until recently because of the modernist assumption that exegesis is objective, with application a further step of appropriation. The obvious problem with this is that the issues of greatest priority — remembering that the cognitive capacity of any culture is finite — are not necessarily the same between different contexts. More subtly, different styles of cognition affect how the Bible is understood, and different values affect how it is lived out. Exegesis that makes sense of a passage for the Western reader does not necessarily work in another context.

The project broadly follows a pattern of observation and analysis in Parts I-II, followed by theory (Part III) and application (Part IV). Observation and analysis concerns both culture and the Bible. For culture, the goal is to understand relevant differences between the West and Toraja. The key distinction that develops is between sincerity and ritual cultures or orientations. This is connected with orality, individualism and relationalism, honour-shame, differences in cognition between North Americans and East
Asians, and ritual theory. It is given historical and phenomenological depth in Charles Taylor’s account of secularisation. The differences raised by these frameworks are illustrated from anthropological research in Toraja and similar areas. The significance of these differences for Westerners bringing the gospel in a genuinely local way to an oral ritual culture is analysed through a detailed examination of A. Kruyt’s reflections on ministry in Poso (just north of Toraja in Central Sulawesi). The key points that emerge for our purposes are summarised in the concept of the Protestant Semiotic ideology, which connected meaning and agency for Kruyt in a way that obscured the gospel for the Poso.

Part III provides an alternative account of the Bible to that which emerges from the Protestant Semiotic ideology. We adapt a Christocentric pragmatic realist account of theological language to our purposes, including giving an account of non-discursive theological representations. A dialogue between Hans-Georg Gadamer and Kevin Vanhoozer’s theo-dramatic account of the Bible provides an account of the Bible in a ritual culture as mythos and ethos. This provides a stable identity for the Bible in the mythos, and appropriate flexibility of use with respect to the ethos.

Part IV applies and operationalises this account with respect to the letter to the Hebrews. The relating of mythos and ethos in the text is operationalised through an appropriation of thick description. This is applied using local Toraja leadership structures as local metaphors for Christ’s divine sonship and high priesthood, and local honour-shame and ecological harmony ethical systems drawn from Toraja rituals. Having suggested these as appropriate prejudgments for understanding Hebrews within a Toraja context, an interpretation of the letter is offered. This points the way to what a genuinely local appropriation of the letter might look like.

This project therefore establishes the possibility of local interpretation by tracing a path towards a plausible example. The missiological importance of doing so is demonstrated, and an alternative to the Protestant Semiotic ideology is offered which preserves a realist understanding of theological truth while allowing for genuine contextual appropriation. It turns out that Hebrews witnesses to Jesus the Community Founder, who
provides for the community of those who join with him, and whose sacrifice promises
a harmony encompassing God, the community, and the world to come.
Contents

I Orientation 1

1 Introduction 2

1.1 Introduction ................................................................. 2
1.2 The Need for Contextualisation ........................................... 3
1.3 Issues in Contextual Theology ........................................... 6
1.4 Issues in Contextual Hermeneutics ................................. 10
1.5 Frameworks for Contextualisation ................................. 13
1.6 Statement of Problem ...................................................... 16
1.7 Situating the Research .................................................... 17
1.8 Introduction to Toraja ........................................................ 19
1.9 Toraja culture and social structure .................................. 22
1.10 Toraja Ritual and Myth ................................................... 23
1.11 Conclusion ................................................................. 26

2 The Problem of Hebrews 9–10 28

2.1 Introduction ................................................................. 28
2.2 The sense of Hebrews 9:23 ................................................ 28
2.3 Initial Reflections ............................................................ 31
2.4 A defiled heaven in Hebrews 9:23? .................................. 35
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Understanding defilement</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>Interpreting Hebrews 9 contextually</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Values and interpretation</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Autonomy and Dependence</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Grace and Reciprocity</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) and Long Term Orientation Index (LTO)</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Values in Toraja</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

II Ministry in a Ritual World 85

| 4 | Magic and Reformed Piety | 86 |
| 4.1 | Introduction | 86 |
| 4.2 | Ritual vs Sincerity in an oral world | 87 |
| 4.3 | Magic and the excluded middle | 89 |
| 4.4 | Conclusion | 97 |

5 Ritual in Toraja 99

| 5.1 | Introduction | 99 |
| 5.2 | Ritual as a Speech Act | 100 |
| 5.3 | Understanding Ritual mode | 103 |
| 5.4 | Conclusion | 111 |

6 Kruyt and a ritual culture 112

| 6.1 | Introduction | 112 |
| 6.2 | Mediation in a fractured world | 113 |
## CONTENTS

6.3 A Clash of Ethical Systems

6.4 A Clash of Semiotic Ideologies

6.5 Corporate sincerity and the triumph of ritual mode

6.6 Conclusion

### III Meaning in a Ritual World

7 Evaluating the Protestant semiotic ideology

7.1 Introduction

7.2 The problem with the Protestant semiotic ideology

7.3 Essentialism versus Pragmatism

7.4 Warfield’s Scientific Theology

7.5 Conclusion

8 Local theology in pragmatic perspective

8.1 Introduction

8.2 A Pragmatic Account of Meaning

8.3 Intersubjective Recognition in the Church’s Form of Life

8.4 Theological reference and truth

8.5 Local theology

8.6 Non-discursive religious representations

8.7 Meaning and Religious Representations

8.8 Regulating Religious Representations

8.9 Conclusion

9 The Bible in a Ritual Culture

9.1 Introduction

9.2 Scripture in pragmatic perspective

9.3 The *Sache* of the Bible
## CONTENTS

9.4 The biblical *Sache* as myth .................................................. 202
9.5 Conclusion .............................................................................. 208

### IV Hebrews in Toraja Perspective ........................................... 211

10 Interpreting the Bible in a Ritual Culture .................................. 212
  10.1 Introduction .......................................................................... 212
  10.2 Approaching the text: thick description .................................. 213
  10.3 Mismatched moral codes ....................................................... 220
  10.4 Mismatched ethical systems .................................................. 224
  10.5 Genuine connection to the theo-drama ................................... 230
  10.6 Conclusion .............................................................................. 237

11 Toraja Ethos in Hebrews ............................................................ 239
  11.1 Introduction .......................................................................... 239
  11.2 A framework for analysis of ethical systems ............................ 239
  11.3 Ethical systems in Hebrews ................................................... 250
  11.4 Jesus as Village Founder ....................................................... 255
  11.5 Conclusion .............................................................................. 258

12 The Letter to the Hebrews ............................................................ 260
  12.1 Introduction .......................................................................... 260
  12.2 Jesus the true *pangala tondok* (Hebrews 1–4) ....................... 261
  12.3 Permanent cleansing (Hebrews 5–10) ..................................... 266
  12.4 Living in hope (Hebrews 11–13) ............................................. 271
  12.5 Conclusion .............................................................................. 276

13 Conclusion .................................................................................. 278

Bibliography .................................................................................... 282
Part I

Orientation
Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The aim of this project is to develop hermeneutical resources for developing a local tradition of biblical interpretation, with a focus on a particular biblical text, the letter to the Hebrews, and a particular locality, the area of Toraja in the highlands of South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The project assumes a conservative Protestant evangelical theology,\(^1\) and is focussing on cultural aspects of the hermeneutical process. A simple example of the need it is addressing occurred when I was serving as a lecturer in Biblical Studies at a local seminary there. One time leading a small group of students on the topic of finding a suitable marriage partner, I was struck by a curious feature of the material I was using, published by an evangelical Indonesian student ministry. There was nothing at all concerning the role of parents. On the cultural side, I had been in Indonesia long enough to understand the importance of parental blessing on a marriage even for financially independent professionals, and to know that that blessing was not to be taken for granted. On the biblical side, the command to honour one’s

\(^1\)The term “evangelical” is increasingly problematic. It is being used here primarily to indicate broad alignment with that aspect of the missionary movement that was focussed on conversion and saw itself as not primarily denominational. The term “conservative” indicates a commitment to Christian orthodoxy, including rejection of a universe closed to direct divine action.
parents is not hidden in an obscure corner, but is one of the Ten Commandments. This raised the question of why it was not mentioned.

My first thought was that the study was a translation of Western material. This was the case with much of the material in the library at my college. While some translations are poor quality, this makes available a wealth of information on the Bible that would not otherwise be accessible to the students, most of whom had poor English. I would not expect a Western study to mention parents, as their blessing is largely a formality. However, I was assured that it was written by Indonesians. If that was the case, it looks like they wrote the study based on Western models, and did not think the issue through afresh from their own context. I have come across other material in the college library like this. It is written by Indonesians trained in the West who (very ably) tackle issues from the Western exegetical and pastoral traditions. While they are Indonesians, the questions they have been trained to answer, and the answers they give to those questions, come from the West.

1.2 The Need for Contextualisation

The need to develop local resources for interpreting the Bible is a part of the broader issue of contextualisation. While this issue is as old as the Jew-Gentile problem in the New Testament, it began to force itself onto the agenda of the Protestant Western Christian church as missionaries working in cultures foreign to their own came to recognise the extent of that foreignness, and even more so when they began to see it not as a deficiency to be corrected by locals becoming more like themselves, but as something neutral or positive. As Western culture has itself undergone increasingly rapid change, the concept of contextualisation has been applied to the need for Western churches to adapt to this change. However, there is a

---


major difference between contextualisation in Western cultures and the problem of contextualisation in new mission fields. The traditions of the churches in the West, that is their theologies, structures and practices, have developed as an integral part of their local Western cultures. However rapidly they may be changing, they are changing from a known base. However, missionaries brought Christianity to cultures with which their Western traditions had no necessary connection.

As long as the missionary’s culture was assumed to be superior, it was the locals who were expected to change. However, a number of factors forced a relativising of this assumption. Among them was the empirical demonstration of socio-cultural adequacy,⁴ that is, that all human cultures are basically equal in providing for human needs. This occurred as sociology showed how culture-bound human perception is,⁵ and anthropology showed that so-called primitive cultures rivalled European culture in complexity. Within the Western church itself this awareness was also strengthened as mission fields became established churches in their own right. Historian Andrew Walls points to the World Mission Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910 as a turning point in this awareness.⁶

This has been termed a “three culture” problem, by analogy with Bible translation.⁷ Eugene Nida identified a central issue for bible translation being not just the translation from original languages into a target language, but also that the translator was working from a third (European) language, foreign to both source and target.⁸ Similarly, contextualisation is dealing with three cultures (or groups of cultures): the various cultures in which Israel

---


and the early church produced the bible; the local culture in which the church believes and practices its faith; and the culture of the missionary, again foreign to both the others.

Our concern is with hermeneutics, critical reflection on the processes that enables the biblical text to have an effect in the believing community. This lies in between and overlaps with the concerns of bible translation and of contextual theology. Just as with translation and theology, a rich tradition of hermeneutical reflection has served Western churches in their changing contexts, but this tradition is not necessarily directly transferable to a new context.

We can illustrate this in very general terms from a recent review of African biblical studies. Two basic issues arise for them. First, since African contexts are often different to the West, some Western interpretation will lack relevance, and in some cases even carry colonial baggage. Western values can obscure the meaning in African cultural contexts. Second, African cultures may be closer to many aspects of biblical culture (especially the Old Testament) than the West. Hence African scholars will have useful insights into cultural practices found in the Bible. Effective African hermeneutical traditions will necessarily differ from Western ones in a variety of ways.

That might imply simply replacing one contextual pair (West + Bible) with another (Africa + Bible). However, the three culture problem also implies interaction between the missionary’s context and the local context, for the simple reason that there is no local hermeneutical tradition of interpreting the Bible when the missionaries first arrive. We can illustrate this in an article by prominent Indonesian Old Testament scholar Emmanuel Singgih on shame. He begins his discussion by comparing Western guilt and Eastern shame

---

11Ibid., 80–83.
cultures,\textsuperscript{12} and shows the problems this created in a pastoral counselling situation in a Japanese context, where the counsellor used Scripture to strengthen the individual ego rather than to strengthen relationships.\textsuperscript{13} He then builds on (and critiques) the work of Norman Kraus (an American who lived in Japan) to illustrate how shame features much more in biblical writing than Western theology appreciates, and suggests with examples how an understanding of shame illuminates the point of a number of Old Testament passages.\textsuperscript{14} Not only does he see the cultural context of Indonesia requiring different emphases in interpretation to those usually provided by Western interpretations, he also uses cultural comparison with his own context as a way to move from one to the other.

\section{1.3 Issues in Contextual Theology}

Since we are situating contextual hermeneutics within contextual theology, we can begin situating our project with reference to Stephen Bevans’s typology of models of contextual theology.\textsuperscript{15} This typology expresses one of the main tensions in contextualisation, namely between fidelity to the message and relevance to the local culture.\textsuperscript{16} Fidelity is the primary concern of translation models, which emphasise the fixed nature of the gospel as something which comes from outside of the culture, a “supracultural” kernel which can take on various


\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., 89–94.


\textsuperscript{15}Stephen B. Bevans, \textit{Models of Contextual Theology} (Faith and cultures series; Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2002).

\textsuperscript{16}Hesselgrave and Rommen, \textit{Contextualization}, 145.
cultural husks. Other models prioritise relevance. Anthropological models look for “God’s hidden presence [to] be manifested in the ordinary structures of the situation.” Praxis models prioritise context in the form of social change. At the centre between fidelity and relevance are Synthetic methods. These assume that revelation is conditioned by the historical contexts of Scripture, but that Scriptural revelation is also able to operate in the contemporary local context, requiring a bringing together of the two.

Bevans himself views these models as potentially complementary. In particular, praxis models are appropriate where the status quo needs questioning, anthropological models where local culture has been disparaged, and translation models for primary evangelism. However, what he means by a translation model here has shifted slightly: it is “translating one’s own understanding of the gospel into the language and customs of another culture,” rather than translating a supracultural gospel. Because of this, the translation model can be replaced by an anthropological or praxis model once “indigenous Christians are able to reflectively construct their own theology.” Taking Bevans’s definitions with full rigour for the sake of argument, that would imply that the gospel is able to become fully acculturated. This is a conclusion we resist on the basis of the apostle Paul’s argument that only God’s call enables the true meaning of Jesus’ crucifixion to make sense (1 Cor 1:18–25). If this is at the heart of the gospel, and the gospel is at the heart of the Christian Scriptures, then, however familiar they may become, the Christian Scriptures can never be fully domesticated. The central theological value of translation models—that the gospel comes from outside any culture—needs to continue to play a role even when the local church has matured. Of course, it is to be hoped that there is a shift from translation of the missionary’s understanding of the gospel to direct engagement with the witness of Scripture and the centuries of reflection on it by the church. This is the question raised by the three-culture problem.

---

17 Bevans, Models of Contextual Theology, 40.
18 Ibid., 55.
19 Ibid., 91.
20 Ibid., 139–40.
21 Ibid., 140.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The danger of subsuming the gospel within local culture can be seen in the following summary of a number of Asian theologians, by an Indonesian author in a volume promoting an anthropological approach to contextualisation, defined as finding the truth of the gospel in local culture.\textsuperscript{22} In their efforts to break free of Enlightenment dualisms and positivism, these Asian theologians have valued culture over Scripture (the two are placed in apparent opposition), denied the uniqueness of the biblical story as salvation history, and affirmed universal salvation, enabling social transformation to take centre stage in the church’s praxis.\textsuperscript{23} From a conservative Protestant viewpoint, this is simply theological revisionism. Moreover, it has been argued that such approaches to contextualisation actually reflect Western worldviews. Yung Hwa, in his detailed analysis of a similar (and overlapping) group of twentieth century Asian contextual theologies, argues that their genealogy is to be found in the European Enlightenment, not in Asian culture.\textsuperscript{24} The low view of Scripture comes from a liberal post-Kantian epistemology that regards the Bible as the record of human experience.\textsuperscript{25} The lack of belief in the supernatural at work in this world reflects the closed world of the West.\textsuperscript{26} Such thoroughgoing anthropological models can therefore be seen as expressing liberal theology that has repented of its European ethnocentrism, and so places the religious experience of the Bible in dialogue with local culture rather than European culture.

The danger of translation models is that the assumption of the supracultural nature of the gospel leads to minimising the significance of cultural difference for understanding that gospel. In his analysis of Asian theologies, Todd LaBute comments that “the contents of a significant portion of Asian theology surrounds issues such as poverty, social justice,

\textsuperscript{24}Yung Hwa, Mangoes or Bananas? The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology (Regnum studies in mission; Oxford: Regnum, 1997).
\textsuperscript{25}Ibid., 216.
\textsuperscript{26}Ibid., 73–76.
corruption, Church-State relations, racial and gender issues, etc.” These “second level” issues are in general based on “first level formulations (basic belief structures that give identity to Christian people)” that are derived from the West.27 By “West” he is referring to European ways of thinking going back to Aristotle, and he contrasts these with Eastern ways of thinking, namely those found in East Asian cultures influenced by Confucianism and Buddhism.28 He notes studies suggesting that there are features of these respective philosophies that appear to have persisted to the present day.29 His conclusion is that Western theology has worked over the biblical data in line with a Western way of thinking, reaching conclusions and formulations that may not be the same if worked out with an Eastern way of thinking. This challenges not just models of contextualisation that focus on ethical and social issues, but also translation models that are content with translating first-level theology texts into the local language.

The distinction of first and second level issues, theological foundations and ethical/social implications, is suggestive for our purposes, but needs refining. The mandate for contextualisation can be traced back to the decision of the early church not to require Gentile Christians to become Jews by taking on the Mosaic Law, but rather for them to turn every aspect of their Hellenistic culture towards Christ.30 This provides the model for any established Christian culture not to impose their cultural expression of the gospel on new cultures where the gospel is planted. This implies that a translation model is inappropriate with respect to cultural expression of the gospel: local culture is to be transformed by the gospel rather than by a translation of the missionary’s culture, or even biblical cultural expressions.

We have thus established, as a simple implication from basic tenets of contextualisation, that the gospel message itself requires translation models, while the cultural expression of that

---

28 Ibid., 37.
29 Ibid., 41–43. We will discuss these in more detail below, with a focus on Richard E. Nisbett, The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently and Why (New York: Free, 2004).
message requires more context-dependent models. Before giving greater specificity to that proposal, we will look briefly at similar issues from some selected approaches to interpreting the Bible in non-Western contexts.

1.4 Issues in Contextual Hermeneutics

Postcolonialist readings continue the trajectory of the readings of liberation theology\(^{31}\) and therefore can be categorised as Praxis models. R. S. Sugirtharajah explains three differences of this approach with traditional exegesis. First, postcolonial exegesis highlights the “ancient and modern colonial contexts” of both the Bible and its interpretations, even as it employs the “best” of the methods that historical criticism uses to explain the production of the text. Second, it extends its intertextual reach to texts of other religious traditions. Third, it treats the historical task of exegesis and the hermeneutical task of interpretation “as a single and unified process.”\(^{32}\) It is this last point that makes sense of the other two, as the goal is realigning the text “with postmodern, postcolonial causes,”\(^{33}\) not with reconstructing the historical production of the text. Both religious traditions and colonialism are a part of the context in which this aim is being pursued. For our purposes, this questions a model whereby allegedly objective historical critical exegesis provides the raw material for further theological exploration. This pattern is evident in both conservative and liberal modern theology, even though the path from exegesis to theology varies considerably.\(^{34}\) It shares the kernel-husk pattern of translation models, though the kernel here is not the gospel, but rather the original meaning of the text.


\(^{33}\)Ibid., 172.

\(^{34}\)David H. Kelsey, Proving Doctrine: The Uses of Scripture in Modern Theology (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1999), 198-201.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

This de-centring of biblical scholarship as the foundation of the hermeneutical task finds interesting expression in projects of scholars reading with non-scholarly readers. Gerald West explains the distinction in terms of training, namely the informal training of family and community in contrast to the formal training of the academy. In reading together, the scholars do not convey their scholarship, but use it to provide “additional reading resources [that] are potentially empowering in enabling familiar texts to be read in unfamiliar ways and in enabling unfamiliar texts or literary units to be read, and in so doing to provide alternative lines of connection between local community contexts and biblical texts.”

The expertise of the scholars with the biblical text is an intrinsically valuable resource for interpretation, but the location of being a scholar is no more privileged than other locations in terms of the interpretive task. Another author in the same volume suggests the terms “critical” and “intuitive” to capture this aspect of the scholarly/non-scholarly distinction. He notes the findings of many of the articles in the volume that intuitive interpreters do not simply accept the readings of critical interpreters, but argues in turn that taking intuitive interpretations seriously as interpretations of the biblical text requires critical response. This mutual and sympathetic engagement of text and context through interpersonal discussion is an example of a Synthetic model at the level of biblical studies.

A proposal engaging with similar issues from an evangelical Asian context, though focussed on empowering pastors rather than ordinary Christians, comes in Larry Caldwell’s call for using local hermeneutical methods in interpreting Scripture. He called for a dis-

---

35 Gerald O. West, “Reading Other-Wise: Socially Engaged Biblical Scholars Reading With Their Local Communities: An Introduction,” in Reading Other-Wise: Socially Engaged Biblical Scholars Reading With Their Local Communities (ed. Gerald O. West; Semeia Studies; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 9.


37 Ibid., 153–4.

cipline of “ethnohermeneutics” which explores “how to interpret the Bible from one culture to the next.”\footnote{Ibid., 23.} This came from his experience of teaching Western hermeneutics to his class in a rural area of the Philippines, and observing the entirely different hermeneutical strategies they used to successfully communicate biblical truth in their villages.\footnote{Ibid., 26.} He proposes that local scriptural interpretation should use local hermeneutical methods, noting that Old Testament interpretation in the New Testament followed methods found at the time, and that the church survived centuries of pre-critical hermeneutical methods.\footnote{Ibid., 31–33.} The use of local hermeneutical methods will reduce dependence on scholarly interpretation, though he acknowledges the need for some (“in fact, not many at all”) to master Western exegetical methods.\footnote{Ibid., 41.}

His proposal proved controversial. One response appealed to the “theological task of protecting the supra-cultural truth of Scripture from invalid methods and, therefore, invalid results.”\footnote{Daniel A. Tappeiner, “A Response to Caldwell’s Trumpet Call to Ethnohermeneutics,” \textit{Journal of Asian Mission} 1 no. 2 (1999): 231.} Here, the kernel of ‘objective’ exegesis supports the kernel of the supra-cultural gospel, provided correct hermeneutical method is employed.

The inadequacies of a kernel-husk approach are increasingly recognised by evangelical theologians. In a volume devoted to (evangelical perspectives on) global theology, Vanhoozer discusses a number of issues implied in our discussion so far. He notes the problem of students having to leave their culture in order to succeed in theological education,\footnote{Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “One Rule to Rule Them All?: Theological Method in an Era of World Christianity,” in \textit{Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity} (ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland; Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2006), 87.} and the necessity of recognising the role of context in giving “texture” to theology.\footnote{Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Exegesis and Hermeneutics,” \textit{Exegesis and Hermeneutics} 93.} This implies a role for culture greater than that given by translation models.\footnote{Vanhoozer, “‘One Rule to Rule Them All?’,” 85–126.} He asks, “Why, in principle, can
theology borrow from Plato but not from primal religions?,” and answers that in either case the key to avoiding syncretism is that the borrowings are “not in the form of a wholesale synthesis but rather as ad hoc assimilation.” In its desire to treat culture and Scripture with equal seriousness, his approach is closer to Synthetic models than to Translation models, and sensitive to three-culture concerns.

Vanhoozer makes his comments in the light of his own theo-dramatic proposal as to the nature of Scripture. In the next section, we will show how his proposal is a suitable theological partner for our project, and also place it briefly in wider missiological and theological context. We will then be in a position to state what it is we are aiming to achieve in this project.

1.5 Frameworks for Contextualisation

Drawing on a summary of anthropological approaches, prominent evangelical missiologist Paul Hiebert presents the concept of worldview as a valuable tool for understanding cultural difference. He defines worldview as “the fundamental cognitive, affective, and evaluative presuppositions a group of people make about the nature of things, and which they use to order their lives.” As presuppositions, they are more basic than explicit beliefs and behaviours. Based on the findings of anthropologists in many different parts of the world, presuppositions can be grouped and classified; different views of time (a cognitive presupposition) would be an example. Such taxonomies are heuristic, helping someone new to a culture to recognise differences more quickly and sympathetically. Potentially, this includes better navigating the three-culture context of interpreting Scripture.

---

47Ibid., 103.
49Ibid., 50-54.
50Ibid., 69.
51In an earlier publication, he promotes a Synthetic approach to applying Scripture to local issues that he terms ‘Critical Contextualisation’. This involves dialogue between locals as the experts on local meanings and
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

He also argues they can aid in identifying syncretism, where the beliefs and behaviours look Christian, but the worldview is not.\textsuperscript{52} The examples he gives of this are a group of converts using significant Christian words as powerful curses on their enemies, and converts painting large crosses on their houses to ward off the evil eye.\textsuperscript{53} What he means, then, is that symbols that are being given meanings at odds with a genuinely Christian worldview. This implies the existence of a Christian worldview, but when he comes to outline what that might be, it is clear that it is not an all-encompassing.\textsuperscript{54} Only a few of the many possible cognitive, affective, and evaluative categories he has discussed appear, and his discussion of good and evil, for example, actually highlights a variety of biblical ways of understanding this.\textsuperscript{55} Consistent with our argument above, these categories can be seen as direct implications of the gospel. The gospel, then, appears to require a limited scope of cognitive presuppositions, and some fairly general affective and evaluative presuppositions with multiple possibilities for connection to a local culture. This means that the concept of worldview as such needs further parsing if it is to be directly useful in contextualisation of theology and interpretation of Scripture.

To that end we turn to Clifford Geertz’s model of religion as a cultural system.\textsuperscript{56} According to Hiebert’s summary of an earlier article,\textsuperscript{57} Geertz describes the mutually reinforcing dynamic between the cognitive (for which Geertz uses the term “worldview”) and the affective and evaluative, which Geertz terms “ethos”.\textsuperscript{58} In the later article, his definition of religion missionaries as the experts on Scripture. See Paul G. Hiebert, Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 1994), 87–89.

\textsuperscript{52}Hiebert, Transforming Worldviews, 69; I have used the term ‘syncretism’ for his ‘Christo-paganism’.

\textsuperscript{53}Ibid., 11.

\textsuperscript{54}Ibid., ch. 10.

\textsuperscript{55}Ibid., 295–8; he mentions holiness of being, keepings laws, and faithfulness in relationship.


\textsuperscript{58}Hiebert, Transforming Worldviews, 24–25.
includes “conceptions of a general order of existence” encoded in symbols (not necessarily verbal), which, through ritual, “establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations.” While the former are clearly cognitive, and the latter affective and evaluative, Geertz is explicitly not describing the whole of a culture. The moods and motivations are religious precisely in that they form part of a religious system; his use of these general terms is intended to encompass the huge variety of actual religious experience which in Christianity takes the form of worship (mood) and piety (motivation). With respect to cognitive presuppositions, Geertz distinguishes religious conceptions from those concerning the common-sense world. The common-sense world is the (socially constructed) real world in which people act; religious conceptions provide a frame in which the “analytic, emotional, and moral” aporia of that world as experienced can be managed.

This provides a framework for understanding the different aspects of contextualisation that we have outlined above. Contextualisation implies translating certain beliefs and cognitive presuppositions behind those beliefs into the local culture, but it is best to see the domain of common-sense not as a target of contextualisation, but as the arena in which contextualisation needs to be acted out. Contextualisation of ethos is not simply a matter of merging Christian and local ethos, but of forming connections between them such that gospel and the local form of Christianity take on that mutually reinforcing function.

Vanhoozer’s account of Scripture as a theo-drama describes this framework in a theological key. The theo-drama is the story of God’s dealings with the world from creation through the history of Israel to Christ and the renewal of all things. This drama is about the activity of the Father, Son and Spirit climaxing in the drama of Jesus Christ. Theology is thus

---

59Geertz, “Religion As a Cultural System,” 87–125, italics removed. Ritual is revealed as the glue holding the religious system together at ibid., 112.

60Ibid., 124–5.

61Ibid., 97.

62Ibid., 111.

63Ibid., 108.

faith seeking theo-dramatic understanding. Scripture functions as the script of this drama, which calls for “faithful and fitting performance here and now.” The theo-drama refers to something which stands outside the local culture, though it still needs to be understood within it, while the concept of faithful and fitting performance implies the contextually sensitive connection of ethos with the theo-drama.

The concept of theo-drama makes the overarching biblical story the proper context for talking about God. For this reason, we will use the term mythos as the complement of ethos. This prioritises what Hiebert terms the diachronic aspect of worldview, often expressed in foundational myths which, he argues, are at the core of worldview. The many and varied aspects of cross-cultural comparison that worldview analysis opens up remain helpful for the task of navigating between the missionary’s and local’s culture, but for contextualisation our focus is on mythos and ethos.

1.6 Statement of Problem

Our aim in this project is to develop a hermeneutical model that provides an account of this dual nature of contextualisation with respect to interpreting Scripture, and thereby provides guidance for developing a local hermeneutical tradition in a three-culture scenario. To provide greater specificity to the questions that need to be answered, the focus will be on interpreting the letter to the Hebrews in Toraja, given a Protestant tradition of interpretation.

It is important to note that this is a project in hermeneutics, not primarily in anthropology, sociology, or missiology. While I have drawn on the resources of those three disciplines, my selection of studies has been based on their usability for the project, rather than criteria internal to their respective disciplines. With regards to Toraja culture, I have done no field work, but have drawn on extensive anthropological literature. This means that the Toraja

---

65Ibid., 109–10.
66Ibid., 110.
67Hiebert, Transforming Worldviews, 66.
that is being brought into interaction with Hebrews is something of an abstraction, given
the variations that emerge from the variety of times and places that research was conducted
in. In particular, the impact of modernisation has been largely bracketed out, and so I talk
about ‘traditional Toraja.’68 Finally, the hermeneutical focus is on the production of mean-
ing, largely bracketing out questions of how those meanings intersect with power dynamics
in a local community.69 In these various ways, then, the specific aim of my project does not
offer a comprehensive answer to the issues raised in this introduction.

1.7 Situating the Research

At the heart of what is being intended by terms such as Protestant or Western culture
is modernism, in particular as an ideology characterised by the search for secure results
based on secure foundations built on by secure methods.70 The kernel-husk approach of
Translation models fits with this, as we saw above, and it plausible to see behind it the Greek
philosophical conviction that Truth was found in what was unchanging.71 Along with this, we
will follow Charles Taylor’s telling of the disenchantment of the West and the rise of modern
individualism.72 Taylor’s story begins in the Middle Ages, but we will see foreshadowings of
it in the philosophical strand of Greek culture,73 and the early Christian centuries.74 It is also

68Roxana Waterson, Paths and Rivers: Sa’Dan Toraja Society in Transformation (Verhandelingen van
het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde; Leiden: KITLV Press, 2009) provides a recent
picture of Toraja in the light of her extensive field-work in earlier times.
69This is a limitation that is charged to Geertz’s proposal as well, see Kevin Schilbrack, “Religion, Models
of, and Reality: Are We Through With Geertz?,” Journal of the American Academy of Religion 73 no. 2
70Robert L. Fossett, Upon This Rock: The Nature of Doctrine From Antifoundationalist Perspective
74Guy G. Stroumsa, The End of Sacrifice: Religious Transformations in Late Antiquity (Chicago: Uni-
correlated with increases in literacy, as we will explore in the next chapter. The Reformation was a part of that story, and the missionaries we will study came from literate churches and had university education. These particular focuses have made Taylor’s telling useful in elucidating the issues of the three-culture situation we are interested in.

Our choice of Geertz’s and Vanhoozer’s work is in part because they seek to move beyond foundationalism. Geertz’s account of religious systems became influential in discussions of theological language when it was taken up by George Lindbeck in his important proposal about the nature of doctrine.\textsuperscript{75} Lindbeck sees him as being one of the first to apply what he calls a cultural-linguistic model of religion.\textsuperscript{76} On this model, religion is conceived of as a ‘form of life’, so that “Christian faith is not primarily theoretical but is better understood as a kind of know-how.”\textsuperscript{77} His model thus emphasises the cultural dynamics of “formation, socialization, and acculturation,” which happen more at the implicit than the explicit level.\textsuperscript{78} It also sees religion as a Wittgensteinian language game, “compris[ing] a vocabulary of discursive and non-discursive symbols together with a distinctive logic or grammar in terms of which this vocabulary can be meaningfully deployed.”\textsuperscript{79} Thus, the religious symbols “themselves shap[e] religious experiences and emotions.”\textsuperscript{80}

Lindbeck’s account stands in contrast to the traditional view which Lindbeck terms a cognitive-propositional approach, “in which church doctrines function as informative propositions or truth claims about objective realities.”\textsuperscript{81} Such a view stands behind Translation models. These truth claims are intended to shape religious experience, but do so in an


\textsuperscript{76}Ibid., 6.

\textsuperscript{77}James K. A. Smith, Who’s Afraid of Relativism?: Community, Contingency, and Creaturehood (The church and postmodern culture; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 152.

\textsuperscript{78}Ibid., 60.

\textsuperscript{79}Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, 19.


\textsuperscript{81}Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, 2.
explicit way. It also stands in contrast to a modern view which he terms an experiential-expressive approach, which “interprets doctrines as noninformative and nondiscursive symbols of inner feelings, attitudes, or existential orientations.”

This approach is congenial to Anthropological models, since these existential orientations are presumably to be found in every culture. Here, religious experience is expressed in the symbols and is the actual referent of such language. Lindbeck’s cultural-linguistic model differs from them both with its pragmatic understanding of meaning, but does not actually decide between their respective ontological commitments.

Thus, Robert Bellah sees cultural-linguistic models in a complementary relation to experiential-expressivist: the inchoate religious impulse needs the form provided by the religious symbols.

By contrast, James Smith uses Lindbeck to provide a non-foundationalist frame for a conservative theology: the truths of Christianity succeed in referring to the God revealed in Jesus Christ, but they shape life by shaping character in community, not just beliefs in the individual.

Vanhoozer’s proposal is another conservative appropriation of Lindbeck’s proposal. In calling it a canonical-linguistic approach, he signals its pragmatic linguistic orientation, but also that the canon of Scripture rather than church culture is the normative source of theology.

It is this move beyond the foundationalism of modernism that, we will argue, opens up space for a better hermeneutical account of contextualisation.

### 1.8 Introduction to Toraja

“Toraja” is the name given to an ethnic grouping found on the island of Sulawesi. The grouping extends from Toraja Mamasa in the province of Sulawesi Barat through the top

---

82Ibid., 2.

83Ibid., 20.


86Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 16.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

part of the province of Sulawesi Selatan and into Sulawesi Tengah, an area covering much of the hill country of the central part of the island. The focus of this study is the grouping called Sa’dan Toraja, named after the river Sa’dan which flows through the area. Till 2009 this area was roughly coterminous with the kabupaten or regency of Tana Toraja. This covers an area of 3,178 km² and consists of a plain at about 800 meters surrounded by mountains up to about 1,600 meters, with the highest peak, Mount Sesean in the north, at over 2,100 meters.\textsuperscript{87} The regency has now been split into two, with the northern half called Toraja Utara, and the two major towns of Rantepao in the north and Makale in the south as their respective administrative capitals.

The area was one of the last to be pacified by the Dutch. Around 1900, only Makassar in the south, and the Minahasa area at the northern tip were under Dutch control, but after Aceh was subdued in 1903 the Dutch took over the rest of Sulawesi, pacifying Toraja in 1908 after some significant resistance in the preceding two years.\textsuperscript{88} Outside of the Christian Minahasa, most of Sulawesi followed Islam, except for these central highland groups that in their relative isolation practised their ancestral religions.\textsuperscript{89}

Pacification of these areas actually opened up opportunities for Muslims to settle there, and to thwart this — the Dutch experience in Aceh having made the administration wary of Islam’s political tendencies — assistants were appointed by the Protestant Church of the Indies in places which did not have missions, including Toraja.\textsuperscript{90} In early 1913, the first baptisms occurred in Toraja at the government school in Makale. This presence of assistants — Indonesian Christians from other areas — was considered a temporary measure, however, and in that same year A. A. van de Loosdrecht was sent to Toraja by the Gereformeerde Zend-


\textsuperscript{88}Ibid., 9.

\textsuperscript{89}Jan Sitar Aritonang and Karel Steenbrink eds., *A History of Christianity in Indonesia* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 455.

\textsuperscript{90}Ibid., 465.
thingsbond (GZB), followed closely by J. Belksma and Dr. H. van der Veen, a linguist who was instrumental in producing a translation of the Bible into the Toraja language.91

The church grew slowly, with less than 1% of the population Christian by 1930, and only 10% in 1950.92 It was given independence in 1947, as the Gereja Toraja or Church of Toraja.93 Links with the mission continue to this day. The 1950s were a time of great instability, with Islamic insurrections against the newly formed Indonesian state. This saw a surge in conversions in response.94

In addition, the church provided a way to connect with the modern Indonesian world.95 Christianity was associated with modernity from early days, since the mission was involved in education from the beginning of its work in Toraja.96 It was a religion of the book,97 and also a religion that worked outside of Tana Toraja.98 With the quelling of Islamic insurgency in Sulawesi, and the opening of foreign investment in natural resources under Suharto in 1965, young Toraja men and women began to leave Toraja to look for work.99 They generally converted to Christianity, as well as providing sources of income that significantly challenged the social structures.

91Ibid., 466; Waterson, Paths and Rivers, 103.
92Ibid., 105.
93Nooy-Palm, The Sa’Dan-Toraja, 9.
94Waterson, Paths and Rivers, 90.
95Ibid., 93.
96Ibid., 101.
98Nooy-Palm, The Sa’Dan-Toraja, 10.
99Volkman, Feasts of Honor, 135.
1.9 Toraja culture and social structure

If significant change has come to Toraja through colonisation, mission, and modernisation, the relative preservation of much traditional culture is attested by its popularity as a destination for anthropological research. At this point, we will give a general overview; other material will be introduced at relevant points in the developing argument.

A major reference work is Hetty Nooy-Palm’s comprehensive two-volume study, which preserves much previous research. Before the coming of the Dutch, the main economic activity was agriculture, particularly rice; this had not changed significantly when Nooy-Palm was writing, and still applies to the rural areas where traditional culture is better preserved.\(^{100}\) Apart from a few members of the nobility who learnt the language and writing of the neighbouring lowland Bugis people, the Toraja had no exposure to writing. The myths, genealogies, and other kinds of fixed discourse that are comparable to writing were all passed on orally.\(^{101}\) The litanies of one feast have been recorded,\(^{102}\) and the Dutch linguist H. van der Veen also oversaw the creation of a dictionary, including a Toraja-Indonesia version.\(^{103}\) More recently, a Toraja anthropologist has provided a detailed linguistic study of a major feast, showing the pragmatic interests at work in the traditional forms.\(^{104}\)

Traditional Toraja society is structured around three kinds of groups, the clan, the village, and mutual aid groups. The clan is called a *tongkonan*, which refers both to the ancestral house where important rituals are held, and to those who belong to it.\(^{105}\) Descent through either parent is recognised, which in theory could create an exponential number of candidate *tongkonan* for a particular family, but marriage to distant relatives is encouraged in order to

\(^{100}\)Nooy-Palm, *The Sa’Dan-Toraja*, 12.

\(^{101}\)Ibid., 13.


\(^{105}\)Volkman, *Feasts of Honor*, ch. 3.
avoid this problem. Importantly, identification is maintained by attendance at ceremonies, accompanied by the appropriately sized gift, most often in the form of pigs.¹⁰⁶

A village is called a *ton dok*, though these are organised into larger groupings whose complexity varies by region.¹⁰⁷ Leadership is drawn from the highest caste, but within that hereditary group (based on *tongkonan*) leadership is a function of charisma, of showing the qualities of wealth (*sugi’*), wisdom (*kinaa*) and courage (*baruni*).¹⁰⁸ All areas had a slave caste below the leadership caste, and many had a commoner class in between.¹⁰⁹ The last structure, the *saroan*, was set up for mutual benefit in farming and in ritual obligations.¹¹⁰

1.10 Toraja Ritual and Myth

The Toraja word *aluk* terms refers to a collection of implicit and explicit norms that cover most of Toraja life. This includes myths about the origin of the physical world (of Toraja) and its people, rites that accompany all the regular events of life, ethical values, and tabus. The system as a whole can be termed *Aluk Todolo*, meaning the *aluk* of the Ancestors,¹¹¹ or *Alukta*, meaning “our *aluk*”.¹¹² It is a system that applies to the gods as well as humans.¹¹³

The rituals in this system have two main categories associated with the points of the compass. The *Rambu Solo’* rituals — meaning the smoke of the sacrifices descends to the underworld — are concerned chiefly with the dead, and its ritual sacrifices are performed on

---


¹⁰⁷Nooy-Palm, *The Sa’Dan-Toraja*, ch. IV.


¹¹³Sandarupama, “The Exemplary Center,” 52.

the West or South-West side of the *tongkonan*, with sacrifices being brought towards sunset. The *Rambu Tuka*’ rituals — meaning the smoke of the sacrifices ascends to the upperworld — are concerned with life, and their placement and timing is the opposite: North or North-East and before noon.\textsuperscript{114}

These rituals also have connection with different spiritual beings. Nooy-Palm records sixteen gods, with varying functions, but the main god is *Puang Matua*. This is the god who created humans, set the *aluk* on earth, and severed the bonds between heaven and earth due to incest and theft.\textsuperscript{115} He therefore stands as the source of the rituals. The *Rambu Tuka*’ rituals are oriented to these gods, though the particular example we will study later is focussed on the local spirits below.\textsuperscript{116}

The death rituals are connected with divinised ancestors (*deata*). For the nobility, at least, the ultimate destination of the soul is to join the gods and become a source of blessing to one’s descendants, particularly concerning rice, according to one chant.\textsuperscript{117} This happens as the result of a three-stage process. In the first stage, in the weeks, months or years between the person’s death and their funeral rite, the deceased is considered asleep rather than dead, and is termed *to makula’, “the hot one”*.\textsuperscript{118} In the second stage, during the rites, the soul reaches *Puya*, an underground place conceived of as southwest of Toraja.\textsuperscript{119} This is a resting place for the dead, perhaps not unlike Sheol in the Old Testament. At this point the *bombo* becomes an ancestor (*nene’) or “old one” (*to matua*).\textsuperscript{120} For those with the requisite status, the final stage is a ritual to return the soul to the upper-world as a deified ancestor.\textsuperscript{121}

\textsuperscript{114}Nooy-Palm, *The Sa’Dan-Toraja*, 112.
\textsuperscript{115}Ibid., 118.
\textsuperscript{116}See page 100.
\textsuperscript{117}Ibid., 123.
\textsuperscript{118}Volkman, *Feasts of Honor*, 84.
\textsuperscript{119}Nooy-Palm, *The Sa’Dan-Toraja*, 112.
\textsuperscript{120}Volkman, *Feasts of Honor*, 33.
\textsuperscript{121}Nooy-Palm, *The Sa’Dan-Toraja*, 113.
without this final stage, deceased ancestors have power for good and evil.\textsuperscript{122}

Apart from these, there are a range of lesser beings. Dead people who are not given the appropriate ceremony become souls who are dangerous to the living.\textsuperscript{123} There are also many spirits in specific locations, such as \textit{ampu padang} who live in the ground, who may require offerings if they will be disturbed.\textsuperscript{124} Finally, there is an array of harmful spirits.\textsuperscript{125}

Some of the pioneering ethnography that Nooy-Palm references was done by GZB missionaries, and the \textit{Gereja Toraja} has continued to show a keen interest in local culture. In the 1980s and 1990s, a research body with the Toraja Church, the \textit{Institut Theologia Gereja Toraja}, produced a series of books in Indonesian related to the Toraja context. The first looked at Toraja culture,\textsuperscript{126} the second at the Toraja world of magic,\textsuperscript{127}, while the third looked at the issue of contextualisation itself.\textsuperscript{128} This last publication criticised the early policy of the mission, which was to determine which parts of the Toraja \textit{aluk} were compatible with the gospel, and which were not. This was done by distinguishing \textit{aluk} and \textit{adat}, the former being religiously charged, and the latter understood as neutral cultural tradition.\textsuperscript{129} This allowed ritual practices with their social implications to continue while associated beliefs (such as souls being transported by the ritual) to wane.\textsuperscript{130} However, the authors argue that the Toraja \textit{aluk} was an indivisible whole. No part of it should escape renewal by God’s word, but the goal is to give cultural forms Christian meanings. Their simplest example is the use

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{122}Ibid., 124.
\item\textsuperscript{123}Ibid., 122.
\item\textsuperscript{124}Ibid., 126.
\item\textsuperscript{125}Ibid., 126–8.
\item\textsuperscript{126}Kobong, \textit{Manusia Toraja}.
\item\textsuperscript{127}Theodorus et al. Kobong, \textit{Roh-Roh \& Kuasa-Kuasa-Gaib} (Seri Institut Theologia Gereja Toraja; n.p., 1984).
\item\textsuperscript{128}Kobong, \textit{Aluk, Adat, dan Kebudayaan Toraja Dalam Perjumpaannya Dengan Injil}.
\item\textsuperscript{129}Ibid., 50–51.
\item\textsuperscript{130}Volkman, \textit{Feasts of Honor}, 36.
\end{itemize}
of the name *Puang Matua* for God.\footnote{Kobong, *Aluk, Adat, dan Kebudayaan Toraja Dalam Perjumpaannya Dengan Injil*, 51. Despite their mentioning Yahweh, a perusal of the Toraja translation of the Bible shows that the Toraja god’s name is used for *elohim* in the Old Testament and *theos* in the New Testament.} This suggests a desire to move from a Translation model to a Synthetic model, though the examples given are very simple.

A Synthetic model approach is evident in the dissertation of Theodorus Kobong, one of the authors of these church publications,\footnote{Theodorus Kobong, *Evangelium Und Tongkonan: Eine Untersuchung Uber Die Begegnung Zwischen Christlicher Botschaft Und Der Kultur Der Toraja* (Ammersbek bei Hamburg: Verlag an der Lottbek, 1989).} which has recently been translated into Indonesian.\footnote{Theodorus Kobong, *Injil dan Tongkonan: Inkarnasi, Konteksualisasi, Transformasi* (trans. Theodorus Kobong and Th. van den End; Jakarta: Gunung Mulia, 2008).} This takes a particular form of local leadership as a metaphor for Christ. It is a contextual theology, not a hermeneutic, but we will use it in the fourth Part. However, subsequent available published work in Toraja has tended towards Anthropological models, and does not add much to the existing publications of the church. The one exception we will use (in that it does add to cultural analysis) is the study mentioned above, that compares the model of sacrifice in Leviticus and a particular area of Toraja.\footnote{Christian Tanduk, “Pertemuan Dialogis Antara Korban Dalam Budaya Toraja Dan Kitab Imamat” (M.Th. thesis, Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana, 2007).}

## 1.11 Conclusion

In this introductory chapter, we have sought to outline the problem we are seeking to solve—to develop a three-culture hermeneutic—and to introduce the resources that will be used in doing so. Through the interaction of a cultural-linguistic approach drawing on resources describing Toraja culture combined with a canonical-linguistic approach, a Synthetic model hermeneutic will be developed.

The second chapter will demonstrate the hermeneutical issues by looking at Heb 9–10 in relation to orality and a view of sacrifice as efficacious. The final chapter of the first Part will explore issues of contextualisation using a cross-cultural set of value scales. One aspect of
this chapter is the argument that values change slowly, and so the modernisation of Toraja life does not imply that they have become Western. The second Part explores the differences between modern culture and traditional Toraja, and analyses their impact on Christian work in the neighbouring area of Poso. This provides sufficient definition of the West-Toraja axis in the three-culture scenario for us to proceed to developing our hermeneutical model in the third Part. This is applied to the letter to the Hebrews in the final Part. In this way the project broadly follows a pattern of observation, analysis, theory, and application.
Chapter 2

The Problem of Hebrews 9–10

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will introduce the letter to the Hebrews with a focus on some key exegetical issues in Heb 8–10. These verses draw much from the Levitical system of sacrifice that is foreign to modern Western experience, but has parallels in traditional Toraja culture.¹ Using orality as a cultural index, we will investigate different possibilities for understanding how the Levitical system is being used, and suggest that how Western interpreters explain this can be conditioned as much by their culture as by the text. The chapter thus concretely demonstrates the three-culture scenario, and introduces a number of issues that will be developed more extensively below.

2.2 The sense of Hebrews 9: 23

Our starting point for this investigation is Heb 9: 23, a single sentence in the Greek. We begin by looking at the sense of this verse, i.e., what the sentence means in itself (its intra-linguistic meaning), before considering the question of reference, or what the sentence is about (its

semantic meaning). In translation this verse says, “So, it was necessary for the sketches of
the things in heaven to be cleansed by these [things], but the heavenly things themselves with
better sacrifices than these.” The sense of this sentence in itself is clear, but rather vague on
its own. There are things in heaven, and sketches of those things. The sketches are cleansed
by “these things”, but the heavenly things need better sacrifices than these. However, this
sense is greatly clarified by the argument of which it is a part, which establishes the context
for a range of intertextual connections. The argument can be briefly summarised as follows.
After establishing in ch. 7 that Jesus is a Great High Priest, but of a non-Levitical kind,
the first part of ch. 8 talks about the heavenly sanctuary in which he served, the second
part quotes Jeremiah’s prophecy of a new covenant of which his high priestly ministry is the
key, then ch. 9:1–10:18 uses elements of the Old Testament sacrificial system to explain the
once-for-all cleansing which his ministry obtains, with the remainder of ch. 10 containing
appeals based on the preceding material. The use of “sketch” (ὑπόδειγμα) and “heavenly”
(ἐπουράνιος) in ch. 9:23 harks back to the discussion of the heavenly sanctuary in ch.
8:5, which uses precisely those two terms. The “sketch” in ch. 8:5 is the tent that Moses
built as a sanctuary. Since the verses leading up to ch. 9:23 refer to ceremonies conducted
in that same tent, the “sketches of the things in heaven” must signify that tent, and the

---

2Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language* (trans. Robert Czerny; London: Routledge Classics, 2003), 84–85. To adapt one of Ricoeur’s examples, the preeminent persecutor of the early church and the apostle to the Gentiles have very different senses, but refer to the same person.

3The adjectival form appears to have the same sense as the noun ‘heaven’ in the first part of the sentence.

4While ὑπόδειγμα in the New Testament usually characterises some behaviour as something to be followed
or avoided, i.e., an example or warning, here it characterises Moses’ tent as the copy of a heavenly sanctuary,
as the quote from Ex ch. 25:40 shows. However, the translation ‘copy’ may give the sense of a replica,
whereas the parallel word ‘shadow’ (σκιά) in ch. 8:5 suggests rather a rough ‘sketch’.

5The Greek σκηνή means ‘tent’, and is so used, for example, of the patriarchs’ portable dwellings (e.g.,
Gen 12:8). Where, as here, it signifies Moses’ portable sanctuary it has traditionally been translated ‘taber-
nacle’ (e.g., KJV, NIV), ‘tabernacle’ being simply the Anglicised form of the Latin for tent. This has become
a useful technical term to refer to the Mosaic portable sanctuary. However, to the extent that the word
‘tabernacle’ has a meaning outside this technical usage, it tends to refer to fixed church buildings. That mo-
bility is an important part of the sense of σκηνή is argued most recently in Thomas Keene, “Heaven Is a Tent:
“things in heaven” therefore signify the heavenly sanctuary. Included, then, in the sense of the “heavenly things” in ch. 9:23 is the characterisation in ch. 8:2 of the heavenly sanctuary as ‘genuine’ (ἀληθινόν), the counterpart of the ‘sketch’ and the ‘shadow’. Next, the cleansing “by these things” in ch. 9:23 looks back to the immediately preceding verses. V. 22 talks of cleansing by blood, which in the light of v. 19 and vv. 12 & 13 before that signifies animal sacrifices whose blood is sprinkled on the things cleansed. In v. 19 those things are the book from which Moses read the Law and the people. This is expanded in v. 21 to include the Mosaic tent and its furnishings. Thus, the cleansing “by these things” signifies the blood of animal sacrifices, understood as providing cleansing. This means that the “better sacrifices” are the parallel to those animal sacrifices for the heavenly sanctuary. The sense of the “better sacrifices”, then, is that which is required to cleanse the heavenly sanctuary, and its form is plural because the sacrifices that cleanse the earthly sanctuary are plural. However, what is referenced is Christ’s sacrifice. The term “better” has been used repeatedly to talk of things associated with Christ in contrast to things associated with the earthly meaning system of which the earthly sacrifices were are part, and the mention of blood easily takes the hearers back to v. 11–12 where Christ enters the same heavenly sanctuary on the basis of his own blood, which is likewise contrasted with the earthly Mosaic sacrifices. The inference that Christ is the better sacrifice is confirmed in the immediately following verses. The sentence as a whole thus asserts the necessity of Christ’s sacrifice to cleanse the heavenly sanctuary, just as the Mosaic sacrifices were necessary for cleansing the earthly sanctuary.

The Tabernacle As an Eschatological Metaphor in the Epistle to the Hebrews” (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2010).

2.3 Initial Reflections

It should be noted that my analysis above already displays a cultural bias, most notably that I am dealing with a written text that I have been trained to treat as an artefact.\(^7\) That Hebrews was written is acknowledged by the writer himself in ch. 13:22, but in the same verse he also styles the work a “word of encouragement”, and recent commentators have observed the oral nature of the work. Luke Johnson lists four aspects that point to this: the frequent use of first person (inclusive) plural; the use by the writer of verbs of speaking rather than writing; the alternation of exposition and exhortation; and the way that themes are adumbrated before being developed; for example, Jesus is mentioned as high priest in ch. 4:14; ch. 5:1–10 before the theme is developed in chs. 7–9.\(^8\) The first two points create a sense of the presence of the writer; the last two points help the listeners to follow without referring to a written text or outline. In relation to the third point, Johnson suggests that the work could be termed a homily, and I will use that term for the work, by analogy with the homilies of the Church of England, sermons written to be read aloud to largely illiterate congregations, and because it is a term I can easily reserve for this one use. I will also use the term “hearers” for the recipients, as does Johnson.\(^9\)

It has been argued that literacy is the single biggest driver of change in human culture, underlying “many of the contrasts often made between ‘western’ and other views” such as “from magic to science, or from the so-called ‘prelogical’ to the more and more ‘rational’ state of consciousness.”\(^10\) If this is the case, where would the writer and listeners of the homily have been on a scale from oral to very literate?

Walter Ong suggests that Plato was among the generation “for whom the alphabet had first become sufficiently interiorised to affect Greek thought,” enabling “lengthy sequen-


\(^9\)Ibid., 10.

tial thought processes... because of the ways in which literacy enabled the mind to process data."¹¹ Among his intellectual descendants was Alexander the Great, whose extensive conquests brought this new way of thinking to a far wider world. There was subsequently an unprecedented explosion in "the quantity and variety of Hellenistic and Jewish-Hellenistic literature."¹² Rather than being confined to specialist elites, perhaps like computers in the 1970s in the West, literacy began to be embraced by the wealthy, like computers in the early 1980s. The writer of the homily was almost certainly a member of this literate class, whether or not, like Paul, he used a scribe. While it was written in order to be read aloud, the level of organisation of the text and its conceptual density exceeds what is possible with purely oral productions, which tend to be episodic and highly redundant.¹³ Greek rhetoric, while oral in focus, was intrinsically shaped by the resources of literacy.¹⁴

What of the hearers of the homily? Though high with respect to any previous known culture, literacy rates in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds are estimated to have reached no more than 30% anywhere, and in most areas less than 20%.¹⁵ Large sections of the population clearly remained illiterate, and, as Ong details based on both research and cognitive considerations, their thinking would have been oral: limited interest in abstraction;¹⁶ categorisation by function not by genus;¹⁷ practical rather than theoretical problem solving;¹⁸

---

¹¹Ibid., 164.
¹³Ong, Orality and Literacy, ch. 2.
¹⁴Ibid., 9.
¹⁶In A. R. Luria’s pre-World War II research in Russia, respondents identified shapes by names of objects, not abstract names such as ‘circle’. See Ong, Orality and Literacy, 50.
¹⁷As asked to exclude the object not belonging with the others, and presented with a hammer, saw, log and hatchet, the same respondents chose the tool considered least useful for working with the log, rather than the log itself as not fitting the category of ‘tool’. See ibid., 50.
¹⁸Those respondents liked riddles but not self-contained logical puzzles. See ibid., 51–52.
and ostensive rather than analytical definition; the latter including difficulty in analysing the self as distinct from their situation. The research Ong quotes suggests that “passing acquaintance with literate organization of knowledge has, at least so far as his cases show, no discernible effect on illiterates. Writing has to be personally interiorized to affect thinking processes.” However, given the extensive literacy among the elites, illiterates in many parts of the Hellenistic world would arguably have had more than the passing acquaintance with literate ways of thinking that Ong’s conclusion assumes. This would have applied even more so for the Jewish and Christian communities, whose mythical world and communal and individual identity was shaped by texts in an way unparalleled in the surrounding pagan world. At the same time, a cultural divide between the literate and illiterate along the lines Ong suggests could be amply illustrated by comparing popular and philosophical ways of thinking in the Hellenistic world. To what extent our homily, or for that matter Paul’s letters, would have been immediately accessible to the illiterates among the original hearers, and to what extent the “teachers” in the house churches would have been expected to bridge that cultural gap is an intriguing question. Fortunately for the scope of this project, this is not a question we need to answer in relation to the first century A.D., as I will argue below.

It is interesting in this connection to note the emphasis in the homily on God speaking. Although the written Greek translation of the Old Testament (the LXX or Septuagint) is heavily used by the writer, it is never referred to as written (except at ch. 9:19 and ch. 10:7, in quotes from the Old Testament itself). The homily is designed to help the hearers hear God’s voice (Heb 3:7), rather than provide a written deposit for reference. This means that in my opening paragraph above, I have turned an act of speaking—a sentence from a word of encouragement—into a static object of analysis. While the intensity and abstraction of the analysis (discussing sense in attempted isolation from reference) is modern, the use of

---

19Ibid., 52–53.
20Ibid., 53.
21Ibid., 55.
a critical approach on a classic text is not. Indeed, classic texts will necessarily generate critical approaches, as new readers who are not part of the initial interpersonal context need to think “about” the text in order to make sense of it. Philo shows the level of sophistication that is possible for a contemporary of the writer to the Hebrews, as the Old Testament text is interpreted critically in order to make sense to Hellenist readers. The writer to the Hebrews is doing the same, not only in relation to contemporary culture but also in relation to the Christ event. Even though he emphasises that God speaks through the Old Testament text, he, along with the Christian tradition of which he is a part, has not just listened to the text but also reflected on, i.e., looked at, the text and thought around it.

Nevertheless, if the hearers of the homily varied from illiterate to literate, they were still far from the print- and now computer-charged literacy of the modern Western biblical scholar, whose way of thinking is not just thoroughly shaped by reading and by texts, but has usually had little contact with oral or semi-literate cultures. As we continue the discussion of Heb 9:23 below, I intend to draw out some cultural implications of this, particularly in how the self is understood. But the research quoted above also raises questions about method. The educated, mainstream Western church’s approach to hearing God’s word is to dissect the text— parsing individual words, making syntax diagrams of the sentences, constructing tables of the flow of discourse, reconstructing historical context— before attempting to rejoin these components into a living word for the contemporary hearer. This labour is divided into two (even if in practice not in as clear-cut fashion as I will describe here). The analytical stage is done by biblical scholars and recorded most definitively in commentaries. The discipline of homiletics then prescribes the process of synthesis with the contemporary context. We separate out the tools from the log and analyse the tools individually, and then as a separate discipline we learn how to cut the log in different ways. The appeal for Westerners of all this hard work is objectivity.\(^{23}\) It is clear that the second stage of application is necessarily context dependent. But it is based on the first stage, which as an historical enquiry into the original meaning of the text can plausibly aim at the objective meaning of the text.

\(^{23}\)See page 76.
That Western methods have provided many useful results is not in question. However, our discussion above raises the question whether such an approach will be difficult, if not impossible, in less literate contexts than that of the Western academy. This will receive further attention in the second Part. At this stage, I simply intend to demonstrate that the biblical scholars looking at our text are not purely objective, but are, quite appropriately, doing culturally conditioned exegesis aimed at Western Christians.

2.4 A defiled heaven in Hebrews 9:23?

In terms of reference, the “real-world” object or event the sentence is talking about, the crux in ch. 9:23 is what it means for the heavenlies to be cleansed. For many commentators this notion “raises difficulties.”24 As Peter O’Brien explains, quoting Lev 16: 16 & 19, the earthly tabernacle needed cleansing due to “the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites.” But if uncleanness is a metaphor for rebellion, that is, intentional disobedience of God’s commands, and heaven, as God’s abode, is free of rebellion, then heaven does not need cleansing. Two lines of interpretation seek to avoid the problem. The first argues that v. 23 is talking about cleansing the sanctuary as part of the inauguration of the new covenant.25 This has good contextual support. In ch. 8:6 the concept of a “better” covenant follows directly on from Jesus’ role in the heavenly sanctuary, and is given weight by the extensive quotation from the new covenant promise of Jer 31:31–34 in ch. 8:8–12. After the summary statement in ch. 9:11–14 comparing the achievement of the Old Testament sacrifices in the earthly sanctuary with that of Christ’s sacrifice in the heavenly sanctuary, the writer is ready to affirm as established that Christ has indeed become the mediator of a new covenant (ch. 9:15). The following verses, at least up to v. 20, are about the establishing of covenants, including the inauguration of the old covenant in vv. 18–20. V. 21 is difficult, since the tabernacle is first

---

24 Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 261.

mentioned in Ex 25 *after* the covenant inauguration ceremony in Ex 24, but is most likely referring to the inauguration of the sanctuary, seen as an integral part of the inauguration of the covenant, even though it was conducted later.\textsuperscript{26} Given the extensive comparison of old and new in the homily, we might even argue that after those verses a statement about Christ’s sacrifice inaugurating the new covenant is to be expected. However, this view does not solve the problem. Since on this view ch. 9:23 continues the inauguration theme of vv. 18–21, it requires v. 22 to include the inauguration ceremonies in its reference. In that case, the sprinkling of blood in the inauguration ceremonies is about cleansing, understood as forgiveness of sins, and so v. 23 still implies that the heavens need cleansing.\textsuperscript{27}

The other line of interpretation, which succeeds in avoiding the problem, in effect seeks to interpret the obscure in the light of the clear. In v. 14 something is cleansed by Christ’s blood which quite clearly needs cleansing, that is, the consciences of those who have done “dead works”. The path from the sense of ‘a heavenly sanctuary’ to a reference to conscience varies. F. F. Bruce argues from Eph 2:22 and 1 Pet 2:5 that Christians are conceived of as a temple. 1 Pet 1:2, 9 & 22–23 even talk of “sprinkling by the blood of Jesus Christ.”\textsuperscript{28} On the reasonable supposition of shared early Christian tradition, this is plausible background for the writer’s statements, and finds some confirmation in Heb 12:22–24 where Zion, the place of the temple, is associated with the church (v. 23, and in v. 24, the covenant). Harold Attridge, on the other hand, argues for a background in Platonic thinking, again a plausible

\textsuperscript{26}There is the further difficulty that in the three places where the consecration of the tabernacle is mentioned, namely Ex ch. 40:9, Lev 8:11, and Num 7:1, each of which in the LXX uses language similar to Hebrews’ “the temple and all [its] vessels”, there is no blood sacrifice mentioned. The first two, quite plausibly referring to the same event given the lack of narrative action in the chapters between them, mention anointing by oil, while Num 7:1, which appears to refer back to the earlier references, is silent about the mode of consecration. However, Lev 8:11 continues in vv. 14–15 with the sacrifice of a bull whose blood consecrates the altar. See ibid., 470; Susan Haber, “From Priestly Torah to Christ Cultus: The Re-Vision of Covenant and Cult in Hebrew,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 28 no. 1 (2005): 110–1.


\textsuperscript{28}F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 227.
hypothesis, whether the hearers are Hellenistic Jews or a mixed audience. On this ground, the “existential referent” of the heavenly sanctuary is the believers’ consciences. “What is ontologically ideal and most real is the realm of the human spirit.”  The two paths are not very far apart, though. Bruce talks of cleansing of defiled conscience as belonging to “the spiritual sphere” and wants to avoid “envisag[ing] the heavenly dwelling-place of God in something like material terms.” Attridge asserts that the writer does not develop the Jewish apocalyptic tradition of a heavenly temple “in a crudely literalistic way.” In either case, it is the realm of ideas and souls that is being addressed. Furthermore, the tone of their argumentation assumes that their readers will agree that religious meaning is found primarily in the spiritual rather than physical spheres.

Given the extraordinary picture particle physics paints of the physical world, it is not clear that we should interpret even our everyday world in a crudely literalistic way. Nevertheless, we do, for the simple reason that for everyday use the everyday models work well enough and do not require higher degrees in physics to use. A crudely literalistic or quasi-material interpretation of heaven would place heaven above the visible sky as the place of God’s (or the gods’) abode. This is a picture which makes good literal sense in a cosmology where the sky is a dome over the disc of the earth. However, it is important to note that functionally this picture did not place heaven within the empirical world, at least, not for Old Testament writers. One might ask how many days’ journey it is from Jerusalem to Dan, but a journey from earth to God’s abode was not within human grasp—only God could breach the gap one way or another. The picture serves another purpose: it places God above humans in every respect, in control of the empirically experienced powers of the sky (rain &c), able to view all things from a unique vantage point. These metaphorical meanings of the picture can work

29 Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 262.
30 Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 228.
31 Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 262.
32 See, for example, Ps 104:2.
beyond the particular cosmology they grew out of; indeed, moderns with our unbounded space can still debate whether God is “over” us, even though none of us are in any danger of using that language literally.\textsuperscript{34} The picture provides a model which gives language to a reality—the divine—with which humans seek to interact.

If the writer of Hebrews was educated in Ptolemaic astronomy, a literal interpretation of this picture may have been as crude for him as it is for moderns. Nevertheless, his use of heaven is not about astronomy in the modern sense, where we do send humans to the moon and human artefacts to the stars. Heaven is the place God has created (ch. 1:10) for God to dwell, from whence comes our calling (ch. 3:1) and the “heavenly gift” (ch. 6:4), to where Christ has gone before (ch. 4:14), and where, in exposition subsequent to our passage, God has prepared a city (ch. 11:16), namely the heavenly Jerusalem (ch. 12:22). In a wider biblical theology, this heavenly Jerusalem descends to the New Earth (Rev 21:2), which is at least consistent with the picture in Heb 12:26–27 of both heaven and earth (not just earth) being purified by a final eschatological shaking. The writer thus has a coherent picture of heaven. Within this picture, a heavenly sanctuary is the appropriate place in God’s abode to offer a sacrifice.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{34}So, in explicit response to Karl Barth’s vertical conception of heaven as above, Jürgen Moltmann argues, “The object of love cannot have a ‘below’ or a ‘later’, let alone a ‘less’,” see \textit{God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation} (trans. Margaret Kohl; London: SCM, 1985), 162. He redefines heaven more horizontally (and therefore egalitarianly) as openness to God’s future, see ibid., 165. Their disagreement has nothing to do with astronomy, but stems from an awareness that we think with symbols, not independently of them. As a piece of contextual theology for educated Westerners, Moltmann succeeds in connecting with central values of the modern age, but, evaluated by the model we proposed in the introduction, at this particular point tampers too much with the theocentric core of the biblical message.

\textsuperscript{35}See David Arthur deSilva, \textit{Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle ‘To the Hebrews’} (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2000), 28 for comparison of this picture with Hellenistic models. Based on that comparison, he suggests that the heavenly realm is the sanctuary.
2.5 Understanding defilement

The problem, then, is not crude literalism but developing a coherent model from what the writer says. Given that God is free from contamination, what is the defilement that is cleansed if the heavenlies in ch. 9: 23 is understand as God’s abode? Older commentators often talked in terms of the satanic polluting of heaven, with the cleansing being correlated with Satan’s expulsion from heaven in Luke 10: 18 and Rev 12: 9, which describe Satan being cast out of heaven. This is perhaps a case of explaining the obscure with the obscure, though the parallel is intriguing. The difficulty is, as commentators point out, this would be an image without parallel in the work, and thus not contributing to a coherent model. More promising is work that sees in the defilement-cleansing language a coherent conception of its own, not just metaphorical language for sin understood as individual intentional disobedience.

An important advocate of this approach was William Johnsson, who in his doctoral dissertation drew on studies in the phenomenology of religion to delineate a religious logic of defilement and cleansing which he saw illuminated many aspects of the discussion in this section of Hebrews. Defilement is conceived of as a stain on the person, holistically conceived, that is, not clearly distinguishing the ritual or bodily from the ethical or spiritual. It is, though invisible, contagious, like viruses and bacteria for moderns, and thus powerful in a dangerous way, and associated with death. It is associated like dirt with disorder, threatening not just the individual but society and the cosmos. A number of elements of the argument to Hebrews work well with this conception. The chief one is the emphasis

---


40 Ibid., 131.

on blood in Heb 9–10, including the statement about the necessity for application of blood in Heb 9:22. Blood is the great agent of purgation from defilement. The defilement of the heavenly sanctuary, as part of the cosmic dimension of an interconnected world, is also completely to be expected. Other themes such as the move from dread (curse) to confidence (blessing) also fit well, as well as the curse on those who “profane the blood of the covenant” (Heb 10:29). Johnsson emphasises that he is describing an anthropology, “how man in his existential concerns sees himself in relation to his fellows, to deity, and to the cosmos.”

Drawing on research which collates results from a wide variety of cultures, this exposes a pattern of thinking about human moral failure that is not easily grasped by the modern West, but was clearly prevalent in Hellenistic society, and most non-Western societies today.

While a couple of commentators, most notably William Lane, use Johnsson directly, those alert to defilement as a way of thinking are more likely to refer to recent research on Leviticus, chiefly by Jacob Milgrom. Milgrom, too, draws on anthropological research as well as ANE parallels to guide a text-based reading of Leviticus and other Priestly Old Testament material. He, too, understands defilement as contagious, reaching even to the sanctuary, and associated with death and disorder. However, he also argues strongly that the Levitical system was a radical recasting, indeed demythologising, of the surrounding religions, in the light of Israel’s relationship with one god conceived of as the only true God. Only humans, not demons, had the power to drive God out of his dwelling-place, and that was the only context in which impurity was a concern. If the sanctuary symbolised God’s presence, impurity thus symbolised human wrongdoing. Defilement left uncleansed threatened God’s

---

42 Johnsson, “Defilement,” 100.
43 Though it is instructive to read older commentators such as Calvin and note how naturally language of defilement is used.
wrath, ultimately in the form of God leaving the sanctuary. Illustrating the potential of this model, David deSilva sees the writer of Hebrews arguing that Jesus’ blood provides precisely that cleansing for the heavenly sanctuary, providing “the ritual enactment of God’s promised resolution to ‘remember sins no more’.”

The alternative, presumably, would be not just the dissolution of Israel but of the cosmos (compare Heb 12:26 above).

It is instructive to compare the approaches of Johnsson and Milgrom as they deal with similar (though not identical) material. Both stand in a tradition of anthropological scholarship that seeks to show the emic rationality of sacrificial rituals, in contrast to an older view of sacrifice as irrational, lacking any kind of logic. However, Johnsson paints a picture that is more alien to modern readers than Milgrom’s. Johnsson describes an anthropology, an implicit understanding of being human, where defilement and its cleansing with blood are basic realities. Of course, defilement and cleansing by blood are, as we would put it, symbolic not literal, in that they are referring to things that are unseen rather than visible dirt. However, what is accessed through those symbols is not something that can be accessed in other ways. In particular, defilement in this anthropology is not a picturesque way of talking about liability to judgement due to transgression of divine law, even if what causes defilement is often transgression of a tabu with divine sanction. Defilement and cleansing are understood from an emic perspective as basic experiences, experiences which do not differentiate the ritual from the ethical, the body from the soul.

Milgrom, by contrast, “decodes” the Levitical system into ethical categories, most clearly when he says, “Thus, in the Priestly scheme, the sanctuary is polluted (read: society is corrupted) by brazen sins (read: the rapacity of the leaders) and also by inadvertent sins (read: the acquiescence of the ‘silent majority’), with the result that God is driven out of

---


47 As viewed from within the culture, rather than etic, as viewed from outside the culture.


his sanctuary (read: the nation is destroyed).”\textsuperscript{50} Similarly, he describes the ascending of the smoke from the sacrifices as “a physical symbol of personal prayers and wishes rising to God.”\textsuperscript{51} In doing so, the Levitical systems\textsuperscript{52} are made “normal” for modern readers.

This contrast in approach points to a deep difference in how religion is understood, a difference which can be seen \textit{in nuce} in the era of the homily and its early interpreters. Guy Stroumsa highlights a number of aspects of this difference in his study of sacrifice in the early centuries of the Christian era. Speaking of Judaism after the destruction of the Temple, he argues, “Under the old regime of sacrifices, religious action in itself had had the power, or at least the ambition, to engage divine power, since it affirmed the equilibrium of the world and the link between the divine and human worlds. Now it is the individual consciousness that is charged with constantly reinvigorating the relation with the divine, still more invisible and incomprehensible than when the Temple was standing.”\textsuperscript{53} In the older scheme, sacrifice achieved its functions through performance, just as a handshake does in modern Australia. It is more important to know when and how to perform the ritual than to know why it works. Handshakers may have various theories about how shaking hands developed (e.g., as a sign of not carrying a weapon), and anthropologists can develop sophisticated theories about their social function. For most practitioners, however, the collection of rituals around greeting provide the practical cognitive maps they use to navigate socially. We both express and find out the state of a relationship in part by how warmly we greet and are greeted. During the regime of sacrifices, a family in Israel knew its sins were forgiven because the sacrifice had been presented. The question of individual consciousness was not absent, but it was expressed by doing the sacrifice correctly. In the newer scheme, inwardness becomes the essence, even if ritual actions are still being performed.

\textsuperscript{50} Milgrom, \textit{Leviticus}, 15.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 17.

\textsuperscript{52} Milgrom distinguishes a Priestly system in Lev 1–16 from a later development in Lev 17–27. See ibid.

\textsuperscript{53} Guy G. Stroumsa, \textit{The End of Sacrifice: Religious Transformations in Late Antiquity} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 70.
Behind this perception of sacrifice is a question of how being human is experienced, in particular, how identity is constructed. This identity construction is a cultural process, that is, the culture provides a set of concepts and practices that give definition to experience of self. Stroumsa speaks of the “transformation of interior life and of rational discipline” which, in their respective fashions, occurred in the philosophical strand of Greek culture and in Judaism.\(^\text{54}\) In their literacy-enabled critical reflections, philosophers gave definitions of what constituted the person, and how those elements interacted. In doing so, new ethical distinctions could arise, along with new means for controlling the self. One consequence of this was an increasing ability to differentiate “ritual” defilement from moral defilement, a differentiation not made in Johnsson’s schema. If, in a non-literate culture like that of the Toraja, adultery, no more and no less than attending a marriage and a funeral ceremony on the same day,\(^\text{55}\) is considered to be a defiling action that threatens disaster, at the opposite end of the scale in the Christian monastic movement any erotic thoughts at all were considered defiling of the soul.\(^\text{56}\) Stroumsa traces this change in identity construction and the meaning of sacrifice in Jewish, Christian and pagan culture of the centuries following Christ. Johnsson captures the oral culture start of this movement, while Milgrom, who draws heavily on Rabbinic interpretations of Leviticus from the time that Stroumsa is talking about, effectively presents a literate, inward reading of Leviticus.

\section*{2.6 Interpreting Hebrews 9 contextually}

Where does Hebrews stand in its use of Leviticus? Is it written to Jewish or mixed background believers who experience sacrifice as Johnsson describes it, or to hearers who are already making the move to an internalised religion as reflected in Milgrom’s Rabbinic interpretation?

---

\(^{54}\)Ibid., 12.


\(^{56}\)Michel Foucault and Jeremy R. Carrette, \textit{Religion and Culture} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 187.
Both possibilities allow a reading of Heb 9:23 as a heavenly sanctuary needing cleansing. However, they lead to different interpretations when it comes to the συνείδησις of dead works that is cleansed by Christ’s blood in ch. 9:14. The word συνείδησις means “consciousness of”, as in ch. 10:2, where the awareness is of sins that have not been cleansed. However, it was frequently used in Greek for the bad feeling that comes from being conscious of fault, of having done wrong, or, less frequently, the positive feeling of having done the right thing.\textsuperscript{57} The Latin form of the word, conscientia, gives us the word ‘conscience’, which in phrases such as “on one’s conscience” is similar to the Greek usage. It is seen as “the inward faculty of distinguishing right and wrong,”\textsuperscript{58} a retrospective judge evaluating actions. More controversial is the suggestion that the Stoics and/or Paul came to see συνείδησις as an internal guiding principle, replacing “morality based on the observance of an external rule.”\textsuperscript{59} However, working within the paradigm of defilement, Johnsson argues for two major differences in understanding the term in Heb 9:14. First, following Bouquet, he suggests that the context of defilement is better served by a translation of “numinous uneasiness.”\textsuperscript{60} This suggests not so much concrete awareness of specific transgression as of being defiled before a holy God. It is a form of awareness of moral failure, but not legal in flavour, closer to fear than a guilty feeling. Second, he argues that this awareness is collective, not individual, “it is the collective unease of the congregation which leads over and over to Atonement Day.”\textsuperscript{61} Given that collective unease implies unease at an individual level, this redefinition does not actually contradict the general sense of a bad feeling from being


\textsuperscript{60}Johnsson, “Defilement,” 286.

\textsuperscript{61}Ibid., 286.
conscious of fault. It does, however, place that unease in a very different context, one which the more philosophical (and therefore literate) strands of Greek culture were in the process of minimising in favour of a more individual and internalised perspective.\textsuperscript{62} We have, then, two alternative understandings of what συνείδησις could be referring to, understandings which, while not antithetical, point to quite different existential conditions.

There is before us, then, an intriguing historical question as to the writer’s religious sensibility along with that of his original hearers. However, as I intimated above, I suggest that it is not a question that requires a definitive answer. To see this, consider what commentators do with Heb 9:23. O’Brien, after surveying the options for the referent of the heavenly sanctuary and expressing his preference for the temple as (presumably a collection of individual) consciences, goes on to say, “whatever these ‘heavenly realities’ are, it is clear that they have been cleansed with better sacrifices, that is, by Jesus’ ‘one oblation of himself once offered’.”\textsuperscript{63} In effect he is saying, if ch. 9:23 refers to consciences we can make sense of it along the lines already discussed in ch. 9:14, and if it is referring to heavenly cleansing then we (his Western Christian readers) cannot really make sense of it, so in either case let us move on to the next point. Lane, as mentioned above, accepts Johnsson’s arguments and uses him at the relevant places, including agreeing that συνείδησις in ch. 9 is collective in focus and that ch. 9:23 refers to the heavenly sanctuary in need of cleansing.\textsuperscript{64} But there is no reference to this in the introductory section of his commentary, where he describes the theology of the book.\textsuperscript{65} The closest he comes to interpreting Johnsson’s perspective is in his introduction to ch. 9: “It is within a religious perspective that an earnest concern with access to the presence of God and with the decisive purgation of the defilement of sin is thrown into sharp relief.”\textsuperscript{66}

Lane the scholar sees that Hebrews was written for an audience unlike his own readers, but

\textsuperscript{62}Which Paul Ricoeure traces to the tribunal of the Greek city, hence its legal flavour. See Ricoeur, \textit{Symbolism of Evil}, 108.

\textsuperscript{63}O’Brien, \textit{The Letter to the Hebrews}, 338, italics original.


\textsuperscript{66}Lane, \textit{Hebrews 9–13}, 218.
is unable to make contextual sense of those differences at the points where he is describing
their significance. DeSilva, who writes about defilement as a distinctive cultural pattern in
his introduction to biblical culture,\(^\text{67}\) works harder in the “Bridging the Horizons” sections
of his commentary, but the significance he can distill for his Western readers comes down to
“Jesus’ personal involvement in securing a renewed relationship between believers and God”
and “a witness to us that we are now completely ‘right with God’.”\(^\text{68}\) Writing for Westerners
at the far end of the sacrifice-rejecting trajectory traced by Stroumsa, they assume, for the
sake of comprehensibility, that Hebrews is further along that defilement-inwardness spectrum
than the evidence may warrant, at the very least in terms of the themes that are clearly there
in Hebrews but are not developed in interpretation.

But what of the many cultures, including the Toraja culture, which are much closer to the
start of that trajectory? The area of Toraja spans an enormous range of development, from
the internet-enabled main towns to remote villages where even among young people literacy
is low. In such areas, problems such as adultery are handled by the local cultural leaders
meeting and dictating a solution to the parties involved, frequently involving the sacrifice of
a chicken or pig, or even water-buffalo. That the sacrifice is part of a worldview closer to
defilement than internalised guilt is also affirmed in anthropological studies,\(^\text{69}\) and we have
already noted the preliminary investigation by Toraja theologian Christian Tanduk giving
a positive conclusion to the hypothesis of a correlation between the Levitical worldview as
explained by Milgrom and the worldview behind this practice.\(^\text{70}\) In such contexts, it is at
least plausible that what is strange to us may make more sense to them. This is not to say
that they stand at the same point as the writer of Hebrews. For those in remote villages with
little education, they clearly stand further back. For them, would a commentary (or some
\(^{67}\)David Arthur deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers

\(^{68}\)deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 330.


\(^{70}\)Tanduk, “Pertemuan,”. Tanduk’s research focussed on the Sesean area, in the north of the North Toraja
regency, an area by no means among the least developed.
other culturally appropriate form of explanation) be justified in pushing the interpretation of Hebrews a little further back along the spectrum, again for the sake of comprehensibility?

We have here, then, an illustration of the two aspects of contextualisation we developed in the introduction. We agree with O’Brien’s suggestion above that what is essential here is the finality and sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice; this is the theo-dramatic aspect of the text. At the same time, in relation to its appropriation, we have seen cultural adaptation of the text, even by conservative scholars with a high view of the Bible’s transcultural validity such as the three Hebrews scholars above. These adaptations have implied different conceptions about what the original author was conveying to his hearers, as if its substance is partly shaped by the contemporary hearers. These conceptions are not necessarily contradictory, since moral failure is plausibly a complex enough phenomenon to encompass more than one model. However, it turns out that the ethos aspect of the text is not simply translatable.

2.7 Conclusion

Our discussion this chapter began from a close examination of the sense of the language of Heb 9:23. We followed this with reflection on that method itself. We saw that orality implies different cognitive preferences and abilities which make such method difficult. Returning to Heb 9:23, its reference raised questions about how language works, leading us to the central problem of the verse, why heaven needs cleansing. This brought up two ways of understanding the defilement/cleansing language of the writer’s surrounding argument, which we connected to the transition from sacrifice to inwardsness that was at work in the early centuries of the Christian Era. This suggested two alternative (though not antithetical) understandings of conscience in the letter (particularly at ch. 9:9 & 14). The exegetical strength of the defilement understanding is that cleansing the heavenly temple makes sense, conceptually and in terms of the surrounding argument. That Western commentators interpret conscience inwardly is therefore due to their context, to the need to make sense of the letter within an inward-oriented culture.
Our assertion at this point was to evaluate this positively. This would imply, however, that interpretation of the passage for cultures at the sacrificial end of the spectrum will legitimately be different. In acknowledging the questions this raises, our initial suggestion was that grasping the finality of Christ’s sacrifice is the goal, for which different conceptions of conscience may be required in different cultural contexts.

This is the mythos-ethos distinction we have already flagged, and will develop below. The issues of language, cognitive orientation, and conscience will also receive sustained attention. Our next focus, however, is ethos, which we will view through value complexes that differ in persistent ways between cultures, and affect interpretation.
Chapter 3

Values and interpretation

3.1 Introduction

A simple illustration of cultural difference is found in Geert Hofstede’s story of a Dutch missionary in Java who shared Jesus’ parable of the two sons (Mt ch. 21:28–31a). The parable is short: asked to work in the vineyard, one son agrees to go but does not go, while the other son refuses to go but then does go (the order differs in different translations, but that is not important here). Jesus then asks the Jewish leaders which son did his father’s will. In most manuscripts, they respond with the one who initially refused but then relented and went. This becomes the basis for Jesus to announce that those sinners who believed John the Baptist’s preaching are, in terms of the kingdom of God, ahead of the Jewish leaders who did not. However, to the missionary’s surprise, the Javanese congregation members chose the other son, the agreeable but non-compliant one, as doing the father’s will, since he maintained harmony. It turns out that these Javanese are not alone: there is a small

---

3In the Indonesian version, the agreeable son simply says “Ok” (“Baik”), which does not convey a definite promise, and the disagreeable son’s phrase (“I do not want to”) is quite unnecessarily direct.
group of manuscripts which has the Jewish leaders also identifying the agreeable but non-compliant son as the obedient one. By contrast, for the Editorial Committee of the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament, that variant “is not only difficult, it is nonsensical—the son who said ‘Yes’ but does nothing obeys his father’s will!” What seems natural to a group of Javanese Christians appears as nonsense to a group of Western scholars!

It is interesting that at least one scholar of New Testament culture, Jerome Neyrey, sees the public shaming of the father as worse in that culture than the lack of work in the field, agreeing with those Javanese against the UBS Editorial Committee. If this is so, this is an example of a non-Western culture being closer to a biblical culture, a benefit to the global church that is often put forward as a major reason to develop local traditions of biblical studies. Our focus is on a second reason, namely that the interpretation put forward by the UBS Editorial Committee potentially functioned to obscure the meaning of the text for locals. What is nonsense, what is problematic and what is obvious may be quite different between the two cultures. The obscuring occurs when the local culture does not become a reference point for hermeneutical investigation.

To illustrate this, consider the issues that could arise in discussion with the missionary. The Javanese position places them in disagreement with the Jewish leaders, which in the context of the Gospels can be a recommendation. Furthermore, their response raises the question of how serious the one son’s refusal to his father’s face was. The missionary reads

---

4Ibid., 44.  
7I am assuming that the original does have the Jewish leaders commending the refusing but then compliant son, since, apart from the much better manuscript evidence, Jesus’ rebuke at the end of v. 32 seems to assume that they have assented to this. However, Neyrey’s view, whether as a dominant cultural pattern or merely an option, opens up more straightforward reasons for the scribal changes than those offered by Metzger et al.
Jesus here engaging in a modern sidelining of the “religious” (showing respect to God) in favour of the “ethical” (doing the kinds of good deeds that God approves of). But for the Javanese, respect towards someone on whom one depends is very important, including to God. However, it is also possible that their response reflects the kind of hypocrisy that Jesus is accusing the Jewish leaders of, where the show of respect in ritual is a substitute for genuine obedience in other areas of life. If so, their initial interpretation of Jesus’ story exposes the more clearly its application to them: Jesus in fact favours the son who says “I do not want to” but goes, over the son who shows respect but does not go, and likewise they need to understand that showing respect to God is not sufficient. This does not affect what God is doing in the passage, namely, bringing sinners into the kingdom through the ministry of John the Baptist and Jesus. But their contextual interpretation — whether historically accurate or not — clarifies what God’s action means for them.

This chapter, then, will look at several value scales that reflect persistent differences between cultures. Our concern is to what extent they can obscure meaning, such that an interpretation appropriate for one end of the scale does not work at the other end of the scale. It will turn out that one of these scales has implications for the conceptualisation of contextualisation itself.

Hofstede’s example comes in the course of his explication of the results of a pioneering cross-cultural study of values. The multinational company he was working for discovered that, despite the same education, training and company structure, there were significant differences in performance in different countries. Using values surveys, he identified four value complexes, each on a one-dimensional index (scaled to fit from 0 to 100) which differentiated those countries. The first, the Power Distance Index (PDI), is “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.”8 The second, the Individualism-Collectivism Index (IDV), is discussed in more detail below. The third, the Masculine-Feminine Index (MAS), is the extent to which gender roles are distinct along a scale of ego (assertive, tough) versus social

---

8Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations Software of the Mind*, 61.
(modest, tender). The fourth, Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI), is “The extent to which
the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations.” Subsequent
research in Asia uncovered a fifth scale, Long Term Orientation (LTO), “the fostering of
virtues oriented towards future rewards, in particular, perseverance and thrift [versus] virtues
related to the past and present, in particular, respect for tradition, preservation of ‘face’ and
fulfilling social obligations.” This scale that did not appear in his own research because
values on this pole did not have sufficient salience in the West to appear in the surveys. He
views this as an object lesson in the influence of culture even on (social) scientific research.

His research supports the reality of value complexes as parts of homeostatic social sys-
tems. The cultural values associated with a degree of individualism or any of the other
indexes reinforce each other, and reinforce and are reinforced by social systems such as family,
schooling, politics, business and even philosophy and religion, each of which have a section
in relation to each index in his popular writings. As homeostatic systems they change only
gradually through generations. It is this which gives them long-term relevance. Though the
focus on this project concerns the less modernised Toraja, those issues concerned with values
are likely to have continuing relevance for modern Toraja as well.

Note that this implies that cultural values are not simply individual values writ large.
Individual values shaped by the gospel are one of the desired outcomes of appropriate con-
textualisation, but they are only one aspect of the social systems subsumed under the rubric
of cultural value complexes. Nor are they to be confused with individual psychology. For
example, one summary of research found that in collective cultures 40% of individuals may be

---


10Ibid., 161.

11Ibid., 359.

12Ibid., 358.

13Ibid., 13.

14Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations Software of the Mind.*
idiocentric, oriented to the self.\textsuperscript{15} These individuals will comply with ingroup requirements in accordance with the shared cultural values, but are more likely to feel and think negatively about them.\textsuperscript{16} Similarly (with differing terminology), Douglas Hollan et al. describes individual assertion among sociocentric Toraja, and a sense of a diminished self at losing a loved one among egocentric North Americans.\textsuperscript{17} Indeed, a cultural value system is likely to require differing, even contradictory, values in different individuals or situations in order to function properly.

For our purposes, however, cultural values are hermeneutical. Hofstede’s definition of a value as “a broad tendency to prefer certain states of affairs over others”\textsuperscript{18} implies this: the same state of affairs is given different meanings in different value systems. His goal is to help people from one culture to interpret the behaviour of others from the others’ grid of values and not from their own, so as not to misconstrue meanings because of cultural difference. Through a myriad of examples and stories taken from a large variety of other people’s research, accompanied by tables listing differing characteristics, he in effect trains his readers in habits of thinking that will help them relate to others with greater understanding. Our concern is more specific — understanding texts — and we will use his value complexes as doors into the major themes of dependence (collectivism and hierarchy), honour-shame, and preferred ways of knowing.


\textsuperscript{18}Hofstede, \textit{Culture’s Consequences}, 5.
3.2 Autonomy and Dependence

The most widely known and discussed value index is individualism versus collectivism. Hofstede characterises a collectivist society as one “in which the interest of the group prevails over the interest of the individual,”\textsuperscript{19} because between “the person and the in-group, a mutual dependence relationship develops that is both practical and psychological.”\textsuperscript{20} The IDV index is negatively correlated with PDI, that is, individualist societies tend to be more egalitarian. This makes sense: a high PDI also suggests dependence, in this case on superiors, and given that one’s own station is fixed, the richer the superior the more resources there are to depend on.\textsuperscript{21} What ties the two kinds of dependence together is economic need, and both indexes correlate strongly with national wealth. With only a handful of exceptions, countries in Hofstede’s study were either relatively wealthy, individualist and egalitarian (Western countries), or relatively poor, collectivist and hierarchical (“the rest”). Within the two groupings, however, the correlation of the two indexes largely disappears, thus showing that both the indexes are needed.\textsuperscript{22}

Modern Protestant biblical scholarship developed in tandem with the rise of modern Western culture, and the impact has been significant. These developments have often been understood simply as progress—much as metal knives might be thought simply to be more advanced than flint ones for the usual uses of a knife. A simple story of the modern world attributes Western culture to science, and Western prosperity to the technology that science enabled. Given the enthusiasm with which people from many traditional cultures (including Toraja) have embraced metal knives, electric lamps and mobile phones, this story has some plausibility. But in terms of values, there was not progress, in the sense of something good (a flint knife) becoming better (a metal knife). There was rather a series of reversals: dependence became bad, autonomy became good. Modern biblical scholarship has, of course, made

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{19}Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov, \textit{Cultures and Organizations Software of the Mind}, 90.
  \item \textsuperscript{20}Ibid., 91.
  \item \textsuperscript{21}Remember that PDI is about acceptance of inequality.
  \item \textsuperscript{22}Hofstede, \textit{Culture’s Consequences}, 216.
\end{itemize}
many metal knives, especially in the area of technical resources related to biblical languages, cultures and historical context. But this reversal of values has created a gap with collective cultures that places the West in a category of its own.

One of the chief emblems of this gap is secularisation, the process whereby religion was constructed as merely one part of culture and then sidelined. Taylor’s magisterial account of this process describes three strands by which mutual dependence was reduced and individual autonomy enabled.23 The most obvious is disenchantment, whereby the world of obscure magic and capricious spirits was replaced with ultimately knowable and predictable laws, enabling unprecedented control of nature. Connected with this was the dissolution of a cosmos impregnated with divine meanings and governed by sacred as well as profane times, and its replacement with the blank canvas of a regular universe, on which humans could project dreams of their own choosing. A fractured world, in the sense of having obscure depths of meaning and not being amenable to control, was replaced by a transparent and ordered world.

The success of science and the explosion of technology gave this ordered world increasing plausibility, but the insights that lay behind it preceded that success, and Taylor argues that its initial plausibility was connected with the other two strands, the social and the individual. At the social level, new models of civility combined with the impulse of religious reform to create new kinds of social order. The models of civility included a society free of carnivals and other kinds of social disorder, and this reform was powered at least partly by the needs of emerging states for increasingly productive and useful citizens.24 The impulse of religious reform desired all Christians to live a consistent Christian life; this was programmatic in the Reformation’s priesthood of all believers, but was a developing impulse long before then. The two impulses of civility and religious reform were “frequently seamlessly combined in practice”25 and implied a “reconstructive” attitude to society and the self.26 This is the

---

24 Ibid., 107.
25 Ibid., 103.
26 Ibid., 114.
connection with science. Formerly, both science and ethics searched for intrinsic forms and purposes. Action (praxis) was thus a kind of mimesis, a conformity to preexisting order. But a reconstructive attitude implies poïësis, a making or fashioning of the self and society, and manipulation of a mechanistic world. This requires new, more abstract and theoretical kinds of reasoning, since the purpose of things is now extrinsic to them. It also gives a new prominence to the will, emphasising no longer conformity to a world of givens, but the strength to carry out that fashioning and manipulation against resistance.

Through this, a new ordered self began to emerge, which Taylor terms a “buffered self”, replacing the “porous self” of medieval times. The porous self is vulnerable to the world: its mind can be taken over, emotions like love can be created within it, and its body can be healed or harmed, all by non-physical forces from outside the individual. The porous self is the fractured individual experience of a fractured enchanted world. This is how, in medieval Europe at least, dependence on the group (including the whole village) and on authority (including God) is a psychological as well as a practical necessity. As an example, Taylor points to collective medieval rituals such as beating the bounds, where community solidarity was necessary to renew protection against threatening spiritual powers. By contrast, the buffered self has a clear boundary with the world, and what happens within that boundary is under the control of the individual. As prosperity and other changing social conditions weakened the practical need for mutual dependence, the buffered self weakened the psychological need. A strong will is expressed rather in autonomy and self-reliance.

The Reformed buffered, autonomous self was freed from three fears that gripped medieval Europe: the fear of magic, the fear of hierarchy, and the fear of eternal damnation. The missionaries of the colonial era were in charge of nature, equal to other persons, and confident of their salvation. They were also civilised, finely fashioned from the raw material of human

---

27Ibid., 113.

28Ibid. Taylor links this with the autonomous freedom of God emphasised in nominalism and affirmed in the Reformation emphasis on God’s sovereignty.

29Ibid., 74–75.
nature in a way that those they ministered to were not.\textsuperscript{30} Encountering cultures like that of Toraja, the missionaries came face to face with their own past. Defending the apparently poor state of Indonesian Christianity in the earliest twentieth century, Dutch missionary Albert Kruyt draws an explicit comparison with the almost unrecognisable state of European Christianity at particular times, and how Christianity was nevertheless able to lift the European nations to ever higher levels.\textsuperscript{31} His discussions make it clear that this rise in level is, more or less, the rise of a Christian buffered self, living in conscious and self-willed obedience to God, rather than driven by custom and the fear of spirits.\textsuperscript{32} The obvious assumption was that an area like Toraja needed to go through a similar process, albeit, Kruyt hoped, in a much shorter time.\textsuperscript{33}

The buffered self belonging to the modern state in an ordered world has had a significant impact on biblical interpretation. The most salient, indeed controversial, level in the past two hundred years has been the level of an ordered world, which made the biblical world of divine intervention seem implausible to many exegetes and theologians.\textsuperscript{34} But the level of the buffered self has the subtler consequence that miracles are not existentially relevant. An obvious example concerns Jesus’ exorcisms. Even for those who accept the biblical accounts at face value, the buffered self, impervious to the world of spirits, makes them existentially irrelevant as exorcisms. Modern medicine has the same effect in relation to Jesus’ healings. This results in missionaries hardly even seeing felt local needs, and applying Western solutions, such as dismissing occult forces as superstition, rather than, say, a biblical emphasis on Christ’s victory over such forces.\textsuperscript{35} Malaysian theologian Hwa Yung goes so far

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{30}Ibid., 101.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{32}See, for example, ibid., 209, which will be discussed below.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{33}Ibid., 255.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{34}David H. Kelsey, \textit{Proving Doctrine: The Uses of Scripture in Modern Theology} (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1999), 179 n.5.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{35}The classic exposition of this issue is Paul G. Hiebert, “The Flaw of the Excluded Middle,” \textit{Missiology: An International Review} X no. 1 (1982), which we will discuss below.
\end{flushright}
as to make this one of his major criteria to evaluate whether Asian theologians are mangoes (yellow through and through) or bananas (white on the inside). The Asian world has not been disenchanted of magic, spirits and an awareness of the divine. If, for example, Jesus’ exorcisms are connected to psychological or physical healing rather than to a current phenomenon of possession, it looks like the preacher or theologian is reading off a Western script.\(^36\)

Equally difficult to appreciate for moderns is the preference for dependence over autonomy. Most Westerners view groups they belong to, and chiefly the state, through the prism of instrumental individualism — that the group exists for the individuals within it.\(^37\) Protestant Christianity, whatever its role in the genesis of such a view, has shown little resistance to it. The New Testament contains an irreducible eschatological individualism — “God will give to each according to his deeds” says the apostle Paul (Rom 2:6). In Calvin’s *Institutes*, this individualism takes on some prominence when the church is discussed under the heading of “external means or helps”; in other words, the church becomes an instrument for the individual’s salvation.\(^38\)

Such a view is compatible with moral individualism, that what counts morally is the individual heart, not relational impact on others. This is a distinction that Foucault traced in Late Antiquity, with a shift from an ethical concern with penetration (relational integrity) to a concern with erection (individual purity), the latter being Augustine’s influential theologising of currents in the monastic movement.\(^39\) Taylor notes a similar shift, predating the Reformation, from an emphasis on relational sins (“anger, violence, the dislocation of fraternal bonds”) to the internal purity of the individual.\(^40\) On this account, the church becomes

---

\(^36\) Yung Hwa, *Mangoes or Bananas? The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology* (Regnum studies in mission; Oxford: Regnum, 1997), 73–76.

\(^37\) Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 541.


\(^40\) Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 69. He connects this with social changes such as the increasing individualism in city states. In between urban Late Antiquity and the urban Renaissance was the massive influx of collectivist
the instrument of enabling individuals to persevere in faith, with relationships with others as a spiritual means (an aspect of obedience) rather than an end. To the modern Westerner, this seems normal, even if we come to the conclusion that it is deficient theologically.

Joel Robbins’ study of the Urapmin tribe in Papua New Guinea provides an example of the difficulties when such an individualist Christianity (Pentecostalism) takes root in a non-individualist culture. Robbins draws on Louis Dumont’s typology of “paramount” values. Paramount values “determine what cultural form something has to take in order even to be eligible to be reckoned as good.” In the West, the paradigm individualist culture, only persons can be evaluated, and that evaluation takes place with respect to “their own self-determined projects”—inner purity would count as an example—“rather than on the state of a larger whole.” Hence, Western culture has seen an ever-increasing elaboration of the self, in comparison to the lack of elaboration of those few areas where the whole might be valued over the individual, such as family. In a holist culture, what is valued is a desired state of the whole (e.g., the nation-state), and actions are valued according to their role in achieving that state. Robbins argues that Melanesians are not individualist because they see themselves more as “a microcosm of relations” than as individuals, with much of their behaviour “elicited by the requirements of the relationships that they have.” Nor do they have a conception of their society as a whole, and so they cannot be holist. Rather, relationships are what are most highly valued, and the reference point for moral evaluations.

---

42 Ibid., 291.
43 Ibid. This is our moral individualism.
44 Ibid., 290.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid., 292.
48 Ibid.
He terms this relationalism.\footnote{See Debra McDougall, “Christianity, Relationality and the Material Limits of Individualism: Reflections on Robbins’s Becoming Sinners,” The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology 10 no. 1 (2009): 14–15 for a critique that relativises the “paramount” values, and recasts relationality as a strategy for acting as an individual and as a collective, in different contexts. This does not affect the general point at hand.}

Robbins argues that their relationalism clashed with both the moral and eschatological individualism of the Christianity they came in contact with. At the moral level, wilfulness was salient as a problem in traditional Urapmin morality, since individual desire could negatively impact relationships. However, evaluated with respect to its effects on relationships, it had its place. For leaders in particular, wilfulness was necessary and positive. However, as Christians, they evaluated wilfulness with respect to the individual, that is, as an expression of the heart. As such, it became always wrong, regardless of its consequences.\footnote{Robbins, Becoming Sinners, 293.} He relates another story of a woman confessing to anger. Such anger was culturally expected, since the person had been cheated by close family, yet the person still took moral responsibility for her response. In this, he says, “the confessing subject in Urapmin is a perfect example of the ‘nonsocial’ yet still moral individual of Christian individualism,” non-social since the moral evaluation concerned only her heart.\footnote{Ibid., 298.} A negative result of this concern could be withdrawal from important roles in society, such as negotiating a bride price for one’s daughter or becoming a big man, since these would involve self-assertion.\footnote{Ibid., 246–7.}

Regardless of whether Robbins is right that Christianity is \textit{inherently} morally individualist,\footnote{McDougall, “Christianity, Relationality and the Material Limits of Individualism,” 1–19 cites examples of Christianity leading to new forms of collectivity (such as belonging to international churches), as well as opening up space for individualism.} the tensions he describes are instructive. Christianity does have an inherent eschatological individualism. Each believer is a servant with direct responsibility to the Master (Rom 14:4); to the extent that a particular form of Christianity has a religious elite, it does not have exclusive responsibility for mediating the divine. By contrast, in the Urapmin
traditional religion, a few specialists took care of religious concerns on behalf of the rest. Robbins argues that this tension created a dualism, as they wavered between a relationalist and individualist hope of salvation.

Robbins describes the tension wrought by the individualist hope of salvation through the puzzle that Mt ch. 25:1–13 presented to one of his respondents. The parable describes ten women waiting for a bridegroom, five of whom do not carry enough oil and miss out on entrance to the wedding. The respondent’s question was why the other women with enough oil did not share it, as the Urupmin would do in most situations. He solved this problem by interpreting the oil as belief; this works because belief cannot be shared. However, this non-relational property of belief had particular social consequences, as seen in their practice of confession. This was done privately before a pastor or deacon in strict confidentiality. It thus acted only on their individual relationship before God, and had no benefit for restoring relationships, as the traditional sin-removing rite did. A similar pattern can be seen in Toraja, where Christians have likewise dropped public confession as an integral step in dealing with sickness. From one respondent’s perspective, “it is only the public acknowledgement of wrongdoing and the disentangling and reordering of troubled social and spiritual relations which this acknowledgement promotes, that insures a return to individual and community well-being.” For such an expression of Christianity, salvation becomes a matter of cleansed hearts, not restored relationships.

This tension was periodically relieved for the Urupmin when the whole community would enter a period of heightened millennial expectation, in which all would be considered pure and therefore the whole community would experience salvation. This was expressed ritually in the “Spirit disco”, where, following personal confession of every member, people would be

---

54 Robbins, Becoming Sinners, 299.
55 In v. 9, the women’s reason is that there will not be enough to go around. No doubt, the Urupmin would still share; better to all fail together than to have only some enter, as in the parable.
56 Ibid., 297.
possessed by the Spirit as evidence that the whole community was clean.\footnote{Robbins, \emph{Becoming Sinners}, 305–6.} This appeared to resolve the problem of not making it to heaven together, but Robbins doubts that a genuine collectivity is formed. Robbins rather characterises it as a pseudo-holism, a collective built on top of individualism and based on a common feature, but not on the integrated roles and relationships of a genuine holism. Robbins sees their eschatological unity similarly: their togetherness is about all of them having individual purity, a characteristic which neither connects with their everyday social roles, nor is even based on the quality of their relationships.\footnote{Ibid., 309.}

The tensions experienced by the Urapmin are perhaps more often resolved in favour of relationalism or holism, to the chagrin of the individualist missionary, as Kruyt experienced in Poso.\footnote{See chapter 6 below.} However, we see how a style of Christianity which can be functional in another context became in some respects quite dysfunctional, due to its cultural incongruity, an incongruity which is not integral to the gospel.

### 3.3 Grace and Reciprocity

The shape of dependence in many cultures includes some form of an honour system. This is increasingly recognised as a potential blind spot for Western biblical studies, because honour-shame language features strongly in the Bible, but has not been regarded as having theological or ethical substance.\footnote{For a discussion of this, and application to an Asian context, see Jackson Wu, \emph{Saving God’s Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation Through Honor and Shame} (EMS Dissertation Series; Pasadena, Calif: WCIU Press, 2012). He argues that honour-shame is integral even to Romans, often considered the bastion of a judicial understanding of Christ’s work (which Wu also affirms).} And indeed, for the buffered self, it does not make sense that one’s worth depends on others’ evaluations. This was not always so, and Taylor describes a shift in Western culture reflected in Descartes’ redefinition of dignity as “liv[ing] up to... the non-
socially-defined [rank] of rational agent.”  

Outside of certain fields, such as sport or the military, one’s actions are meant to be self-directed, whether by reason, conscience, or some other aspect of the self, not directed by public opinion.

In the 1950s and 1960s, a group of anthropologists published a set of studies suggesting that a broad Mediterranean honour-shame system could be discerned from ancient Greece through to present-day communities. Given that most of the Bible takes place in the same area, a number of biblical scholars have sought to read the Bible on the hypothesis that the honour-shame language in the Bible reflects this cultural system. One such study by Neyrey is of immediate interest, because it focuses on Mt ch. 5:1–6:18, a major passage used to support modern interiority: actions (murder, adultery) become matters of the heart (anger, lust); love is to respect no boundaries; piety is the individual alone before God. It is worth investigating whether, informed with insights from anthropology about some collectivist cultures, interpretations may emerge which are more accessible by those cultures.

Bruce Malina argues that honour plays much the same role in the biblical world as economics does in the modern West: it is the “pivotal” value system that ties all other values together. Western economics describes a system where in principle individuals can succeed in independence of relationships that are given, such as family or ethnicity or place of birth. The high individualism and low power distance implied by this is enabled by economic

---

62Taylor, A Secular Age, 134.
65Neyrey, Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew.
wealth;\textsuperscript{67} in poor countries, a family’s honour is in effect their relational capital. Wealth is not irrelevant, but having standing within networks of obligation is more important.\textsuperscript{68} These networks are composed of pairs of men who enter relationships of reciprocity. These can be between those of equal status, which Malina sees as “enabling the social interdependence necessary for life” within the closed system of the local community,\textsuperscript{69} or patron-client relationships between those of unequal status, which make available the greater resources of the patron in return for the support of the client.\textsuperscript{70} On this view, honour is the motor of reciprocity because it is only honour that requires that a favour be returned. Such an idea is not absent in Western culture, of course. However, since the necessities of life, including others’ help, is limited in the biblical world, honour takes on an urgency that is hard for Westerners to appreciate.\textsuperscript{71}

Such is the structure of the honour system. Central to its implementation is the “public court of reputation” (PCR), the actual evaluation of a person by the “public.”\textsuperscript{72} Malina describes two kinds of honour, attributed and distributed.\textsuperscript{73} Attributed honour comes from without, from family of origin or designation by a sufficiently powerful superior or God. Distributed honour comes from action, and here the system makes its sharpest claims. First, there is a clear gender distinction. Males accrue honour in public before other men, women

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{67}Hofstede, \textit{Culture’s Consequences}, 216.
\textsuperscript{68}Albert Schrauwers contrasts the abilities of two rich people in his area of Sulawesi to put on a celebration; the one who had worked elsewhere and did not have networks was very limited in what he could do. See Albert Schrauwers, \textit{Colonial ‘Reformation’ in the Highlands of Central Sulawesi, Indonesia, 1892–1995} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 186–7.
\textsuperscript{69}Malina, \textit{The New Testament World}, 94.
\textsuperscript{70}Ibid., 95.
\textsuperscript{71}Nerrey, \textit{Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew}, 18.
\textsuperscript{72}Zeba Crook, “Honor, Shame, and Social Status Revisited,” \textit{JBL} 128 no. 3 (2009): 593.
\textsuperscript{73}Malina, \textit{The New Testament World}, 32–33. Malina’s terms are “ascribed” and “acquired”, but “acquired” implies the individual as the subject who acquires, whereas it is the PCR that distributes honour. See Crook, “Honor, Shame, and Social Status Revisited,” 591–611.
\end{footnotesize}
maintain honour in the domestic sphere through submission and especially sexual purity.\textsuperscript{74} Second, men accrue honour in an agonistic fashion, summarised by Neyrey as claim, challenge, riposte and public verdict.\textsuperscript{75} Honour comes when the claim (based on a self-perception) results in a positive public verdict.\textsuperscript{76} Jesus’ interactions in the temple illustrate this well. Jesus’ actions and teaching in the temple make very strong claims to God’s authority, such as that he is God’s final messenger to Israel (Mt ch. 21:33–43). These claims directly infringe on the status of the Jewish leaders. In turn, the Pharisees and Sadducees challenge Jesus with difficult questions (Mt ch. 22:15–40). In each case, Jesus has a riposte which silences them, and the crowds give their positive verdict of astonishment (Mt ch. 22:33). The agonism in such examples is clear, but the claim is that in almost all interactions by men in the public square, honour is at stake. These include “positive” challenges, such as praise, gifts, or requests for help, since the recipient’s response is still open to evaluation by others. Whenever a man is in public (or not in public when he should be), his honour is subject to the PCR.\textsuperscript{77}

The final claim is that challenge and riposte, however, only count between those whose status is equal.\textsuperscript{78} This has a systemic plausibility, even necessity. Different status levels correspond to different levels of resources which are not in direct competition. A slave cannot threaten his master as master, and if his actions are considered threatening or inappropriate, his punishment is simply punishment, not a riposte. To treat it as a challenge would actually be to concede a status that is not there. Conversely, if a master beats his slave unjustly, the slave has no standing with which to object. Thus, Pilate pities Jesus and flogs him with equal

\textsuperscript{74}Malina, \textit{The New Testament World}, 47–48. This distinction is not absolute: a “fallen” woman may still have respect in other areas, and there is ample evidence, especially in Roman culture, that it did happen that a woman accrued honour in the public sphere. See Crook, “Honor, Shame, and Social Status Revisited,” 591–611. Debora and Esther would be Old Testament examples.

\textsuperscript{75}Neyrey, \textit{Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew}, 20.


\textsuperscript{77}Ibid., 36.

\textsuperscript{78}Ibid., 39; “Only equals may play,” Neyrey, \textit{Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew}, 20.
indifference to status implications with respect to Jesus. The absoluteness of this requirement of status equality has been challenged, however. If patrons—including even emperors or gods—fail their clients, then the PCR has the power to revoke their attributed honour, and therefore their status. Zeba Crook thus lists examples of commoners (as a collective) challenging emperors and gods disappearing from use. Status is never an absolute given, and punishment of inferiors can function as a riposte to maintain honour. Less convincing are his arguments from Jesus’ ministry, where he appeals to Jesus’ lowly status as an artisan. Socio-economic status is hardly the playing field on which Jesus challenges the religious leaders of the day. His εξουσία (Mt ch. 7:29; ch. 8:9; ch. 9:8) is as a prophet whose status is attributed by God. In this he does compete directly with the religious leaders, since he claims such roles as defining Torah-observance (Mt ch. 5:17–20) and mediating God’s forgiveness (Mt ch. 9:1–7). The crowds’ acclamations makes this claim credible as a challenge to them: the PCR rules.

Armed with this cultural understanding, Neyrey interprets the Beatitudes (Mt ch. 5:3–12), Antitheses (ch. 5:21–48) and Instructions on Piety (ch. 6:1–18) as redefining the honour game for the village life of Jesus’ hearers. To take the last first, the Instructions on Piety do not challenge alms-giving, prayer, and fasting as acts expressing right relationship to God. Rather, there is a contrast in mode: they are to be done “in secret” (ch. 6:4, 6 & 18) rather than “before men” (ch. 6:1). This is usually taken as a contrast of sincerity and hypocrisy. The hypocrisy is seen in honour becoming the goal of the acts rather than the poor, God’s kingdom, or self-humbling. Since sincerity is a matter of an undivided heart, “in secret” becomes a code for purity of motivation, with Jesus’ commands providing means for building or guarding sincerity. For Neyrey, the contrast in mode is quite concrete. “Before men”

---

80Ibid., 602–4.
81Ibid., 601.
CHAPTER 3. VALUES AND INTERPRETATION

refers to the custom of men performing those practices together as an expression of their solidarity in piety and thereby as an expression of their honour.\textsuperscript{84} Hence, “in secret” means doing those activities at home, forgoing public honour and solidarity.\textsuperscript{85} The contrast, then, is in where honour is sought, whether from the community or from God. This is, no doubt, a matter of the heart, but unlike the usual interpretation, it is not guarded by the sincerity of introspection, but rather through a change in practice, a change in the arena where one performs the acts of piety. Of course, in Neyrey’s picture that practice has precise cultural expression, one which is impossible today because the actions in Jesus’ words do not have the same cultural meanings. The standard interpretation provides a way of generalising Jesus’ intention so that it can be applied in a practice-neutral way: in whatever context we find ourselves, we can examine our hearts for evidence of seeking praise of others. For the less introspective traditional Toraja, it will be far more useful to translate the practices. At the very least, interpreting “in secret” at the level of the family rather than the individual is likely to make good sense.

Neyrey sees the practices put forward by Jesus as almost certainly causing rifts with the local community. His interpretation that Jesus’ words imply avoiding local solidarity seems to import a theme of separation from an evil and adulterous generation. For Mt ch. 6: 1–18, it may be better to allow for hyperbole on Jesus’ part, given that the actions of the hypocrites are extreme. Doing the acts of piety at home is then a discipline which trains Jesus’ disciples in looking to God for honour, but does not forbid involvement in local practices of piety in a God-honouring way, as ch. 5: 16 indicates.\textsuperscript{86} When we come to the Antitheses, Jesus clearly is speaking counter-culturally, and Neyrey’s proposals add a useful dimension for our purposes.\textsuperscript{87} He reads Mt ch. 5: 21–48 as Jesus forbidding his disciples to make claims to

\textsuperscript{84}Neyrey, Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew, 216.

\textsuperscript{85}Ibid., 218–21.

\textsuperscript{86}Neyrey notes the tension between this verse and Mt ch. 6: 1, but solves it by making good deeds and acts of piety two separate categories, see ibid., 216. However, his proposal of withdrawal seems to contradict Jesus’ missiological purpose in ch. 5: 16.

\textsuperscript{87}He does not claim that other approaches to this passage are superseded by his approach, see ibid., 210.
honour,\textsuperscript{88} to initiate\textsuperscript{89} or continue challenges,\textsuperscript{90} and to make a riposte to a challenge.\textsuperscript{91} In other words, all of the moves necessary to maintain honour in the village are forbidden.\textsuperscript{92} This interpretation highlights social consequences rather than motives of the heart. Looking at a woman with lust is wrong as an aggressive act against her family, not as evidence of impurity of heart.

As the final verses of the Antitheses indicate, Jesus’ disciples are to see themselves as part of a new family with God as father, and to follow his value system, which includes doing good to enemies. Neyrey claims that Jesus does not reject honour as such, and indeed plays the honour game in his claims to be God’s emissary. Rather, Jesus redefines the values which define what is honourable.\textsuperscript{93} He goes so far as to argue that μακάριοι in Mt ch. 5:3–12 should be translated “how honourable” rather than “how blessed”.\textsuperscript{94} However, others have pointed out that Jesus’ redefinition of honour evacuates the distinctive features of the Mediterranean honour system.\textsuperscript{95} The emphasis on the home\textsuperscript{96} cuts across the male/female distinction. The agonistic pattern of challenge and riposte is forbidden by Jesus. Nor does God replace the PCR directly, since his honour gifts are attributions, not distributions. The community of the faithful does function as an alternate PCR, but their estimations are shaped by God’s word in ways that are more explicit and directive than the influence of general cultural values and custom. In fact, it is only at the final judgment that God’s valuation will become public.

\textsuperscript{88}The oaths of ch. 5:34–37 are interpreted as forms of boasting.
\textsuperscript{89}For example, looking at a women (ch. 5:29), as well as adultery (ch. 5:28), is aggression against the male whose honour is bound up in her chastity.
\textsuperscript{90}Rather, the challenger must reconcile (ch. 5:23–26).
\textsuperscript{91}Rather, turning the other cheek and loving enemies (ch. 5:39–45).
\textsuperscript{92}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{93}Ibid., 221.
\textsuperscript{94}Ibid., ch. 8.
\textsuperscript{95}Francis Gerald Downing, \textit{Making Sense in (and of) the First Christian Century} (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 36.
\textsuperscript{96}Neyrey notes that Jesus is often shown in homes. See \textit{Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew}, 220–1.
Jesus does promote a system of honour for the faithful, but it is a different system, not the same system with different values.\textsuperscript{97}

This system is close to what Pitt-Rivers, describing the same (twentieth century) cultures for which the Mediterranean honour system was theorised, calls the domain of grace. The foundation of this concept is religious, based on the unpredictable and un-manipulable gifts of God.\textsuperscript{98} Grace also forms relationship through reciprocity, but reciprocity that is, in principle at least, outside of calculation or the regularity of law, and hence gratuitous.\textsuperscript{99} What is exchanged is sentiment, or to put it more precisely, “what is resented if it is not returned is not the material loss but the rejection of the donor’s self.”\textsuperscript{100} The primary return is gratitude; a return favour cannot be obligatory (even though it may be expected) or the initial favour was not grace.\textsuperscript{101}

This system is related to honour, but in a complex way. Granting a favour grants honour, and having a favour rebuffed is to lose honour. Those in power have, and can bestow, both honour and grace.\textsuperscript{102} But grace as a system is closer to female honour, since it cannot be obtained by self-assertion.\textsuperscript{103} It is thus at times complementary or even in opposition to agonistic male honour.\textsuperscript{104} Thus, he concludes that “[g]race, not honor, is the ideal enjoined by the Beatitudes...one must renounce one’s claim to honor as precedence if one is to attain the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, or more precisely one must invert it, adopt the counter-principle represented by the honor of women, whose sex excludes them in theory from the

\textsuperscript{97}At the same time, Neyrey is correct to observe that much of Jesus’ public ministry plays the game of challenge and riposte, as we noted above. However, honour does not seem to be Jesus’ goal—he comes with claims (Mt ch. 4: 17 & 23), and uses the means provided by the culture to make them.


\textsuperscript{99}Ibid., 224.

\textsuperscript{100}Ibid., 239.

\textsuperscript{101}Ibid., 231.

\textsuperscript{102}Ibid., 240.

\textsuperscript{103}Ibid., 227.

\textsuperscript{104}Ibid., 241.
agonistic sphere.”

Neyrey’s arguments actually support this conclusion. In the place of male honour to those whose claims succeed before the PCR, Jesus announces grace to those who embody and practise grace as children of the God of grace.

On this understanding, Jesus’ words are certainly counter-cultural, but do not require the jarring break that Neyrey posits, since this system of grace can operate in the two kinds of reciprocal relationships discussed above, those based in sentiment as well as more material exchange. Pitt-Rivers gives an example among peers in a farming community, where mutual help is given according to need. No formal account is kept, though unwillingness to help results in exclusion, presumably through a natural rather than a judicial process. Clearly, participating in mutual help creates the goodwill that I suggested above was indexed by honour, but this picture emphasises the shared interests of the community. Solidarity is primary over competition. Pitt-River pays less attention to grace among non-peers, other than to note that showing favour that cannot be returned can be an expression of superiority, as in the practice of tipping. However, in ancient Greece, the Greek term for grace, χάρις, was heavily implicated in patron-client relationships, being used for “the benefactor’s favorable disposition toward the petitioner…, the actual benefit conferred…, or the client’s gratitude.” It makes sense for patron-client relations to be cast in terms of grace, since the patron provides favours that the client can only repay with gratitude, with that gratitude motivating support for the patron in a continuing relationship. The sanction for not expressing gratitude is loss of the relationship, which of course may be severe in terms

---

105Ibid., 241–2.
106It is perhaps this difference in style which will point people to the God of Jesus as the one behind his disciples’ good deeds (Mt ch. 5: 16).
107This appears to be group help, rather than the picture of dyadic relationships that Malina proposes for the New Testament world.
109Presumably, both will always be operative to some extent.
110Ibid., 224.
111deSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 61. The Greek term πίστις similarly referred to both the client’s trust in (“faith”) and loyalty to (“faithfulness”) the patron. See ibid., 62.
of loss of benefit and/or punishment from a powerful patron.\textsuperscript{112} That punishment may well be connected with honour maintenance on the patron’s part, but essentially a patron-client relationship is about alignment of interests, so that the client’s well-being becomes a part of the patron’s.

The historical accuracy of Neyrey’s model is less important for our purposes than what it exposes about the importance of values in interpretation. As we have seen, he provides an interpretation that focuses on social effects rather than inner purity. But his interpretation also brings into relief the pattern of honour competition. Inner purity interpretations provide a way for modern individuals to apply Jesus’ teaching in a social context that disvalues honour competition outside of certain contexts and promotes a tolerance that can easily be mistaken for relationships of grace. But in a collective culture where honour is established competitively, where grace will be learnt through counter-cultural ways of relating more than through introspection, inner purity interpretations will blunt the force of Jesus’ vision, and may even provide a way of avoiding it.\textsuperscript{113} An interesting historical example is the Maori of New Zealand. On Walls’s telling, in over twenty years to 1827, there was only a handful of converts. In the next thirteen years, over 30,000 had become Christians. However, it was not the interior conviction of sin which moved them, as the missionaries hoped given their own evangelical experience, but rather that their culture of revenge became disastrous with the introduction of firearms. The gospel thus offered a new code for their society, which thousands embraced.\textsuperscript{114} Walls argues that this was a genuine repentance from evil and a turning to God in “faith, for in turning to the way of peace they risked much: the wrath of the Atua (local spiritual powers), humiliation by enemies in their newly chosen defencelessness, and the disorientation of abandoning known ways.”\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{112}Ibid., 63.

\textsuperscript{113}Again, I am drawing strong contrasts, and presumably no context should entirely ignore either social effects or motivation.


\textsuperscript{115}Ibid., 23.
Traditional Toraja are much closer to Julian Pitt-Rivers’s farming community than to the Maori. As subsistence wet-rice cultivators, “life centers around interdependent relationships,” and reciprocal exchange is the substance of those relationships; the ideal is generosity, but generosity without expectation of return makes no sense. The return will be the same in the case of borrowing a pig for a ceremony, similar in kind in the case of children becoming the carers in their parents’ old age, or unequal if the parties have unequal status, wealth or power. The latter includes the gods, spirits and ancestors, whose bounty far exceeds human offerings. In this sense, divine grace is fundamental, as it is for any such community. Various features suggest strongly that the Toraja are not agonistic. Need is openly expressed (including by males), in a style of “appeal” rather than “assertion.” Honour is important in the culture, but the term used, *siri*, is also used for shame. This term is fundamental to self-identity, since it is the recognition of “one’s ‘place,’ the recognition of self in relation to others: to those with whom one shares ancestors or *tongkonan*, to those of loftier or lesser status. *Siri* may come to the fore in any interaction in which the relative status of two persons is uncertain, in which dignity may be asserted or shame endured. This can occur in relation to eating together, and especially in rituals, preeminently funeral

---

116 Hollan and Wellenkamp, *Contentment and Suffering*, 46.
117 Without any suggestion that evening the score will close the relationship.
118 Ibid., 47.
119 “Penonjolan diri merupakan hal yang dianggap tidak baik, namun melalui cara merendahkan diri seseorang bisa menonjolkan diri.” (“Putting oneself forward is something that is considered not good, nevertheless, through putting oneself down one can put oneself forward.”) See Theodorus et al. Kobong, *Manusia Toraja: Dari Mana - Bagaimana - Ke Mana* (Seri Institut Theologia Gereja Toraja; n.p., 1983), 23.
ceremonies. One cycle of exchange occurs in terms of animals brought to the feast. These index family belonging, related to the *tongkonan*; status is indexed in the distribution of meat cuts, which occurs within the *saroan* grouping.\textsuperscript{122} This status is received rather than asserted, though it can be contested. Overall, in research by the local Church of Toraja, harmony and fellowship ranked higher on a value scale than self-worth.\textsuperscript{123}

This contrast of assertive honour and more harmony-oriented grace fits with the traits described in Hofstede’s Masculine-Feminine Index (MAS), where solidarity is a chief distinguishing feature of low MAS, and competition of high MAS.\textsuperscript{124} The Mediterranean countries of modern Greece and Italy do indeed score highly on this scale, while Indonesia comes in the middle. Hofstede discusses a study on styles in religion, and suggests that “Conversionism,” “Theism” and “Traditionalism,” styles of religion that emphasise religious identity in potential opposition to culture, correlate with high MAS contexts, while “Exemplarism” and “Mysticism,” religious styles that are more consonant with solidarity, correlate with low MAS contexts.\textsuperscript{125} These could well influence approaches to contextualisation. However, the next set of values have deeper implications, both for the bringer of the message and for the recipients.

\textsuperscript{122}See page 22.

\textsuperscript{123}Kobong, *Manusia Toraja*, 4. We discuss this below.

\textsuperscript{124}Hofstede, *Culture’s Consequences*, 314–5; ibid., 309 directly discusses the similar Caribbean patten of machismo and *marianismo* (“saintliness, submissiveness, and frigidity”).

\textsuperscript{125}Ibid., 328. The categories are drawn from ibid., 177, quoting Robert Towler, *The Need for Certainty: A Sociological Study of Conventional Religion* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1984), and reflect a British Anglican context in the 1960s. Conversionism focuses on a personal experience of having been saved from sin. Theism responds primarily to nature as God’s creation. Traditionalism means uncritical acceptance of the church’s teachings. Exemplarism regards Jesus primarily as an example, while Gnosticism (mentioned below) is concerned with hidden knowledge, Hofstede adds mysticism, a personal experience of unity with God, from an Asian context.
3.4 Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) and Long Term Orientation Index (LTO)

Hofstede’s first three dimensions concern social relations learned in the family. These are most likely to influence ethical values; the Individualism-Collectivism Index (IDV) affects whether the individual or group counts as ethical; MAS affects attitudes to honour and harmony. The other two scales are cognitive in orientation. The UAI dimension measures intolerance for ambiguity, that is, to what extent knowably clear and consistent structures of existence (however culturally understood) are considered important; the higher the UAI, the more important it is to avoid ambiguity. Thus Hofstede sees this dimension measuring values associated with “Truth.” An ethical goal such as self-actualisation will be reflected in IDV, but how unambiguously that goal is conceptualised will be reflected in UAI. This happens at a cultural level. Even those thinkers whose psychological tolerance for ambiguity is high will be conditioned in their thinking about self-actualisation by the greater cultural interest in clear and convincing portrayals reflected in a high UAI. The LTO dimension measure values associated with “Virtue” to what extent decisions are understood narratively in terms of the past and present (low LTO) or in terms of the (longer-term) future (high LTO). Again, this concerns not so much ethical goals but how those goals are implemented. Self-actualisation conceived of as a short-term or long-term goal will lead to potentially quite different strategies gaining cultural prominence.

Hofstede notes a correlation between medium to high UAI (a relative intolerance for ambiguity) in those cultures with Abrahamic religions, and low UAI (a greater tolerance for ambiguity) in Hindu and Buddhist countries. Within Christian countries, he notes that Catholic countries tend to have high UAI, whereas Protestant countries tend to have have medium UAI. From this he surmises a connection between the appeal of a doctrine of

---

126Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations Software of the Mind*, 247.
127Ibid., 247.
revelation and a desire for certainty. He applies this further to variations even within organisations such as a denomination. The study he references on religious styles in English Anglicanism connects “Conversionism” and “Gnosticism” with a weaker tolerance for uncertainty (dubbed “certitude” in the study), and “Exemplarism” and “Theism” with a stronger tolerance for uncertainty (dubbed “faith” in the study).

In broader terms, he sees scholarship in the higher UAI countries looking for “certainties, for Theory with a capital T, for Truth”, in contrast to lower UAI countries that “take a more relativistic and pragmatic stand and look for usable knowledge.” The LTO dimension reflects a similar pattern in the realm of decision-making. High LTO shows itself in people giving greater weight to circumstances while low LTO prefers universal guidelines. If UAI covers a scale from relativism to dogmatism, LTO covers a scale from duty to pragmatism.

These dimensions have likely implications for the process of contextualisation itself. The theological formulations and traditions of interpretation brought by Western missionaries were tried and true; allowing local culture a legitimate place in interpretation would invite ambiguity. That the Sermon on the Mount might be ambiguous — speaking about honour or about sincerity depending on the hearers — will not be easily received in a high-UAI context. For missionaries from a high-UAI mission culture, the ambiguities due to the difficulty of reading the local culture — for example, whether a particular practice is idolatrous — will either be resolved with premature interpretations, or undue caution. Similarly, lower-LTO missions (and, for that matter, indigenous theological colleges) are more likely to translate the results of Western exegesis than develop local traditions of interpretation over several generations.

They also have implications for the local hermeneutics. Western hermeneutics has developed in a medium to high-UAI context, and has tended to appeal to clear results based on

---

129Ibid., 177.
130Ibid., see page 73, footnote 125 above.
131Ibid., 178.
132Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov, Cultures and Organizations Software of the Mind, 248.
secure foundations, whether that be the Roman Catholic magisterium, denominational Confessions, or correct method in modern biblical studies. A lower-UAI context is likely to be more interested in relevance. Theological depth would then need to emerge through practical relevance, rather than the more familiar model of theological truth which is then applied. A lower-LTO environment would tend towards seeing the biblical narratives as providing fixed tradition to be followed, rather than as contextual responses to the long-term eschatological goals of the Kingdom of God.

Hofstede makes much of the fact that only the UAI dimension came up in his research based on American values, while the LTO dimension only came up in later research intentionally based on Chinese values. (The three relational dimensions came up in both.) He connects this to a frequently observed difference between Western and East Asian cultures. The differences between East Asia and the West have long been examined through the lens of a comparison of Confucian and ancient Greek philosophy. Recently, Richard Nisbett has written up a major restatement of this, sharpened and supported by a range of psychological experiments.\textsuperscript{133} As we emphasised in relation to individualism in the Introduction, these are differences in averages over the different populations which affect cultural systems, rather than categories into which individuals fall based on their group.

These differences begin with perception. For Westerners, objects are primary. Objects are more salient than the relationships between objects, and objects are more salient than the wholes of which they are a part. This results in a model of the world which is simpler, more predictable and more controllable. In particular, time is not of the essence, as the world is fundamentally stable. Furthermore, objects have epistemological priority. Westerners are more likely to reason from properties inhering in an object rather than its relationships or context, and are more likely to reason from categories organised around properties. Such categories make plausible the law of non-contradiction, because an object is either in or out

\textsuperscript{133}Richard E. Nisbett, \textit{The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently and Why} (New York: Free, 2004); most of his experiments were between Northern Americans and Eastern Asians (in China, Japan, Korea).
of a category based on its intrinsic properties, and is so in a non-time-dependent way. This reduction in ambiguity due to the focus on objects is the connection with Hofstede’s UAI index.

East Asians are the opposite (in tendency). Wholes are primary; objects are understood in relationship with their contexts. Thus, the world is complex, change over time is the only given, and adaptation is more useful than control. Wholes have epistemological priority, and East Asians are more likely to reason from context and pay less attention to inherent properties. Hence, the law of non-contradiction is considered rarely applicable; apparent contradictions are much more likely to be aspects of a larger whole, to be revealed in time, than to be actually contradictory. Disagreement can lead to a Middle Way that transcends the opposing positions.\textsuperscript{134}

We can illustrate the difference this might make to biblical interpretation by looking at the picture of Jesus as the Good Shepherd in Jn ch. 10:11–16. The presents a coherent metaphor, but a Western biblical theology will tend to analyse it into component parts. This might include Christology (Jesus taking on God’s role in Ezek 34), Atonement (Jesus laying down his life for the sheep) and Ecclesiology (the sheep are not just Israel). Having abstracted these doctrinal “objects” from the text, they may then in turn be reconnected using the parable. Such analysis and synthesis is actually a long way around for a text that is already coherently holistic on its own terms, but many Westerners will feel that the passage is the clearer for it. For East Asians, by Nisbett’s hypothesis, the identity of the Good Shepherd and the sheep, and what is said about atonement, will become clear through the relationships conveyed in Jesus’ parable as a whole.

Nisbett’s two systems are based on empirical psychological research involving both basic cognition\textsuperscript{135} and action in the world.\textsuperscript{136} However, they are in no sense considered to establish

\textsuperscript{134}Ibid., 44.
\textsuperscript{135}For example, given a more or less perpendicular line in a crooked frame, Westerners are better at ignoring the context of the frame and correctly discerning if the frame is actually perpendicular, see ibid., 96.
\textsuperscript{136}Ibid., passim.
two incompatible and incommensurable systems. The experiments demonstrate differences in averages, with much overlap between groups. His argument is that these differences can be coherently related with each other in systematic ways, sufficiently so that we can make useful generalisations about East and West. He further shows coherence between these modern findings and long-noted differences between Confucian and ancient Greek philosophy, suggesting that these differences are culturally reproducing value systems.\textsuperscript{137} However, I would suggest that there is a strong educational (i.e., literacy based) component to how strongly the Western outlook is evidenced. Even within Greek culture, the Platonic and Aristotelian outlook took time to recast the traditional honour culture and gain hegemony over the much more East Asian pre-Socratic philosophies.\textsuperscript{138} Charles Taylor’s telling of secularisation could be cast as a reconversion of Europe to this Greek way of thinking, preserved for many centuries only in the clerical elite of the church, with education a key aspect of this change. An example from Nisbett himself suggests that education is not irrelevant. This experiment concerned the place of logic in reason. Aristotle asserted that heavier objects fall more quickly than lighter ones, and Nisbett presented two arguments against this: Galileo’s famous logical proof — if we tie a light and heavy object together, do they fall faster as a heavier unit, or at the average speeds of the two objects? — and a made-up “Asian” proof that talked about contextual factors such as wind. A majority of Americans preferred the logical proof, and a majority of Chinese preferred the contextual proof. However, Nisbett reports his Western scientific colleagues’ astonishment at this Chinese result, suggesting close to 0\% of this well-educated sub-group preferred the contextual argument over the logical argument, compared to 40\% of general Americans.\textsuperscript{139} It is quite possible, then, that Western theology, includ-

\textsuperscript{137}Ibid., chs. 1–2.

\textsuperscript{138}Ibid., 3 sees Greek individualism dating at least from the time of the writings of Homer, and this may well be the case compared to surrounding cultures. Others, however, see the philosophical movement as creating a new sense of self, see Anthony A. Long, “Ancient Philosophy’s Hardest Question: What to Make of Oneself?,” \textit{Representations} 74 no. 1 (2001): 19–36.

\textsuperscript{139}Nisbett, \textit{The Geography of Thought}, 180.
ing hermeneutics, is more rigorously Western in cognition than even the Western church in general.

A final example relates to the issue of properties and categories in relation to the Christological controversies of the early church. Nisbett argues that if the world is fundamentally substance, then it will most easily be understood in terms of parts and wholes. Chinese will group grass, rather than a chicken, alongside a cow, on the grounds that cows eat grass. This is a functional whole, similar to the classifications Luria found with his non-literate Soviet Union peasants. Ancient Chinese classifications also extended to apparently arbitrary groupings, such as “spring, east, wood, wind, and green,” that were considered to influence each other through resonance. By contrast, if the world is fundamentally objects, it will be understood in terms of individuals and classes. Westerners will place the chicken with the cow, as two instances of the animal class. Since classes are defined as collections of properties, properties take on a perceived reality that is rarer in East Asian thinking. In the Christological controversies, Jesus’ divinity was problematic because of such properties. If omniscience has a meaning independent of the person to whom it is attached, and is considered an essential property of divinity, then calling the man Jesus divine raises serious difficulties, leading to the odd, and exegetically difficult to justify, spectacle of parcelling up Jesus’ actions in the Gospels into his divine and human natures. Much recent New Testament scholarship argues for a perhaps more East Asian New Testament that identifies Jesus with God narratively: Jesus does what God does. Jesus is divine due to his relationship of identity with God, rather than to a collection of properties. The controversies of the early centuries

---

140Ibid., 141.
142Nisbett, The Geography of Thought, 138.
143Ibid., 138.
no doubt demonstrate that this narrative or identity Christology was not sufficient to guard that identity in the Greek philosophical context. Properties were real enough for them that the fate of the properties of each of the two natures in the one person of Christ needed to be worked out. Because of the cultural cognitive bias, it was a question that would keep getting raised and answered in more or less helpful ways. But, suggests Nisbett, categories “do not fuel inductive inferences for Easterners as much as for Westerners.” Jesus’ reported non-omniscience may not inevitably lead to questions about his divinity in the same way in the East. At least some of the Nicene and Chalcedonian agreements about the Trinity and the nature(s) of Christ may not be relevant to an East Asian context, due to their different modes of understanding the world.

Such differences give substance to the call for Asian theology, not just in relation to social issues raised by Asian contexts, as suggested by the first three of Hofstede’s value complexes, but also, at a cognitive level, in terms of the “first level formulations (basic belief structures that give identity to Christian people)” that are derived from the West. Whatever the exact materials with which theology works, East Asians and Westerners will treat it differently.

### 3.5 Values in Toraja

The discussion so far has made the general point that cultural differences can lead to differences in interpretation. Much of it is not necessarily directly relevant to the Toraja. In this section we survey data on Toraja values.

In 1983, the Church of Toraja (Gereja Toraja) published its own research on traditional Toraja culture, based on values surveys. The resulting list begins with a value that lies

---

145 Again, it is not clear that these were issues for the non-educated faithful; worship of Jesus in the liturgy appears to have driven doctrinal speculation rather than the other way around. See Richard Bauckham, “The Worship of Jesus,” *ABD* 817–8.

146 Nisbett, *The Geography of Thought*, 147.


outside the individualism-collectivism scale, namely blessing/wealth. This is traditionally divided into three aspects: offspring, livestock (particularly water buffalo) and rice (fields and barns). Possessing these three is a sign of divine blessing, since they are the foundations of the survival of the community.

The next two values are peace and fellowship. Peace refers to harmony between parties, while fellowship points towards participation together in an environment where cooperation is vital to survival. A point is made that the value of “peace in the interests of community” is given greater weight than other values such as truth and justice where they come into conflict. For example, where land is disputed, the disputed portion will be divided in two, thus “buying” peace at the expense of a strictly fair solution. Giving and taking are also careful to be seen not as commercial transactions, but as expressions of this fellowship. For example, if salt is lent in a time of need and then repaid, the lender will be insulted. Of course, as part of their sharing in the same community, the lender will expect to be the recipient at a different time.

The values that follow reflect a relational orientation. Self-respect is found in the “self-respect” of the community rather than the individual, and is contrasted to self-promotion. Politeness majors on not giving offence, through a variety of means of indirection. Having visitors is considered a great blessing, with potential reward from the gods, so much so that a lack of visitors may be seen as the consequence of a transgression that has not been dealt with. Hard work, being liked, marriage, loyalty and honesty are also listed.

---

149Indonesian “Kebahagiaan/kekayaan”, ibid., 8–9.
150Indonesian “Kedamaian”, “persekutuan”, ibid., 10–11.
152Kobong, Manusia Toraja, 10.
153Ibid., 13.
155Ibid., 15–17.
156Ibid., 18–19.
Two sources for the values were used which illustrate the wider three-culture context of contextualisation.\textsuperscript{157} One source was, effectively, a cultural elite. Described (using the English word) as “brainstorming”, along with interviews and observation, it involved the seven researchers themselves,\textsuperscript{158} plus a group of twenty from various areas selected by the researchers as being reliable sources of information about traditional Toraja culture. The other was a simple questionnaire used in about a hundred congregations in five rural districts from house clans (\textit{tongkonan}) considered close to traditional ways. The two lists of values have the same contents (presumably the brainstorming results were used to form the list in the survey) but in different orders. In particular, having wealth is at the top of the elite list, and almost at the bottom of the survey results. This difference may illustrate Hofstede’s distinction between the desired (what empirically motivates people) and the desirable (social norms).\textsuperscript{159} The researchers observe that wealth is in fact highly desired and that much social activity revolves around it. But wealth is not a norm; it is not an ethical choice but evidence of divine blessing. Thus, the survey, which is likely to have been interpreted by the congregational members as being about norms not practice, ranks relational values such as honesty and manners most highly. The different rankings thus reflect different perspectives. The researchers’ perspective is not just that of the church leadership whose task it is to guide the church in the task of contextualising the gospel;\textsuperscript{160} it is so in a largely modern way. The values methodology is a modern method, which reduces culture to a set of values (not necessarily in a pernicious way), enabling it to be viewed and manipulated. The language they use is that of modernity and rationality, Indonesian.\textsuperscript{161} This applies even for the values

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{157}Ibid., 3.
\item \textsuperscript{158}The Institut Theologia Gereja Toraja comprised six Toraja (five of them ministers) and one foreign (Dutch) missionary. See ibid., 51.
\item \textsuperscript{159}Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov, \textit{Cultures and Organizations Software of the Mind}, 28.
\item \textsuperscript{160}Kobong, \textit{Manusia Toraja}, 8.
\item \textsuperscript{161}With the occasional English, German and even Latin phrases thrown in. See Yoonhee Kang, “‘Staged’ Rituals and ‘Veiled’ Spells: Multiple Language Ideologies and Transformations in Petalangan Verbal Magic,” \textit{Journal of Linguistic Anthropology} 16 no. 1 (2006): 4 for the language ideology that places Indonesian language as a marker of modernity and rationality.
\end{itemize}
themselves, though the Toraja terms for the values do appear in their explanations. The shortcomings of their approach becomes evident when they move beyond analysis to suggesting solutions. The conclusion of the book observes the fragmentation of identity between traditional, Christian, and modern values, and calls for “seeking a new identity that can unite the Toraja people.”\textsuperscript{163} The answer proposed is that this identity will be built around the value of fellowship, a value common to traditional Toraja culture and Christianity, though not necessarily identical. But how is that value to be exercised? The book itself repeatedly highlights ritual as the means of maintenance of the traditional Toraja value system, and points to the changes in ritual performance as evidence that that system has suffered inroads from Christianity and modernity.\textsuperscript{163} However, ritual does not feature in their discussion of solutions. Their discussion is consistent with the assumption of Western theoretical thinking that if a person or group has grasped a principle then they should be able to apply it. In terms of the three cultures of contextualisation — biblical cultures, Western culture, and local culture — they are writing as Westerners.

### 3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have used Hofstede’s value complexes to explore potential differences in contextualisation. The Individualism-Collectivism Index led us to a discussion of the modern self, and of honour-shame systems (where the Masculine-Feminine Index also played a role). The Uncertainty Avoidance Index led us to a discussion of differences between Asian and Western cultures. A look at values in Toraja done by the Church of Toraja showed it to be at the more collective end of the IDV scale, and also showed the Western orientation of the researchers.

Both our sounding of Heb 9 and our discussion of value scales have provided examples of the difference that cultural context makes as the interpreter seeks to make sense of the Bible.

\textsuperscript{162}a[M]encari identitas baru yang dapat mempersatukan manusia Toraja”. See Kobong, \textit{Manusia Toraja}, 50.

\textsuperscript{163}Ibid., 49.
CHAPTER 3. VALUES AND INTERPRETATION

This is most obvious at the ethical level, as different groups will have different evaluations of the same material. With respect to the use of purity in Hebrews, and the attitude of sons to fathers in Jesus’ parable, we saw that the differing responses of readers actually provided a contextualised bridge to what God is doing in each of those passages. We saw how the individualism of Protestant missionaries created confusion in New Guinea and New Zealand, and that there may be valid relational interpretations even of classic supports for individualism such as the Sermon on the Mount, and valid non-forensic interpretations of Jesus’ death in Heb 9. Beyond the ethical, we saw that different cultural contexts influence cognition, affecting how knowledge is processed and organised. This suggests that contextual interpretation is not simply a matter of applying existing methods to new contexts, but the approach of the interpreter will also need to be contextual. Some of the features of oral cognition appeared again in an East Asian context, and in both chapters, ritual made an appearance. We saw the difficulty a Western interpreter had in making sense for his readers of Hebrews’ use of cultic language to describe Jesus’ work, and we saw how local leaders trained in Western ways of thinking were also unable to utilise ritual as a solution, despite seeing clearly its salience in the local culture. In the following Part, with these initial soundings in mind, we will extend our analysis of these cultural differences through examining how these differences have affected Christian missions.
Part II

Ministry in a Ritual World
Chapter 4

Magic and Reformed Piety

4.1 Introduction

We have seen how differing values can lead to differing interpretations, not just in the sense of a tendency to choose one out of several plausible alternatives, but in the deeper sense that what makes sense to one group makes little sense to another. In this Part, we will seek to clarify which differences between the modern West and traditional Toraja have this effect of obscuring local grasp of the biblical message, that is, are most relevant to our hermeneutical project. We will begin by introducing the distinction of ritual and sincerity orientations, a distinction which takes up our previous discussions of the buffered self and intolerance for ambiguity, and brings those into connection with ritual. This chapter will look at the interaction of Protestant ministry with magic, while the next chapter will compare traditional and Protestant ritual forms. The final chapter of this Part will engage with the reflections of an experienced, culturally sensitive missionary in an area near Toraja.\(^1\) The interaction of sincere Protestant ministry with a ritual local culture will bring out mediation and agency as the main areas of cross-cultural hermeneutical confusion.

4.2 Ritual vs Sincerity in an oral world

The distinction of ritual and sincerity modes comes from a study by Adam Seligman et al., based on Roy Rappaport’s detailed account of how ritual creates meaning.\(^2\) The rise of a society where sincerity mode is dominant is connected with the rise of the buffered self, societies oriented to the individual, and mechanistic universe that we looked at above,\(^3\) which were in part due to the impact of writing, since writing extends memory and communication, which are foundational to the experience of the self and to society. In this context, a new possibility and salience developed for sincerity. The new possibility came from the greater correspondence of intention, word, and action enabled by the new level of self-knowledge implied in the buffered self, along with the greater predictability of the mechanistic world and ordered society in which the self acts. This became salient because a society ordered to the interests of its individual citizens—or for that matter, a church ordered to (the building up of) the individual faith of its members—requires those interests or that faith to be identifiable and expressible.\(^4\) The self takes on much of the responsibility for decisions that would have been taken by others, the group, or leaders in collective and hierarchical cultures.

This rise of sincerity corresponds with a deprecation of ritual.\(^5\) This is because they represent two very different construals of order and disorder in the world. Modern sincerity builds on a deep ontological order discovered behind the apparent chaos of the phenomenal—whether Platonic Ideas, the Laws of Nature, or the certain truths of theology.\(^6\) Ritual creates order within a fractured phenomenal world through forming an “as if” world.\(^7\) An example


\(^3\)See Autonomy and Dependence (§3.2) above.

\(^4\)Seligman et al., Ritual and Its Consequences, 121–2.

\(^5\)Ibid., 105.

\(^6\)Since Descartes, this ontological order has been considered to reside in the mind rather than in or behind the world, enabling belief to be sincerely referential. See ibid., 122.

\(^7\)Ibid., ch. 1.
in a social context is greeting. The “as is” world contains a society of people who have good, 
bad or no relations with each other, and who may be feeling sociable, angry, or disinterested 
at the point in time when they meet others. Greeting rituals — shaking hands, pleasantry —
create order in this disorder. Shaking hands creates an “as if” world which acknowledges the 
other and opens a space for further communication. It is easy to see that modern sincerity 
cannot adequately deal with this situation. Consistently expressing one’s feelings for the 
other would create social chaos, since it is simply not realistic to hope (or demand) that 
everyone always have appropriate feelings on meeting others.

The study from which that example is drawn seeks to recognise ritual “as if” modes in 
a modern context, and to rehabilitate them as a complement to sincerity in social and personal 
contexts. This rehabilitation is needed because the concept of ritual threatens modern 
sincerity at all three levels of order. It deprecates the Given Truth behind the phenomenal 
world; the givenness of ritual impinges on the autonomy of the buffered self in society; and 
the “as-if”-ness implies pretence, i.e., hypocrisy within the individual. Protestant Christian-
ity, particularly in its more Puritan forms, sought to de-ritualise its regular congregational 
activities, for example removing much of the framing, spoken and symbolic, of the Roman 
Catholic Eucharist in its own celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Its aim has been sincere 
ritual, sharing many of the features of other rituals, such as marked-off times, but aimed at 
creating “as-is” order. This means building personal, sincere faith based on the Given Truths 
of theology, so that this faith in turn generates and maintains ordered societies.

As the greeting example above demonstrates, the social and personal levels have never 
escaped the need for ritualisations, even if they have not been recognised as such. Many 
modern Protestants, even among Puritan heirs like evangelicals, are joining with this re-
evaluation of ritual. For traditional cultures the problem is much sharper. There, ritual is

---

8See ibid., 5–6, 21–23.
9Ibid., 5.
10See, for example, James K. A. Smith, Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural For-
formation (Volume 1 of Cultural liturgies; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2009).
needed not just to combat social and personal disorder, but also to contain cosmic disorder, a problem that is alien to the modern mind for whom the Laws of Nature are secure. This chapter and the next can therefore be seen in terms of how the Toraja experience a fractured world. The subsequent analysis of Kruyt’s ministry will examine the issues raised by the attempt to introduce sincere Protestantism into the ritual culture of Poso.

4.3 Magic and the excluded middle

In the terms we are developing, magic and spells are ritual responses to a world where unseen powers are responsible for disorder in the world. They thus imply a fractured phenomenal world. Such a world is still very much alive in Toraja. As a simple example, a student at my college underwent discipline for consulting a “seer”\(^{11}\) when her mobile phone was stolen at the campus.\(^{12}\) A seer requires particular expertise, but anyone can have a dream. As a Church of Toraja publication on spirits and occult powers describes it, “[i]t is no surprise if someone suddenly fixes up a burial place. That probably means that in their dream they received a message [from their deceased ancestor] about something that is going to happen (a disaster or a blessing).”\(^{13}\) Fixing the burial place is either an effort to avert the disaster or an expression of thanks to confirm the promised blessing. Back to my campus, another student described greeting a fellow student there, only to later learn that he had died earlier that day in a neighbouring regency, several hours away. Conversing with the bombo\(^{14}\) of a deceased person is considered not unusual before their funeral rites (often many months later) carry them on to Puya, the world of the dead.\(^{15}\)

\(^{11}\)The Toraja term is to petiro-tiro from the root tiro meaning “see”, see Theodorus et al. Kobong, Roh-Roh & Kuasa-Kuasa-Gaib (Seri Institut Theologia Gereja Toraja; n.p., 1984), 73–74.

\(^{12}\)In this case, the seer accused a fellow student, who appears to have been innocent. Nor was the stolen item recovered.

\(^{13}\)Ibid., 74; original is in Indonesian. I have used the English third person plural to translate the gender neutral third person singular Indonesian pronoun.

\(^{14}\)The word refers to the life-force of the person, which we might translate as soul, but looks more or less like the person when alive. If funeral rites are not effective, the person becomes what we would call a ghost.

\(^{15}\)Ibid., 36–37.
This is the “real world” in which the Toraja live and into which they act, what Geertz calls the common sense world.\textsuperscript{16} Their common sense world is fractured, without the hidden order provided by the Laws of Nature in a Western worldview. If fractures in social order and the buffered self are leading to the reappraisal of the role of ritual in the West, it is not hard to see the importance of rituals to deal with this more fundamental level of disorder. The fractured common sense world provides a comprehensible basis for action, even if that action may be considered wrong by parties like the church, as in the first example above. A few more examples will give us a flavour of the Toraja experience of this disorder.

Douglas Hollan describes three levels of illness in the understanding of the Toraja village where he did his fieldwork.\textsuperscript{17} Common minor illnesses are regarded as normal. More serious illnesses are connected with violations of \textit{aluk sola pemali}, the system of regulations (\textit{Aluk}; the term used to translate references to the Mosaic legislation in Old Testament and New Testament) and tabus (\textit{pemali}). These illnesses are connected with the \textit{deata}, the gods and divinised ancestors that are directly involved in the various rituals and prohibitions. They are resolved through a process of public confession and sacrifice that we will describe later.\textsuperscript{18} If an illness is sudden, or does not respond to the treatments for the above categories, it may belong to the third category, human-caused illnesses. These can be caused by poisons “introduced into someone’s food or drink, placed on the trail for someone to step on, or spoken into the wind,” or from magic spells (\textit{doti}).\textsuperscript{19}

The church publication mentioned above takes about 50 pages to itemise spirits and magic items.\textsuperscript{20} A variety of heirlooms bring status and also blessing. Some kinds of objects bring blessing of a specific kind, for example increasing fertility of livestock (water buffaloes

\textsuperscript{18} See page 247.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 167.
and pigs). Another set of charms provide physical protection, for example, making the user “slippery as an eel”, able to cover large distances quickly, invisible, or rendering a target group unable to speak (this presumably disables them using a spell themselves) or act against the user of the spell. There is a charm for keeping safe in danger (for example, in a war zone); another to make the user “always appear pretty and sweet”; another to prevent others being angry at the user! In addition to the seers and dreams mentioned above, the appearance or particular behaviour of certain birds and insects is portentous, usually of death, but a hen-fight in the daytime more promisingly portends visitors from afar. And then there is active magic. Doti is the deadliest form; passepu’ restricts movement; pa’paramma’ causes drowsiness or sleep (of the inhabitants of a house in preparation for being robbed); while pontiana’ is sent by a jilted male to cause the one rejecting him to become hysterical or to have a fit.

Such a list is far from modern everyday experience. Similarly to its publication on values, this publication of the church reflects some of that cultural distance. The chapter on magic items ends with a series of rhetorical questions as to whether these phenomena make sense, and some suggestions for how it comes about that the Toraja actually believe them. The suggestions can be summarised as association of an object with an outcome (experience), the casting of a spell on an object (ritual), and tradition. In their subsequent

---

21Ibid., 62-63.
22Ibid., 71-72.
23Ibid., 72.
24Ibid., 67.
25Hollan seems to understand doti as a general word for magic spell, which follows the Toraja dictionary, see J Tammmu and H. van der Veen, Kamus Toradja-Indonesia: Disusun Oleh J. Tammmu [dan] H. Van Der Veen (Rantepao: Jajasan Perguruan Kristen Toradja, 1972), 145, whereas in this publication it refers to deadly spells. This may reflect different areas or a broader and narrower usage.
27See page 82 above.
28Ibid., 82.
29Ibid., 83.
response, they make further distinctions that reflect Western thought patterns. For example, the occasional New Testament connection between illness and unclean spirits is termed a “religious diagnosis”, not a “medical” one, in that sickness is seen as a manifestation of “the devil’s kingdom.”\(^{30}\) Similarly, modern views of possession as being psychological and due to suggestion are presented without disagreement and then placed on a different level to the “religious” level which is the concern of the Bible, a standard hermeneutical means of harmonising the biblical picture with the modern world of impersonal cause and effect.\(^{31}\) The educated church leadership has internalised a common Western response to such phenomena.

A cogent and influential analysis of this worldview gap was proposed by evangelical missiologist Paul Hiebert, which he termed the flaw of the excluded middle, illustrated by his experience as a missionary in India.\(^{32}\) After noting that spiritual and ordinary illnesses found plausible solutions in the Christian minister and Western medicine, he asks about the area of spirits and magic.\(^{33}\) He continues, “[n]either the missionary evangelist or doctor had an answer. These did not really exist, they said. But to people for whom these were very real experiences in their lives, there had to be an answer. It is not surprising, therefore, that many of them returned to the magician for cures.”\(^{34}\)

Hiebert goes on to propose a framework to analyse these issues.\(^{35}\) He describes three levels, starting with the empirical worldly level, and ending with the other-worldly level (e.g., heaven), which is by definition transempirical. The middle level, that which is excluded in a disenchanted world, is the transempirical worldly level, the world of spirits, ancestors, magic


\(^{31}\)Ibid., 104, again referring to Grundmann.


\(^{33}\)It is interesting that he observed a similar tripartite classification to Hollan above, with spiritual illnesses here being analogous to the *aluk sola pemali* transgressions.

\(^{34}\)Ibid., 39.

\(^{35}\)See the table in ibid., 40.
and astrology.\textsuperscript{36} This lack of a middle level means that “[w]hen tribal people spoke of fear of evil spirits, [the Western-trained missionaries] denied the existence of the spirits rather than claim the power of Christ over them.”\textsuperscript{37} They were unable to understand, let alone provide answers to, the needs expressed in the middle level, needs reflected in the lists above, which Hiebert summarises as “the questions of the uncertainty of the future, the crises of present life and the unknowns of the past.”\textsuperscript{38}

Hiebert concludes his article with the need for a holistic theology which has a clear place for the middle level, “a theology of divine guidance, provision and healing; of ancestors, spirits and invisible powers of this world; and of suffering, misfortune and death.”\textsuperscript{39} This call has been responded to in quite contrasting ways. We have already mentioned Malaysian theologian Hwa Yung’s argument that the biblical world is much closer to the Asian world than to the disenchanted world of moderns.\textsuperscript{40} Thus, he argues, healing and exorcism are essential ministries in an Asian context and combat the real Satanic power seen in the Bible.\textsuperscript{41} The opposing view argues that a theology of the middle level needs to reinforce that only God can do genuine miracles. Calvin appears to express such a position when he says that “Satan has his miracles, . . . though they are deceitful tricks rather than true powers.”\textsuperscript{42} A modern exponent of this position is Pierre Gilbert, who argues that Gen 1:1 is “a thundering declaration that rids the universe of the multitude of gods and demons that populated the ancient world,” and that also eliminates a modern view of a “kind of underlying psychic energy

\textsuperscript{36}Each level is also divided into two spheres, one which operates with organic (or personal) beings, the other with mechanical (impersonal) forces. At the middle level this distinguishes spirits and ancestors from magic and astrology.

\textsuperscript{37}Ibid., 44.

\textsuperscript{38}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{39}Ibid., 46.

\textsuperscript{40}See page 57.

\textsuperscript{41}Yung Hwa, Mangoes or Bananas? The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology (Regnum studies in mission; Oxford: Regnum, 1997), 73–76.

grid that is presumed to give real effectiveness to magical and occult practices or any other kind of supernatural phenomena.” For him, Satan’s tricks work through “the overwhelming power of suggestion.” Gilbert does not make the mistake of suggesting that Christians in indigenous cultures be taught about suggestion; rather, they need to absorb the message of Genesis.43 Nevertheless, it is not clear whether his interpretation of Genesis will continue to make sense to them when they go on to read stories that seem to reflect an enchanted world, such as when Paul casts out a divining spirit causing economic loss to the girl’s owners (Acts 16:18–19). Even the practically disenchancing prohibitions in the Pentateuch do not clearly deny some effectiveness to those powers. For example, in Deut 13:3, the success of a diviner is attributed to the Lord testing Israel. This both acknowledges God as the ultimate source of power, but also the success of the divination. What it does not hint at is a modern explanation, such as confirmation bias (good guesses confirm the belief in the diviner’s power, non-successes are explained away), or Gilbert’s solution of suggestion.

Is the world enchanted according to the Bible or not? More precisely, are the always negatively evaluated practices of magic not just rebellion against God, but also foolishly empty? The ambiguity can be seen in 2 Thess 2:9, where Satan is described as using power and signs and wonders. The word “wonders”, and perhaps also “power” and “signs”, are modified as being a lie (πσεύδος). The import of being a lie is clear with respect to the term “signs” (σημεία), which foregrounds meaning, and the term “wonders” (πέρατα), which foregrounds human response. Paul is warning that the miracles will be deceitful in their message, as they promote the man of lawlessness. The word “power” (δύναμις) goes a step further, and suggests effect on the world. If this is included in the terms modified by “lie”, that might suggest that the miracles are in fact counterfeit, consistent with Gilbert’s view above. Is that what Paul is claiming? It is hard to see how that question would even arise in an enchanted world, not because there is no category of counterfeit miracles in enchanted

cultures, but rather that, given the significance and impact ascribed to the man of lawlessness in 2 Thess 2, simple trickery would not be a plausible interpretation. Nor does the immediate context in the text require an answer either way, since the plausibility of the lying wonders in the following verse resides in people’s refusal to accept the saving truth about Jesus, regardless of whether the miracles are counterfeit or not. Paul’s warning speaks to believers in the enchanted or disenchanted world that their culturally conditioned experience gives them.

What, then, is the motivation for wanting to push disenchantment into the Bible itself, and thereby make it part of the biblical message even for believers in an enchanted world, as the Reformers did in their context, and many Protestant missionaries since? Taylor notes the increasing tendency in the late medieval period for the educated elite to regard the common preoccupation with pilgrimages, relics and other sources of sacred power — the so-called “good magic” — as “mindless diversion from real piety.” Calvin echoes this sentiment when he continues the quotation above that Satan’s miracles are tricks “of such sort as to mislead the simple-minded and untutored.” But he goes further, in that he denies not just bad and good magic, but any Christian miracles beyond the apostolic age. Looked at from the perspective of God’s economy of salvation, the main purpose of genuine miracles is to adorn the word about Christ. Pastorally, the simple relation of the believer to God the Father by word and prayer is actually threatened by miraculous claims, as the believer is tempted to shift focus from God to the miraculous.

Calvinism’s self-understanding of this tendency is as an expression of theocentrism. God is absolutely sovereign. To have anything to do with such a God, humans require mediation, and the Reformation slogans define where that mediation is found: Christ, known in the

---

45 Calvin, Institutes, 17.
46 Peter F. Jensen, “Calvin, Charismatics and Miracles,” The Evangelical Quarterly no. 3 (1979): 131–144.
47 Ibid., 140–2.
48 Ibid., 144.
Scriptures, and received by faith. But these mediations are entirely under God’s control, that is, by grace alone. All of this matters morally, because any other means will detract from all glory belonging to God. This theological framework is not being contested in this project. However, for Calvin and many after him, this meant that the fears of an enchanted world were to be met by a simple trust in God’s sovereignty, residing in the heart, un tarnished by material mediations that might lead us to consider that we have God under control. This application is what needs problematising.

Taylor does so by situating this view historically in at least two ways. First, the rise of nominalism raised the bar for what would count as a thorough-going conception of God’s sovereignty, an essential component of a theology that gives glory to God. The medieval view saw God’s power made manifest in the world through the chain of being and the webs of meanings which connected material objects with spiritual forces. God’s power was stronger than black magic, but, to the extent that it was mediated through material objects such as the sacramentals, it was in human hands. Miracles, then, demonstrated which sacramentals were effective and could be trusted. The philosophical-theological movement of nominalism, in its claim that properties are just names, not intrinsic meanings, placed the exercise of divine power in the world directly in the will of God, so that the efficacy or otherwise of a sacramental could not be guaranteed or predicted by humans. The Reformation focus on the Word clarified that meaning was determined by God alone, and not by forms in the world. Second, when this theology was fully grasped, the affective change in the three reversals in the field of fear—of magic, hierarchy, and eternal damnation—produced an energy that promised to achieve the Reform that had eluded late-medieval efforts in that direction. The Reformation gospel promised liberation from fear of damnation of the soul, from useless tradition and corrupt ecclesiastical hierarchies, and from malevolent or chaotic forces in the world.

The importance of these affective changes for attaining to Calvin’s unadorned faith can be seen in the rise in Reformation areas of Word-focussed sacramentals (Bibles and hymnals)

---

49 Taylor, A Secular Age, 74–75.
and spells (Bible verses and Protestant texts). The theology that the Word was the mediator of divine power was heard and responded to, but the felt need to have material channels by which to access that power remained. Robert Scribner’s list of uses would apply very well to Toraja: “to perform counter-magic against bewitchment, to divine lost or stolen objects, to discover the cause of human and animal illness, to heal, to protect, and to cast spells of various kinds, whether against human or demonic ill will, or simply to guard against disaster.” While it is easy enough to lament the “simple-minded and untutored”, it may well be that for those in a more dependent cultural framework, hierarchy, tradition, and solidarity in facing chaotic forces may not have been seen as oppressive situations calling for liberation.

4.4 Conclusion

We began our discussion of the relevantly hermeneutically significant areas of cultural difference with a discussion of ritual and sincerity orientations. The latter is an outworking of the buffered self in an ordered society and cosmos; the former creates order in the midst of a fractured world. We looked at magic in Toraja as a manifestation of a ritual orientation, and again saw church scholars demonstrating a more Western sincerity orientation, with a hermeneutic confining the biblical phenomena to a ‘religious’ sphere. Hiebert’s article showed how this hermeneutic can lead to this significant area of local’s experience not coming into contact with the Bible. Hiebert is describing evangelical missionaries who accept the historicity of the biblical stories of healings and exorcisms, and so he explains this lacuna in terms of the experience and worldview of the missionaries. The excluded middle world is precisely the world that a sincerity orientation has no need for.

We noted the debate around the hermeneutical issue of how to understand the miraculous, including whether there are (dependent) sources of supernatural power other than God.

---

However, we argued from 2 Th ch. 2:9 that this remains an open question in the Bible; trust in Jesus (mythos) is what is required; belief or disbelief in such sources (ethos) is the context in which such trust is called for. But behind this debate we discerned two other issues. The first concerned mediation by anything other than God’s word, which was seen as substituting the mediation for God. The second concerned liberation of the self, including the social component of tradition and hierarchies, which are questions of agency. These are related: hierarchy and tradition can be viewed as mediations of authority and wisdom, and for those in a fractured world, those mediations are sources of salvation, not oppression.

Ritual, of course, is a prime means of mediation: of tradition, hierarchy, and of spiritual power. The next chapter will focus on ritual, adding the further dimension of the pragmatic rather than didactic purpose of the ritual orientation.
Chapter 5

Ritual in Toraja

5.1 Introduction

We have seen that ritual culture raises issues about interpreting the supernatural, and behind this are questions of mediation and agency. We will continue our investigation by looking at ritual. If the kind of magic we examined in the previous chapter is usually aimed at personal, instrumental ends (and is often evaluated negatively even within its own culture), the rituals we will look at in this chapter constitute a ‘white magic’,\(^1\) authorised rituals designed to ensure the ongoing life and prosperity of the community. Geertz saw ritual as the hermeneutical tie between mythos and ethos, each making sense of the other.\(^2\) Understanding how this hermeneutical tie operates is therefore an important aspect of developing a local hermeneutic.

For this purpose I will draw on Rappaport’s landmark analysis of ritual, which provided the conceptual apparatus for the distinction of ritual and sincerity in the previous chapter. While his purpose is the scientific task of explaining ritual, meaning is central to this explanation. An implication of his account is to challenge the Christian tendency to view ritual

\(^1\)Compare Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 44.

\(^2\)See *Situating the Research* (§1.7, p. 17).
referentially, as a visible sign of an invisible reality (Augustine), with, for example, disputes over rituals usually focussing on theological propositions (is the bread and wine divine or not?). By contrast, he draws on speech act theory to emphasise the performative effects of ritual, with implications for the nature of belief as such. A comparison with a Protestant ritual clarifies these differences, with their potential implications for how the Bible itself is understood as a sacred text.

5.2 Ritual as a Speech Act

Speech act theory describes two basic features of an utterance, namely, its propositional content and its illocutionary force, the latter meaning what is done in the saying of the utterance. Thus, saying “I promise P” does not only talk about P as a future state of affairs, it also creates a promise in the saying of it. Similarly, a marriage ceremony does not just contain a theology of marriage, it also creates a marriage by its performance. A ritual is richer than a proposition, however. A marriage ceremony contains not just an official theology of marriage in its liturgical form, but also elements that reflect the couple and their situation, such as their clothes, the music chosen, and the number of people attending. One of Rappaport’s key insights is that “canonical messages”, here the theology of marriage, are conveyed in the parts of the service that are fixed, while the variable aspects reflect the participants and their social context. This provides a way to analyse ritual that does not prematurely emphasise the message, or belief in the message.

The ritual we will look at is a local variant of the Maro ceremony, as performed in a little village in the northwest corner of Toraja during the period 1980–1984 and recorded and analysed by Elizabeth Coville. Held over three days in the yard of the highest ranking house

---


4Ibid., §2.11.

in the village, soon after rice harvest, it begins in the afternoon with a few ritual specialists chanting the *gelong maro*. This chant begins with praising the glories of the village, and then praises the recently dead ancestors. It continues with the blessing of iron knives and red bloodwort leaf. By this time the yard is increasingly full of people from the village as well as guests from elsewhere, the circle of chanters is growing, and the chant becomes more intense. The final and most important stage of the chant is calling the spirits (here called *deata*). This is done by describing in elaborate detail their journey from all directions and places to a sacred lake near the village, from where they journey in the chant to the place of the chanter. At the height of the tension, the circle breaks as women enter the space inside the circle. A drum is sounded; the spirits have arrived. What follows could appropriately be described as pandemonium. Those who are possessed convey requests for the gods, either to swing drums, spin around in pairs, play with cloth, or to bloodlessly cut themselves with a blessed knife covered with blessed red bloodwort leaf. Meanwhile, the chanter increase their volume with soothing chants to maintain control. Once the gods have had their fill of play, they are sent home, those who went into trance regain consciousness, and the festival closes with sharing sticky rice cakes and chicken morsels. If all has gone well, this will provide blessing (health and prosperity) for the following year.6

Clearly, there is a lot of ‘religious’ information that is present in or implied in this ritual.7 A social world wider than humans is presented here. The *deata* (spirits) called by the chants are connected with local places or features. These are spirits that can be sporadic but unreliable sources of help or hurt, but they do not undergo change, they do not have distinct histories or identities, and they are not easily engaged.8 In this ceremony, they come from surrounding locations to bless the village in this particular place as a single community. By contrast, the ancestors (*nene*’) have distinct histories and identities, and relate to their

---

6Summarised from ibid., 9–11, see also ibid., 241–2.

7The terminology in the village where Coville did her research is not entirely consistent with that presented in the Introduction, due to local variation.

8Ibid., 153.
still living descendants rather than a localised community (though of course there may be significant overlap between the two groups). Ritualy, the two classes of divine being are strongly separated. The *deata* are the focus of the ceremonies of the East, the *Rambu Tuka’* or “smoke rising” ceremonies. Conversely, the *nene’* are the focus of the ceremonies of the West (chiefly funerals), the *Rambu Solo’* or “smoke descending” ceremonies. It is a strong tabu to mix ceremonies, for example, by attending one kind in the morning and the other kind in the afternoon, or by wearing black to a ceremony of the East or not wearing black to a funeral ceremony. Within the *maro* ceremony, which is a ceremony of the East, this separation is marked by a distinct change in pace, as if mention of the ancestors is difficult. It is important that they are mentioned, but that they are not called. Their function in this ceremony is as authority. Because the ceremony is being done exactly in accordance with the pattern given to the ancestors at the time of creation, it is able to succeed in calling the *deata*. Because of this, argues Coville, the ancestors provide a link to the past and origins, while the spirits are oriented to the future. Though the ancestors have decayed to the point of death, and their bones continue to decay, they represent the solidity of the past. Though the *deata* are effectively eternal, in their evanescence they reflect the elusiveness of the future.

However, these understandings are only “information” to the outsider. To the villagers in the community, these are simply the realities in which they live and move and have their being. The salience of the ceremony is in its illocutionary force and perlocutionary effects. These effects are empirical. The empirical result of the ceremony will be seen in whether the following year brings blessing or not. This effect is worked towards through playing with the *deata*. The illocutionary import of this is to include the *deata* in the fundamental social

---

9See page 23.
12The illocution creates a social fact, a promise or a command or a marriage, in the saying of it. Perlocutionary effects are what results from this, for example, turning up at the agreed time and place, or living together.
activity of exchange by giving them something. Exchange is not a simple *do ut des*, and the gift of play to the *deata* does not guarantee their blessing. Rather, exchange places giver and receiver in a system. The village can perform the ceremony because of the blessing of the previous year, and so the ceremony is a thanksgiving which provides an incentive for the *deata* to provide blessing to enable next year’s ceremony.\(^{13}\) Moreover, as in a wedding, it is possible for one of the parties to perform incorrectly, so that the ritual fails. Over the five years (1980–84) that Coville gleaned information, this happened from both sides. In 1982, the ceremony was not performed. In 1983, it was performed, but no *deata* came.\(^{14}\) The locals’ explanation for this was that the ritual words and procedures were not performed correctly.\(^{15}\) This places correct performance among what Searle terms the preparatory conditions for the ritual illocution to succeed. For example, making a promise implies “that the thing promised is in the hearer’s interest,”\(^{16}\) and there are certain vows that need to be made for a ritual to count as a marriage ceremony. Coville sees a range of social factors behind the poor performance, and analyses the “immutable” ritual’s inevitable sensitivity to local happenings.\(^{17}\)

### 5.3 Understanding Ritual mode

Rappaport’s distinction between invariant canonical messages and variable self-referential messages flows from his definition of ritual as “the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers,”\(^{18}\) a definition

---

\(^{13}\)There is no indication that the *deata* are, or even could be, under threat of some sanction.

\(^{14}\)Ibid., 299–300.

\(^{15}\)Ibid., 300.


\(^{17}\)Coville, “‘A Single Word Brings to Life’,” 301 This is all the more cogent if the *deata* are social facts rather than empirical entities, since then the non-appearance of the *deata* is in fact information about the performers.

from which he endeavours to illuminate the origins of religious experience, cosmology, norms and political legitimacy. The apparent equivocation, "more or less" and "not entirely", is where the variable self-referential messages find a place in the midst of the invariant canonical messages. To characterise the difference, he draws on Charles Pierce’s distinction of icon, index and symbol. Icons signify by similarity, symbols by convention, and indexes by intrinsic association, whether cause and effect or part to whole. Invariant parts of the ritual tend to be symbols (or icons) of general conceptions, since they are not encoded by the performers, whereas the variant parts tend to be indexical, connected with the performers. This well describes Coville’s analysis. Her summary captures the “more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances” of this ritual, which are rich with explicit and implicit general conceptions. The symbolic aspects include the chants, but also the ritual paraphernalia such as the bloodwort leaves (symbolising the spirits) and the iron knives (symbolising the ancestors). As significant are the iconic meanings. The circle of chanters creates a centre, and the movement of the ritual is centripetal, as both those possessed and the spirits converge in that centre. This centre thus becomes an icon of the community. However, as Coville notes, the performance of the ritual “contains within it the social context of its production.” Each performance is different, and much as a thermometer indexes temperature, these differences index aspects of the community, albeit not necessarily with great precision. The actual cohesion, authority and ability of those leading the chant is seen in the accuracy and power of the performance, symbolised by the nene'. The “spirit” of the community as a whole is indexed in the quantity and quality of the possession by deata. The disruptions described above, where problems with leadership and the community actually caused the ceremony to fail, are limiting case demonstrations of this. If the unity of the

---

19Ibid., 27.  
22Ibid., 281.  
23Ibid., 271.
community is a fixed “as if” which is projected in the ritual, these variables are indexes to the “as is” of the community.

The indexical nature of ritual becomes salient in the funeral ceremony, which displays difference as well as unity. As mentioned above, this is the main Rambu Solo’ ceremony (oriented to the West), and focusses on the ancestors. Indeed, its main illocutionary force is to turn the deceased person into an ancestor. By means of the ceremony, the soul (bombo) of the deceased is moved to Puya, the abode of the dead, accompanied by the animals sacrificed during the ceremony, which are like provisions for the next world.\textsuperscript{24} The perlocutionary effect is that the deceased will not cause mischief as a ghost, but rather become a source of blessing. If the Maro ceremony indexes social unity, the funeral ceremony indexes social status and social relationships in addition. The status of the deceased (and therefore their family) is seen in the kind of funeral that is held. Depending on social status and age, the funeral can last from one through to seven nights, with from one to twenty-four water buffalo sacrificed.\textsuperscript{25} Second, the status of those attending is displayed and confirmed in the meat division ceremony, where cuts of meat from the sacrificed water buffalo are divided. Both the particular cut and the order in which the pieces are handed out are quite precise indexes of status. However, the judgment of the person distributing the meat can be and is often contested, so that the result is to some extent a collective judgment.\textsuperscript{26} In this way, an invisible social attribute, status, is made visible, measurable and, at the point of the meat division, measured.

Relationships are displayed, and to a great extent constituted, by gifts of water buffalo and pigs to the ceremony, brought by members of the extended family, or through other

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{24}]Douglas Hollan, “Disruptive Behavior in a Toraja Community” (Ph.D., University of California, 1984), 63. Puya appears to be somewhat akin to the Old Testament Sheol, a shadow-like copy of this world.
\item[\textsuperscript{25}]See Stanislaus Sandarupa, “The Exemplary Center: Poetics and Politics of the Kingly Death Ritual Practice in Toraja, South Sulawesi, Indonesia” (Ph.D, The University of Chicago, 2004), 114 for a table of the graded levels of funeral.
\item[\textsuperscript{26}]Toby Alice Volkman, Feasts of Honor: Ritual and Change in the Toraja Highlands (Illinois studies in anthropology; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 97–100.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
associations with the deceased. The size of the gift (the number and size of the animals) is an index—again making the invisible visible and measurable—of the strength of the relationship of the bringer with the deceased and/or their family.\(^{27}\) Close family bring one or more water buffalo, and this can have implications for inheritance.\(^{28}\) More generally, these gifts become a kind of debt, as the receiving family will be expected to bring something similar when the giver next has a funeral in the family. These debts are taken into account as the family considers its resources for holding the funeral, which will have hundreds of people attending each day. Nevertheless, the return gift is not the fulfilling of a contract, but rather a return expression of the relationship expressed in the previous gift.\(^{29}\) As mentioned earlier, membership of a *tongkonan* (clan house) is possible through any ancestor, male or female, and so affiliation is not automatic.\(^{30}\) Nor is the strength of relationship a given. The bringing of gifts to the funeral ceremonies indexes dynamic social patterns, just as the distribution of meat indexes dynamic social status, though neither necessarily changes quickly.

The fundamental thing about a person that is indexed in a ritual performance is their participation.\(^{31}\) Rappaport argues that participation indicates not belief in the general conceptions conveyed in the ritual but rather acceptance of the social order implied in the ritual.\(^{32}\) Acceptance is the basic illocutionary force of participation. To take part in the *Rambu Solo*’ funeral ceremony is to accept the hierarchy and web of relationships expressed and reproduced within it, including with the deceased and other longer standing ancestors. To take part in the *Maro* festival is to accept the community presented within it, including the *deata* who join in the festivities. This acceptance implies, of course, a range of understandings about the world that are assumed together, understandings that could be termed beliefs. However, they are not believed in the same way as, for example, the propositions of

---

27Ibid., 94–95.
28Ibid., 104.
29Ibid., 183 n. 7.
30See page 22.
32Ibid., 119.
the creed are intended to be believed by sincere Protestants. At the simplest level, this can be seen in that the sacred messages are conveyed in what amounts to a distinct language of conventional metaphors that are only learnt by certain classes of people.33 The language of the ritual is provided by the ancestors to achieve the illocutionary effects of the ritual (calling the deata, moving the ancestor to the next place), not to teach.

Nevertheless, the rituals do sustain the Toraja worldview. First, the rituals work (evaluated within the framework of the local culture). The world does not disintegrate into chaos, crops grow, and babies are born, showing that the ancestors and spirits are playing their part. Second, the rituals themselves clearly point beyond the mundane. People are possessed, and some cut themselves with knives without bleeding. These demonstrate both the presence of the deata and their power;34 and also the authority of the ancestors who provided the form of the ritual.35 The Maro ritual and many elements of other rituals would also fit well with Rappaport’s analysis of the scale of time experienced in many rituals. The rhythm of the chant is close to bodily rhythm, while the form of the ritual goes back to ancestral time. Thus the ritual connects personal time with ancestral time, and takes the participants outside of ordinary social time.36

Rappaport’s analysis can be applied to Protestant ritual, too, and this clarifies some of the differences between ritual and sincerity modes. A typical Church of Toraja Sunday service uses a traditional Calvinist form. The service begins with an introductory song and a prayer of invocation which invokes God’s name and calls for God’s grace on the meeting, and ends with a blessing and a final song. In between, and interspersed with hymns and sung psalms, are found (with some variations) a reading of the Ten Commandments (Ex 20) and/or Jesus’ summary (Mt ch. 22: 37–40), a general confession of sins followed by a declaration of forgiveness, a reciting of the creed, a prayer for the Bible reading, the

33Toby Alice Volkman, “The Pig Has Eaten the Vegetables: Ritual and Change in Tana Toraja” (Ph.D., Cornell University, 1980), 43.

34See Rappaport, Ritual and Religion, §12.7 on the numinous and belief.

35See ibid., §9.7.

36Ibid., §7.3.
Bible reading and the sermon, an offertory with its own prayer, and intercessory prayers. A number of these elements have illocutionary force. During the introductory song, an elder gives the preacher his or her Bible and shakes hands as a sign of authorisation, and the Bible is handed back during the song after the blessing. Within this human authorisation, the votum and the blessing mark the service time as belonging to God, using sentences from the Bible. Much of the service in between alternates between the Word of God and a response by the congregation. The commandments are answered by a confession, which in turn is answered with the declaration of forgiveness. The reading and preaching of the Bible passage is responded to by the offertory and intercessory prayers. Thus, the broader illocutionary force of the service is to host a conversation between God and the congregation.\textsuperscript{37}

What the Toraja and Protestant rituals share, which is what makes sense of even comparing them, is that spiritual entities are brought into interaction with the community through the ritual, thereby being constituted as social facts (whatever their respective ontological statuses). The field spirits are largely defined through such rituals, though their presence is also felt through tabus, for example against using a particular path. The ancestors are defined by their historical personages, but their change of status is defined ritually, and they can continue to make their presence felt in dreams. The high gods seem to be largely internal to the rituals, featuring in the ritual poems given by the original ancestors.\textsuperscript{38} This suggests that traditional Toraja will identify the Christian God through rituals such as the Sunday Service. This is not a Protestant understanding, which identifies God through the two books of Scripture and nature.

This leads to a second contrast. In the Protestant understanding, God’s presence is given, both as omnipresent Creator and as the one who redeems by grace alone, and therefore cannot fail. This can be clarified by an interesting application by Seligman et al. of a typology of

\textsuperscript{37}James K. A. Smith, Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation (Volume 1 of Cultural liturgies; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2009), 259.

\textsuperscript{38}H. van der Veen, Merok Feast of the Sa’Dan Toradja (’s-Gravenhage: M. Nijhoff, 1965), 11–12.
CHAPTER 5. RITUAL IN TORAJA

The typology differentiates games, and thus rituals, on two axes. The first is whether the ending is known. For a healing ritual, or the *Maro* ritual, it is not, just as it is not in gambling. It is no accident that the church has been the most active against such rituals, since they are incompatible with the givenness of God’s providence and redemption.\(^{39}\) The second axis concerns whether the participants are themselves or playing a role. In a healing ritual, the sick person is looking for healing as themselves; in the *Maro* ritual, those possessed become the *deata*. In general, Protestant ritual is in the first quadrant: people come to church as themselves, and the illocution of conversation with God is not in doubt. By contrast, the illocution of exchange with the *deata* in the *Rambu Tuka’* ceremonies can fail. This does not seem to be the case for the funeral ceremonies, which the church has allowed, with modifications.

Of course, desired perlocutions can always fail. A conversation generally seeks to build relationship and guide behaviour. Since God does not change, the desired perlocutionary effect of the Protestant service is change in the participants through their interaction with God. Within a traditional Calvinist service, this is almost entirely internal, and often largely cognitive. Central to this is belief, of the explicit, chosen variety. Thus, the language of the canonical messages needs to be clear, since the desired change needs to come from understanding. This contrasts with the intended effects of the Toraja rituals, namely prosperity in field and womb.\(^{40}\) Hence, the language of the canonical messages needs to be authorised and intelligible to the intended recipients (the spirits or ancestors) rather than the participants, somewhat like the language of legal documents.

This leads to a final contrast, that of historical perspective. Rappaport points out that most oral societies can only remember history back a few generations, so that the forms of


\(^{40}\)Healing is a difficult issue in strongly Reformed churches precisely because prayer for healing can resemble healing rituals, but there is a strong desire to uphold God’s sovereignty in the process, which denies that the outcome is unknown to God, though it remains unknown to the participants at the time of prayer.

\(^{41}\)Social harmony would be common to both, though the Toraja sociality includes ancestors as well as the high god.
the rituals really do come from beyond historical time. Who else but the original ancestors could have produced rituals that have such potent effects? However, the Bible’s invariance does not carry the same meaning, since it comes from its status as a written text, written within the history it conveys. False gods and false prophets abound within that text, pointing to the existence of many alternatives. Authority thus becomes a matter of belief that these writings are the particular ones chosen by God, rather than being given implicitly in the form of the ritual.

In these several ways, Protestant ritual takes an “as is” stance. The canonical messages arise within history (even if their source is beyond), and are aimed at the participants in their personal histories, an intention conveyed in the secularising slogans of the priesthood of all believers, all of life being worship, and the vocational nature of non-religious occupations. The conversation with God is everyday in using clear language and aiming at influencing practical affairs.

Of course, this has not stopped Protestant ritual moving towards ritual mode. Rappaport’s analysis suggests that participation in Protestant ritual in fact indexes acceptance of the social order, which in this case includes belief. Of course, acceptance of the social value of belief is not the same as sincere belief, but it can function as a “means of grace” for its sustenance, given the fragility of faith in an invisible God. God’s unfailing presence is meant to be grasped by faith, but that faith is in practice fragile. If strengthening faith is the goal of Protestant ritual, the appropriateness of material prosperity for the faithful was often a live theme too.\footnote{Rappaport, Ritual and Religion, 234. Coville, “A Single Word Brings to Life”, 204 reports an historical consciousness of three to five generations in her area.}

5.4 Conclusion

Our discussion of ritual mode has shown how ritual creates order in a fractured world. The Maro ceremony projects the spiritual beings who can bring blessing, as well as unity; the funeral ceremony indexes relationships and status. Rappaport’s emphasises that participation indexes acceptance of the order, rather than belief as such, but his analysis also shows that the rituals sustain the plausibility of the spiritual beings and social order projected in the rituals. Plausibility implies implicit belief, but the Christian ritual we examined is looking for self-grounded belief, that is, sincerity. Unlike the empirically oriented Toraja rituals which create order, the conversation that forms the illocution of the Protestant service is grounded in preexisting divine order and cannot fail to occur, though its perlocutionary effects may not be as hoped. We concluded that Protestant ritual takes an “as is” stance, aiming at becoming sincere ritual.

Central to this Protestant ritual is the Bible, which as God’s word takes on the character of the definitively “as is” text. By contrast, an example of an “as if” stance to the Bible is when it is used as a charm. But the persistence of a world experienced as fractured may affect how the Bible is viewed in less obvious ways. This is what we will explore through an analysis of a sincere Protestant mission in a traditional ritual culture.
Chapter 6

Kruyt and a ritual culture

6.1 Introduction

The centrality of the Bible for Protestant ritual was an important aspect of the shift towards sincere ritual, as the Bible’s teaching was the ground for sincere belief. This ideal of sincere ritual, which our analysis suggests is somewhat paradoxical, was made plausible in Calvin’s time due to the cultural shifts such as the liberty of a growing individualism, undergirded by the simplification of removing meaning from the world to God’s will. By the late nineteenth century, God’s will in nature had been increasingly seen to be mathematically regular, and the initial social achievements of Geneva and the Puritans had become a general experience of modern states.

This was the era when Albert C. Kruyt was sent by a Dutch mission (the Nederlandsch Zendeling Genootschap) to the Poso area, in what is now Central Sulawesi, and served there for most of the period from 1893 till his retirement in 1932.\(^1\) It took over fifteen years before the head of a local ethnic group was willing to be baptised in 1909, along with his wife and 160 others, mostly from that same group.\(^2\) He had a significant influence on other missionaries in Indonesia, including A. A. van de Loosdrecht, the first Dutch missionary who came to

---


\(^2\)Ibid., 4.
Toraja in 1913. As a member of a new breed of ethnographers, he brought new powers of observation to the difficulties of the interaction of the sincerity mode of the Protestant message with a ritual culture.

The following discussion is taken from the Indonesian translation of Von Heiden Tot Christen, his mature missiological work, written in 1925. By this stage, the ministry was well-established, as was his understanding of how those converts understood and lived out their new faith. This was informed by his evolutionary theory of religious development, from belief in non-personal powers (dynamism), through belief in personal spirits and gods (animism), culminating in (Protestant) Christianity. He placed the Poso at the level of animism, with “survivals” of dynamism. While the theory has been discredited, its plausibility was at least in part due to the scientific and social achievements of the era, along with the experience of the buffered self. A sincerity orientation shared in this plausibility, as we shall see.

Behind much of Kruyt’s discussion is the question of why the Reformation gospel did not produce the same effect in the Poso people as it did in Europe. Our interest is in the hermeneutical issues that lie behind his answers to this question. These will give more definition to the issues of mediation and agency that we have already identified.

6.2 Mediation in a fractured world

A starting point for clarifying the differences observed in the response of the Poso to the gospel is Taylor’s discussion of the reversals of fear that energised the Reformation. Taylor singles out fear of eternal damnation as “the nevralgic [sic] issue” of the era. Kruyt, however, notes a complete absence of this fear in the Poso traditional culture. There is a fear of death, but it is a fear of the power of a dead person to affect crops or cause further death, which power

---


4Kruyt, Keluar, 8.

5Ibid., ch. 1.

is addressed by animal sacrifices.\(^7\) He suggests that the concept of post-mortem punishment does not arise due to the following (presumably implicit) logic: death is the most severe penalty for a transgression, and so a person’s death wipes the slate clean.\(^8\) Furthermore, a person’s prosperity or otherwise in this life is a sign of the gods’ blessing, and continues into the next life.\(^9\) Thus, the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, with its reversal of blessing and curse between this life and the next, makes no sense to them.\(^10\) This is perhaps connected with their more communal orientation: blessing is the continuance of the community more than of the individual soul. But even the most communal phases of medieval Christianity had an eschatological individualism, which became increasingly salient before the Reformation. This had no parallel in the Poso experience.

The other two fears that Taylor sees being reversed in the Reformation are connected: the reversal of the fear of black and white magic went hand in hand with the reversal of fear towards the religious hierarchy whose rituals were behind the production of the white magic, such as the sacraments.\(^11\) According to Kruyt, there was for the Poso Christians a release from the fear of spirits and supernatural powers, including the power of death.\(^12\) However, the emotion he associates with this is not a new energy, but rather relief. Furthermore, their sense of dependence on religious hierarchy remained unaffected. Whether Christian or pre-Christian, they desired someone with connections to the divine to pray for them, whether in sickness, at the start of planting, or at the start of building a house.\(^13\) What happened was not a jump out of the field of fear of magic, but rather a change in the form of white magic, from traditional to Christian. They became Christian for a variety of “non-religious”

\(^7\)Kruyt, *Keluar*, 208.
\(^8\)Ibid., 142.
\(^9\)Ibid., 143.
\(^10\)Ibid., 144–5.
\(^12\)Kruyt, *Keluar*, 208.
\(^13\)Ibid., 233.
reasons, such as following the example of someone influential,\textsuperscript{14} but their way of thinking did not change.

Nevertheless, the Poso clearly inhabited a fractured world, as did medieval Europe. In his chapter on sin, Kruyt mentions the gods, powerful humans, and magic as sources of disorder. His central point in describing the local gods is that they do not administer an impartial law, but rather they are as inconsistent as nature is.\textsuperscript{15} This arises because the occurrence of a transgression against the gods is discerned through punishment, often in the form of acts of nature.\textsuperscript{16} But the attitude of the gods is also consistent with the fickleness of humans in power, who can be arbitrary in their own application of rules, and enjoy the favour of the gods despite obvious transgressions.\textsuperscript{17} The other source of misfortune and death is magic, which can include magically inserting illness, and draining a person’s life-force.\textsuperscript{18} We have seen much of this above in traditional Toraja culture.

Kruyt discusses their traditional ways of dealing with this fractured world in a series of chapters, through the obviously Christian lenses of ritual and doctrine, belief, prayer, sin, and law. What he highlights is the outwardness of their traditional religion, in comparison to the inner focus that he sets up as the norm. Their focus is this-worldly blessing which is pursued through keeping rules,[193] and transgression of those rules is discerned when blessing is threatened, e.g., by sickness or pestilence. It is also pursued through talismans, sacrifices, ritual specialists and other channels of supernatural power.\textsuperscript{19} For Kruyt, true religion is the expression in a “spiritual life”\textsuperscript{20} of a faith which is “a matter of the heart and captures the whole person.”\textsuperscript{21} Thus, at every point, what for Kruyt is essentially ‘spiritual’ — blessing,

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., 126.
\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., 119.
\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., 125.
\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., 120.
\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., 72–74, 109.
\textsuperscript{20}“kehidupan rohani”. See ibid., 44.
\textsuperscript{21}“urusan hati dan menyita seluruh manusia”. See ibid.
prayer, obedience—is mediated physically in the traditional religion. Divine blessing is experienced in prosperity, rather than healing in the soul; prayer is exercised through rituals and objects, rather than being a matter of the heart; obedience is conformity to rules governing actions, rather than a matter of right intentions. This is clearly not religion in sincerity mode, since the heart does not feature at any point for there to be correspondence with either words or actions.

Given Kruyt’s understanding of religion, it is axiomatic that this lack of focus on the heart limits the possibilities for devotion to God. Genuine trust in a higher power “takes the form of surrender of oneself with full confidence… which is inner fellowship with the gods.” Devotion to the divine equals fellowship conducted and experienced in the soul. Since dynamism only understands a life-force, with little sense of a soul, such devotion would be almost impossible in such a culture. For animists such as the Poso, he does allow for some level of devotion, and gives a number of examples of trust in divine help. However, the level of self-consciousness in animism varies, being strongest in the chiefs who were eligible to become divine ancestors, and by implication weaker in most others. Central to the importance of the soul for Kruyt is that Christ saves the soul from the power of sin within; grasping this is the key to heart-felt devotion. Hence, their ‘shallow’ understanding of transgression as action, even unintentional action, along with their understanding of punishment as death, misfortune, or sickness, means that his converts understand that Jesus’s sacrifice replaces the old sacrifices and so they look to him to save them from death, misfortune, and sickness.

---

22Ibid., 74.
23Ibid., 69.
24Ibid., 34.
25Ibid., 76–83.
27Kruyt, Keluar, 90.
28Ibid., 193.
29Ibid.
But this devotion remains as shallow as its understanding of sin.\textsuperscript{30}

Kruyt also sees the use of mediation as inimical to faith, as it encourages self-reliance.\textsuperscript{31} His point seems to be that such mediations give the illusion either of an alternative source of power to God, or of human control of divine power. Thus, his converts began referring to magic as “snatching God’s power.”\textsuperscript{32} Along with objects and rituals, he explicitly includes rules within this sphere of self-reliance, based on the apostle Paul’s polemic against Christians who relied on the Law for salvation.\textsuperscript{33} Indeed, even doctrine can become a kind of idol, if it does not express the heart.\textsuperscript{34}

What made the above contrasts difficult to grasp for his converts was the “pre-logical” nature of their culture: “The Poso do not appreciate philosophy, no matter how simple that philosophy is. Every spiritual truth or religious deed must have an immediate practical use.”\textsuperscript{35} “Philosophy” here is contrasted with immediacy and practicality; it thus encompasses truths and rituals (“religious deeds”) which refer to a sphere of non-instrumental, long-term ends. Presumably, this sphere is the soul understood in the context of Christian eschatology. In a ‘rational’ culture, the soul is both the agent and object of religious action: obedience begins with intention, prayer comes from the heart; the goal is a soul freed from the power of sin and headed for eternal life.

A connection between principles (an aspect of ‘philosophy’) and intention becomes clear in his discussion of ethical rules. As Kruyt describes it, they acknowledged the value for social well-being of ethical principles such as not stealing,\textsuperscript{36} and, at least in Toraja, a notion of personal responsibility is implied in the alternative explanation that the person has been

\textsuperscript{30}Ibid., 171.
\textsuperscript{31}Ibid., 84.
\textsuperscript{32}“merampas kuasa Allah”. See ibid., 72–73.
\textsuperscript{33}Ibid., 85–87.
\textsuperscript{34}Ibid., 46.
\textsuperscript{35}“Orang Poso tidak menghargai filsafat, sesederhana apa pun filsafat itu. Setiap kebenaran rohani atau perbuatan keagamaan haruslah segera menghasilkan manfaat praktis.” See ibid., 109.
\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., 195.
acted on by external forces.\textsuperscript{37} This indicates that they are capable of ethical principles pointing to classes of actions, and of giving ethical value to intention. However, since it is the action, e.g., of committing adultery, which brings punishment, not the intention, they show little interest in intention at a religious level. By contrast, for Kruyt intentions are basic. Ethical principles, such as love for neighbour as described in the Ten Commandments, refer to intentions, and intentions are primary in evaluating actions.\textsuperscript{38} So, in relation to Sunday rest, the Poso Christians wanted rules about what actions were permissible or not. They could not understand Kruyt’s explanation that urgent needs were allowed to take priority over Sunday worship, that it was up to the individual to decide if that was the case, but that God would know if they were just making excuses not to come to church.\textsuperscript{39} As this example demonstrates, thinking ethically from intention does require ‘philosophical’ thinking; Kruyt is effectively asking them to think through their decision on what to do on a Sunday from first principles each time. He recognises both that this is difficult for them, and that their understanding of transgression gives them little incentive to work on that difficulty.

However, thinking the particular situation through from intention is precisely what Kruyt understands by “liberty” in the gospel.\textsuperscript{40} This concerns not being under ‘arbitrary’ rules, as any attempt to define Sunday observance in lists of allowed and disallowed activities will be. The alternative to agreed rules is that one becomes the author of one’s own rules, a ‘philosopher’. This can be seen in the story he tells of when the missionaries wanted to promote the giving of an offertory in church, an important moment in traditional Protestant liturgy. The missionaries wanted them to give “according to their means, from a heart full of thanks to God.”\textsuperscript{41} The action was meant to be grounded in a motivation founded in awareness of God’s mercy, and therefore a free and willing recognition of God’s authority to

\textsuperscript{37}Douglas Hollan, “‘Disruptive’ Behavior in a Toraja Community” (Ph.D., University of California, 1984), 323.

\textsuperscript{38}Kruyt, Kehar, 194.

\textsuperscript{39}Ibid., 202–3.

\textsuperscript{40}“kebebasan.” See ibid., 192.

\textsuperscript{41}“menurut kemampuan mereka, dari hati yang penuh rasa syukur kepada Allah.” See ibid., 209.
require giving. At the same time, this motivation was to function as a rational principle, from which each person would think through how much was appropriate to give based on individual circumstances.

However, the congregations insisted on the missionaries determining a fixed amount, and finally the missionaries relented. Kruyt explains, “If we had held our ground and insisted, ‘You must give as your heart moves you’, then no-one would have given anything. On the contrary, they happily obeyed that command, for the obligation was a part of their status as Christians.”\(^{42}\) He acknowledges a level of sincerity, in that they happily obeyed the command, but his critique of it is that their obedience has been reduced to mere conformity. He continues with a story illustrating that this conformity left no room for generosity, since everyone gave exactly the agreed amount.\(^{43}\) Generosity here is tied to the ability to think for oneself, not bound by others’ expectations. By contrast, they are ethically limited, only capable of accepting or rejecting rules. So then, gospel liberty as Kruyt understands it includes freedom from arbitrary rules, and the ability to author one’s own application of basic moral principles.

Thus, in Kruyt’s understanding, rules limit one’s ability to become a fully ethical person, just as charms and rituals limit one’s ability to become fully devoted to God. They reduce the liberty of the believer, not only in subjection towards those who control the rules and rituals, but also in not allowing full expression of their agency.

### 6.3 A Clash of Ethical Systems

Kruyt’s discussion provides enough information to sketch out two ethical systems, his own and the ‘religious’ system of the Poso.\(^{44}\) The obvious difference between systems concerns the

---

\(^{42}\)Sekiranya kami bertahan dan tetap menyatakan, ‘Saudara-saudara harus memberi menurut dorongan hatimu’, maka orang tidak akan memberi apa-apa. Sebaliknya, perintah itu mereka taati dengan senang hati, sebab kewajiban itu termasuk status selaku orang Kristen.” See ibid.

\(^{43}\)Ibid., 210.

\(^{44}\)The framework we are using is taken from James D. Faubion, *An Anthropology of Ethics* (New Departures in Anthropology; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), and is described in more detail on page 239.
CHAPTER 6. KRUYT AND A RITUAL CULTURE  120

ethical substance, what aspect of the person that enters into ethical calculation. Thus, Joel Robbins compared the traditional Melanesian culture in which relationships were the arena of ethical concern with the Pentecostal emphasis on individual motivation.\footnote{45} Kruyt is clearly individualist, with a focus on the soul as the ethical substance. The ethical telos or goal is inward communion with the divine through complete self-surrender; the askēsis or means of moving towards the telos includes grasping that Christ saves the soul from sin. However, his description of the Poso religiosity is not relationalist, but rather takes dynamism as its baseline, which effectively makes a kind of life-force the area of ethical concern.\footnote{46} Here, the ethical telos is a world in ecological harmony, where the threatening aspects of the life-force have been neutralised. The askēsis that works towards this goal includes the community rituals with their sacrifices, and the more individual use of talismans, dukun, and the like. The one is entirely internalised, the other entirely externalised.

This extends to the form of ethical evaluation. Intention is that aspect of a moral action which resides in the soul, and so the biblical rules are interpreted in terms of intention. For the Poso, actions are evaluated by consequences, by the misfortune that indicates that a transgression occurred. The rules are not the determiner of right or wrong, but rather post-hoc paths towards the appropriate askēsis, i.e., ritual remedy.

Lastly, the Protestant ‘ideal type’ of subjectivation is conversion, usually understood as a process of recognising oneself as a sinner and coming to Christ for salvation. Christ crucified functions as the chrism, the ground of ethical valuation, in that he is the giver of undeserved grace, enabling Taylor’s three-fold reversal of fear. Kruyt’s observations led him to understand the difficulty of such a process, despite the apparent similarities with medieval Europe, since their own ethical system engendered no fear of eternal punishment, and they were comfortable with being dependent on others for help with spiritual forces.

\footnote{45}{The terms ‘ethical substance’, ‘askēsis’, and ‘telos’ are part of this framework, which derives from later writings of Michel Foucault. See ibid., 26; Joel Robbins, Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2004), 216–7.}

\footnote{46}{He borrows the Melanesian term mana to describe this, see Kruyt, Keluar, 59.}
Thus, Kruyt envisaged a gradual process towards Western interiority. Where Christianity did seem to connect initially was with release from the economic burden of rituals and the fear of dangerous powers. Thus, the encouragements that Kruyt notes are changes in the area of *askēsis* of the life-force. Baptism became a sign of God’s ownership of the Christian Poso, a warning which lesser spirits would respect.\(^{47}\) They no longer offered sacrifices for transgressions, with the Lord’s Supper considered effective against sin.\(^{48}\) They asked Christian ministers or elders to pray before planting rice, or over the sick, again without sacrifices.\(^{49}\) In these kinds of ways, Kruyt believed that Christ was present in the culture, and would change it from within, as he had done in Europe.\(^{50}\) Presumably, the inner, spiritual meanings of the sacraments and prayer would work to change the cultural understanding of the ethical substance itself.

Kruyt emphasises that this process cannot be rushed. Indeed, he warns against too harshly criticising their existing level of religiosity, lest they lose confidence in religion as such before being able to grasp the gospel at a purer level.\(^{51}\) Since they are “pre-logical”, Christ can *only* come into the culture through its existing patterns of thought.\(^{52}\) In this way he is a forerunner of modern contextualisation. The difference is not that he expected the culture to change—that is a standard expectation in terms of the impact of the gospel—but rather that he was sure in what direction the culture had to change, namely towards his Protestant interior ethical system.

\(^{47}\)Ibid., 37.

\(^{48}\)Ibid., 38.

\(^{49}\)Ibid., 112.

\(^{50}\)Ibid., 255.

\(^{51}\)Ibid., 74.

\(^{52}\)Ibid., 255.
6.4 A Clash of Semiotic Ideologies

To understand this better, we will draw on Webb Keane’s concept of a semiotic ideology, which he explicates with reference to the Calvinist mission in Sumba, an island in Indonesia to the South of Sulawesi. A language ideology is a set of cultural ideas about language, conjoined with moral and political implications.53 A simple example of a language ideology concerns Indonesian, which is seen by modern Indonesians (including, I would add, theology teachers) as a modern, rational language, in contrast to traditional local languages more appropriate for feeling and intuition.54 This set of cultural ideas about the national language has political implications as it connects with government policies which turn traditional culture into museum pieces.55 In talking of a semiotic ideology, Keane broadens the scope to include any potential bearer of meaning.56 This enables his analysis to comprehend what we have observed above, where we have been able to group both linguistic and non-linguistic forms together as mediations.

On Keane’s analysis, Calvinism had a semiotic ideology that worked to correctly distinguish concepts, words and things,57 in order to guard a particular concept of agency, and therefore of freedom. Taylor’s fields of fear imply some of the threats to this freedom: intrinsic meanings in magical objects and sacramentals is a confusion of concepts and things, resulting in bondage to superstition, and in unwarranted subservience to those who claimed to be able to use such intrinsic meanings (whether priests through the sacraments, the papacy through letters reducing time in purgatory, or shamans and other dealers in magic). Kruyt adds linguistic forms to this threat: rules which replace self-determination, and doctrine which becomes an idol when it no longer expresses a people’s world view, as faith is

55Ibid., 5.
56Keane, Christian Moderns, 18.
57Ibid., 66.
forced to conform to doctrine. If magic indicates the importance of distinguishing things from meanings, Kruyt’s examples point to the importance of distinguishing meanings from the words used to express them.

This need to distinguish concepts, words, and things works out in history as a process of purification. On the moral and political side, the Calvinist semiotic ideology (along with subsequent modernist ones) involves the rejection of superstition, priestcraft, and conformity; Keane summarises this by saying that the modern subject is “normatively abstracted from material and social entanglements in the name of greater freedom.” Kruyt’s evolutionary scheme is thus a hope for such purification. While rejecting his evolutionism, the introduction to the Indonesian translation of his work affirms the transition from pagan to Christian as a series of purifications, leaving behind the bodily for the spiritual, the visible for the invisible, the external for the internal, the ritual for the ethical, Law for Gospel, and self-reliance for full surrender to God’s leading.

What the concept of a semiotic ideology achieves is to link these cultural issues which we have already explored with an understanding of language and meaning. An individualism which emphasises the inner person (soul, mind) is deeply connected with a concept of language which prioritises concepts over words and words over objects as potential bearers of meaning, and therefore of having a capacity for truth. Thus, the same semiotic ideology can be behind apparently disparate phenomena such as sincerity and authorial intention. Personal sincerity becomes more than just exercising good faith in personal interaction; words need to conform fully to concepts in the heart to be truly sincere. Similarly, “[w]ords should be contextualized relative to the speaker’s intent to convey ideas,” since words derive from concepts in the speaker’s mind. Limiting meaning to the speaker’s intention cuts out the

---

58 Kruyt, Keluar, 46.
59 Keane, Christian Moderns, 66. He takes the term from Bruno Latour.
60 Ibid., 76.
61 Kruyt, Keluar, 19.
62 Keane, Christian Moderns, 15.
re-contextualisation of scriptural verses, divine names or liturgical prayers as charms. It also had a deep impact on how the Bible was interpreted, especially as the human authorship of the Bible was given greater prominence.

This issue of a semiotic ideology is at the heart of the sincerity/ritual distinction, since participating in a ritual involves conforming to the “intersubjective intention” given in the ritual, rather than engaging in instrumental action.\textsuperscript{63} Ritual appears to be giving away agency, and therefore diminishing selfhood. Kruyt was aware of the importance of ritual, and our final dialogue with him concerns this area.

6.5 Corporate sincerity and the triumph of ritual mode

Kruyt’s understanding of religion that lies behind his analysis is laid out in his chapter on doctrine and ritual, the first pastoral issue that he addresses.\textsuperscript{64} We have already seen his emphasis on interiority. The faith which is at the heart of true religion encompasses both beliefs and devotion to God/the gods.\textsuperscript{65} Importantly, this faith, particularly the belief aspect, is expressed in two ways: ritual and doctrine.\textsuperscript{66} Western peoples are very good at “thinking and expressing their thoughts and feelings,”\textsuperscript{67} so the verbal forms of doctrine are sufficient to express their faith.\textsuperscript{68} Poso people are, by implication, not good at verbalisation. Their traditional beliefs are rather expressed in rituals.

The rest of the chapter details the problems that occur when the religious expression of faith — doctrine and/or ritual — does not correspond well with the faith itself. This is

\textsuperscript{63}Clemens Cavallin, \textit{Ritualization and Human Interiority} (Denmark: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2013), 22–23.

\textsuperscript{64}Kruyt, \textit{Keluar}, ch. 2.

\textsuperscript{65}Ibid., 69.

\textsuperscript{66}Ibid., 44.

\textsuperscript{67}“berpikir dan mengungkapkan pikiran serta perasaannya”. See ibid., 45.

\textsuperscript{68}Ibid.
the assumption of sincerity mode, that heart, action and words need to correspond. However, since ritual and doctrine are corporate actions and words, he is describing a corporate sincerity. Ritual and doctrine express beliefs that are held in common, and this happens because the beliefs of the individual heart are conditioned by its cultural context. Those from a “dynamistic” culture that views the supernatural as being non-personal can only understand supernatural power: the Bible becomes a magic book, the minister a diviner, baptismal water and the elements of the Lord’s Supper are used for healing.\(^69\) Where the culture has progressed to “animism” — recognising supernatural beings such as spirits, ancestors, or gods —, transgression includes a sense of offence against those beings,\(^70\) sacrifice for transgression includes a sense of propitiation,\(^71\) and there is some sense of an after-life.\(^72\) So elements of genuine faith become possible: prayer is more than just a mantra; belief has a personal element, baptism works as a sign of God’s ownership which other spirits respect, and opens the key to heaven after death; and the Lord’s Supper is connected with forgiveness of sins.\(^73\) This still falls short of the devotion that is the gospel norm.\(^74\) But corporate sincerity itself actually requires that this deficiency be accepted as a staging post: it mandates a correspondence between ritual and doctrine and individual belief, but culture limits the possibilities of belief in the individual heart, hence corporate sincerity requires that ritual and doctrine adapt to the culture.\(^75\)

\(^{69}\)Ibid., 27.

\(^{70}\)Ibid., 31.

\(^{71}\)Ibid., 32–34.

\(^{72}\)Ibid., 35.

\(^{73}\)Ibid., 37–38.

\(^{74}\)Ibid., 38.

\(^{75}\)This can be distinguished from a theologically liberal understanding that makes religious experience the actual referent of the Bible’s stories and statements about God. His coming to conviction about the Dutch Ethical Theology was also a rejection of Dutch liberal theology. See Gerrit Noort, *De Weg Van Magie Tot Geloof: Leven En Werk Van Albert C. Kruyt (1869–1949)*, *Zending-Leraar in Midden-Celebes, Indonesië* (Mission: Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2006), 579.
CHAPTER 6. KRUYT AND A RITUAL CULTURE

This signals a change in the place of doctrine within the traditional Reformation paradigm (which Kruyt assumes). The traditional paradigm could be schematised as follows: God is mediated solely through his Word, which changes the individual heart (including the mind) by the Spirit, out of which flows right words and actions. This is a sincerity paradigm, since correspondence of heart, words, and actions is central. It is a Reformation paradigm, in that the heart is changed by the Word received by faith, not through rituals which infuse grace. For confessional Calvinist churches, the Word was formulated in some detail in the confessions and catechisms which formed the substance of doctrine, and so a central component of faith was conforming belief to the Word, so that human words correspond to the Word via true beliefs. For Kruyt, the Word is mediated directly through the preaching of the “pure gospel.”76

Doctrine has shifted from being the expression of the Word to being the expression of faith, human words expressing the corporate heart of a people in a gospel-shaped culture.77 Thus, referring to the Dutch church in the Christian Netherlands, the changes in world view brought about by the explosion of knowledge through the sciences called for changes in doctrine. The old formulations worked in the pre-scientific age, but had (presumably non-core) aspects about them that could no longer be believed, and hence needed changing.78

Ritual, too, took on a different place, no longer as the corporate expression of doctrine, as the outward sign of an inward meaning,79 but as a potentially independent expression of faith. Thus, he analyses the problem of the doctrine of transubstantiation as a doctrinal “survival” of a semi-pagan misinterpretation of the words of institution (“this is my body/blood”),

76Kruyt, Keluar, 255.
77This is consistent with the Ethical Theology Kruyt came to hold during his mission training. Growing out of the mid-nineteenth century Dutch revival, this movement shared the general concern of revivals with a response of faith that affected the whole person—not just belief as assent to certain truths. However, it saw that faith within a wider spiritual community, as part of a volkskerk or people’s church. See Schrauwers, Colonial ‘Reformation’ in the Highlands of Central Sulawesi, Indonesia, 1892–1995, 43.
78Kruyt, Keluar, 45. His discussion concerns those with sufficient education to know about the sciences, and indeed the Dutch revival was an affair of the presumably educated aristocratic class. See Schrauwers, Colonial ‘Reformation’ in the Highlands of Central Sulawesi, Indonesia, 1892–1995, 38.
79Ibid., 174.
which became increasingly out of step with people’s actual beliefs as their understanding of God grew. The doctrine and the ritual varied over time as adequate expressions of faith, to some extent independently. This opens the possibility that ritual could express faith without doctrine, even if that expression is incomplete.

This, in fact, is what happened. As we have seen, Kruyt assumed that the culture would move towards the normative Reformation pattern. Hindsight, in the form of the research of Albert Schrauwers in the Poso area 60 years after Kruyt retired, suggests that his hoped for evolution in culture had yet to happen at that point. In particular, Schrauwers describes how ritual retained primacy over doctrine as their preferred ‘expression of faith’.

Part of the background to this was the division of the local culture into custom (adat) and religion (agama). This was an important aspect of the process of modernisation carried on both by the Dutch colonial administration and, in different ways, by successive Indonesian governments. While adat was expected to conform where it contradicted Christian principles, it was in principle neutral. Traditional religion, on the other hand, needed to be replaced with Christianity. This illuminates Kruyt’s discussion topics mentioned above, which are all ‘religious’. As with the secular-sacred divide in the West, the scheme restricts doctrine to the religious sphere as defined by the church, and is thus likely to lead to the problem of ‘middle-level’ issues described above. Schrauwers lists several such issues, including a belief in divine sanctions against those rebelling against authority, turning to traditional healers, and blaming ghosts and changelings for illness and death. The presence of these issues suggests a culture that is still in an enchanted world, and the adat/agama divide enabled these ritual world issues to run parallel to official doctrine, without either being integrated or contradicted.

---

80 Kruyt, Keluar, 46–47.
81 Ibid., 44.
83 Ibid., 78.
84 Ibid., 203–6.
With *adat* in principle neutral, Kruyt was able to use cultural forms in such a way that the community, via its existing power relations, replaced the role of an “interiorized theology” in clarifying identity and providing moral direction.\textsuperscript{85} Schrauwers’ mention of interiorised theology alludes to the traditional Reformation pattern where the Word is mediated via doctrine to become sincere belief. This shared belief becomes a central feature forming the church’s identity, as well as the critical principle informing and reforming both words and actions. These functions are what were effectively carried out through ritual forms rather than doctrine.

In particular, Kruyt made religious use of the advice traditionally given at the end of a shared meal or feast. In the traditional culture, several families lived together, and ate together in a way which emphasised both sharing together and also hierarchy. The latter was embodied spatially: the elder of the family sat higher than everyone else, with no-one else allowed to stand taller, even while moving, without apologising; and in general people sat behind those of greater standing. Larger feasts utilised this embodied grammar to reflect the wider hierarchy within networks of patronage. At meals both small and large, the most senior person would give some advice relevant to the occasion. Thus, the Sunday service began as a large meal in people’s homes, with the sermon replacing the advice. This meant that, regardless of people’s beliefs about the Bible as the Word of God, they were predisposed to accept the right of the preacher to speak. In this way, the ritualising force of *adat* produced dispositions that preceded, and perhaps replaced the need for, a doctrinal understanding of the Bible.

While feasting did not continue as part of the liturgy when Sunday Services moved to schools and then church buildings, they did continue as adjuncts to liturgies conducted in homes during the week, both routine services on a rotating basis, and occasional thanksgiving services. Over time, social changes made these home services one of the main avenues for reproducing patronage networks, as the business of providing coffee and biscuits, or even a meal for thanksgivings, required means beyond an individual household’s resources. Thus,

\textsuperscript{85}Ibid., 200.
the interests of the local hierarchy articulated with those of the church, the latter in the sermon, the former in the meal which was occasioned by the sermon.\textsuperscript{86} This provided for unity, precisely not on the basis of shared belief. Rather, the ritual form validated the particular application of the Bible presented for the particular occasion of a service, whether or not it was consistent with other words brought on other occasions.\textsuperscript{87}

One result that Schrauwers highlights is a muting of the critical function of the Bible, compared to traditional Reformation emphases.\textsuperscript{88} There was a strong emphasis on immediate relevance in the preaching style Schrauwers describes, avoiding aspects of the passage that might be difficult.\textsuperscript{89} There was also a conscious policy not to be critical, either of people’s ad hoc beliefs, or directly of their behaviour. This did not preclude strategies for reform, but again the means were ritual: he notes the success of the women’s ministry, via house services for women, in producing active church members, and, to a more limited extent, a drive directed at men involved in gambling and excessive drinking via house services for the ‘whole family’.\textsuperscript{90} Thus, as in mission times, there was a critical function being exercised—effectively through the doctrine of an educated elite, whether missionaries or church leaders. Schrauwers notes that this elite tended to reflect economic and social privilege, since a good education is more easily attained by those with means.\textsuperscript{91} It is no surprise, then, if the sins of the many (such as gambling) were being addressed, but there is no evidence of a critique of the sins of power, such as we find in the apostle Paul’s critique of the wealthy shaming the poor by their manner of eating (1 Cor 11:20–22). On the contrary, Schrauwers anticipates no change in the status quo. Kruyt likened the Poso to children,\textsuperscript{92} while for the current church

\textsuperscript{86}Ibid., 179–91.
\textsuperscript{87}Ibid., 206.
\textsuperscript{88}Ibid., 211.
\textsuperscript{89}Ibid., 208–10.
\textsuperscript{90}Ibid., 216–8.
\textsuperscript{91}Ibid., 86.
\textsuperscript{92}Ibid., 201.
leadership, “[t]he standardization and systematization of beliefs is considered a long-term project, always seemingly postponed because of the congregation’s lack of education.”

6.6 Conclusion

The differences between ritual and sincerity modes runs deep. We might imagine one of those Gestalt drawings, in which two very different pictures appear, depending on how the features in the drawing are put together. In our fictitious example, Kruyt sees a European king on a throne, whereas the locals see a Poso elder seated higher than those around him, these being allegories of the two very different understandings of the gospel that were found between what Kruyt preached and what his hearers understood. Kruyt sought to describe these difference, and explain them by the ‘cultural deficiencies’ which he saw as depriving his converts from enjoying the gospel fully. Their concept of salvation focussed on physical life and the continuation of the group, while their ethics paid attention to others’ desires in order to maintain relationships; they thus demonstrated a cultural lack of ability to attend to the soul. Their ‘pre-logical’ thinking meant that they were not used to the ‘rational’ ways of thinking that were necessary both to grasp Western doctrine and to ‘think for themselves’ ethically. With their resulting limited understanding of God and self, their devotion to God was similarly constrained. What Kruyt understood was that for them to see the gospel as he saw it, it was not as simple as being told to look for the European king where they saw the Poso elder. Indeed, it was precisely the king who had been preached to them, yet what they persisted in perceiving was a Poso elder.

Kruyt rejoices that they saw something vaguely analogous to a king, but his insistence that it was a king, not a Poso elder, ensured that they would not scrutinise the picture for themselves. Those who had brought the picture to them told them that it was not what it appeared to them to be, clearly demonstrating their lack of competence to look closely at the picture in order to answer the kinds of questions that a picture of a Poso elder might raise.

93Ibid., 202.
Hence, nearly a century after Kruyt, we found a church where an educated elite has learnt to see the European king, but the church members still mostly cannot see that picture. Since no-one has worked out how to exegete the Poso elder, sermons focus on practical advice, with the picture playing an appreciated but vague role in the background.

This is the effect that Christian ministry in sincerity mode had in the ritual culture of the Poso. At the same time, Kruyt himself pointed to different approaches. His repositioning of doctrine and ritual as corporate expressions of faith relativises doctrine, allowing that different contexts may require different emphases or explanations. We have seen that orality requires extending this difference to the modes in which doctrine is conveyed. Kruyt understands the problem, and devotes a whole chapter to the use of visual aids, drama, and pictures in preaching, with clear examples. On the way he mentions baptism and the Lord’s Supper, as preaching in visible form, and thus highly valued by the locals. His scheme also places ritual parallel to doctrine, and we saw how he used ritualised forms in the culture to convey a theological understanding of the importance of the sermon.

Behind Kruyt’s reluctance to see those uses of pictures, symbols, and ritual as real theologising lies the Reformation semiotic ideology that valorises agency rather than the conformity of ritual, and places meaning in the non-material — human souls or the divine. If this proved difficult for the Poso, the ideology also preserves values that are important to Christian faith, such as the offer of genuine connection with God, and the dignity of being a part of his purposes. The next Part seeks to develop an account of meaning for a ritual world which preserves these values.

---


95 Ibid., 176.
Part III

Meaning in a Ritual World
Chapter 7

Evaluating the Protestant semiotic ideology

7.1 Introduction

Kruyt represents a class of missionaries who sought to understood the cultural gap between the local culture and their Protestant religion, and who believed that Christ could be genuinely present in the local context. In that sense he counts as a forerunner of modern contextualisation. The turn by Indonesian missions to a more contextualised approach of which Kruyt was an influential part appears to have successful, as it coincided with an acceleration in the number of Indonesians turning to Protestant Christianity in the early twentieth century. However, his evolutionary perspective assumed that the culture would move towards sincerity mode, and he therefore had no reason to question his assumption of incompatibility between their existing culture and those aspects of Christian religion that seemed stunted by its ritual mode, such as devotion and the importance of intentionality in ethics.

If the message of the gospel really is for all cultures as they are, then Kruyt’s assumption that Christianity was necessarily diminished in the Poso context could be mistaken in two

ways. It could be that the Poso were quite capable of modern Protestant religiosity, and Kruyt and his companions simply failed to find a way to teach it to them. If so, this was not for lack of trying, and Kruyt’s study of the local culture was world-class for its time. But we take it that our analyses above prove Kruyt basically right about their limitations, not necessarily at an individual level, but at least at a cultural level. As Charles Taylor’s story shows, the Western sincerity mode of religion required cultural infrastructure that was built up over centuries, both before and after the Reformation. Behind this story, as a necessary though not sufficient condition, are the cognitive resources of literacy, absent in their oral culture.

The second way that Kruyt could be mistaken is in his assumption that Protestant religiosity really is the purest form of the Christian religion, towards which any ritual mode Christianity should aspire. This is not to question that the gospel will bring change to a culture, but rather, to question whether the changes the gospel does bring should be in the direction of a sincerity mode of religion. This is a normative question, and we have already indicated that at least one pillar of such a view, the Sermon on the Mount, is capable of a relationalist interpretation which does not prioritise introspection.²

The framework for contextualisation that we discussed in the Introduction does not assume sincerity mode. Clifford Geertz’s analysis of religion as a cultural system focusses on meaning making rather than truth (which he explicitly brackets out), and makes ritual central to the system.³ At least in Toraja context, we have seen that ritual is about the perlocutions of fertility and other concrete expressions of blessing rather than conveying spiritual truth. But Vanhoozer’s theo-dramatic account of Christian doctrine also pushes the boundaries of the Protestant semiotic ideology. He makes the overarching story the substance of the Christian mythos, with all its potential ambiguity, rather than a set of clear doctrines. He

²See page 71.
casts obedience as fitting participation of that theo-drama in the local context, explicitly contrasting this dramatic consistency with the logical consistency of applying principles. Logical consistency implies that, once a situation is known, the appropriate action is predictable in advance. Vanhoozer explicates dramatic consistency as improvisation, where the consistency of an action with the theo-drama is not predictable in advance but defendable in retrospect. In relation to the “excluded middle” discussed above, denying the existence of spirits is the improvisational equivalent of blocking, not accepting the premise that one’s partner provides, whereas proclaiming Jesus’ power over them accepts the premise and moves it forward.

All these examples raise the issue of the fit between language and world which is central to the Protestant semiotic ideology. If, for example, a Western missionary joins in prayer for a spirit to leave a person who is possessed, is that prayer sincere in the case that the missionary believes it to be not an actual spirit but rather a purely psychological phenomenon? The sincerity in question is not whether the missionary wants the person to get better, but rather the truthfulness of using the language of spirits even though it does not correspond to reality as the missionary understands it. Lindbeck raises a similar issue with respect to calling God Creator: what is imagined in using that term is different for an inhabitant of the Ancient Near East thought world of Gen 1, for someone trained in Greek philosophy, and for moderns who accept the scientific conception of the Big Bang. Even modern Christians who desire to imagine it in terms of Gen 1 do not imagine the sun and moon as the original writers would have. Similarly, if Bruce Malina is right that the New Testament is written in and for an assertive honour-shame culture, does that reduce the Sermon on the Mount’s application (or those parts shown to be about making challenges) to the residual areas of

---


5Ibid., 111.

6Ibid., 335ff.

CHAPTER 7. EVALUATING THE PROTESTANT SEMIOTIC IDEOLOGY

Western society where such a culture still operates? Vanhoozer’s concept of “fittingness” would allow for wider application, but it might appear to be at the cost of abandoning the strong link between concepts and words that the Protestant semiotic ideology upholds. In a similar vein, are metaphor and story, let alone material symbols, precise enough for the task of becoming vehicles of true belief about God?\(^8\)

Vanhoozer’s proposal’s self-designation as “post-propositionalist” captures the issues at stake. Like propositionalists, he wants to preserve Truth, that the theo-drama provides access to the really real that makes sense of our world, and provides the way of true human living. At the same time, he wants to acknowledge a richness to Scripture that allows for the imagination required for fitting obedience.\(^9\) Our argument wants to go further than this, since, following Kruyt’s hints, we want to explore non-linguistic representations. In this chapter, then, we turn to an evaluation of the Protestant semiotic ideology, first providing a brief theological and cultural analysis of it, and then arguing that it is a contextualised conception of meaning and truth that is itself incapable of supporting contextualisation outside of modernity. This will provide an account of mediation. The next chapter will propose a Christocentric pragmatic realist account of theological language and texts that allows for theological truth in ritual cultures. The third chapter of this section will outline a hermeneutic that accommodates the three-culture scenario, in dialogue with Gadamer and Vanhoozer. The final chapter of this Part will indicate how this can be applied, and here we will address the question of agency.

\(^8\)See Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 280 for the problem of metaphor in Western culture, and its rehabilitation in some recent philosophical thought.

\(^9\)Ibid., 278.
7.2 The problem with the Protestant semiotic ideology

We have seen that according to the Protestant semiotic ideology, it is important to separate concepts, words, and things in order to preserve true agency.\textsuperscript{10}\textsuperscript{11} Magic is an extension of this to objects which are not necessarily authorised in communal rituals. Both magic and idolatry work on the assumption that meanings inhere in objects, whether the god in the idol, or spiritual powers in amulets and charms.\textsuperscript{12} We see here the theological importance of separating concepts and things; things hold out the possibility of power over spiritual forces.

However, a few chapters after the giving of the Ten Commandments, it becomes clear that things are to have a role in Israel’s worship, as instructions are given for the making of the Tabernacle where God will dwell (Ex 25–30). We can make sense of them as religious representations by noting that they do not directly represent God, but rather represent aspects of Israel’s relationship with God. For example, the ark of the covenant represents the covenant, with various symbols of God’s provision for Israel in the desert, along with the two tablets of the Ten Commandments directing how the covenant people are to live. This implies that the Second Commandment cannot be taken as a prohibition of all religious representations, but only of direct representations of God. Furthermore, the tabernacle or temple with their accompanying rituals enabled quite concrete expression of Israel’s covenant relationship with God, including pleasing God with the odour of the sacrifices, and seeking God’s direction in importance decisions. Coercion of spiritual forces is expressly repudiated, but in fact the system gives empirical access to God, even if God’s transcendence is preserved by the mediation of his presence through his Name or his angel. This implies that the Second Commandment cannot be taken as a prohibition of material mediations.


\textsuperscript{12}Charles Taylor, \textit{A Secular Age} (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 34–35.
However, those physical and ritual symbols are then put aside in the New Testament, leaving just baptism and the Lord’s supper. These lack the grandeur of a temple, the drama of animal sacrifice, and in Paul’s day, the support of large crowds gathering together for great feasts—features of both Jewish and pagan rituals. What we find in Paul’s letters to compensate for this loss of ritual support is an emphasis on grasping the biblical story focussed on Christ, that is, on theology. This story is what gives the simple rituals of baptism, the Lord’s supper, and the meeting of a few families in a house the weight of meaning sufficient to sustain the community.\(^{13}\) This is not a deprecation of ritual as such. The condemnation of ritual which is already found in the Old Testament concerns the inconsistency of worshipping God and not loving one’s neighbour with justice. Once the Spirit of the risen Jesus had been poured out on the church, the Spirit-filled Jewish Christians continued to worship at the temple, but the gospel was no longer to be bound the boundaries of Israel’s rituals and symbols. The increased importance of theology over ritual is a matter of mission, not ethics.

Such an understanding became more difficult as the gospel moved into Hellenistic culture. With many of the Church’s intellectual leaders schooled in Greek philosophical forms, theology became tied to the Greek semiotic ideology, the precursor of the Protestant and Western semiotic ideologies. Anthony Long argues that those schooled in Greek philosophy had found a way to bridge the gap between the world of appearances and the really real through propositions imitating the power of mathematics to refer to the essence of things. Heraclitus pioneered a concept of rationality, built of “such concepts as structure, measure, proportion, balance, rhythm, ratio.”\(^{14}\) Since this rationality, or logos, ruled even the heavens, it was connected with the divine. This essence behind appearances was connected with agency, as Plato and others developed a Greek philosophical prototype of the buffered self, with reason as the divine element in the human, seeking to bring unruly passions into har-

---


monious proportion.\textsuperscript{15} This provided the means to transcend the inherent tragedy of life, making happiness independent of life circumstances.\textsuperscript{16} It had social consequences, as it contrasted with the “non-self model” of the sophists, where humans are the playthings of the \textit{logos} of the rhetorician.\textsuperscript{17} These are the same three levels of disembedding—self, society, and cosmos—as we found in Taylor’s story of disenchantment.

The Greek semiotic ideology thus provided a path from the really real to a new way of being-in-the-world independent of corporate ritual, an ethical path in the sense we saw above of being grounded within one’s self.\textsuperscript{18} This is the move from ritual to sincerity orientation. According to a Christian version of such an ideology, the New Testament move to theology can only be interpreted as the triumph of the Word over ritual, and of the heart over external actions. This makes the religious representations of the Old Testament an accommodation to weakness which is overcome by Christian faith.

This is what leads to the impetus for purification that arguably is a contributor to the energy of Reform that led up to the Reformation on Taylor’s account.\textsuperscript{19} Keane notes how this impetus played out at ever more refined levels, a process he terms fractal recursivity, similar to continually cutting the remainder of a cake in half. The polemic of the Catholic church towards Jews, Muslims and pagans was taken up by the Reformers against the Catholic church, and then by Puritans and others against the mainline Protestant movement.\textsuperscript{20} For example, Protestants emphasised doing the liturgy in the vernacular in order to place meaning where it belonged, in the words of the liturgy rather than the actions of the ritual, thus building up faith through the mind rather than through ritually conveyed grace. But for the Puritan John Milton, vernacular set prayers were a “tyranny,” an imposition of the words

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., 29.
\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., 26.
\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., 28.
\textsuperscript{18}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19}Taylor, \textit{A Secular Age}, 63.
\textsuperscript{20}Keane, \textit{Christian Moderns}, 50.
of men on the believer.\textsuperscript{21} Set prayers play the same agency-limiting role within the space of vernacular liturgy that Latin prayers did within the space of liturgy in general.

In effect, the Christianised Greek semiotic ideology understands the reason for the prohibition against idols being the danger of semiotic contamination of the worshiper’s idea of God with material things; we see something like this in Isa 40:18–20, which asks, “Who is like God?”, before mocking idols as man-made.\textsuperscript{22} Sacramentals were proof to the Reformers that this contamination included the danger of being led to try to control supernatural power.\textsuperscript{23} What happened as the process of purification became more refined in the Protestant semiotic ideology was that the threat of semiotic contamination could be applied even to language itself. On the strongly referential understanding of language inherited from Greek philosophy, a misunderstood metaphor could lead to false, and therefore idolatrous, concepts of God. Aquinas regarded metaphor as inferior to analogy, because it includes the creaturely in its talking about God.\textsuperscript{24} By Enlightenment times, metaphors and stories were considered to lack precision, and needed to be restated as plain propositions.\textsuperscript{25} By contrast, postmodern theology has often rejected such propositions because they are too concrete. For example, Walter Brueggemann’s Old Testament theology expounds a series of nouns that are commonly used for Yahweh.\textsuperscript{26} These are explicitly understood as metaphors, not just because this makes sense linguistically, but also because “[m]onotheism, unprotected by metaphor, moves towards idolatry.”\textsuperscript{27} This somewhat paradoxical saying—given that Israelite monotheism emerged in opposition to idolatry—is because the more a proposition

\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid., 1.
\item Vanhoozer, \textit{The Drama of Doctrine}, 280.
\item Ibid., 231.
\end{enumerate}
is considered to refer to an essence, the more God is “captured” by the proposition. By this point, the Second Commandment potentially applies even to biblical language about God. The purificatory process has continued into postmodernism, questioning whether an accurate verbal picture of God using biblical language is not itself an idol. At this point, the Protestant semiotic ideology has led to a theological *reductio ad absurdum*.

Keane argues persuasively that this impetus for purification, which, we have suggested, stems from the combination of the already ethically charged Greek semiotic ideology with the religious imperative against idolatry, is unable to be satisfied because words continue to have material form. This is how the Lord’s Prayer can be used as a charm, or the Lord’s name taken in vain. As Keane argues, this is intrinsic to the ability of any semiotic form, material or verbal, to have social effects. Purification means that this material side is suppressed, to ensure that the immaterial concepts are not compromised. Since the material side can only be suppressed, but never removed, this purification is an endless task. The suppression of material form cannot succeed in a definitive way, making purification an endless project.

Purification is an important biblical theme, seen as the Promised Land is purified of idols and idolaters (initially Canaanites; later on, the Israelites themselves), as worshippers are purified of uncleanness, or in purification of the heart. Purification implies oppositions, such as true versus false worship, or clean versus unclean. In the New Testament, flesh and Spirit becomes a major opposition in Paul’s writings, and we will meet others in the book of Hebrews. But in Paul, at least, flesh and Spirit is not a contrast between material and immaterial. Rather, the contrast is between two systems, the current visible age structured around a ‘fleshly’ humanity in rebellion against God, and the not yet visible age to come, already present in Christ and his church by the Spirit. This age of the Spirit to come thus includes the physical, as the doctrine of the resurrection attests; and in the present age, true worship based on God’s mercies is offering one’s body as a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1).

---

*28Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 157 argues that the Third Commandment was aimed at “magical” use of the Lord’s name.

*29Keane, *Christian Moderns*, 79.*
Conversely, idolatry includes greed (Col 3:5). Keane suggests that the Calvinist/modernist form of purification is ultimately a desire to escape from the limitations of an embodied existence, a desire that has come under increasing critique by recent Reformed theologians.\textsuperscript{30}

What this account shows is an increasing sensitivity to what counts as “pure” semiosis, something we saw reflected in Kruyt’s concern about the Poso’s need for material mediation, in comparison to the direct access of the soul to God. At this we turn to Michael Polanyi’s account of mediation, since one of his targets is precisely modernism’s purifying drive for clarity at every level: “unbridled lucidity can destroy our understanding of complex matters.”\textsuperscript{31}

To combat this, he shows from an analysis of implicit knowledge that mediation is intrinsic to all knowledge. Knowledge of something occurs through the particulars that constitute the thing: the face in its features, the music through the sound waves, the meaning through the marks on the page. The former he terms the distal, the latter the proximal, and he argues that we only know the distal and the proximal as a unity, with meaning located in the distal, and the proximal known through our awareness of the distal.\textsuperscript{32} He thus recasts the venerable metaphor of ‘knowledge as seeing’: “it is not by looking at things, but by dwelling in them,” that is, in their particulars, “that we understand their joint meaning.”\textsuperscript{33} This allows for an epistemology that encompasses our pragmatic knowledge of the world. Our bodies enable action in the world through indwelling via the various senses, including internal senses like balance. Tools become an extension of the body as we attend to what is being manipulated through the sensations caused by using the tool. Internalisation of moral codes, or of a scientific theory, occurs when the codes or theory becomes the tacit knowledge by which the moral situation or data is attended to.\textsuperscript{34} All knowledge is mediated through what is implicit.

\textsuperscript{30}Ibid., 81; see James K. A. Smith, The Fall of Interpretation: Philosophical Foundations for a Creational Hermeneutic (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2012) for an extended argument concerning human limitation, applied particularly to the question of biblical interpretation.

\textsuperscript{31}Michael Polanyi, The Tacit Dimension (Terry lectures; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966), 18.

\textsuperscript{32}Ibid., 10–13.

\textsuperscript{33}Ibid., 18.

\textsuperscript{34}Ibid., 17.
Polanyi briefly points out language’s mediating function when he classes “the denotative use of language” alongside tools and pointers, “as a kind of verbal pointing.”\textsuperscript{35} In using a pointer, our focus is on what is being pointed to, and not on the pointer, and the same goes for words. Part of Polanyi’s point is that the mediation of a pointer or word does not obscure access to the thing, but rather provides it. Knowledge is always of a distal through the indwelling of of the proximal. So the distinction is not between words which give direct access and material objects which mediate. Rather, mediation obscures access to what is mediated when the proximal becomes the focus, rather than being indwelt. The pianist focusses on her fingers rather than the music; the speaker reads out the words rather than delivers the message. This is an ever present possibility even for intangibles, as the history of the Protestant semiotic ideology attests. Much as rules can become the focus rather than the morally charged world in which they are meant to provide direction, religious mediations can become the focus, rather than being indwelt so as to relate to God.

What our analysis so far contributes is to suggest that the kind of mediation that is appropriate depends on how buffered the self is. An increasingly buffered self finds it increasingly difficult to indwell material mediations (or concrete rules); this helps explain how the very words that God provided to Israel as an alternative to idols could come to be felt by a buffered self as themselves an idol. Conversely, ideas (or general principles) are too insubstantial for a more porous self. For example, Keane describes how for the traditional Sumba (an Indonesian island to the south of Sulawesi), words require something material to give them solidity.\textsuperscript{36} In either case, a mismatched mediation will bring the mediation into focus rather than the meaning. The drive for purification was in part validly motivated by changing cultural conditions, but was not in itself a move towards a purer Christianity.

We conclude, then, that the limits set by the Second Commandment are what they were in the Old Testament: no direct representations of God, and no attempts to manipulate su-

\textsuperscript{35}Ibid., 7.

\textsuperscript{36}Keane, \textit{Christian Moderns}, 230–1; See Elizabeth Coville, “‘A Single Word Brings to Life’: The Maro Ritual in Tana Toraja (Indonesia)” (Ph.D., The University of Chicago, 1988), 181 for the same understanding in Toraja.
pernatural power through religious representations. This means that the Protestant semiotic ideology is a contextual understanding of theological language which is not itself theologically mandated. The rest of this chapter argues that not only is it not mandated, it is actually unsuited to the task of understanding contextualisation at the level of language, the focus of biblical interpretation.

7.3 Essentialism versus Pragmatism

Our positive account of language will draw heavily on a recent pragmatic account of theological language developed by Kevin Hector, written as an explicit alternative to the understanding of language we saw above.\(^{37}\) He distils two components of that understanding. The first is essentialism, “a picture according to which an object’s ultimate reality is identified with a real, idea-like ‘essence’ that stands at a remove from ordinary experience.”\(^{38}\) Since essences are idea-like, essentialism denies non-language representations the ability to grasp them. This is the quasi-mathematical nature of philosophical language that we found at the centre of the Greek semiotic ideology above. Essentialism has thus been central to the Western semiotic ideology in which the Protestant semiotic ideology partakes.

The second feature is ‘correspondentism’, “according to which the distance between human persons and fundamental reality is supposed to be bridged by dint of our ideas and words hooking up with or corresponding to” this essence.\(^{39}\) This means a concept of truth “characterized by two claims: (a) that ideas, beliefs, and statements are true if and only if they are isomorphic with that which they are about, and (b) that such isomorphism explains that in virtue of which such beliefs count as true.”\(^{40}\) The idea-like essence lies behind the


\(^{38}\)Ibid., 14.

\(^{39}\)Ibid., 15.

\(^{40}\)Ibid., 203.
phenomenal world, and are reached through ideas and language which correspond point by point with that essence. They are true to the extent that that isomorphism holds.

It is important to note that what is being talked about here is the “ultimate” or “fundamental” reality about which theology aims to speak. Everyday language is often concerned with reference and truth, but its focus is pragmatic: it makes do with what is necessary to enable people to live. For example, we say, “the sun is rising”, even when we have enough astronomy to know that in fact it is the rotation of the earth that causes the sun to appear to rise. The phrase corresponds to the most significant feature of dawn for most people, namely the appearing of the sun at their particular position on the earth, and so it presents a proposition whose truth can easily be ascertained. But it lacks isomorphic correspondence; for example, it implies that the earth is still and the sun is moving, which is not the case. Hence, on the Western semiotic ideology, this locution can be — and apparently has been — critiqued, on the grounds that the language of the speaker does not correspond to the concept in their mind.41

Western science, philosophy, and theology, on the other hand, all look behind the everyday world to find Truth. What is most real are unchanging essences — Laws of nature, Ideas, God — behind a fickle empirical world. These can only be grasped, on this view, through the conceptual clarity implied by isomorphism. This appeal of essences as a ground for essences finds support when we look at the alternative of a radically empiricist pragmatism, such as that of W. V. Quine. He argues that ‘ontology’ — the positing of objects such as atoms, natural forces such as gravity, and abstract notions such as irrational numbers — is a means of simplifying explanations of empirical phenomena, and not a matter of reference, at least in essentialist terms.42 Quine goes so far as to contend that belief in Homer’s gods has the same epistemological status as belief in physical objects, since both are part of networks of beliefs which are anchored in the real world as networks, not as individual beliefs. Quine certainly


favours physics over Homer’s gods, because it makes sense of much more of our experience, but he would appear to accept that the Homeric cosmology was true as far as it went (which was perhaps not very far), just as the sun rising is true as far as it goes.\footnote{Ibid., 41.} A similar move is made in thorough-going experiential-expressivist views of religion, where the religions are seen as different networks of belief whose empirical anchor is a basic human religiosities.\footnote{George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (1st ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 31–32.} The ontological status of the entities posited in them, such as gods, sin, or salvation, is not recoverable, other than as social facts which affect how people express their religiosity and live their lives. Hence, cognitive-propositionalist theologians argue that theology requires isomorphically corresponding propositions at its core, if the Christian mythos is to be more than just a social fact grounding ethos and framing empirical reality.

This project shares that concern for theological reference, but sees essentialism as a hindrance to the task of contextual theology. To see why, we will go back to an account of theology that is unabashedly modernist, where the implications of essentialism can be seen in stark clarity.

### 7.4 Warfield’s Scientific Theology

At the end of the nineteenth century, around the time Dutch missionaries were beginning to work in Central Sulawesi, Benjamin Warfield presented a grand vision of systematic theology based explicitly on a ‘scientific’ method of induction.\footnote{Benjamin B. Warfield, “The Idea of Systematic Theology,” *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 7 no. 26 (1896): 243–71.} On his model, the Bible provides the *data* of special revelation, which through the objective and neutral activity of exegesis are perceived and processed into *facts*, which are then synthesised through Biblical Theology into a form ready to be developed into a *theoretical framework* in Systematic Theology. Here, the Bible is first of all an object of historical study: what the biblical authors meant. Then,
as scripture the object of the study of the Bible is Biblical Theology, a systematic body of propositions covering the full range of what the Bible said. Since this is still past tense, hermeneutics is actually subsequent to Biblical Theology. This is achieved by turning what the Bible said in the past into the timeless truths of Systematic Theology, which is then applied to the present through the various disciplines of pastoral theology. This is the basic pattern of translation methods of contextualisation.

His view clearly fits our description of essentialism. If for Plato the essence grasped in the concept is the Idea in which the object participates, Warfield’s conception follows Descartes’ version of essentialism, basic to modernism, where those ideas reside in the human subject, though still corresponding to external essences. The need for isomorphism is expressed by Warfield when he says, “the task of the systematic theologian is to see that the relations in which the separate truths actually stand are rightly conceived...by allowing them to frame themselves into their own system as indicated by their own natures — as the stones in Solomon’s temple were cut each for its place — we shall make each available for all men, for just the place in the saving process for which it was divinely framed and divinely given.” The rightly constructed system of systematic theology captures the essence of God as revealed in the economy of salvation portrayed in the Bible.

Our question, then, is what room for contextualisation such a conception leaves. Warfield might seem to give some room when he acknowledges that systematic theology has a history, attaining clarity with respect to the doctrine of God (the Trinity and Christology) in the first few centuries; grace with Augustine; atonement with Anselm; and forensic justification in the Reformation. He furthermore acknowledges that this clarification is not “as yet perfected.” He even acknowledges that this progress occurred because of pastoral needs:

---

46 Hector, Theology Without Metaphysics, 8.
49 Ibid., 265.
50 Ibid., 263.
“every advance in the scientific statement of theological truth has been made in response to a practical demand.”\textsuperscript{51} However, he also shares the late nineteenth century confidence in progress: “the great outlines [of systematic theology] are already securely laid and most of the details soundly discovered and arranged.”\textsuperscript{52} Just as the physics of his late nineteenth century era could not imagine the revolutions about to occur in that field, the above list looked to him essentially complete. For him, the history of systematic theology is a unilinear one of progress in objective knowledge, not a history of contextualisation: “[t]he physician who would bring back to-day the medicine of Galen would be no more mad than the theologian who would revive the theology of Clement of Alexandria.”\textsuperscript{53} This is logically implied by isomorphic correspondence to eternal truths: such knowledge, if correct, can only be added to or fleshed out, not changed.

This would imply that the more the church in Toraja can come to a knowledge of late nineteenth century Reformed systematic theology in its not yet—but nearly—complete isomorphic correspondence to the being of God and the economy of salvation, “the more certainly and richly will [theology] produce its appropriate effect.”\textsuperscript{54} Logically, this implication extends to biblical interpretation: the Bible will need to be taught so that students can retrace, isomorphically, the path from knowledge of the Bible’s theological (and other) facts, through the system of Biblical Theology, to the destination of Systematic Theology. The unique contribution of the local theologian will only appear after this point, for example, in homiletical style, a point that is accepted by translation model theorists.\textsuperscript{55}

Warfield is clear that his purpose in emphasising isomorphic correspondence is to guard the reality and objectivity of the Bible’s revelation in the face of expressivist theologies that seemed to collapse biblical truth into Christian experience, an aim with which we are in

\textsuperscript{51}Ibid., 267.
\textsuperscript{52}Ibid., 263.
\textsuperscript{53}Ibid., 265.
\textsuperscript{54}Ibid., 267.
sympathy.\footnote{Warfield, “The Idea of Systematic Theology,” 243–71.} An initial response, then, might be to take issue not with isomorphism but with the fullness of perspective that he claims—to soften Warfield’s strong theological realism with critical realism. For example, he speaks of bringing the “whole landscape” of the biblical revelation “into our field of sight.”\footnote{Ibid., 257.} Any number of factors would incline us in the twenty-first century to doubt that there is one vantage point that brings the whole landscape into sight. In the twentieth century, the absolute world of logic and mathematics turned out to be perspectival,\footnote{For a creative introduction to Gödel’s Theorem, which showed that any sufficiently interesting axiomatic system is incomplete, see Douglas R. Hofstadter, \textit{Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid} (20th ed.; New York: Basic Books, 1999).} and not just in the ivory towers of academia, since it turned out that space and time followed a non-Euclidean geometry. Thinkers such as Quine questioned such fundamental logical concepts as analytic truths.\footnote{Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” 20–43.} The effect of culture on thinking was increasingly recognised, to the point that Nisbett can argue that even particle physicists have been helped by applying non-Western cognitive patterns.\footnote{Richard E. Nisbett, \textit{The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently and Why} (New York: Free, 2004), 225.} It has thus become quite conventional to argue that new contexts may actually bring aspects of biblical truth to light that are obscured by Western vantage points, that the “facts” of biblical revelation are more than can be grasped in any one cultural context. Warfield acknowledged “that God hath more truth yet to break forth from His holy Word,”\footnote{Warfield, “The Idea of Systematic Theology,” 243–71.} but had difficulty seeing where that might be; a full recognition of local theologising is presumably a part of the answer. If this is so, then perhaps local theologians and biblical interpreters do have an irreplaceable role at the constructive end of the theological process, not just the pastoral end.

However, it is not hard to see that this is a local theologising of the gaps. The notion of isomorphic correspondence implies that local theology can only differ in detail and scope
from “the already ascertained truth”.\textsuperscript{62} two pictures of the same scene can vary in resolution and vantage point, but will concur at every point that they overlap. If a more detailed understanding of shame is needed in an Asian context, it will nevertheless map onto the more cursory understanding of Western theology (as far as the latter is correct) without contradiction; if the theme of defilement in the Bible needs to become a functional truth in a Toraja context, it will nevertheless connect with Systematic Theology to form an enlarged seamless whole. On this scheme, the local theologian is still only local in connection with particular local issues, like an Indonesian biologist studying Indonesian fauna, whose cultural competence and location may enable her to identify and carry out research projects in Indonesian contexts that would not be practicable for a Western scientist, but with that cultural competence remaining an adjunct to the subject matter being researched. In effect, there is no such thing as a local theologian with respect to the basic disciplines of biblical and systematic theology.

This negative conclusion is confirmed when we view Warfield’s scheme as a form of foundationalism, “the assumption of and/or the search for some universal and objective standard that can be appealed to and that stands outside of, all contexts, perspectives, biases, and agendas.”\textsuperscript{63} The point of the “objective standard that can be appealed to” is that it would command the assent of all reasonable persons. It is thus a response to diversity, a way of adjudicating between competing positions, whether those of warring Christian factions in post-Reformation Europe, or those of the Church and various generations of cultured despisers in the modern West, or those of competing religions in the global world. Hence, this objective standard should also adjudicate contextual theologies.

Integral to the objective standard are methods that enable us “to transcend the particularity of language, culture, and context.”\textsuperscript{64} Warfield emphasises the disinterested nature of

\textsuperscript{62}Ibid., 264.


\textsuperscript{64}Ibid., 43.
exegesis when he says that “[t]he independence of Exegetical Theology is seen in the fact
that it does its work wholly without thought or anxiety as to the use that is to be made of its
results.” More broadly, the task of the theologian is to allow theological truths “to frame
themselves into their own system as indicated by their own natures,” that is, independently
of the interpreter. Warfield’s conception is of a number of interconnected sub-systems, each
operating internally with their own intrinsic methods, and passing on their assured results—
in the form of propositions—to the other disciplines. Systematic Theology forms the peak,
up to which Exegetical and Biblical Theology provide a flow of facts, and down from which
the pastoral disciplines draw the material that will be implemented. The correct application
of this series of disinterested methods on the foundation of the Bible guarantees that the re-
sulting propositions are correct, that is, isomorphically correspond to divine essences. Even
if a local theologian identifies local issues requiring the development of biblical theology, they
will need to do so using the methods of modern theology.

The importance of this for Warfield is that the greater the accuracy of correspondence
of the theological “system” produced by this method, the more it will have “a new power to
convince the understanding, move the heart, and quicken the will,” to the end of “sav[ing]
and sanctify[ing] the soul.” Theological concepts organised in a system is the form in which
the biblical message will change lives. Systematic theology thus plays more or less the same
role that ritual plays in Geertz’s schema, as the link between mythos (the Bible) and ethos
(sanctification). In this respect, essentialism mandates theory for the whole local church, as
well as correct method for its theologians. The burden of much of our analysis so far is to
show how culturally limited that assumption is, limited, that is, to cultures that promote
buffered selves.

---

66Ibid., 267.
67As Lakoff points out, even on a foundationalist account method involves a community practice that
overcomes individual failings. See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Metaphors We Live by (Chicago:
CHAPTER 7. EVALUATING THE PROTESTANT SEMIOTIC IDEOLOGY

What produces this cultural blindness is essentialism, the account of meaning that goes directly from concepts to essences, with culture as contamination, removed (as far as possible) through correct method. As the analysis of Western or Protestant semiotic ideology shows, this is but another expression of the culturally formed buffered self. If Warfield’s emphasis is exclusively on meaning, Kruty gives significant attention to the “problem” of culture. He is thus able to recognise that the gospel cannot be communicated as a conceptual system, and acknowledges a place for symbols, understand as visual aids.⁶⁹ However, this is with respect to communication of an already developed theology, not for the purpose of theologising. Kruty and Warfield share the Protestant semiotic ideology which placed Western culture as the most developed fruit of the gospel so far, and thus neither imagine a local process of interpreting the Bible and theologising from it.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to prepare for our account of theological language by showing the limitations of the Protestant semiotic ideology theologically, culturally, and missiologically. Theologically, we found that the Second Commandment prohibiting idols does not necessarily imply the strong separation of concepts, words, and things that is the goal of the ideology. The separation of words and things implied in avoiding idols only applies to representing God. In the Old Testament, there are many representations of Israel’s covenant relationship with God, and in the New Testament, their simplification to the congregational meeting and the sacraments is an expression of the new stage of salvation history — moving beyond Israel’s borders — not the inferiority of material mediations as such. The Bible presents embodied humans engaging with God through a variety of mediations.

 Culturally and historically, we explained the Protestant semiotic ideology’s stronger reading of the Second Commandment as due to reading the Bible with Greek philosophical eyes,

and used Polanyi’s account of mediation to suggest that the increasing rigour of the Protestant semiotic ideology described by Keane was due to buffered selves fitting better with less material mediation than non-buffered selves do. That this process led to biblical statements about monotheism being considered potentially idolatrous was evidence of the Keane’s insight into the inherent tension of the ideology, namely that words not only convey immaterial concepts but are themselves material.

Missiologically, we have described the tension between the need for a realist account of theological language, and the difficulty of giving space for genuine contextual theologising on an essentialist account. The Greek conviction that sufficiently pure language could refer to the essence of things provided a non-ritual means of access to intangible realities that are central to Christian faith, and in Warfield’s account guarded the human-independent reality of the gospel in the face of non-realist accounts of theological language. However, we showed that if theology is isomorphic with theological reality, it can only allow for contextualisation at the point of application, after the work of theology has been done.

Our problem with this was that it requires local theologians to learn Western methods and translate the results back into their own context, even though their culture may be different not just in its behaviours and customs, but also in its cognitive approaches, as we saw with Nisbett’s research. This is the negative effect of its foundationalism, its confidence in its correct method. Robert Fossett raises a deeper theological objection: this foundation is independent of Christ.

What is needed is a realist account of theological language which is culturally flexible, which explains how language can refer truly to God while being itself material and conditioned by material circumstances. We turn now to such an account, which, as turns out, is grounded very clearly in Christ and the Spirit.
Chapter 8

Local theology in pragmatic perspective

8.1 Introduction

Our discussion has led us to look for an alternative to an essentialist account of meaning. A strong alternative is the family of pragmatic accounts of language, whose strength is that they are grounded in how language actually works, rather than how it ought to work. The loss of essences in such accounts is often taken to imply relativism, especially about non-empirical entities. However, we will explore an account that shows how Christ and the work of the Spirit in the Christian community can ground theological reference and meaning in a pragmatic way, leveraging the historical existence of Israel, Jesus, and the community where the Spirit is taken to be at work. As with the current project, this account takes for granted affirmative answers to apologetic questions surrounding that history, but aims to show how that history makes non-essentialist sense of talking about God. Since the account provides a putatively general (cross-cultural) account of how language works, and grounds theological

---

language in Christ and the Spirit, it will be, by construction, valid for Christian communities from any cultural background. This is not to claim that the account will make sense to people in any culture—it is clearly a theoretical construct deploying refined philosophical method. It is rather that, for those who have succeeded in becoming theoretical thinkers it will prove a better basis for thinking about contextualisation than an essentialist account. While Hector, being a philosopher and not an anthropologist, focusses on language and conceptual reference, his views will provide space for a wider typology of representations such as symbols and ritual, as we will argue below.

8.2 A Pragmatic Account of Meaning

His account has several features that contrast with essentialist thinking. The first is an optimism that concepts bring us in touch with the world, without the need to postulate essences connected to ideas. This is because concepts are learned in interaction with the world, as learning in children shows. Through this process, the culture of parents and others enables the children to begin making sense of the world. Thus, they are in touch with the world they refer to, though in a culturally given way. Concepts reflect a form of life which has successfully made its way in the world, indicating that most beliefs about the world are true enough for the forms of life for which they function, or, in Wittgenstein’s phrase, in their language games. The sun really does rise, and tables really are solid, unless one is engaged in the kinds of activities characteristic of language games such as astronomy or particle physics. What his account will need to establish is that this optimism can be applied to theological truth.

Second, this optimistic account depends on concepts functioning best when they are non-inferential. A concept is used non-inferentially when its application is based not on a rule, but rather on previous experience, as we will explain shortly. This means that we have mastered the concept of a tree when we see something as a tree without having to think

---

3Ibid., 187–9.
about it. Non-inferential therefore implies implicit: the concept is a proximal enabling the
distal to be experienced.\footnote{Michael Polanyi, \textit{The Tacit Dimension} (Terry lectures; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966), 11.} This provides a link between Hector’s account of concepts and
Polanyi’s purpose of deflating the overly high place given by the Western semiotic ideology
to explicit understanding and theory in its account of knowledge. Reflection, the process
of focussing on the implicit and making it explicit, occurs precisely when concepts are not
working smoothly. For example, the learning process usually involves reflection, as the learner
seeks to understand concepts and the forms of life associated with them, whether of everyday
living in a particular community, or of a more specialised practice such as carpentry or living
as a Christian. Similarly, when something goes wrong — the experiment does not produce the
result predicted by theory, or an Arius emerges denying the worship of Jesus that is implicit
in the Church’s practice — reflection will be called for.\footnote{George A. Lindbeck, \textit{The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age} (25th ed.; Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 81, though Lindbeck notes the historical picture is
complicated with respect to Arius.} This, too, will result in learning.
But the goal is for the new insights to become implicit. A scientific theory succeeds when it
becomes part of the conceptual apparatus of its field;\footnote{Polanyi, \textit{The Tacit Dimension}, 17.} the doctrine of the Trinity succeeded
by becoming a part of the Church’s grammar for talking about God. They succeed even
more so when the theory enters everyday life, operationalised as technology or sustaining
and generating more authentic worship and obedience.

The third feature is the coherentism we saw earlier in Quine: while networks of belief are
anchored in the world, individual beliefs are evaluated by their place within those networks,
meaning that “one can contest any particular judgment or trajectory, just not all at once.”\footnote{Hector, \textit{Theology Without Metaphysics}, 99.} As Quine suggests, an unexpected experience has an unpredictable effect on the network of
beliefs.\footnote{Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” 20–43.} It may cause only localised disturbance, e.g., that there was a problem with the
mechanism of observation, or it may go so far as to generate a paradigm change, a large-scale
rearrangement of the network. This may include the loss of objects until then considered real, such as the ether in which light travelled in the nineteenth century, or the pagan pantheon in Christian Rome. Similarly, new objects may appear: curved space, or the Triune God. Even in the most radical cases, though, more is assumed and therefore continuous than is overturned. Relativity and quantum mechanics still reduce to the Newtonian universe as a special case, which happens to cover the vast bulk of human experience. The Reformation assumed the structure of Catholic theology as summarised in the ecumenical creeds and more, though significant objects were lost, such as purgatory, the intercessory role of the saints and Mary, and transubstantiation.

What changes will depend partly on the criteria of coherence for the language game.\(^9\) The language games valorised by the Western semiotic ideology have criteria of coherence that are formalised in methods that are made as explicit as possible. But in general, coherence is learned by immersion, and depends on the realities with which the language game deals.\(^{10}\) A good move in chess involves far more than just being a legal move; knowing the best route through a city involves knowing the realities of both geography and traffic. Christian liturgies have addressed Jesus as divine from early times, but not with the precision called for in evaluating the controversy over whether Jesus has the same or merely similar divine nature as God. The church’s answer was not based on the particularities of exegesis or formal logic, but rather the implicit logic of Christian worship, which made clear that a gap in being between Jesus and God was not appropriate.\(^{11}\) The criteria of coherence depends on the form of life.

In sum, concepts do not unearth an essence of a different order of being behind appearances, but rather bring to explicit expression aspects of the largely implicit network of beliefs.\(^{12}\) This means that the same or similar experiences may be covered in different ways,

---

\(^9\)Ibid., 40.
\(^{11}\)Ibid., 163.
\(^{12}\)Ibid., 123.
as the classic example of colour vocabulary shows. This is what opens up space for genuinely local configurations of theology. At the same time, for this account to count as realist, there need to be anchors in the network of meaning that do not disappear when the system is reconfigured. For our purposes, these are the non-negotiable entities in the gospel story—chiefly the characters in the theo-drama (the Triune God, humans, creation), the turning points in the theo-drama such as the Exodus of Israel and Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, and values such as love. Exactly what constitutes this list is, of course, contested, and we will account for this below in terms of theological traditions.

This implies three aspects to theological truth: a form of life, concepts, and reference. For the non-negotiable entities, reference—“pick[ing] out one and only one object”—is fundamental.\textsuperscript{13} Unless those entities can be identified, the form of life has no claim to be dealing with reality. However, this is not the same as saying that our concepts of those entities are without error. It is a long-standing observation that meaning (conceptual content) and reference are distinct. The “Messiah foretold by the Old Testament” and “Jesus of Nazareth” refer to the same person (according to the New Testament), but they are clearly distinct concepts. Similarly, “four” and “the number of Gospels” refer to the same abstract entity, but are different concepts.\textsuperscript{14} Because of this, we can refer even when our concepts are vague or inaccurate. “That old man in the corner” can succeed in referring even if the man in the corner turns out to be a young actor who has been expertly made up.\textsuperscript{15} Nevertheless, our concepts are what enable us to navigate our forms of life, individually and together. We may be able to point to a taxi, but if we think of it as a private vehicle we will not be able to make proper use of it. Theological concepts need to be ‘livable’, grounded in forms of life such as liturgy and daily habits. This requires sufficient clarity in those concepts considered non-negotiable, and coherence for those concepts that lie in the networks of concepts ‘between’ (in Quine’s sense) the non-negotiable entities. What counts as coherence will reflect

\textsuperscript{13}Hector, \textit{Theology Without Metaphysics}, 157.

\textsuperscript{14}Examples adapted from Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” 20–43.

\textsuperscript{15}Hector, \textit{Theology Without Metaphysics}, 164.
the form of life, and the form of life will in turn be evaluated by its coherence with the concepts, especially those considered non-negotiable.

Hector’s pragmatic account of meaning shows how such an account of fixed points and contextual conceptual clarity can work, grounded in the activity of the Triune God.

8.3 Intersubjective Recognition in the Church’s Form of Life

Hector unpacks the embeddedness of concepts in a form of life through an account of the process of intersubjective recognition. When we use a term or form of language, we are seeking to use it in a way that makes a judgment about how others have used the term, and aims to be recognised as “going on in the same way” in turn.\(^\text{16}\) Most of the time, that judgment and aim is implicit, since it is learned through being part of a form of life. Nevertheless, it is a judgment, and as such implies the presence of (largely implicit) norms. The normed nature of concepts becomes apparent when misunderstanding occurs, and the judgment is made explicit via reasons.\(^\text{17}\) These reasons are previous uses of the concept that are taken to be precedents, and so the norm defines a class of precedent uses. Since the class is implicit, as the product of learning in community, it cannot be reduced without remainder to any explicit definition. Rather, every use of a concept slightly alters it, since it adds to the set of precedents a use that is in some small way unique.\(^\text{18}\) Hector illustrates the difference with the example of a series, such as “0, 1, 2, 3”. Essentialism looks for a rule of the form, \(x’ = x + 1\), as the concept’s definition, in which case it can only go on with “4, 5, 6, . . . ”. This is why essentialism give no space for locals as locals, since its concepts are already determined in advance. However, it may turn out that continuing with “2, 1, 0”, or repeating with “0, 1, 2”, counts as continuations of the series in retrospect, even though they do not fit with a

\(^{16}\)Ibid., 56.

\(^{17}\)Ibid., 64.

\(^{18}\)Ibid., 68.
predetermined rule.\textsuperscript{19} Hence this account allows for novel developments in concept use which are still considered faithful renditions of the concept by those engaged in the form of life.

Conceptual meaning, then, “precipitate[s] out of our \textit{use} of concepts,” as we seek to understand a particular concept use as continuing the trajectory of precedent uses of that concept.\textsuperscript{20} He distinguishes two aspects of those precedent uses whose similarity gives the concept identity. The first is relevant \textit{circumstances}; for example, we learn how to use the concept ‘red’ from absorbing the limited range of colour sensations that lead others to use the concept.\textsuperscript{21} The second is relevant \textit{consequences}, that is, other concepts that are implied in this concept, such as stopping at a traffic light that is red.\textsuperscript{22} Communication succeeds because in general people in the same form of life have sufficiently similar sets of precedents so as to recognise each other’s usages. This does not mean they share a subset of the same experiences, but rather that within the same form of life, their varied experiences lead to similar judgments as to what continues the trajectory of precedent uses.\textsuperscript{23} Hector takes metaphor as a paradigmatic example: hearing “The Lord is my shepherd”, Hector argues that we do not start with a literal meaning which is then replaced by a metaphorical one, rather, we seek to understand how “shepherd” can be used in a way consistent with previous uses, but applied to God.\textsuperscript{24} Metaphorical usage thus demonstrates how continuity in a concept’s meaning works in retrospect, allowing for novel use that maintains conceptual identity.

This inferentialist semantics (‘relevant circumstances and consequences’) implies our earlier point that coherence is based on a form of life, not explicit logic. The pragmatic account of meaning in which this is embedded provides the flexibility for novel yet faithful concept use, which will be contextual to that form of life. Its explanation in terms of intersubjective recognition places the account at a cultural level, a product of the community’s ongoing

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., 51.
\textsuperscript{20}Ibid., 112.
\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., 107.
\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., 108.
\textsuperscript{23}Ibid., 111.
\textsuperscript{24}Ibid., 120.
construal of a form of life rather than of intrinsic capabilities of an individual soul or mind to grasp essences.\textsuperscript{25} In this way, intersubjective recognition implicitly constitutes a community, namely of those who mutually recognise each other’s language use. This community can be as broad as the users of a language, but intersubjective recognition applies also to sub-groups who participate in a field of knowledge.\textsuperscript{26} Such fields of knowledge clarify that language use is related to forms of life, since its language facilitates practices, whether carpentry, pure mathematics, or putting on rituals. The mutual recognisers are those who are able not just to imitate the language but to use it on their own in service of these practices.\textsuperscript{27}

For theological concepts, the community of intersubjective recognition is the church established by Christ in which the Spirit dwells.\textsuperscript{28} This is grounded in a form of life, which can be summarised as being conformed to Christ. Following Schleiermacher, Hector takes that to mean being “able to produce Christ-conforming performances as one’s own, which turns out to mean that one must be able to produce them on one’s own.”\textsuperscript{29} Producing them on one’s own requires in turn the ability to make judgements (implicit or explicit) about the faithfulness of such performances. These judgments go back to Christ, who trained the disciples to the point where they did not just follow him, but where “he recognized them as reliably able to judge what would count as following him, at which point their so following became fully their own.”\textsuperscript{30} This was the start of the chain of intersubjective recognition that continued in the church, guided by the Spirit. He appeals to “linguistic communities” and “game-playing and skill-employing communities” to demonstrate that continuity over long periods in such a process is possible;\textsuperscript{31} we will suggest below that Scripture also plays a necessary role. The result is that “theological concept use depends upon one’s being answerable to Christ by the

\textsuperscript{25}Ibid., n. 3 106.

\textsuperscript{26}Ibid., 67.

\textsuperscript{27}Ibid., 87.

\textsuperscript{28}Ibid., 86–98.

\textsuperscript{29}Ibid., 87.

\textsuperscript{30}Ibid., 89.

\textsuperscript{31}Ibid., 93.
power of his Spirit.” 32 Hector emphasises that this account enfolds Christian concepts within the Trinity, since they are authorised by Christ and continued by the Spirit. 33

Theological concepts participate in the retrospective, and therefore open, continuity of concepts implied in this account. This allows for an important conclusion, following Karl Barth, that by grace the Father takes up human concepts to partake of his knowledge of himself in the Son by the Spirit, grounded in the incarnation of the Son. 34 The application of concepts to God does not cut God down to the concepts’ size, but rather allows those concepts to be “restored.” 35 Their fitness to be applied to God is not grounded in the concepts themselves, but can only be seen in retrospect. 36 A concept’s application to God both fulfils and judges the whole chain of its use, both preceding and following. 37 Referring to Aquinas’ notion of analogy, he concludes that “[t]heological meaning is analogous to ordinary meaning, therefore, not because there is a bridge-like relationship between two different, idea-like ‘meanings,’ but because a concept’s application to God represents the fulfillment and judgment of the precedent series leading to and from that application.” 38 This is grounded in the incarnation (and, I would add, the biblical testimony which provides the context of the incarnation), not only because Jesus authorises the use of various concepts in his teaching, but also because he embodies them in humanly graspable form. Concepts such as love, power, and wisdom find their definitive content in Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. 39

32 Ibid., 95.
33 Ibid., 96.
34 Ibid., 128–9.
35 Ibid., 131.
36 Ibid., 133.
37 Ibid., 134.
38 Ibid., 142.
8.4 Theological reference and truth

Hector continues his exposition by accounting for theological reference in terms of inheriting from Christ and the Scriptures an intention to refer. Hector defines reference as picking out one and only one object.\(^{40}\) This is described as a process of triangulation, that is, specifying something from two or more perspectives, just as GPS units identify location using the directions of several GPS satellites.\(^{41}\) Triangulation in turn relies on anaphora, the ability to refer again to the same thing, since without it, there would be no way to say that the second and subsequent ‘lines’ of triangulation are intended to converge on the same object.\(^ {42}\) This means there would also be no way for reference to be sustained beyond its original context. The paradigmatic example of anaphora is what a pronoun does, repeating a reference which has already been established to a person or object. Names are also anaphoric, since a name is used with an implicit claim to be referring to the same object as the previous time it was used. Nevertheless, anaphora is not restricted to certain forms of words, but arises from an intention to repeat a reference. As with his previous arguments, this intention is a matter of inheriting precedent references, and intending one’s own use to be similarly inheritable.\(^ {43}\)

The importance of this is that this inheritance of precedent reference happens independently of any particular conceptual content. For example, I can refer to Aristotle by inheriting a chain of reference going back to his parents who named him, without knowing much about him, or even despite holding to misinformation about him. So, it is not the accuracy of the conceptual content, or its logical sufficiency to identify exactly one entity, that enables reference to work. Of course, these are among the means available to someone intending to convey an inheritable reference, and without some conceptual content the reference may succeed but will be of little use. By contrast, a descriptivist theory of names (which an essentialist account favours) makes the conceptual content associated with the name Aristotle

\(^{40}\)Hector, Theology Without Metaphysics, 157–8.

\(^{41}\)Ibid., 158.

\(^{42}\)Ibid., 162.

\(^{43}\)Ibid., 165.
essential to reference, since reference succeeds due to that conceptual content being sufficient to uniquely identify him. In relation to God, Hector’s concern is that such an account courts the danger of cutting God down to the size of the identifying concepts; our concern is that it makes a certain level and form of theological understanding necessary for adequately referring to God. Inheritance of precedent reference allows for reference to God to happen without depending on such conceptual content.

Theological reference, then, is a matter of inheriting the references to God, and by extension other anchors of the theo-drama such as the resurrection and love, just as someone can refer to Aristotle by inheriting a chain of reference going back to his own day. Hector shows in some detail that this is a key way in which the Bible itself refers to God: Abraham identifies God to others as the one who called him; God is identified to Moses in Ex ch. 3:11 as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The New Testament identifies Jesus with the God of this reference chain, but makes Jesus its standard, so that the Old Testament references also point forward to the God revealed in Jesus. Reference to the revealing acts of God are also similarly inherited; this is why the theme of witness is prominent in the New Testament. It might be wondered whether reference to values such as love can be simply inherited, since with abstracts there is not the concrete instance that stands regardless of conceptual confusion concerning it. Calling an act of cruelty “love” seems simply mistaken. However, the central values connected with the gospel are those exemplified in Christ: love in his sacrifice; power in the life-giving resurrection; wisdom in the Cross as God’s means of salvation. Reference to theological values are thus inherited through the scriptural stories, which are also the primary vehicles of reference to divine acts and divine presence. This means that Christ is the anchor for theological reference, as well as the giver of the concepts which enable that reference to be lived out by his disciples.

44Ibid., 150.
45Ibid., 165.
46So Gunton, Act and Being.
Finally Hector comes to the question of truth. In general terms, truth is cast in non-correspondentist terms as getting the subject matter right. This is intended in a realist sense: the truth of a belief concerns the object of belief, not community consensus or whether the belief is justified. Realism is justified to the extent that concepts are in direct contact with the world, which he has already argued. Objectivity is implied in the practice of taking-true. Since concepts are learned in community, many beliefs are implicit and derived from the community. However, when a community changes its mind, it regards its former beliefs as mistaken, thus denying that its consensus is the same as truth. Similarly, some beliefs are arrived at after a process of explicit reflection. But again, regarding a previously held belief as mistaken may include an acknowledgement that the belief was justified at the time.\textsuperscript{47} Objectivity here concerns the truth value of a proposition, not the bias-free quality of foundationalist methods. Of course, the practice of taking-true does not \textit{guarantee} the truth of what is taken-true. But neither do the allegedly bias-free methods of foundationalism.

In the light of what has been said above, getting the subject matter of God right occurs when theological references are inherited from Christ, and theological concepts renewed in the light of Christ, processes superintended by the Spirit through the process of intersubjective recognition in the believing community. This is consistent with a Christ-centred and Spirit-directed doctrine of revelation, that emphasises that it is only Christ who definitively knows what he is talking about with respect to God.

## 8.5 Local theology

Hector’s account is able to provide a basis for Kruyt’s optimism that Christ was present in the Poso church even though their understanding of God seemed closer to their former religion than to Christianity. This is because the account distinguishes reference and conception. Reference is robust: it succeeds if the intention is to continue in a chain of reference, regardless of conceptual flaws. This suggests two aspects to the development of local theology. The

\textsuperscript{47}Hector, \textit{Theology Without Metaphysics}, 211–6.
first is grasping the theological references that will anchor the theology and form of life as a whole. The second is the development of theological concepts that enable the community to practice that form of life.

We look first at reference. The idea that the Poso’s misconceptions about God meant that they were not genuinely referring to God stems from an essentialist account of language, since concepts refer to essences through their isomorphic correspondence. While this does not require that conceptual content be without flaw in order to succeed in referring to theological realities, we saw in Warfield the importance of a high degree of conceptual clarity and consistency. This is an important aspect of coherence in sincerity culture, and therefore important in such a context, but on our account, theology does not refer because of its conceptual clarity, but rather because it talks about the references to God and other key points in the theo-drama inherited from Christ through the Spirit.

By contrast, ritual cultures such as Toraja identify divine beings through ritual.\textsuperscript{48} The Toraja rituals provide a powerful means of triangulation of the field spirits, ancestors, and gods, which then enable those entities to be brought in as explanatory factors for other phenomena in wider networks of meaning. This ritual form of coherence would suggest that ritual will be an the initial point of reference to Jesus: Jesus is the god that Christians worship in their ritual, e.g., Sunday services. This is sufficient to inherit as reference, even though the initial conceptual content about Jesus may be quite mistaken at many points. So, for example, a person could pray to the Jesus those Christians worship and be healed, and those Christians would legitimately attribute the healing to Jesus, even though the person healed may have much less conceptual content about Jesus than they do. But it is likely that for the local Christians themselves, ritual will continue to be function as the primary way of identifying the Christian God. However, once again, this succeeds not because the ritual identifies God directly, but rather because it is within the ritual that the biblical story is known and celebrated. For oral and semi-oral cultures this is likely to remain central.

\textsuperscript{48}See page 108.
CHAPTER 8. LOCAL THEOLOGY IN PRAGMATIC PERSPECTIVE

This is not to say that use of Christian terms automatically implies reference, it is the implicit intention to continue the reference that counts. Thus, magic may well use a Christian term or symbol with an intention to refer to supernatural power rather than the God revealed in Jesus Christ. Some forms of experiential-expressivist pluralism seem to make human religious capacity the actual referent which is triangulated through many different religious forms of life, rather than intending to inherit theological reference from Christ, though it might still be open to subsequent argument that the references cohere.\(^{49}\)

The second aspect of a local theology is the development of concepts. We have already suggested that successful reference does not imply appropriate use. Thus, even if the Christian God is being intended in blessing an amulet, this is not faithful theo-dramatic performance, that is, it does not cohere with what the God so intended requires. In order to navigate the Christian form of life, local theological concepts need to develop that cohere in a local way with the anchors that provide reference, and that are renewed through their interaction with the Bible. These succeed to the extent that they enter a process of intersubjective recognition that mediates the Christian form of life, so that they are able to function implicitly.

This suggests a definition for local theology, namely the set of theological concepts used non-inferentially by a local church. This defines a local theological community through intersubjective concept use, with much the same empirical solidity — albeit often fuzzy boundaries — as language use defines a language community. It also defines when theological concepts can be said to be contextual, namely when they are able to operate implicitly (non-inferentially) in a community of intersubjective recognition which encompasses not just trained theologians but the whole local community of the faithful. This implies that the primary audience of local theologising is other local theologians, not Western theologians, or local theologians whose primary orientation stems from their Western training.

At the same time, answerability to Christ by the Spirit means that a local theology can in principle be evaluated by any part of the body of Christ, however culturally distant. The theological unity of the body of Christ implies that we would expect to find significant

\(^{49}\text{Cf. ibid., 196–8.}\)
similarities in the form of life of very different local expressions of faith, which will include dealing with the Bible (particularly as summarised in the ecumenical creeds), worship of the Triune God (including the sacraments), and a concept of love extending even to enemies. This unity is mediated (as well as problematised) by potentially multiple forms of life, both ecclesiastical and local, that are shared by a particular group of Christians with other groups. Thus a group may be answerable to Christ in part through the Reformed tradition, or by comparison with other groups from an indigenous religious background. These all provide points of contact with the wider church, though, of course, this is contact with other culturally embedded forms of Christian living, not with a supra-cultural theology. Second, these points of contact will only be partial, with neither local concepts nor tradition a subset of the other. These means that local theological concepts outside of those points of contact, whether explicit or implicit, will be evaluable only in terms of coherence (locally understood) with the traditions in which it shares.

The tension between local theology and its wider answerability is due to the latter not in general being able to occur non-inferentially, due to cultural difference. Cross-cultural evaluation will always require significant thought and be prone to misunderstanding coming from different backgrounds of implicit use. This provides some definition for the task of local theologians with respect to the wider church, namely to make explicit local meanings that are obscure to outsiders, and to translate these sufficiently to be answerable to other communities, even if only to those that are ‘near’ ecclesiually and culturally. Since the locals are the ones who understand local meanings best, they have an epistemic priority in evaluating theological meaning, though they need ongoing connection with the wider church tradition to maintain faithfulness to the tradition. For example, we might envisage elders (or evangelists) from a non-literate congregation who dialogue with literate ministers from the same culture, who in turn are taught (e.g., at a Bible college) by people who have access to the wider church tradition, who may be locals or nonlocals who have experience of the local culture. Each link in this chain will require significant reflection on concept use, but such a structure
maximises the implicit concepts that are shared at each point in the chain, taking advantage of overlapping communities of intersubjective recognition.

Hector’s account thus gives substance to the concept of local theology, as a community of intersubjective recognition, and a structure to its content that helps account both for accountability to the wider church as well as the epistemic priority of the local theologian. This builds on the flexibility of theological concepts to adapt to local context, while remaining subject to correction through the Scriptures.

8.6 Non-discursive religious representations

We now want to follow the hint in Kruyt’s analysis of the Poso, that local coherence will involve the use of material mediations. We have already accepted Polanyi’s argument that concepts also mediate, and Hector’s account has shown that in greater detail. Furthermore, Hector’s account shows that correspondence to theological reality happens because of Spirit-directed intersubjective intentions to be faithful to (go on in the same way as) Christ, not because of a particular propositional form. Our question is whether this intersubjective intention can operate around more material forms as well.

To give some definition to this task, we will draw on Bellah’s typology of what he calls religious representations, a term which assumes some degree of reference without specifying the level of correspondence. It also allows for pragmatic use of symbols—representation ‘for’—, as well as representation ‘of’.50 Based on a theory of how children learn to represent the world around them, his typology includes enactment (“bodily acting out of religious meaning”), symbols (including pictures, music, and poetic language such as metaphor), and narrative, along with conceptual representation.51 By the latter he means the use of stable


51Bellah, Religion in Human Evolution, 13–14. Metaphor is included in poetic language on ibid., 29.
concepts in a wider set of logical relations than that found in narrative. These concepts objectify the world, enabling reasoning that produces increasingly complex and coordinated instrumental action within it.\textsuperscript{52} This is the level of explicit knowledge, where correspondence to the world sufficient for effective instrumental action becomes primary. But Bellah goes one stage further. When concepts are objectified in writing, it became feasible to apply reasoning to the concepts themselves, leading to theory, that is, sets of concepts whose organisation has itself been reflected on.\textsuperscript{53} Bellah sees the rise of the Axial Age, in which he includes Greek philosophy and the rise of Old Testament prophecy, occurring when this second-order reflection was applied not just to particular areas of endeavour such as astronomy or geometry, but rather to the cosmology that undergirded “the religio-political premises of society itself.”\textsuperscript{54}

Bellah argues that each level depends on the levels below. He takes that most discursive of practices, science, and points out that the big advances of science are often driven by symbols and metaphor, some even derived from religion.\textsuperscript{55} The coherence of theory and the confirmation of correspondence that are the focus of scientific method build on top of a process of imagination.\textsuperscript{56} In fact, it has been argued that most abstract conceptual representation is metaphorical.\textsuperscript{57} For concrete objects, we may well have a mental picture, but abstract concepts are expressed in terms of more concrete experience, in systematic ways. For example, argument is understood in terms of the child’s experience of physical struggle against parents.\textsuperscript{58} More concretely again, status is understood, consistently in a whole range of expressions, in terms of higher and lower: “He’s at the peak of his career….She fell in status.”\textsuperscript{59} This is based on the correlation of status with power, and the embodied experience

\textsuperscript{52}Ibid., 38.
\textsuperscript{53}Ibid., 364. Bellah does not see writing as a precondition for the rise of theory, but rather for its continuation.
\textsuperscript{54}Ibid., 275.
\textsuperscript{55}Ibid., 40–41.
\textsuperscript{56}Ibid., 41–42.
\textsuperscript{57}George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, \textit{Metaphors We Live by} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).
\textsuperscript{58}Ibid., 264.
\textsuperscript{59}Ibid., 16.
of “the victor in a fight [being] typically on the top.” That is, in general metaphors come back to the body, to enactment.

Furthermore, the higher levels can feed back into the lower levels, meaning that the levels interpenetrate. Learning a skill may well involve conceptual representation in the form of explanation, but with practice the skill becomes implicit knowledge stored in the body, functioning as “a recipe for a certain kind of action when that action is called for.” The crouching of the Poso in deference is an example of such embodied knowledge in the social sphere. Symbols can condense a whole range of explicit as well as implicit and affective meanings, operative within a community or form of life; national anthems serve as an example. This means that the lower levels do represent. A ritual such as the Lord’s Supper clearly involves a combination of conceptual, symbolic, and enactive representations.

Our interest, then, is investigating whether such representations can hold theological meaning and/or inherit theological reference and therefore take their part, along with conceptual representations, in leading the community into gospel truth, which in Bellah’s terms is a matter of enactment as well as conceptual understanding. At one level, this is uncontroversial. No doubt, even Warfield would accept some use of non-discursive representations in the process of communicating the truths arrived at through theory, and he would have some version of enactment as a consequence of good theology. Both these uses occur after the work of theology has been done. Our interest is whether such representations can also be a part of the process of reflecting on the Bible so as to generate truly local theology.

8.7 Meaning and Religious Representations

Religious representations are not concepts in the sense that Hector uses the term, that is as implicit, precedent-driven rules which enable the concept user to make sense of their

---

60Ibid., 15.
61Bellah, Religion in Human Evolution, 19.
62See page 128.
63Ibid., 31.
experience, to pick out relevant similarities so as to be able to engage with reality. However, concepts require mediation in order to partake in social processes. If verbal language is the most usual kind of mediation, our focus here is on other kinds. If something has sufficiently stable conceptual content that it is able to be termed a representation, we assume that Hector’s account applies to it, that its conceptual content precipitates out of use and is regulated through intersubjective recognition. Even as complicated a representation as a ritual intends to go on in the same way as previous rituals, though doing so is likely to involve much more explicit reflection that applying a simple concept. We will look at different kinds of representations in Bellah’s hierarchy, in order to evaluate their place in doing theology, including biblical interpretation.

We begin with enactive representations, which are concepts whose implications include action; Hector’s example of stopping at a red light would count as such.\textsuperscript{64} Calling them enactive representations makes explicit that these are a matter of know-how which includes the ability to do the action, not just to recognise the possibility of doing it. It also clarifies that the performance of the action is integral to using the concept, rather than being a subsequent application. In Bellah’s account, enactive representations are the ground of the ability of representations in general to direct activity. These are illocutionary functions, such as promising or commanding. Hector specifically argues that speech acts fit within his account of intersubjective recognition, since there are standard ways in which different kinds of speech acts can be recast in propositional form.\textsuperscript{65} Representations for work the same way as as representations of.

The possibility of enactive representations having theological content is best demonstrated from Scripture. In Gal 2:11–16, the apostle Paul recounts an episode where he rebuked the apostle Peter for withdrawing from table fellowship with the Gentile Christians in Antioch after a group of Jewish Christians came from Jerusalem. Paul terms this hypocrisy, not disobedience: Peter was acting consistently with the decision of the council of Jerusalem,

\textsuperscript{64}Hector, \emph{Theology Without Metaphysics}, 107.

\textsuperscript{65}Ibid., 240.
which allowed for Gentiles to continue to live as Gentiles and assumed that the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem would continue to live as Torah-observant Jews (Acts 15). This hypocrisy is clearly connected with Peter’s change of policy, from eating with Gentiles to not eating with them, but, of course, Paul would have thoroughly agreed with Peter’s original change of policy in the other direction, as told in Acts 10. More significant is the reason Paul gives for this change: Peter “feared” them. However, the word for fear can be translated “respect” in some contexts, and commentators note reasons why Peter may well have had reason to respect the sensitivities of the visitors. It is clearest, then, to see the hypocrisy of v. 13 explained in the following verse: not acting in line with the truth of the gospel. The significance of the change in Peter’s policy is that by eating with the Gentile Christians in the first place, Peter had performed an enacted symbol of justification by faith. This symbol was not a product of his intention, but rather of shared social meanings. His reversion thus took on the character of an enacted symbol which repudiated justification by faith, regardless of the nature of his fear or respect for the Jerusalem party.

The flow of Paul’s exposition in his letter to the Galatians suggests that in the enactive representations of Peter’s actions we already have the substance (positive and negative) of what Paul goes on to expound. We can see this in other places in the New Testament. For example, Jesus makes the practice of forgiving others an enacted representation of God’s forgiveness (Mt ch. 18:21–35); in a less direct way, a woman uses the practice of washing feet to express her love for Jesus, which Jesus casts as an index of her sins having been forgiven (Luke 7:36–50). In Luke’s presentation of Peter’s ‘conversion’ to full inclusion of the Gentiles, justification by faith is enacted in Peter’s entering Cornelius’ house, preaching

---

66 See Eph 5:33 for wives towards husbands (so NRSV, NIV, ESV).
the gospel to them, and not requiring them to become Jews, with Peter’s vision of unclean foods as the first step in this series of actions (Acts 10: 1–11: 18).

Clearly, such enacted theological representations do not stand on their own. Paul continues his defence of this gospel with a dense exposition of salvation history in Gal 3–4. This does not just proclaim the truth of the gospel, it also enables him to justify it theologically, generalise it beyond Jew and Gentile, and to do so in a way which still speaks in contexts where Peter’s actions would not have the meaning they did. As Bellah’s explanation of his typology suggests, conceptual representations have a flexibility of use which is not matched by enactive and symbolic representations. However, conceptual representations also do not stand on their own. For example, Paul’s striking proposition that in Christ the distinctions of Jew and Gentile, slave and free, and male and female, no longer apply (Gal 3: 28), makes its sense within Paul’s letter as part of the theo-drama and a form of life which includes eating together. Its status as verbal language enables its wide reach, but it gives it no greater ability to stand on its own than non-discursive representations.

This implies, in relation to interpreting the Bible, that enactive representations may validly function to convey the meaning of a passage. For example, in the light of Paul’s generalisation in Gal 3: 28, any area where a culture leads the church to treat a particular class of people as less than full members of Christ can suggest actions that will carry theological weight in proclaiming justification by faith in that context. Whereas in a more theoretically inclined culture, we might begin with the doctrine and show how the practice forms a logical implication of the doctrine, in a traditional culture such actions may well function as cognitive entry points, as theological representations which anchor other levels of explanation.

This analysis can be extended to other kinds of representations, as, for example, when Paul tells the Corinthians that they are proclaiming the Lord’s death until he comes when they eat the bread and drink the wine in the Lord’s supper (1 Cor 11: 26). What we see in the two New Testament sacraments is that the narrative content of the gospel is put into ritual form, enabling the individual to enact participation in the story. In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus’ baptism becomes the means whereby he identifies with a repentant Israel,
an action that will culminate in his death on the cross (Mt ch. 3:13–17). At the end of the Gospel, baptism is the means by which the nations are included in Jesus’ rule (Mt ch. 28:18–20). The apostle Paul makes explicit that this includes enacting an identification of the believer with Jesus’ death and resurrection saving work, with its implications for a new life (Rom 6:3–4). Similarly, the Lord’s Supper also looks back to Jesus’ death, and forward to his coming again (1 Cor 11:26), and enacts fellowship with Jesus (1 Cor 10:16). It is this implicit narrative content that provides the normative features for evaluating the faithfulness of their subsequent use.

Both the sacraments are authorised by Christ, and we can liken this authorisation to the definition of a technical term, which provides a form for the representation as well as determining its conceptual content. However, as with all representations, conceptual or otherwise, this conceptual content is not limited to what is explicitly authorised. This is especially so for the sacraments given that they condense the heart of the theo-drama. We see this in the way that both Paul and Peter use baptism to expound Old Testament scriptures. Paul draws on baptism as a lens for interpreting and applying Israel’s experience in the wilderness: the Israelites were “baptised into Moses” yet perished because of their idolatry, this being a warning for the baptised but flirting-with-idolatry Corinthians (1 Cor 10:1–13). Similarly, 1 Pet 3:20–22 likens baptism to the water that kept Noah’s ark afloat, and ties it to Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension. In both cases, the presence of physical water (the Red Sea, the floodwaters) provides a concrete link to a wider dramatic similarity. Again, Paul uses the sacrament of the Lord’s supper to theologise about the unity of the body of believers who eat from the one bread (1 Cor 10:17), and to warn against idolatry, in that sharing in the Lord’s supper is eating at the Lord’s table (1 Cor 10:21). Here, the similarities of the Lord’s supper to pagan and Israelite sacrifice, despite the absence of dead animals, provides the connection. The sacraments are used to make theological connections that are only implicit in their authorisation.

This is one of the deficiencies of non-discursive representations according to the Protestant
semiotic ideology: the materiality of the symbol can lead in unintended directions. This is because its materiality can have iconic or indexical aspects to it, as we have seen for ritual. However, this is but one way in which a representation can have a richness of conceptual content that resists a simple process of intersubjective recognition; it means different things to different groups of users. But for the apostles, this is a feature which enables rich theo-dramatic connection. Along with connections to Old Testament sacrifice, the sacramental bread connects with sustenance and desire, and the wine connects with feasting, itself a symbol of eschatological joy. Water connects with thirst, cleansing, and burial. As condensed symbols, the sacraments are able to tie together many different aspects of the theo-drama in concrete representations that are accessible to non-theoretical thinkers.

Again we conclude that in ritual cultures, there is value in tying exposition of passages to the sacraments. In an oral culture, the question of hooks for remembering theological meanings would be sufficient reason for this. For ritual cultures, we have argued that ritual is the likely point of inheriting reference to God, and so it makes sense to concentrate conceptual content there also. This is not to suggest that the sacraments are a hidden meaning in every passage. We will develop this point in the next chapter, but for the present we remember that Warfield saw the need to bring different Bible passages together into a systematic framework so that their meaning might be fully understood. If this systematic framework is in fact a recasting of the theo-drama in a culturally coherent form, the same role can be played by the theo-drama-condensing sacraments in a ritual context.

As with biblical metaphors, the sacraments fit easily into Hector’s account of answerability to Christ through the Spirit-superintended process of intersubjective recognition. What about the use of non-biblical local symbols? This question applies not just to material representations but also to local metaphors, any representation that is not simply a translation of biblical language. Our relativising of the difference between conceptual and non-discursive representations suggests that the in principle answer to this question will be the same for both kinds.

The issue here is often cast in terms of syncretism, but this has two forms, which we can illustrate from post-mission Toraja experience in relation to two theological terms. The traditional Toraja term for the resting place of the recently deceased, Puya, was considered too different from the Christian concept of heaven to be used as a translation: like the Old Testament Sheol it is not a dwelling place for divinities. Because of this, the Indonesian word for heaven was adapted to the phonetically acceptable form of suruga. This freed the Christian term to be given exclusively Christian content, but an unintended consequence was a dualism: the terms were taken by many to refer to two after-life destinations, each reserved for their respective adherents. Since adherence is understood ritually, older adherents of the traditional aluk todolo faced the question of baptism as a choice between post-mortem existence with their aluk todolo ancestors or their Christian children. By contrast, the missionaries chose the name of the chief deity of the Toraja pantheon, Puang Matua, to refer to God. In terms of correspondence to the biblical picture of God, the local conception of this deity fails at many points. However, there was no longer any possibility of considering them parallel deities. This decision is consistent with Hector’s account of theological concepts, whereby a local concept is taken up and purified through the biblical story. This enables the name, as a religious representation, to become an arena where theology is done. It turns out, then, that the semiotic safety of avoiding local terms with their misleading conceptual content results in that conceptual content being able to avoid contact with the gospel.

The richness of symbols that is used by New Testament writers with respect to the sacraments applies here as well. If pagan ideas have sometimes crept into local understandings of the sacraments, Christianity has also been happy to draw on the meanings found in local symbols. In a classic text from the seventh century, Pope Gregory the Great advised Augustine of Canterbury not to destroy the temples in his area, but to remove the idols and


conduct Christian worship there (presumably the Eucharist).\textsuperscript{72} The temple was presumably one of the main places people went to obtain and/or appease sacral power. There was thus a set of circumstances and implications contained in the building as a religious representation that the church wanted to retain, but attach to Christ through the Eucharist, rather than to the idols. The buildings as religious representations could thus become an arena for contesting religious meanings, using the very flexibility of those forms. As with local terms, the former temples participated in the process of doing theology.

Finally, a similar process can be conceived of for local metaphors. A controversial example has been the used of the title of Ancestor for Jesus.\textsuperscript{73} This is an extended metaphor, and runs the risk of culturally “contaminating” the concept of God. However, its use ensures that the many meanings associated with ancestors are brought into conversation with the gospel. In the Toraja context, which did not have kings, Kobong’s Tongkonan theology draws on the local Toraja form of power and realm to convey much of the substance of the biblical metaphors of Christ being Shepherd and King; Christ is the founder of the tongkonan (housegroup or clan).\textsuperscript{74} Since over time this founder will die and be divinised, this might appear to make Christ an ancestor as well, but Kobong does not draw this connection. His focus on the local clan structure means that these concepts are brought into connection with the gospel; this will renew them in relation to Christ, and it will also affect the understanding of the local power structures themselves. In particular, as Christ becomes the ideal clan leader, this has implications for how Christian clan leaders exercise their function.

The use of metaphors and symbols is not, then, restricted to representations found in the Bible. Using local symbols and metaphors provides arenas for the interaction of the gospel and local culture, reducing the danger of areas shielded from that interaction. In ritual

\textsuperscript{72} Norman E. Thomas, Classic Texts in Mission and World Christianity (Maryknoll, 1995), 22.

\textsuperscript{73} Timothy C. Tennent, Theology in the Context of World Christianity: How the Global Church Is Influencing the Way We Think About and Discuss Theology (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2007), ch. 5 has a comprehensive discussion of this.

\textsuperscript{74} Theodorus Kobong, Injil dan Tongkonan: Inkarnasi, Kontekstualisasi, Transformasi (trans. Theodorus Kobong and Th. van den End; Jakarta: Gunung Mulia, 2008).
cultures, biblical interpretation needs to make good use of such representations in order to build up the local understanding of the theo-drama in a locally coherent way.

### 8.8 Regulating Religious Representations

Our argument so far has shown the adequacy of a variety of religious representations to carry theological meaning, and the appropriateness of doing so in many local contexts. In the terms of Lindbeck’s account, enactive and symbolic representations have their place alongside conceptual representations in shaping religious experience, the first-order function of theology. However, Lindbeck also describes a second-order function of theology, namely making explicit the grammar of those symbols for the purpose of regulating their use.\(^7^5\) Making explicit is what conceptual representations do. Thus, the second-order function of regulation can only work with conceptual representations (propositions), whereas shaping religious experience can work with a variety of religious representations. As Lindbeck notes, this function has a prominence in Christianity not found in most other religions, and certainly not in indigenous religions such the traditional Toraja one.\(^7^6\)

Lindbeck uses grammar as a primary metaphor for describing what the second-order function is making explicit, meaning the deeper structures that define what makes sense and what does not. Since grammars are made explicit as theoretical systems, this might suggest that he sees second-order theology as an inherently theoretical exercise. Certainly, technical theology, which Lindbeck includes in this second-order use, is systematic and theoretical, and Protestant doctrine has usually taken the form of confessions of faith that aim to be complete and consistent. Given the importance of this second-order function, this would make theoretical theology a necessary part of the local church, even if it does not need to have the first-order role that Warfield also assigned to it. We want to evaluate to what extent this is so.

\(^7^5\) Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 65–70.

\(^7^6\) Ibid., 55.
Regulation is a concept derived from systems theory. According to Anthony Thiselton, systems theory concerns “a self-regulating organism that maintains stability, identity, and boundaries.”\(^{77}\) Systems are always recursive, with elements of a system able to be analysed as systems, and systems functioning as parts of larger systems.\(^{78}\) Hector’s account provides a systemic account of concepts and representations, both as systems in themselves and as elements of a form of life. Second-order theology functions as a higher level system to help the church maintain its identity as the church.\(^{79}\) But any system that persists has regulatory functions that, by construction, arise out of the system. Hence, regulation of a cultural system is also shaped by that culture. This suggests that regulation using theory will not work in a non-theoretical culture. This seems to be confirmed in history by the development of hybrid systems, such as Taylor’s two-speed medieval Christianity, or Schrauwers’s equivalent in Poso, where an educated elite regulates according to theory via social power.

Most cultural systems, however, self-regulate without theory. For ritual cultures, Rappaport presents a sketch of a hierarchy of conceptual systems maintained through ritual that them to maintain identity (go on in the same way) while incrementally adapting.\(^{80}\) At the top level are the Ultimate Sacred Postulates. For the Toraja, these would concern the gods and ancestors and how they gave the system of *alu k sola pemali*, the commands and prohibitions that regulate traditional Toraja life. This system as a system is non-empirical, as all empirical happening, both good and bad, can be explained within it. However, within the system are what he terms Cosmological Axioms, such as, for the Toraja, the strong separation of ceremonies of the East (spirits) and West (ancestors), or the fundamental nature of reciprocity in relationships, human and supra-human. These have strong empirical content


\(^{79}\)Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 140.

and application. They therefore need to be able to adapt to changing circumstances, and he argues that their grounding in the Ultimate Sacred Postulates enables this to happen without threatening their authority. The Cosmological Axioms are in turn applied in Rules, that is, for the Toraja, ethical principles (sangka’), prescriptions (aluk), tabus (pemali), and so on, that apply also outside of ritual life. Finally, the indexical elements in rituals import current conditions. Provided that the level of generality of a message is appropriate to its rank in the system, this allows for controlled adaptability, with lower level changes not threatening integrity at a higher level. Ritual thus undergirds a cultural system that enables the society to respond intelligently to change. This intelligence is spread, however, over different psychological faculties (unconscious changes, dreams & prophecies, as well as explicit reflection and discussion), over members of the community, and over generations.

In axial cultures, on Bellah’s account, it became thinkable to seek to move this process of regulation from ritual into the explicit arena of theory. In principle, the entire hierarchy of Ultimate Sacred Postulates, Cosmological Axioms and Rules can be made explicit and put in order, enabling it to be manipulated like any other object. In the Greek axial culture, this objectification of propositions enabled them to be dis-embedded from their ritual context and attached to essences, thus providing an alternative means of giving substance to the “really real”, as we have discussed above. This enables greater flexibility of response when cultural change is faster than the largely implicit processes of a traditional system can cope with. Since the gospel was from early times brought into new cultural situations, this flexibility was essential to Christianity’s spread.

Bellah argues that Israel also developed an axial culture, but in a different way. The prophets used a form of narrative theology, retelling the foundational myths to critique the existing social order. This critique extended even to such central symbols as the temple,

---

81 See page 166, and behind that, page 108.
82 Bellah, Religion in Human Evolution, 322.
83 See Jeremiah’s temple sermon (Jer 7:1–29), or Ezekiel’s prophecy of Yahweh’s glory departing from the temple (Ezek 10).
as well as the existing social hierarchy. This partial disembedding of the divinity from the social order enabled the further move of hope when Israel was soundly defeated by other nations, since God was not tied to the political fortunes of Israel. The relations of God as Creator (Ultimate Sacred Postulate), God’s choice of Israel (Cosmological Axiom), and how Israel should live (Rules) were necessarily made explicit as Israel moved through national traumas that did not allow for incremental adaption. This process of prophetic narrative theology remained a feature of Second Temple Judaism, providing the flexibility for Jesus to promote a vision of the Kingdom of God whose continuity with prophetic precedent was unpredictable but recognisable in retrospect.

We have already noted N. T. Wright’s argument that such narrative theology was used by Paul to compensate for the relative lack of rituals and symbols in the early Christian communities. Paul’s statements of the gospel are narrative in form, as are many of his theological arguments, including those most clearly exercising a regulatory function through polemic, such as Gal 3–4. The Apostle’s Creed consists of a summary of the biblical story from creation to new creation, grouped around the three persons of the triune main character. In other words, narrative theology worked for the first few centuries to regulate the theology of the church. If this regulative function was increasingly theoretical over time, this was part of a *cultural* (and therefore contextualised) trajectory for Europe, not a movement towards a biblical ideal. A strong grasp of the theo-drama is sufficient to regulate the various kinds of theological representation in the life of the community.

---

84 See Mic 3 as one of many examples.
85 See page 138.
86 E.g., 1 Cor 15: 3–8; Rom 1: 2–4.
8.9 Conclusion

Our goal in this chapter was to outline an alternative to the Protestant semiotic ideology that would be suitable for ritual and even oral cultures. We began by outlining some features of our pragmatic proposal that differ from the essentialism found in the Protestant semiotic ideology: concepts are in touch with the world; concepts work implicitly in terms of a coherent network of concepts; and concepts find their meaning in coherence. From this we suggested a framework where a culturally coherent network of theo-dramatic meanings which enable participation in a local theo-dramatic form of life is anchored in particular reference points in the Christian mythos.

We then looked at Hector’s account of concepts as implicit rules built up from precedent use and regulated by intersubjective recognition. This provided for a Barthian account of theological concepts as concepts which find their norm in Christ’s use of them, with the Spirit superintending the process of intersubjective recognition, such that theological concept use is answerable to Christ by the Spirit, with conformity to Christ characterising (in a general way) the form of life that these concepts enable participation in.

The anchors of the theological networks of meaning were then correlated with reference in Hector’s account. This account of reference is robust: reference can succeed despite significant conceptual error, though such error diminishes the ability to make proper use of the reference in the form of life. We noted that this account is a realist account in terms of truth: a proposition is true by means of getting its subject matter right, not on account of consensus or being justified belief.

The structure of Hector’s proposal, then, is that theological truth is grounded in Jesus Christ, who gets God the Father right, and so becomes the basis of reference to God, the arbiter of theological concepts, and the one who embodied the form of life (comprehensive obedience) within which such concepts make sense.88 While communities of believers experience many things that cohere with their beliefs, and often engage in locally contextual

88 Hector, Theology Without Metaphysics, 213.
forms of justification of them (such as philosophical apologetics), Jesus Christ is the one who has had direct contact with God, and so validated the references and concepts of those who had gone before (i.e., the Old Testament), and authorised the references and concepts of the generation of apostles who witnessed to him (i.e., the New Testament). The church’s truth-telling is fundamentally a passing on of what has been received, through the Spirit-directed process of intersubjective recognition, which involves not just cognitive content but also participation in Jesus’ form of life.\footnote{Ibid., 230–1.} This epistemological dependence on Christ by the Spirit is not bypassed by a putative power of concepts to refer isomorphically.

This account provided support for the common missiological strategy of providing access to the anchors (by preaching the gospel), and allowing that conceptual clarification will be an ongoing process. We noted that this allows ritual cultures to reference Christ through ritual, provided the ritual presents the references of the theo-drama. It also allows theological theory to refer to Christ, provided those references are what are conveyed in it.

We then used the account to construct a simple model of local theology, whereby local theologians have epistemic priority in relation to local coherence, but answerability to Christ through the wider church in relation to the inherited references.

In the second half of the chapter, we built on this account to discuss non-discursive representations, an important aspect of local coherence. We discussed enactive representations as know-how which provides a representation for doing something, and noted that Hector’s account covers such illocutionary force. We noted how in Scripture, actions can carry theological meaning. We further discussed the sacraments, and noted how they condense the scriptural narrative in a way that enables the believer to participate in it. For both kinds of representation, we concluded that in ritual cultures, tying the meaning of a biblical passage into these symbols will fit with local forms of coherence, just as tying the meaning of a biblical passage into a systematic theological framework fits with educated sincerity oriented believers. We extended this to local non-biblical symbols, noting the danger of dualism where new symbols are brought in alongside old ones, and the potential for interaction with
the local culture where old symbols are reused. Finally, we discussed the role of theory in the second-order function of regulating the church, and concluded that regulation requires conceptual representations that make explicit what the church is doing, but that theology in narrative form is sufficient to the task, as we find in the New Testament itself.

We suggested that this account would be applicable to any cultural situation, since the pragmatic account of language is general, and its account of theological language is tied to Christ by the Spirit. It is beyond our competence to prove this, but we have shown how it encompasses both ritual and sincerity orientations, which is sufficient for our purposes. We have also begun indicating how representations might be used in interpreting the Bible. An account of the Bible is the task of the next chapter.
Chapter 9

The Bible in a Ritual Culture

9.1 Introduction

Hector’s pragmatic account of theological concepts has shown us how theological concepts can talk truly about God yet have the necessary flexibility for contextual use. Hector’s perspective will continue to be useful to us, but it does not directly answer questions about different interpretations of the Bible in different contexts. It is not yet clear, for example, how the same passage of the Bible can be individualist and relationalist at the same time.

Hector’s concepts answer to the reality they are about, albeit via intersubjective recognition, and we take it as given that interpretation needs to answer to the text that is being interpreted. Our question in this chapter, then, concerns what the Bible actually is. We have already seen how this has implications for how the Bible is approached in interpretation. Warfield’s conception of scripture as data implies correct method in a foundationalist sense. For the data to be objective, the Bible has to be understood as a series of communications whose meaning is fixed, independent of the interpreter. This is usually achieved by appeal to authorial intention as expressed in the text. This historicist approach to exegesis aims to understand the Bible in its historical contexts, but to do so independently of the historical context of the interpreter, even if it is acknowledged that this is not fully attainable in practice. Warfield’s propositional approach also rules out non-discursive representations as means of doing theology.
CHAPTER 9. THE BIBLE IN A RITUAL CULTURE

To aid our thinking about what the Bible is, we will turn to Gadamer’s *magnum opus, Truth and Method*, which turns out to have strong parallels with Hector’s account of concept use, but at the level of understanding texts. Gadamer is strongly opposed to historicism, and to inflated views of method. This will help clarify the implications of Vanhoozer’s more holistic theo-dramatic model of what the Bible is, and will enable us to draw some implications from the distinction between mythos and ethos that we made in the Introduction. This will complete the groundwork for developing a local Toraja approach to the Bible in the following chapters.

### 9.2 Scripture in pragmatic perspective

We begin by summarising the role of Scripture in Hector’s account. Although Scripture never becomes a thematic focus, we can draw out the following implications. His account of theological concepts assumes that the Old Testament was authorised afresh by Christ in some sense. In turn, the New Testament provides a snapshot of the apostolic stage of the chain (or chains) of intersubjective recognition, as these writings aimed to convey and explicate the already received gospel, and were accepted by the church as doing so. This does not bypass the continuing work of the Spirit of intersubjective recognition in the church that Hector describes, since the interpretation of Scripture itself involves using theological concepts.

From this, we can propose that Scripture plays a distinctive role in relation to theological concepts. First, Scripture is the written record of the gospel story (beginning with creation and Abraham’s call), including those non-negotiable references to God and his activity which anchor the web of theological meaning. This story occurred in a number of cultural-historical contexts, but makes a claim to universal relevance. This relevance is not a claim to have uncovered existing cultural universals; any particular culture will presumably share particular features with the cultures portrayed in the Bible, but this does not imply that there are values

---

CHAPTER 9. THE BIBLE IN A RITUAL CULTURE

found in all cultures. Rather, this is a relevance from outside any particular culture, from a history functioning as mythos which is not the local history or mythos. It is in providing new anchors to the web of meaning that the gospel needs to replace local mythos, and this referring function is based in Scripture. The answerability of the local church to Christ is thus in part a matter of its use of Scripture, which brings good news from outside of the culture.

Second, Scripture is a chief means by which theological concepts are made fit for use by God. A concept about the local empirical world is kept fit for use in the midst of its incremental changes by the reality in relation to which it is used; the reality serves as its criterion. This works for religious concepts in a ritual world such as Toraja: the reality of the field spirits or ancestors is empirically grounded in their relevant rituals. On Hector’s account, the form of life of the believing community (including rituals) is certainly involved in theological concept use, but that is not the entire reality which serves as its criterion, except in thoroughgoing experiential-expressivist accounts. Theological concepts are not empirical in that sense, which is why some form of essentialism has seemed necessary for God-talk to make sense. In rejecting essentialism, Hector turns to the empirical past, to the divine interventions and revelations where God has chosen to reveal himself. Our point here is that these are recorded in Scripture. It is as theological concepts are learned in accordance with their use in Scripture that they are made fit for use by God. The task of the local interpreter of the Bible is to enfold Scripture into the process of intersubjective recognition of theological concepts, including inherited references, thus enabling the local community to genuinely follow Christ.

Hector’s flexible theological concepts help us to understand how, for example, the detailed conceptual content of how God created the world can be different in different cultures, yet the same reality is being referred to.\(^2\) However, interpreting the Bible means interpreting particular texts, and pragmatic concept use does not immediately make sense of how local

metaphors and symbols can be involved in that process, nor how individualist and relation-alist readings of the same passage can be equally valid. Since Hector’s account is realist, it might be possible to maintain historicist approaches to biblical interpretation, where the original meaning of the text is the criterion of an interpretation, and the interpreter’s context only plays a role in a further step of application. This would not be exactly the same as Warfield’s approach. A pragmatic realism would not require a genuine interpretation to capture the essence of a passage, but simply to get its subject matter right. However, Hector’s account has implications that undermine historicism. Getting it right is a process involving intersubjective recognition by contemporaries, not by the original author or hearers. Without propositions that reach essences, it becomes harder to deny that the involvement of the interpreter’s context in understanding a passage is not a lamentable consequence of human limitation, but is in fact essential to the exercise: if contemporaries cannot understand the interpretation, it is of no use.

This is why we turn to Gadamer’s now classic account of understanding.³ At the level of texts, his account parallels Hector’s, with a meaningful unit of the Bible as the equivalent of a concept, and interpretation as the equivalent of concept use. Hector’s trajectory of concept use parallels Gadamer’s *Wirkungsgeschichte*, as the tradition of interpretation enables and shapes interpretation in a similar way to previous concept use enabling and shaping apprehension of what the concept is about.⁴ Both are thus able to explain novelty which is faithful to the matter at hand, which we have identified as a primary need for local theology.⁵ But the major theme that we will draw on is Gadamer’s emphasis that truth emerges in the dialogue between the work and the interpreter.⁶ This, too, is not foreign to Hector’s account: one interprets another’s particular concept use through seeking a passing convergence of that

³Gadamer, *Truth and Method*.
⁴Ibid., 299ff.
⁵Ibid., 404 himself points to a pragmatic understanding of language, of an “ongoing process of concept formation”.
⁶Ibid., 361.
use with precedent use.\(^7\) From this emerges not only the importance of the context of the interpreter, for which Gadamer uses the abstract term ‘horizon’, but also an account of how that operates that will help us characterise what local interpretation is.

Interpretation as dialogue implies two personal interlocutors. Gadamer draws a basic distinction between the natural sciences, where the object of study is impersonal, and the humanities, where the object of study involves human beings. Both depend on tradition to provide motivation for an investigation; for example, science depends on existing theories that have become implicit in order to open up new investigations, and what is considered worth investigating is determined as much by context as by what current theory makes possible.\(^8\) Gadamer refers to these conditions as prejudices, but we will refer to them more neutrally as prejudgments. Tradition stands behind all investigation, but Gadamer argues that the results of investigation in the natural sciences are in principle independent of the investigator, determined by the object alone.\(^9\) This was what Warfield claimed for biblical studies, and we have seen how it gave no room for the local interpreter as a local. When humans are studying human objects, however, the investigator is necessarily self-involved.\(^10\) We saw this at work even in the field of textual criticism, in relation to determining from conflicting manuscript evidence which of the sons in Jesus’ parable was the obedient one. Textual criticism is perhaps the most technical field in biblical studies, but its object of study is the process of copying texts which is done by humans. Hence, the UBS committee’s own horizon influenced their perception of what would make a plausible reconstruction of the manuscript evidence. The point here is not that their humanity caused them (perhaps) to err: science, too, is fallible. It is rather that their horizon is not just an aspect of their motivation for

---


\(^8\) Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Terry lectures; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966).

\(^9\) Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 284. In the second edition he acknowledges that this picture has been complicated by Thomas Kuhn’s work on how science operates. See ibid., 374 n.25. This does not substantially affect his point.

\(^10\) Ibid., 295.
research, as with science, but also an integral part of what they are looking for. This is why Gadamer argues, in contrast to Warfield’s dismissal of early theologians,\(^{11}\) that the writings of an old historian are still of interest today, despite the progress of historical information since his time, whereas the findings an old scientist are either superseded or subsumed by new research.\(^{12}\) The horizon of the historian is of the same kind as the horizon of what he is investigating. In short, investigation in the humanities is a dialogue between the horizon of the investigator and the horizon of what is being investigated. Gadamer likens a scientific approach to humanities to the one-sidedness of a conversation with a doctor, where only the horizon of the patient is at stake.\(^{13}\)

In casting hermeneutics as a dialogue, Gadamer likens the substance of the text to an interlocutor.\(^{14}\) Each interlocutor in a dialogue has their own integrity, which is why Gadamer emphasises two horizons, in order to guard against “assimilating the past to our own expectations of meaning” by ignoring the text’s horizon,\(^{15}\) and the opposite error of a historicism that ignores the interpreter’s horizon, as we have just discussed.

This means that the dialogue between text and interpreter does not begin after the original meaning has been ascertained, but rather is there from the start. One of our main contentions has been that the prejudices a culture brings to a text can serve positively to highlight what is important in that text for that culture. Whatever the cultural understanding of defilement, and whether it is the same as for the original hearers of Heb 9, it has been taken up in Jesus’ sacrifice.\(^{16}\) The integrity of relationships with fellow humans and God that Jesus paints in the Sermon on the Mount can be read in an individualist mode of personal commitment to God, or in an honour mode of seeking reputation from the Father.\(^{17}\) Even


\(^{13}\) Ibid., 302.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., 362.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 304.

\(^{16}\) See page 46.

\(^{17}\) See page 71.
the question of whether Paul saw the miracles of the man of lawlessness as fakes (our proxy for the question of the reality of the excluded middle) turned out not to have been made clear in Paul’s language, though it may have been obvious to his initial readers.\textsuperscript{18} The local interpreter does not just bring particular questions to the text, but also brings a particular horizon to bear in constructing the meaning of the text which results in genuine dialogue.

Gadamer provides a concrete account of this dialogue in terms of question and answer. The interpreter’s assumption is that the text provides an adequate answer to a question, and Gadamer argues that understanding that question is the key to understanding the substance of the text. Crucially, this is a question from the text to the \textit{interpreter}, which the interpreter then works on with the text. For genuine dialogue to occur, the question needs to be a real question from within the interpreter’s horizon. This means it may not be exactly the same as the question of the original author. Gadamer allows that it may not always be possible to find a real question from the interpreter’s horizon which the text answers, in which case understanding reduces to the historicist project of understanding the presuppositions of the original question that are unacceptable to us.\textsuperscript{19} We will address the question of obscure passages of Scripture below, but we note a less obvious symptom of inadequate questions, namely what he terms “problems”. These are abstractions of once genuinely motivated questions that have taken on a merely formal character.\textsuperscript{20} This well characterises what happens when a Western model of biblical interpretation is simply transplanted into a different cultural context, with the change in horizon in this case due not to the passage of time, but of place.

We can thus characterise local interpretation as finding real questions which both make sense in the local horizon and which are questions the text answers. The difficulty is that Gadamer’s account assumes participation in an ongoing tradition of interpretation with its incremental change. Just as precedent concept use provides a store of experience with the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[18] See page 94.
\item[19] Ibid., 368.
\item[20] Ibid., 369.
\end{footnotes}
CHAPTER 9. THE BIBLE IN A RITUAL CULTURE

reality the concept is about, each effort to interpret the text adds to the experience of the tradition with that text. It is the previous interpretations with their questions and answers that open up the work to new questions. At times, as with Hector’s unexpected concept continuations, a new experience with the text—perhaps provoked by something new in the context—leads to new insights, a process which “involves an escape from something that had deceived us and held us captive,” the “negative” experience of reality turning out to be different to expectations.\textsuperscript{21} This is how tradition over time distinguishes appropriate from mismatched prejudices, a process that cannot be decided \textit{a priori} but only as those prejudices are used in interpretation.\textsuperscript{22} However, just as not everything can be questioned at once in a network of beliefs, so too it is difficult to evaluate multiple prejudices at the same time. But this is what the large gap that we have identified between the modern Protestant culture of the missionaries and the local cultures they were working in implies: not just values, but metaphors and even kinds of representations need to change. If Kruyt recognised the unsuitability of the questions he brought to the text for the traditional Poso culture, he hoped that the culture would change so that the questions would work. Through his negative experience we have identified, albeit at a somewhat abstract level, some of those mismatched prejudices, such as his sincerity oriented focus on the soul. At the same time, he recognised that they had their own questions which found answers with some biblical connection, such as the sacraments answering their need for sacred power to guard against disaster. Our task now is to point towards the kinds of prejudices that need to be developed. To this end, we are drawing on the general experience of indigenous cultures and Toraja culture in particular through anthropological research, but any concrete proposals can only be proved in use, an exercise beyond the limitations of this project.

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., 350.

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., 295.
9.3 The Sache of the Bible

Gadamer is careful to insist that finding real questions is not a method. Rather, method is the reuse of questions that have proved useful in the past.23 In Hector’s account, the criterion of a concept is the reality with which the concept enables interaction, its “aboutness”.24 Intersubjective recognition at times requires explicit justification in terms of this criterion. Hector characterises this not as the application of method, but as picking out relevant features from precedent use.25 Similarly, in hermeneutics, method makes explicit aspects of the tradition of interpretation, but remains subordinate to the goal of understanding, i.e., to the real questions the text poses in the current horizon. That is, the substantive criterion of the “aboutness” of the text cannot be replaced by formal criteria of method; method is just one component of the tradition of interpretation.26

This “aboutness” which forms the criterion of interpretation is the major prejudgment we will explore in the rest of this chapter, its Sache or substance.27 For Gadamer, this is the hermeneutical object of investigation, that which undergoes the hermeneutical process he is describing. This can be different for different fields of the humanities. He illustrates this with the historical investigation of texts, an example that is relevant for Biblical studies. Historical investigation treats texts as exemplifications of historical forces, not as witnesses to truth, which is how texts are treated in literary investigation on Gadamer’s account. He shows that historical investigation is nevertheless hermeneutical by pointing out that its object is not the text as such, but the historical event of which the text is a part. This historical event is
understood hermeneutically in the light of its development in subsequent history, just as the classic text is understood in its history of reception.\footnote{Gadamer, \textit{Truth and Method}, 334–5.}

Gadamer compares several different kinds of hermeneutical objects which will prove useful for our analysis, namely historical events, legal texts, and Scripture. Our interest is in how the two horizons relate. The two extremes, which suppress the dialogue of genuine hermeneutics, are historicism and assimilation. In understanding historical events, the historical horizon is obviously primary, but this horizon is in fact partly determined by the interpreter’s horizon, because the meaning of an historical event develops over the course of time: to investigate an event historically is precisely to place it in a flow of historical cause and effect.\footnote{Ibid., 297–8; David Weberman, “A New Defense of Gadamer’s Hermeneutics,” \textit{Philosophy and Phenomenological Research} 60 no. 1 (2000): 45–65.} For legal texts which require application in a formal judgment, the jurist’s horizon is primary, but the importance of the text as authority gives weight to its own horizon. At the same time, legal judgments can add to the substance of the law, so that, again, the meaning of the legal text grows over time.\footnote{Gadamer, \textit{Truth and Method}, 322–3.} For philosophical and literary texts, the image changes from a growth in substance to the mining of an “inexhaustible” meaning through the process of understanding the text.\footnote{Ibid., 366. He actually mentions poetic texts here, but I take it they are the same class of texts as the literary texts he mentions in other contexts.} Here, neither horizon is prominent, since the text does not have legal authority, and a concrete decision does not have to be made. Rather, the goal of understanding is the expanded horizon due to the fusion of horizons. This expanded horizon becomes part of the tradition enabling further mining of the inexhaustible meaning. The meaning is inexhaustible because it can continue to be brought into productive relationship with new horizons.

Lastly (for for our purposes), Gadamer discusses the hermeneutics of Scripture.\footnote{Ibid., 326–8.} He argues that it shares with legal texts the authority of the text and the priority of application to the present. However, unlike legal judgments, “the gospel acquires no new content in
being preached.” Scripture is “promise demanding only faith, whose authors are in fact witnesses to something so incomprehensible that to see it is a God-given sign to the individual.” Understanding the Scriptures is a matter of God-given faith, which is not a part of the general human condition, and therefore does not develop through the experience of tradition. The word of God does not belong to any human horizon, and so meets the individual independently of the mediation of the community. This makes Gadamer’s account of hearing Scripture less hermeneutical than his account of science, which at least is done in community.

These different types of hermeneutical object will provide a framework to begin developing a Toraja account of the Bible in dialogue with our major point of reference, Vanhoozer’s theodramatic account of the Scriptures. There are two aspects of his account that are important to us at this point. He upholds the Scripture as a Word of personal address, but, unlike Gadamer’s non-social Word, gives an account of the substance of that Word as historical myth which grounds a community’s life. We have here an interplay of address and history, mythos and ethos that, we will argue, works differently in a sincerity culture than in a ritual culture.

His account of Scripture as God’s Word follows Nicholas Wolterstorff’s concept of double agency discourse, the two agents being God and the human author. Wolterstorff notes that one person’s discourse can be appropriated by another and so become their discourse, too. This can happen in two ways: someone being deputised to speak, or their existing discourse

---

33Ibid., 326.

34Philippe Eberhard, The Middle Voice in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics: A Basic Interpretation With Some Theological Implications (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 202, italics original.


36Eberhard, The Middle Voice in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics, 200.

37Ibid., 202.

being appropriated after the fact. If prophets and apostles resemble the former case, as when the apostle Paul conveys God’s appeal to be reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:20), the non-Israelite proverbs in the book of Proverbs resemble the latter case—their inclusion in the book of Proverbs has authorised them as God’s word. This account understands Scripture as first of all a collection of human speech acts, using a variety of illocutions from multiple historical horizons. These illocutions are taken up and used by God, firstly in the original context of communication, but also whenever the Bible is used as Scripture. Vanhoozer uses a Christological analogy to describe this dual nature of Scripture. The Sache of the text, Christ, is embodied in “corporeal discourse: what someone in a particular time and place and language says to someone about something.” The human illocutions of particular texts are witnesses to the Sache.39

These human illocutions constitute the original meaning of the text which becomes the ‘objective’ data of interpretation on a Warfieldian model. However, our pragmatic account requires not timeless propositions that can be extracted from these illocutions, but references to the anchors of the theo-drama that can be inherited, and use of theological concepts that can continually reform the local community’s use of those concepts. The former are in general historical events, which means on Gadamer’s account that their meaning grows over time. This is the basis of typology: Israel’s exodus from Egypt takes on new meaning as a pattern for Israel’s hoped for return from Babel and then for redemption in Christ (Col 1:13–14).40 The latter occurs as the community engages with canonical texts from many historical horizons and life situations reflected in a variety of genres, with later texts reusing and reapplying earlier texts. This forms a tradition of inexhaustible meaning.41 These functions (reference and theological concept use) are among the chief divine uses of the human illocutions. It is this divine use of Scripture, rather than the original historical meaning, that is the object of hermeneutical interest.

40Peter J. Leithart, Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2009), 44–46.
41Ibid., 109–40.
For Vanhoozer, this divine use of Scripture finds its focus in the “Christotope: what God was doing in the history of Jesus Christ,” covering Jesus’ earthly life through to Christ’s gift of the Spirit at Pentecost. This is the theo-dramatic *Sache* that provides the substance of the tradition that develops through the canonical dialogue and as God does new things. Within the canon, the “words and acts of God recorded in and as Scripture *increase in significance* over time.” However, once Christ comes, there is no new meaning to be added: the Christotope sums up the meaning of the theo-drama, and is significant for all times and places. Here, the Christotope is functioning much as Christ’s concept use did in Hector’s account of theological concepts, renewing not only meanings in the preceding chain of concept uses, but also in the chain of subsequent uses as well.

An implication of this is that believers stand theo-dramatically within the same canonical “situation” as the New Testament church, namely between the first and second comings of Christ. Since the second coming indicates how history will end — with a general resurrection and new creation fulfilling God’s promises and purposes —, intervening history does not add to the meaning of Christ. This implies a theo-dramatic horizon: by entering the canonical world “we develop the ability to interpret our own world,” enabling appropriate action in it. This suggests a fusion of horizons in the reverse direction to that of historical events: the horizon of the theo-drama becomes the horizon from which to understand the current world.

At the same time, Vanhoozer in practice allows that Gadamerian processes take place as the church appropriates Scripture, even as he argues for a single theo-dramatic horizon. He argues that the same Spirit is at work in the church now as then, but, following Hector’s account, this occurs through the process of tradition, not instead of it. He claims that we can

---

42 Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 347.
43 Ibid., 346–7.
44 Ibid., 347.
45 Ibid., 331.
46 Ibid., 330.
make the biblical genres our own through participating in their “communicative practice,” a claim that implies a Gadamerian fusion of horizons: we first recognise the otherness of foreign genres in the Bible, and then we can begin to make sense of them and so expand our literary horizons to encompass the Bible, though our sense of them cannot replicate the original hearers’ sense. Finally, he argues for doctrine as creative understanding. This is based on “meaning potential,” by which he means that apparently novel contextual interpretation of the Scriptures is bringing out meaning that was already there in potential in the canonical text. In other words, the canon of the Bible, like Gadamer’s literary texts, has inexhaustible meaning which is mined by the church from its various historical horizons.

This tension in his exposition partly reflects a tension between the inevitability of an historical process of tradition in interpretation, and the Protestant need for Scripture to able to speak “against the tradition of its interpretation.” This has particular application for our concern, since the best tradition for one context can become an obstacle to understanding the Scriptures in another context. However, this is not a tension in Gadamer’s proposal, since the Sache is well able to speak against its tradition. This happens precisely as the tradition is used, that is, as prejudgments are tested through the process of interpretation, as we discussed earlier. In particular, Gadamer notes the value of horizons with some “distance” from the horizon in which the prejudgment was developed; importantly for us, this distance is “not only temporal.” What Gadamer denies is that there is a supra-cultural rationality which can arbitrate this process: any “emancipatory reflection” that frees us from distortions is itself part of the historical hermeneutical process. Vanhoozer’s legitimate concern is not with Gadamer’s general proposal but with binding precedent such as is found in some legal traditions. This concern is not a simple Catholic-Protestant divide. Warfield’s sense of

47Ibid., 331.
48Ibid., 352.
49Ibid., 330.
50Gadamer, Truth and Method, 376 n.44.
51Ibid., 570–3.
progress in assured results has much the same effect as binding dogmas for our purposes: tradition incrementally developed in one context is taken to apply in a new context; the set of questions which the text answers in the old context become dead questions in the new. Local understanding needs to become a tradition in order to truly succeed, just as new concepts succeed when they are used implicitly. This tradition will grow over time in a Gadamerian way, but each new situation needs to return in principle to the Christotope, in whose horizon all communities of believers find themselves.

More generally, we propose that Vanhoozer’s tension comes from the necessary difference between two ways of approaching the Bible, namely as mythos and ethos. Vanhoozer’s Christotope is the heart of the theo-drama as story, as mythos. The task of contextualisation is grasping this meaning from within one’s own horizon, as Gadamer described for historical objects, which is consistent with our proposal that mythos fits within the category of Bevans’s translation models. We have already suggested that this involves two aspects, namely theological references that anchor the theo-dramatic web of meaning, and local coherence that shapes the web itself. What the theological references need to be is determined by a construal of the mythos, of the theo-dramatic story as a whole. As Vanhoozer puts it, “The core doctrines of Christianity are those that identify the principal *dramatis personae* (e.g., Trinity, incarnation) and those that clarify critical turning points in the theo-drama (e.g., creation, fall, redemption, consummation).”\(^{52}\) This construal is objective in the ontological sense: the degree to which a construal gets what God has done in Christ right is independent of who makes the construal. Its criterion is the mythos of the Scriptures, not the local horizon. However, this does not imply epistemological objectivity, that there is a method that guarantees a correct construal. Rather, we find here the irreplaceable role of theological traditions. Preaching and teaching the gospel inherently involves making such a construal, and as a believing community is formed, the theological tradition it shares with other parts of the body of Christ becomes a significant aspect of the local church’s answerability to Christ

\(^{52}\)Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 324 n.50.
through the Spirit, as we proposed earlier.\textsuperscript{53} This brings the benefit to the theological tradition of more rigorous testing of its prejudices (e.g., about the shape of the mythos) as they are tested in a new horizon.

However, the mythos is always conveyed in the midst of various human horizons and the various life situations of different genres. The implications of the mythos in these contexts is what we are referring to as ethos. As well as general principles such as the Ten Commandments, we have case law, proverbs, stories of people being faithful or unfaithful, and the laments and praises of the righteous in the midst of the wicked. That is, biblical ethos is contextual; even the general principles can be recontextualised, as Jesus does in the Sermon on the Mount with the Ten Commandments.\textsuperscript{54} Furthermore, as we have argued, the divine decision to limit the Torah to the time of Jesus’ coming means that the ethos of the biblical contexts is not mandated, and the gospel requires fleshing out in terms of local ethos. As ethos, then, the various texts of the canon fit with Gadamer’s account of literary works, which, as human illocutions, they are. Gadamer’s account implies that new horizons bring about new variations in those aspects of the human condition which the text is about. Thus, the Truth that comes out in the dialogue of interpretation shifts and grows over time, because the reality which it is about is not identical. Similarly, in every new cultural situation, faithful theo-dramatic performance brings out (incrementally) new truth about the human condition before God. The local performance of a Francis of Assisi enlarges the meaning of the Great Commandment to love one’s neighbour; the local performance of a Hudson Taylor enlarges the meaning of the Great Commission to take the gospel into all the world.\textsuperscript{55} The variety of authentic theo-dramatic performance found in thousands of different cultural contexts attests to the inexhaustible richness of the Christian form of life generated by the Scriptures. This supports our proposal that ethos fits an anthropological model of

\textsuperscript{53}See page 168.

\textsuperscript{54}Ibid., 331 n.73.

\textsuperscript{55}Ibid., 451–7.
contextualisation. It is not objective but relative to the local context; its criterion is its fit with both the mythos and the local context.\textsuperscript{56}

### 9.4 The biblical Sache as myth

We now need to bring this account into dialogue with traditional Toraja horizons. The closest Toraja equivalents to the biblical texts are the extensive poems used in rituals.\textsuperscript{57} This is firstly because they are considered to be of divine origin. Second, since they constitute much of the invariant parts of a ritual, they have a fixed form, and lack the contextual markers of immediate speech.\textsuperscript{58} Third, the Toraja mythos is found there, in the stories about the gods and first humans which explain and define the present.

If a connection is to be found with Vanhoozer’s account, it is clear that it will not lie with a conception or experience of double agency discourse. This is because the ritual oral texts have only a single agency, namely the divine agency of the high god who gave the texts to the first humans.\textsuperscript{59} Furthermore, this divine communication is largely addressed not to humans but rather to spiritual entities, such as the field spirits invited to play in the Maro festival.\textsuperscript{60} What is expected to be taken up by humans is the aluk sola pemali, the system of ritual rules and tabus.

More promising is the Christotope as a parallel to the Toraja myths. On Gadamer’s account, for a culture that lacks historical consciousness, myth appears to provide a fixed horizon that encompasses the culture, though the reality is that humans are historical and so

---

\textsuperscript{56}Ibid., 258–9.

\textsuperscript{57}For transcriptions of Toraja ritual texts see, e.g., H. van der Veen, Merok Feast of the Sa’Dan Toradja (’s-Gravenhage: M. Nijhoff, 1965); Jeannine Koubi, Rambu Solo’ = ‘La Fumée Descend’: Le Culte Des Morts Chez Les Toradja Du Sud (Paris: Editions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1982).


\textsuperscript{59}See page 102.

\textsuperscript{60}Compare ibid., 260–1.
their horizons are always moving.\(^{61}\) This is supported by Rappaport’s argument that myths and rituals do change over time through use (like concepts in use), but this happens too slowly to be culturally perceptible.\(^{62}\) Gadamer’s account replaces the transcendent mythical horizon with an enlarged perspective that comes through consciousness of the “one great horizon” that encompasses past and present horizons.\(^{63}\) This perspective remains immanent no matter how large the perspective, and as history is inherently open-ended, its meaning can never be complete. This is perhaps why the transcendent Word in Gadamer’s account of Scripture needed to be an horizon-free Word. Vanhoozer recovers an encompassing horizon whose meaning is in principle complete in part by appealing to the final act of the theo-drama, the return of Jesus Christ to complete what was begun in the resurrection.\(^{64}\) However, his fundamental strategy is to argue that the theo-drama has a different conception of time and space to modern mechanical time and linear cause and effect, drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of chronotopes, which analyse different such conceptions inscribed in literature.\(^{65}\) What he describes in the Christotope shares with myth the conception of a fixed horizon which encompasses and defines the local horizon. If the Bible is likely to be understood as a kind of myth in traditional Toraja culture, Vanhoozer’s conception of the Christotope shows that this is a fair first approximation.

We suggest, then, that for a Toraja context, the Sache of the Bible is best understood mythically. This is what can be grasped from within a traditional context with little historical consciousness. That God chiefly addresses humans in that Word, and does so in a variety of historical situations, is something that will be learned as the biblical stories are learned. This is the opposite order to the moderns that Vanhoozer is addressing. For us, the Bible as a means of God speaking personally is more easily able to be grasped than a quasi-mythical


\(^{62}\)See page 180.

\(^{63}\)Ibid., 303.


\(^{65}\)Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 345.
chronotope. The centrality of Christ as the horizon of human history is learned as the Word is paid attention to.

If the Bible is to be understood mythically in Toraja, this means that it will be understood through ritual. Ritual is where, on Geertz’s account, a kind of fusion of horizons occurs, though these are not Gadamer’s historical horizons. In ritual, “the common-sense world . . . is now seen as but the partial form of a wider reality which corrects and completes it.”66 The local ethos is affected, as “[t]he moods and motivations a religious orientation produces cast a derivative, lunar light over the solid features of a people’s secular life.”67 This fusion happens semiotically: “In a ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turn out to be the same world.”68

A key characteristic of this process is that it does not require reflection, and is therefore pragmatic rather than sincere. The fusing of the empirical and mythical worlds happens through their association in the single set of symbolic forms, not as a result of thinking about the nature of reality. The moods and motivations that form the ethos are understood as dispositions, and Geertz chooses an account of dispositions that is agnostic about the degree of self-awareness implied in them.69 The mythical horizon becomes a part of reality, believed in in the sense that bamboo is believed in in building a bridge, or certain plants are believed in in treating a wound, that is, as practical realities, not philosophical certainties (or speculations). These are all implicit processes. Of course, the implicit can become explicit. Rappaport’s hierarchy of the general conceptions includes postulates, axioms, and rules.70 In the Toraja case, these are implied in the myths, but, since the axioms and rules directly condition social behaviour, they will tend to be made explicit, as Rappaport’s nomenclature suggests. However, even as explicit axioms and rules, their importance lies in helping the

67Ibid., 124.
69Ibid., 96.
70See page 180.
community navigate spiritual realities; there is no virtue as such in believing the conceptions. This pragmatic orientation is summarised by one writer as follows: “One does not believe in ritual: one practices it. One does not believe in myths: one lives by them. One does not believe in symbols: one uses them.”71

This pragmatic orientation is reflected in Rappaport’s argument that participation in a ritual indexes acceptance of the social order implied in the ritual rather than belief in the conceptions. However, he does also argue that without some level of belief, a ritual order cannot last. Belief comes through the distinctive and powerful affective experiences—the experience of the numinous—that occur within the rituals.72 In the maro ceremony, these are not just the frenzy of the chanting and possession, but also the grief raised by the mention of recently deceased ancestors near the start of the chanting, which Coville sees helping to open people up to other intense affects.73 These experiences occur within the rituals that, due to a limited historical horizon, can only be plausibly understood as deriving from the gods.74 This combination of powerful experience and unquestionable tradition creates the “holy”,75 which stands at the head of a conception of overall order, making it appear to be correct, necessary and natural.76 “Natural” implies belief that can function implicitly without the need for reflection or ethical decision.

Christianity cannot be entirely natural in this sense. This is firstly because the mythos is historical. This has implications for the nature of belief: history cannot be believed implicitly. The Toraja field spirits show themselves in the maro ceremony, and the crops grow in the

74See page 109.
75Rappaport, Ritual and Religion, §12.3.
76Ibid., §12.10.
following year; performing the ceremony is a matter of seeing the connection as part of the ritually-created natural order of things. Jesus’ death and resurrection are historical events that cannot be shown but only testified to. Accepting or rejecting testimony not only requires explicit reflection, it has an ethical dimension. Believing the testimony, holding fast to the testimony despite loss through doing so, commending that testimony to others all reflect an evaluation of the worth of the testimony and those giving it.  

Second, Christianity’s ethos includes an irreducibly non-pragmatic component, best exemplified in Jesus’ call to his disciples to take up their cross, a call whose metaphorical meaning did not preclude literal application, as Jesus showed (Mark 8:34). Performing the *Maro* ceremony has an ethical aspect: it is done with a vision of the common good and with respect to the ancestors who gave the ritual. This connects, of course, with the Old Testament vision of prosperity, but in the New Testament, the promise of land is pushed out to the eschatological new creation, which is experienced now in such non-tangible benefits as forgiveness of sins, freedom from this present evil age (Gal 1:4), and life in the Spirit (Gal 3:14). Again, this is a vision of the good which cannot be learned implicitly.

What fulfills the function of ritual for the theo-drama is the Scriptures. The fusion of the world as lived and imagined is presented theo-dramatically in the canonical texts, as the same stories convey both God’s action and human response. Thus, Vanhoozer talks about “being apprenticed to the canon.” Immersion in the variety of concrete situations in the biblical canon in which the theo-drama is performed produces practical Christian wisdom—dispositions to act in line with the theo-drama and local context. It is there that the capacities for theological judgment are “formed and transformed by the ensemble of canonical practices that constitute Scripture.” This includes the various genres whose “distinct communicative practice[s]” can be learned through engagement with the Scriptures.  

---


78 Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 331.
Clearly, this is a conscious process involving reflection and decision, and for a literate subset of the Christian community, this has been a process that can happen at least partly outside the communal ritual of the Christian meeting. However, Vanhoozer himself does not put this focus on the biblical text in opposition to ritual, including the symbolic forms of the sacraments, arguing that “Word and sacraments alike insert us into the flow of theo-dramatic reality.”\textsuperscript{79} In Christian liturgy, with the Bible and sacraments as the chief symbolic forms, the theo-dramatic reality becomes our reality.

We are thus proposing that for traditional Toraja, the object of understanding is the Bible understood as myth with its embedded ethos, which will engage with the community of faith in the dialogue of understanding through ritual. This does not preclude engaging with the Bible outside of ritual, and we have assumed literacy as at least a resource available to the local community. If ritual is seen as the most natural context for the Bible to take effect, the use of the Bible is one of the variant aspects of the ritual, and therefore requires reflection and decision. What follows is a summary of some suggestions of how understanding will take shape in this kind of context.

First, some of the ethos and mythos is able to be made natural. The apostle Paul regards the eternal power and divinity of God as natural, evident to all (Rom 1:20). Prayer for the sick and other needs related to human flourishing connect with this general understanding reflected in the perlocutionary aims of traditional rituals. The local dispositions that will be used to express the Christian ethos can be promoted implicitly in ritual. We saw some examples of this in Schrauwers’s analysis of post-Kruyt Poso.\textsuperscript{80} Rappaport’s argument about participation indexing acceptance of a social order applies equally to the Christian congregation. Lastly, and importantly, that God in the theo-drama addresses the community of believers can be conveyed implicitly in a form of liturgy that enacts a conversation with God.\textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{79}Ibid., 412.
\textsuperscript{80}See page 128.
\textsuperscript{81}See page 108.
CHAPTER 9. THE BIBLE IN A RITUAL CULTURE

Second, in terms of the historical nature of the mythos, we have noted that ritual reference to God’s revelation in history works provided the theo-dramatic references are intended in the ritual.\textsuperscript{82} We have seen how the sacraments condense the theo-drama and insert the participants into it.\textsuperscript{83} We have argued that narrative theology can perform the regulating function of criticising what seems natural, but which does not fit with the theo-drama.\textsuperscript{84} We have also suggested the use of local metaphors as one way of ensuring local coherence.

Third, Vanhoozer’s conception implies bringing the mythos into dialogue with the local ethos in an inductive way, building up from the concrete stories, proverbs, and other genres. This leaves room for enactive theological representations and ethical principles conveyed in concrete communal rules. In terms of coherence, we have shown at points the possibility of interpretations that are oriented towards a relationalist rather than individualist culture.

\subsection*{9.5 Conclusion}

We began this chapter arguing that Scripture is essential to the use of theological concepts, as it records both the references to God’s action and revelation that becomes the anchor of theological meaning, and provides a snapshot of the use of theological concepts by the apostles. We saw that Gadamer’s concept of tradition was compatible with Hector’s concept of precedent use, and therefore proceeded on the hypothesis that Gadamer’s account of hermeneutics would help us address our issue of local interpretation. This clarified our task as developing local prejudgments that will enable questions that are real to be asked and answered from the text. The questions arise from the text in that they lie behind it and are answered in it, but they arise in a form that make sense and whose answers matter within the local culture.

The rest of the chapter concerned the nature of the Bible, to address which we drew on the notion of a hermeneutical object, a \textit{Sache}, namely that in relation to which the questions and

\textsuperscript{82}See page 166.

\textsuperscript{83}See page 174.

\textsuperscript{84}See page 182.
answers arise. We noted Gadamer’s account of historical events which grow in meaning over time, legal texts where binding precedents add to its hermeneutical substance, and literary texts where the interpreter’s horizon brings out aspects of the text’s inexhaustible meaning. We also noted his argument that Scripture does not partake in the hermeneutical process, being divine address of a gospel which only makes sense to individual faith, not in any human horizon.

This provided a framework to begin developing a hermeneutical account of the Bible appropriate for Toraja in dialogue with Vanhoozer’s theo-dramatic account of Scripture. This casts Scripture as double agency discourse: the ‘flesh’ of Scripture is the human illocutions, what the human authors say about the Sache to others; God then takes up these illocutions to perform divine illocutions. This happens as the illocutions that portray God’s saving acts grow in meaning as the theo-drama develops; and through the variety of canonical texts that gives depth to theological concepts. This divine use finds its focus in the Christotope, the time and space of Christ’s ministry and work; as with theological concepts, both before and after find their meaning there. This implied that the theo-drama forms an horizon from which the local horizon can be viewed, an horizon whose meaning is already complete.

We observed a tension in this account, since Vanhoozer acknowledges Gadamerian processes of tradition at work in the Church, but wants to argue that the Christotope is already complete in meaning. We noted that, on Gadamer’s account, the process of understanding continually tests the prejudgments of tradition, allowing the Sache to speak against tradition. Nevertheless, the importance of the Christotope’s completeness of meaning is that in new contexts, we are free to return to the Christotope without being bound by traditions that have developed for another context.

Our own resolution to this tension was to return to our distinction between mythos and ethos. The mythos, which focusses on the Christotope, is independent of the local horizon. Of course, this is grasped from local horizons, aided by theological traditions which give us a construal of the shape of the theo-drama. The prejudgments of those traditions are in turn tested in the new horizons. The ethos is conveyed in the variety of historical situations
and forms of life reflected in different genres. We thus argued that biblical texts, as human illocutions, function as literary texts, whose substance grows over time as each new context brings out new ways of being theo-dramatically faithful.

We then brought this account to bear on the Toraja ritual texts that most approximate the Bible in function. We saw that Vanhoozer’s double agency discourse does not connect at all with those texts, but that the Christotope functions like Toraja myth, providing an encompassing horizon for the empirical world. This led us to look at ritual, since that is where a non-historical fusion of mythos and ethos occurs. The process that Geertz describes is implicit, and so functions to make the myth natural. Here the historical nature of the Christotope required us to see that Christian belief includes a component of reflection and ethical decision, and that some of its ethical demands similarly require more than the implicit shaping of dispositions.

Hence we returned to Vanhoozer’s account of the Bible as the place where myth and ethos fuse in the stories and other genres. However, he also describes how ritual becomes a vehicle for that to happen. We thus construed Vanhoozer’s Christotope as myth with embedded ethos, with the dialogue of understanding occurring chiefly through ritual. We concluded with suggesting that ritual can function implicitly for those aspects of the Bible that are already natural in local terms, and drew on previous findings from this section, such as using local metaphors to understand the mythos, sacraments to convey participation in the theo-drama, and the possibility of drawing out different values for different contexts.

This concludes our explorations of an approach to theological representation and an understanding of the hermeneutical nature of the Bible itself in which the flexibility we have argued is needed for contextual interpretation does not undermine a realist understanding of the truth of the Bible. In the final Part, we will apply this account to the process of interpretation itself, and develop and apply some concrete prejudgments for mythos and ethos in the book of Hebrews for a Toraja context.
Part IV

Hebrews in Toraja Perspective
Chapter 10

Interpreting the Bible in a Ritual Culture

10.1 Introduction

We have now come to the point where we need to give some substance to the development of local prejudgments in order to enable understanding of the letter to the Hebrews in a traditional Toraja context. If we have emphasised the *Sache* of the Scriptures as the criterion of interpretation, in its two modes of mythos and ethos, our presupposition is that this understanding can only happen through engagement with the text of the Bible. Gadamer uses incarnation as an analogy to describe the relation of thought and word, but Vanhoozer argues that the miracle is that that Word became flesh, that divine discourse occurs in and through the human illocutions of the Bible.\footnote{Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (1st ed.; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 23–24.} If our account gives a strong role to the divine illocutions, this is not to deny that the divine discourse occurs through the text, that the claim of most biblical texts is to stand at particular points in theo-dramatic history, and that some texts (like Paul’s Corinthian correspondence) are very concrete communicative events.

This Part focusses on interpreting mythos and ethos in the letter to the Hebrews. The issues that will be covered can be seen in the writer’s exhortations at the end of the central
section of Hebrews, ch. 10:19–25, a passage which arguably expresses the writer’s central purposes in the letter. The content of the exhortations is to draw near to God (v. 22), to hold fast to public confession of Christ (v. 23), and to practice mutual encouragement towards good works through regular fellowship (v. 24–25). As for most of the New Testament, these commands are not specific advice for a particular circumstance. In each case, the writer assumes a local culture (including aspects that may be specific to the Christian community) in order to be able to live out its commands, as we have consistently argued. At the same time, what is common to these exhortations is the constant grounding in the mythos of the theo-drama. Drawing near to God is based on Jesus’ purifying blood; holding fast to one’s confession is based on God’s faithfulness; encouraging one another is based on the coming judgment and salvation (since the Day of ch. 10:25 is presumably connected with post-mortem judgment in ch. 9:27, which will be a day of salvation for Jesus’ followers in ch. 9:28).

This chapter will begin by giving an account of the relation of mythos and ethos as thick description. We then focus on the the merging of local ethos with the theo-drama, which will enable us to give an account of genuine Christian agency which does not require the self-grounding promoted by the Protestant semiotic ideology.

10.2 Approaching the text: thick description

Thick description was Geertz’s conceptualisation of ethnography, of the effort to make intelligible the actions (including speech acts) of people in a culture. He explains thick description with an example from Gilbert Ryle comparing an involuntary twitch of the eyes, a wink, a fake wink, and a practice fake wink. The thinnest description is of the eye movement as such, with no element of human intention involved. A thick description includes the meaning

that is added by personal intention, the illocutions of the act. The anthropologist produces a text which not only describes actions as a camera might record them, but also attempts to describe the meanings which those actions express, meanings which may well be multi-layered. Since those meanings are shared, these descriptions are also entry points into the local culture as a web of meaning.

His account makes the Gadamerian point, all the more obvious when very different cultures are involved, that anthropologists do not understand as locals but as anthropologists. Thick description aims to elucidate the local meanings that make sense of the actor’s action, but does so in a way that makes sense to the anthropologist.³ Less Gadamerian at first glance is Geertz’s insistence on theory, without which anthropology would not be a science. Anthropologists use existing anthropological theories to guide their observations and help explain them; they then modify those theories based on the new observations arising out of the thick descriptions of their ethnographic labours.⁴ Geertz likens this to diagnosis, where the doctor notes precisely what is unusual in the patient, so as to work out what theoretical framework to apply.⁵ This account of anthropological theories makes them a kind of complex concept enabling aspects of cultural reality to be noticed and engaged with. As with concepts, the (provisional) confirmation of such a theory is not in its predictive power (as with natural sciences), but in its continuing capacity to bring understanding. That is, they are primarily hermeneutical rather than explanatory. In Gadamerian terms, anthropological theories are reflections on and formalisations of questions which have opened up unfamiliar cultures to understanding, and may do so again.

We are thus characterising biblical interpretation by analogy with thick description. This analogy works (and breaks down) differently at the two levels of mythos and ethos. Understanding the theo-dramatic mythos is necessarily a matter of the divine illocutions in Scripture, exploring how God uses the different parts of Scripture to provide a thick descrip-

⁴Ibid., 23–25.
⁵Ibid., 26.
tion of the Christotope. Understanding the theo-dramatic ethos requires equal attention to the human illocutions of Scripture (both those made by the texts and those contained in the texts), since these provide the concrete case studies whose thick description will train the local believing community in theo-dramatic performance. We will look more closely at each in turn.

Geertz’s account of thick description suggests the kind of fusion of horizons that we saw with the study of history, that is, making sense of something foreign, rather than the more existential fusion of horizons involved in reading great literature. As we have indicated, this characterises grasping the mythos. By analogy with anthropological theory, one of the goals of biblical interpretation is the formulation of concepts that open up the local community’s understanding of the theo-drama. Such understandings are indeed not predictive but hermeneutical. Their usefulness is indicated firstly by their ability to make sense of other parts of the theo-drama, and this inevitably involves their modification. As with Geertz’s illustration of diagnosis, it the odd or surprising aspects of a biblical story or confession of faith, relative to the interpreting community, that most expose the hermeneutical power or lack thereof of their existing theological concepts. This is part of the process of redemption of theological concepts that Hector identified, a process that takes place in each context of interpretation, rather than definitively in the march of theological progress. At the same time, these theological concepts need to help the local church make sense of its world; this was the missiological failure highlighted in Hiebert’s discussion of the excluded middle. Where the analogy with thick description fails is that understanding the mythos is exclusively hermeneutical. Anthropological theories, dealing as they do with a multitude of cultures, can look beyond understanding local meanings to correlations with biological, social, and ecological contexts in order to place those meanings to some extent in the world of cause and effect. However, the theo-drama is the expression of the one God who acts in divine freedom and created the world of cause and effect; it is a message to be understood rather than explained.
At the level of ethos, thick description of human action in the Bible connects those actions with the theo-drama, while thick description of the local culture enables correspondences to the theo-dramatic actions to be made, in ways we will discuss in more detail below. We have already assumed the value of explanatory theories in relation to Western and Toraja cultures.\(^6\) However, the focus on the human illocutions of the Bible means that explanatory theories have a place in interpretation of the biblical ethos, too. The significant presence of historical works in both Old and New Testaments gives some support to this, in that such works take seriously the world as a world of cause and effect, of personal, social, and political explanation, alongside the divine interventions which gave theo-dramatic meaning to that history. We have drawn on such theories in relation to the cultures of Bible times in part to de-centre Western interpretative assumptions. Such theories can further provide starting points for interpretation in non-Western contexts. For example, we will make particular use of deSilva’s Hebrews commentary, which looks at the letter through the grid of the social system of patronage and the cultural system of honour-shame which lay behind it.\(^7\) However, all such theories are brought to the Bible to be tested by the hermeneutical illumination they bring; explanation remains the servant of understanding.

What the biblical canon provides is a range of historical and cultural contexts within which people lived out—well or poorly—some aspect of the theo-drama, shown in stories and expressed in a variety of other genres. Historical research of the Bible as practised in the modern era emphasises the difference of historical and cultural context, but the thick description we are describing places all of them in the one theodramatic context. The different cultures and eras reflected in the Bible are therefore parallel to sub-groups within a single, but complex, culture, that bring out different, even contradictory, aspects of the

---

\(^6\)For a detailed account of using the approaches of various social disciplines to generate thick descriptions of Western culture in the context of doing theology, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Charles A. Anderson, and Michael J. Sleasman, *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends* (Cultural exegesis; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2007).

culture with greater clarity, but are related because they share the same cultural space. The faith of Abraham and the faith of David or the New Testament believer are not related as instances of a universal human phenomenon, but as different expressions of the one theo-dramatic reality, albeit and importantly in different stages of realisation. The very different cultural and historical contexts reflected in the Bible are related through sharing in the one storyline, including prophecy and fulfilment, patterns of action which reflect earlier episodes (typology), and, at the level of the writings which convey these unifying elements, extensive reference to earlier writings (intertextuality).\footnote{For an overview of salvation history, typology, promise and fulfilment, and the question of continuity and discontinuity connected with Christ’s coming in biblical scholarship, see David L. Baker, \textit{Two Testaments, One Bible: The Theological Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments} (n.p.: InterVarsity Press, 2010).} This reflects the most obvious difference between ethnography and biblical interpretation: biblical interpreters are not participant observers but rather participants. Their aim is to help the local church play their part in the theo-drama within whose horizon they are included by faith.

The analogy with ethnography provides, in comparison, say, to Warfield’s analogy with astronomy, a picture of theological concepts arising out of engagement with the text in a way that depends in part on the culture of the interpreter, and whose validity is found in continued use, rather than deductively. For the mythos, the story is the foundation, on top of which various kinds of theology can be built. For the ethos, the human responses to the theo-drama are the reality, on top of which various ethical frameworks can be developed. Vanhoozer expresses this in terms of the biblical canon being a training ground for theo-dramatic practice;\footnote{Vanhoozer, \textit{The Drama of Doctrine}, 331.} we might also say that the canon provides a fund of precedent uses to be applied faithfully, but not necessarily predictably, in new contexts. As we have argued, these interpretations succeed when they are able to operate at an implicit level. For mythos, this means that the theo-drama makes ultimate sense of the local world. For ethos, this happens as the horizon of the local ethos is expanded by its fusion with the theo-dramatic horizon.
CHAPTER 10. INTERPRETING THE BIBLE IN A RITUAL CULTURE

This account provides for cultural flexibility in three ways. First, it allows for multiple divine illocutions in the one act: at the simplest level, what is a warning for one group (e.g., the oppressors), can function as an encouragement for another (e.g., the oppressed). These are quite distinct illocutions, though the propositional content they share will limit the variety of illocutions, but not, in general, to one. Second, as we have discussed at length, the pragmatic account of this propositional content implies that it is able to shift in meaning in accordance with its contexts of use. These shifts are smaller, since they circle around the reality the content is about. Third, the explanations built on top of the Story and stories will be local explanations employing local coherence.

In considering how thick description might work in biblical interpretation, we can distinguish three kinds of multiplicity. Ryle’s example described illocutions that were layered—practising and faking are ‘second-order’ activities that operate on actions that are themselves meaningful, and thus practising and faking cannot stand on their own. Illocutions can also be thick in parallel: I fill in a form on a webpage and 1) help my favourite charity and 2) reduce my tax. These two intentions are quite distinct; I can help a charity without reducing my tax and vice versa. Illocutions may also be intrinsically thick, as parts of wider social processes: in filling out my ballot paper I am voting for a candidate, the candidate’s party, and at a wider level again supporting the system of democracy, and all that entails about the direction of my country (if it is Indonesia, for example). Here, the meanings are related as part of the practice of democracy, but increasingly broad in scope.

No doubt, the thickest event in the Bible is Jesus’ death on a cross, where a man hangs on a piece of wood (the thin description), as innocent victim, as accused by God, as servant King, as Passover sacrifice; four parallel thick descriptions. On each of those illocutions are layered transformations of the human condition, of the meaning of suffering, justification, honour, and sacrifice for others. These illocutions are part of the broader meaning of the theo-drama, being the turning point prophesied in the Old Testament in the fulfilment of God’s purposes.

10Nicholas P. Wolterstorff, “Authorial Discourse Interpretation,” Authorial Discourse Interpretation 80.
At the simplest level, the possibility of parallel illocutions implies the possibility of different yet faithful contextual interpretations. The challenge of the Sermon on the Mount to individuals with buffered selves and to honour-shame communities is not exactly the same (it is also not radically different), and our argument is that the divine intention covers both cultural contexts, each according to their need. The plurality of metaphors of the atonement testifies that God was doing a number of things in Jesus’ death and resurrection. Contextual interpretation works because the divine illocutions are richer than any one context can absorb and use.

Layering points to the integration of the ethos and mythos, among other things. Most of the Bible has human characters, or human authors, whose actions include an illocutionary layer of obedience or disobedience. Ryle actually mentions that obedience is a second-order activity, but genuine obedience in the Bible is itself the expression of a further illocutionary layer, namely faith in, or faithfulness to, the God of the theo-drama. Obedience looks back to what God has done to save, and forward to what God has promised, and reflects God’s character of justice and love. It is such thick action that counts as theo-dramatic performance, and the Bible provides a multitude of examples, more failures than successes overall, but with Jesus as the light at the centre. Thick descriptions of human action in the Bible enable the interpreter to go beyond the overly thin descriptions of moralism which simply try to replicate biblical examples. This enables local actions, which by construction are meaningful in local ways, to add various forms of obedience to their illocutionary thickness.

Thick description of divine action is what we have already described as narrative biblical theology, building up a coherent sense of the overarching story, and of the various roles or metaphors that characterise God’s actions. We have already indicated that a local church needs an existing theological tradition to provide the salient points of the story, but we have also indicated that those salient points require local coherence in order to form them into a coherent mythos. Our assumption is that the dramatic form of the theo-drama is accessible in most cultures, and certainly in cultures with myths. But how the story fits together will depend on local coherence.
10.3 Mismatched moral codes

The remainder of this chapter will focus on ethos. Ethos has a particular importance since it is the domain of values, and therefore of affect. As Geert Hofstede et al. puts it, values are “feelings with an added arrow indicating a plus and a minus side.”11 Affect also appears in Geertz’s account of religious cultural systems, since a function of the ethos is to make the mythos “emotionally convincing.”12 Ethos here covers “deeply felt moral and aesthetic sentiments,” that is, both ethical and non-ethical values.13 Similarly, Hofstede et al. distinguishes ethical and non-ethical values which together form value complexes: what people think is right, which he terms the “desirable,” and what people actually want, which he terms the “desired.”14

Our focus, however, is on the ethical. This is because, as we discussed earlier, theo-dramatic performance requires a level of explicit belief and non-pragmatic action.15 It is not able to operate solely by what Robbins perhaps overstates as “rigid cultural compulsion,”16 which includes actions that are naturalised by ritual in Rappaport’s sense. It therefore requires “conscious deliberation and considered action.”17 However, this does not nullify its affective aspect. Not to be able to use native ethical systems is to handicap the ability of a culture to appropriate the biblical message for itself.

We begin with a pair of articles analysing the three-culture scenario at the level of moral

---


13Ibid., 90.

14Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations Software of the Mind*, 28.

15See page 205.


17Ibid., 316.
codes. Moral codes are a reasonable first-approximation to an ethical cultural system, since they are its most salient aspect. Interpretation of rules, proverbs, or examples in the Bible are dealing with codes. In any culture, they argue, the moral demands of the Bible and those of the local culture have areas of agreement and disagreement. This becomes interesting when the third culture of the missionary is introduced. The missionary comes, on their scenario, with the intention of preaching the locals’ need for Jesus to forgive their sins. As evidence of this need, the missionary points out sins in the local community. The problem is, the moral codes of the missionary and local culture also have areas of agreement and disagreement. What is visible to the missionary, and therefore able to become examples of sin, is most likely to be behaviours that are acceptable to the local community; Robert Priest gives polygamy and chewing betel nut as examples. This means that the missionary fills the Christian concept of sin with content that does not connect with local moral frameworks, even though the missionary is using moral vocabulary. Furthermore, the prime example of a Christian believer is the missionary, who also does not hide behaviours which the locals find objectionable; Priest highlights Western concepts of ownership. Again, the moral model being presented does not connect with the local moral frameworks. To convey the potential affective power of this cultural mismatch, Priest presents a scenario of a Russian preacher coming to North America and, based on the frequent biblical commands to greet one another with a holy kiss, telling the males to repent of their lack of love and start kissing their male brothers in Christ.

The combined effect of this is that the call to convert to Christianity becomes a call to abandon the local ethos for that of the missionary. This becomes a major obstacle

---


19 Ibid., 309.

20 Ibid., 305.

21 Ibid., 307.

22 Romans 16: 16; 1 Cor 16: 20; 2 Cor 13: 12; 1 Th ch. 5: 26; 1 Pet 5: 14.

23 Ibid., 303.

24 Ibid., 304.
to Christianity’s reception, but it also has consequences for those who join the Christian community. We saw one possible consequence in Schrauwers’s analysis of the Poso after Kruyt, namely that the elite take on many aspects of the missionary ethos, so that the cultural divide is reproduced between the leadership and general membership of the church.

T. Wayne Dye notes another possible long term consequence: the converts learn the Bible for themselves, come to realise the ethnocentric bias of the missionaries, and form their own churches.25 In the shorter term, Dye points to “an inability to function independently” expressed in “a slavish obedience to everything the missionary suggests or does, including brushing one’s teeth and putting flowers on the dinner table.”26

Priest argues that this happens because the missionary, as a culturally conditioned human, has trouble differentiating the biblical moral code from his or her cultural code. This is not just that certain North American cultural values like punctuality have no specific biblical warrant.27 Rather, as he notes, “Christians learn biblical principles in the context of specific cultural meanings and conventions.”28 Local ethos does not just extend (or contend with) the biblical ethos, it also instantiates it. His example is stealing: modern culture defines ideas as property, so that plagiarism comes under the prohibition of theft; he contrasts this with the extensive and guilt-free use of others’ ideas in the early Church Fathers.29 This is much of the way towards an understanding of biblical ethical principles as pragmatic rather than essentialist propositions, meaningful in relation to a form of life rather than a fixed definition. This extends to the two authors’ solution to the problem, which is for the missionary to preach about emic sins, i.e., “behavior which falls short of cultural ideals,” and practice emic love, i.e., “behavior understood as love in that culture.”30 In other words, missionaries need to

26Ibid., 37.
27Ibid., 28.
29Ibid., 295.
relearn their ethical concepts in relation to the local culture, giving up the illusion that the biblical principles they have learned in their own culture contain fixed propositional content that captures the essence of the ethical reality they are about.

This raises the question of what forms the ‘aboutness’ that gives ethical concepts identity in the midst of their cultural flexibility. Vanhoozer characterises this in terms of fittingness. His term for the ‘slavish obedience’ described above is “wooden repetition.”\(^{31}\) Certain features of the missionary’s ethical concepts are taken across, namely what is imitable in terms of physical actions, but they are not actually relevant features which characterise the identity of the concept. This identity is found, Vanhoozer argues, in the illocution, what is being ethically intended in the action. Performing the same illocution in a different cultural context with its different network of connected meanings requires discerning what Vanhoozer calls “cross-modal” similarity.\(^{32}\) His example is where size (small to large) is mapped onto sound (soft to loud). Often such a cross-modal similarity is embedded in language, where, for example, low-high is used for height, pitch, mood, status, and other modes. We have already noted George Lakoff et al.’s argument that such correspondences are not only metaphoric, but indeed constituted by the metaphors, though he also made a case for why certain correspondences (such as status understood in terms of height) are found in many cultures.\(^{33}\) On this analogy, taking a neighbour’s chicken without permission and using someone’s ideas without acknowledgement are different modes of activity, but in both actions, the same intention of benefiting at the other’s expense can be discerned. Within certain cultural contexts, plucking a fruit from an orchard one is passing through and using someone’s ideas without acknowledgement in a sermon are considered to be legitimate uses of another’s property for the common good. The same ethical intention can be exercised in many different ways in many contexts. Cross-modal similarity provides an account of what it means to go on in the same way in a different cultural context.

\(^{31}\)Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 335.


\(^{33}\)See page 170.
As we have seen, the canon itself contains the kind of ethical complexity that provides a training ground for learning to apply illocutions in different contexts. The life of faith in the Bible is conveyed in pastoral, agricultural, and urban contexts, by elites, by the poor, and by those under persecution. The apostle Paul can take Abraham’s trust in God’s promise to give him a son in his and his wife’s old age and see the same illocution of trust in the Christian’s belief in Jesus’ resurrection (Rom 4:20–24); Jesus can take several of the Ten Commandments and apply them to the unspoken illocutions conveyed in the challenge and response of Jewish male culture. Even more surprisingly, the whole system of Mosaic rituals and tabus enacts illocutions that turn out to be enactable by faith in Jesus and living by the Spirit, as the apostle Paul argues at length in his letter to the Galatians.

These last two examples point to our central issue, as they are often understood not just as a reinterpretation of code, but as a change in ethical system from one based in ritual and external observance to one focussed on the heart. If so, a genuine Christian ethical system will focus on interiority. We have already noted two examples of the difficulties this can generate. This is not surprising; if a mismatch in ethical code obscures the theo-dramatic message, we would expect the same of the more subtle mismatch of ethical systems.

### 10.4 Mismatched ethical systems

One approach to this issue is to look at conscience. As Priest puts it, “Conscience is psychologically and spiritually at the heart of an individual’s awareness of the need of salvation, at the heart of an individual’s initial response to God, and at the heart of an individual’s ongoing spiritual life and mental health.” This expresses a key theo-dramatic point: Jesus died for sins, and joining with his movement involves repentance, turning away from sin (this

---

34 See page 201.

35 See page 71.

36 See page 61 and page 119.

is a basic teaching according to Heb 6:1). This implies at least the ability to apply moral concepts to oneself. Here we are following the meaning of the Greek term usually translated “conscience” (συνείδησις), whose basic meaning is consciousness of something. Used absolutely, it meant consciousness of moral failure, with an appropriate moral affect. We will take that as a minimal definition of conscience; our question is whether such an understanding of conscience is sufficient for genuine theo-dramatic connection.

On our definition, conscience operates in any ethical system as the evaluation of the ethical substance. For Kruyt, conscience was awareness of the soul; this could only be an internal, individual process, as Priest’s quote above also appears to assume. For the relational Urapmin, conscience was the evaluation of relationships; this could not be entirely individual, since other parties are involved. For the Poso, conscience was the awareness of a problem leading to a decision about its cause. Here, the awareness of fault happened at a group level; whatever private opinions the offending parties may have had were not decisive until confirmed by the group. In some cases, the transgression may not even have been realised before the relevant procedure unearthed it.

These three patterns have received significant missiological attention recently under the labels of guilt, shame, and fear cultures. These take their name from the dominant moral affect rather than the ethical substance. Hannes Wiher, in his comprehensive study of conscience in missiological perspective, summarises the correlation between affect and culture in relation to guilt and shame. Psychologically, shame is a response to exposure of the self, while guilt concerns regret over a particular action. Individuals experience both, but usually experience one mode more strongly. Guilt-oriented consciences arise out of socialisation with clear values from a limited number of significant others, so that both moral principles

---

38 See page 44.

39 For more detail on this, see page 239 below.


and those significant others are introjected. Thus, the individual does not need the actual presence of significant others to be motivated by those moral principles. Shame-oriented consciences arise out of socialisation with many significant others and many mixed messages about moral principles. While moral principles are learned, this inhibits the introjection of those significant others, so that conformity is more dependent on their actual presence.\footnote{Ibid., 166.} Clearly enough, the socialisation of a guilt-oriented culture is more likely in an individualist society, and produces people who are less dependent on others for application of moral principles. Similarly, shame-orientation fits as part of a relationalist society. Wiher makes it clear that these are generalisations: both orientations are found in all cultures, and individuals are found on a continuum.\footnote{Ibid., 130.}

These two orientations require different approaches in order to overcome moral failure. Shame is oriented to relationships, and hence requires reconciliation through mediation in order to restore honour or harmony. Guilt is oriented to principles, and hence requires reparation in order to satisfy justice.\footnote{Ibid., 176.} To illustrate the difference, he tells a story of a local driver of a mission vehicle who is involved in an accident where a member of the public taken on illegally as a passenger dies and the vehicle is badly damaged.\footnote{Ibid., 27–28.} The mission, with their guilt-orientation, look for the driver to admit his fault and make some reparations. He acknowledges fault indirectly through mediators, as is appropriate in a shame culture, but this is seen as a lack of direct and frank acknowledgement of his part in the accident. So, the mission expresses forgiveness of what he has done, but does not reinstate him as a driver, which is what the reconciliation appropriate to their shame-oriented culture would entail. Eventually the driver leaves town to avoid the embarrassment of being asked about being fired.\footnote{Ibid., 176.}
Wiher argues that a similar mismatch occurs if justification by faith is presented in a guilt-oriented manner to shame-oriented people. The message of the reparation that Jesus’ death offers to God on behalf of human sinners so as to declare them not guilty connects with the felt need of a guilt-oriented conscience, but does not clearly convey to a shame-oriented conscience how moral restoration is achieved through Jesus’ death. On Wiher’s model, a genuine solution would involve a mediator who acknowledges the wrong-doing to God and arranges for the sinner to be received back into God’s community. This would emphasise justification as restoration of the sinner into God’s covenant community. There is biblical support for each of those elements, but it is quite possible to present Jesus’ death as reparation without referring to them. Jesus’ death then solves the problem of sin apart from the relational reconnection that modifies shame-oriented people’s behaviour in socially positive directions.

Wiher provides a comprehensive survey of material about shame and guilt, and also surveys the biblical material explaining salvation in terms of the movement from shame to honour as well as from guilt to innocence. He argues that the Bible is balanced, moving cultures which are unbalanced towards a proper appreciation of both justice and honour. However, he does not give a separate place to the kind of life-force system we saw with the Poso, seeing it rather as an aspect of animist shame-oriented cultures. Psychologically, the fear that is taken to be the dominant negative affect is also found in shame and guilt cultures. In shame cultures, a transgression does not produce shame until the transgression becomes known, but before that it can produce anxiety. Sociologically, power stands in opposition to shame, and so is part of the shame orientation. This seems plausible, as the examples

---

48 Ibid., 319.
49 Ibid., 176.
50 Ibid., 180.
51 Ibid., 332.
52 Ibid., 169.
53 Ibid., 147.
of fear cultures we have seen are all shame oriented.

However, we remember Kruyt’s observation that Christ became a part of the local culture precisely at the point of the life-force system, as the sacraments and prayer (of designated leaders) replaced previous means of power.\textsuperscript{54} While shame and fear, as well as honour and power, may well be related, the ethical systems we have studied have different scopes. Honour concerns human relationships, while power concerns a wider system which includes spiritual entities. Furthermore, different theo-dramatic metaphors address these different scopes. For example, from the one writing of Paul to the Ephesians, Jayson Georges notes pardon of sins addressing guilt (ch. 1:7), incorporation into God’s people addressing shame (ch. 1:5; ch. 2:19), and Christ’s rule above all spiritual powers (ch. 1:19–21) providing power to believers now (ch. 6:10–11).\textsuperscript{55} The assumption is that the aspects that correlate with cultural patterns will be more easily understood, or be more compelling. As we saw with Heb 9, the less accessible or compelling metaphors may also be transposed so as to make sense.\textsuperscript{56}

Arguably, this process occurs in the Bible itself. Gen 3 uses the relational categories of shame and expulsion from the garden, but Paul’s reflection on that in Rom 5:12–21 is dominated by legal language, based on the fact of the single command of Gen 2:17 (with its punishment in ch. 3:17) which points forward to the Mosaic Law (ch. 5:13–14). Similarly, the apostle Paul supports his declaration in Rom 10:10 of justification for whoever believes with a quote from Isa 28:16 that whoever believes will not be put to shame (quoted in Rom 10:11). This could be taken as evidence that one of the metaphors points directly to the reality, while the others are partial pictures of the same thing. Thus, the power language can be taken as a picture of the power of sin (Col 2:13–15 connects pardon and the defeat of the powers), or shame language as an emotionally vivid way of talking about guilt. However, these metaphors point to different aspects of the theo-drama. A not guilty

\textsuperscript{54}See page 121.

\textsuperscript{55}Georges, The 3D Gospel, 38.

\textsuperscript{56}See page 46.
verdict, incorporation into God’s people, and the defeat of cosmic evil are not the same thing, however closely related they may be. If the metaphors are transposed, there are theo-dramatic realities that need to preserved.

Given the affective power of the dominant local ethical system, we assume that the theo-dramatic metaphors will need to be transposed. We saw that in one direction with Heb 9, and Douglas Hollan notes that the Christians in his area still operated on a power ethic, and had not adopted an internalised Protestant conscience. Each ethical system, then, will have its strengths in terms of its ‘native’ level, and its weaknesses at other levels. Hiebert’s exploration of the ‘excluded middle’ demonstrates one potential weakness for a guilt-oriented conscience. The theo-dramatic strength of the guilt-oriented conscience is its consistency in holding to theo-dramatically grounded ethical illocutions that are not supported by the social or wider context, since moral evaluation does not depend on discovery. The shame-oriented conscience appears to open up a gap between transgression and the moral affect of shame, as the intervening anxiety is oriented to the problem of being exposed, not to the transgression itself. For the collective fear-oriented conscience, even the moral code itself can lack consistency. Before the effect of the transgression occurs, the transgressor(s) may be unaware that they have transgressed, or they may not be convinced that it will be counted as a transgression. Both these orientations are dependent, the latter entirely so, on the collective.

All these ethical systems therefore need theo-dramatic correction. This is not just an issue at conversion, since the local ethical system does not change easily. We are asking about the ability of an ethical system to sustain Christian maturity, and we take it that the consistency we have just described is indeed implicit in this. Wiher emphasises that both shame and guilt need to be oriented to God to function theo-dramatically, and so he argues that shame is able to be experienced in relation to God.58 This shame will necessarily be mediated through the

---


58 Wiher, Shame and Guilt, 280.
believing community, but since God is all-seeing, moral affect does not have to await human discovery. The fear-oriented conscience learns to fear God. Learning this from consequences, however, is problematic, given that the perfect Man suffered crucifixion, and his apostles were largely martyred. What the theo-drama provides is a different set of consequences which indicate God’s blessing. Hebrews presents the vitality of the congregation as evidence of its being blessed, learning from suffering as the sign of being genuine children of God, and finally presents a vivid picture of the eschatological hope that has permeated the letter.

Even with this theo-dramatic revision, these systems remain dependent to some degree on the collective. Our next stage in the argument is to provide an account of genuine theo-dramatic performance that allows for such dependence.

### 10.5 Genuine connection to the theo-drama

We begin with the general account of the connection of ethos and mythos presented in Geertz’s account of religious systems. Ritual presents both mythos and ethos in the one set of symbolic forms, and thereby forms dispositions. Dispositions are tendencies towards particular actions or affects in particular circumstances. Dispositions well describe what general exhortations, such as found in Hebrews, are aiming to produce, since they are not occasional commands requiring a single act of obedience, and continual conscious obedience of all the exhortations at once is impossible. Rather, Heb 10: 22 wants to instil a disposition to approach God regularly, especially when needing help (ch. 4: 16); ch. 10: 23 wants to instil a disposition to remain publicly loyal when there is pressure to do otherwise.

Geertz gives those actions or affects a meaning based on two kinds of dispositions. Motivations “are ‘made meaningful’ with reference to the ends towards which they are conceived to conduce” while moods “are ‘made meaningful’ with reference to the conditions from which they are conceived to spring.”

As we noted in the introduction, these two kinds of dispositions are intended as generalisations of the Christian concepts of worship and piety. Piety

---

59Geertz, “Religion As a Cultural System,” 87–125.
thus covers motivations directed towards loving God and neighbour; worship covers moods arising in response to the Christian message. The point for our purposes is that the mythos will feature in a sufficiently thick description of actions or affects arising from such dispositions, since they form part of the same religious cultural system. This is the most basic sense in which ethos and mythos are connected. It includes the variety of motivations that different ethical systems promote, for example that something is done in obedience to God, or to glorify God, or to be holy as God is holy.

The presence of these dispositions provides a minimal account of the genuineness of theodramatic performance. Intentional acts do not need to be dispositional to have meaning, but to count as religious or ethical they do. This is because religious or ethical acts are, by construction, aspects of socially reproducible cultural systems, which, again by construction, have regularities of behaviour. This provides theoretical support for the intuition that a once-off action that looks religious or ethical is not genuinely so: if an action or attitude is not regular, then it is not a part of a system, whether ethical or religious. As we noted, the three exhortations from Hebrews, along with most of the Bible, are aiming at inculcating dispositions, not once-off obedience.

However, this argument does not prove the need for consistency at an individual level. The Maro ceremony demonstrates a disposition for being possessed, but those who are possessed are not necessarily the same each year. Being possessed is also problematic as a personal intention. What we see here is a group intention expressed in holding the ceremony. In the local understanding, we further see intention in the spirits who choose how they will play with their human hosts during the time of possession. Because of these kind of phenomena, James Faubion, whose framework for ethical analysis we use below, argues that ethical intention (and, by implication, having dispositions) is not in general limited to individual agents.60

This makes sense within Geertz’s account because he draws on an account of dispositions that is purely functional (i.e., ontologically agnostic), that brings them “out of any dim and

---

inaccessible realm of private sensation into the...well-lit world of observables.” The dim realm he speaks of is precisely the inner realm that sincerity orientation requires to be in correspondence with words and actions. Sincerity orientation requires that this inner realm be accessible to the individual, and so a “high degrees of self-consciousness” is intrinsic to the Western concept of agency, so that the agent knows what they are doing. Furthermore, the need for correspondence means that dispositions need to be able to be changed in order to conform to the operative ethical code; changing words and actions is not sufficient. This makes ethical work a reflexive exercise, a work on one’s interior (however conceived), not just on one’s actions.

What sincerity orientation does is to replicate within the buffered self Geertz’s communal religious system. Each individual is meant to know the (in our case) theo-dramatic grounds and ends that inform their actions, and the self takes primary responsibility for the regulation of the dispositions that provide the continuity that constitutes genuine religious action, whatever external aids may be called upon for this task. Self-reflexive askēsis takes the place of ritual (though it may still take ritual form, of course). The conviction of the Protestant semiotic ideology is that only so can dispositions be formed that not only tend to theo-dramatic action, but do so reliably, ideally without fail. Taylor’s account of the rise of the buffered self in post-Reformation communities shows that this was not without empirical basis.

As a complete system, this would be an unbiblical picture. Paul’s ethical exhortation in the letter to the Ephesians begins by describing a religious-ethical system, which is not the individual but the body of Christ (Eph 4:11–16). This system grows to maturity in Christ, including not being swayed by false teaching, as every part of the body works together. The goal is a shared personal knowledge (ἐπίγνωσις) of Christ, but some are given the

---

responsibility of teaching, implying that an ability to make explicit theo-dramatic grounds and ends is not distributed uniformly. The implication is that the Christian community is the prime level at which the theo-dramatic system operates, not the buffered self. One could read Taylor’s account of the subsequent parting of the post-Reformation buffered self from its theo-dramatic moorings as an illustration of the dangers of the buffered self as an apparently self-sufficient ethical system.

This does not bypass the individual, but rather puts the individual in a wider context, and thereby provides space for ritual mode ethical systems. In Hebrews we see both aspects. Heb 5:14 uses common-place Hellenistic educational metaphors to promote an ideal of maturity in moral discernment developed through habit ($\tau \eta \nu \varepsilon \xi \iota \nu$). Individual dispositions are clearly in view here. At the same time, the necessity of mutual exhortation appears at two key junctures: ch. 10:24–25 that we have just seen, and ch. 3:13, where mutual exhortation is given as the preventive measure against the possibility of the individual’s heart hardening against God’s word.

Genuine theo-dramatic performance, then, is a matter of the exercise of dispositions ordered to the theo-drama. However, for this to count as genuine Christian agency does not require direct introspection of those dispositions, but rather knowing the theo-dramatic grounds and ends of one’s actions and attitudes, meanings which are given in the community of faith, as Hector’s account has shown us. It is in this sense that an agent needs to know what they are doing. This does require the ability to apply moral concepts to oneself, to give a moral evaluation of a behaviour or attitude in oneself. However, awareness of moral failure does not have to have its source in introspection, it can be pointed out by others. In Heb 10:24, this extends to a kind of corporate askêsis, as the members pay attention to ($\kappa \alpha \tau \alpha \nu o e i \nu$, used with Christ as the object in ch. 3:1) each other for the purpose of ($e i \xi$) provocation ($\pi a r o \xi u o m o \zeta$) to love and good works. This provocation includes good example

---

provoking emulation, and looking out for weaknesses in the other. This means that there is no minimum capacity for introspection required for genuine theo-dramatic performance beyond what may be required for normal human functioning. For example, Hollan et al. notes Toraja respondents who were reluctant to self-identify moral failings, and suggested asking others about them. If we take this at face value as evidence of an under-developed capacity for (or interest in) introspection, these respondents can nevertheless develop genuine theo-dramatic dispositions despite that lack, if they are willing to be learn from what those others say.

To test and develop this understanding of genuine agency we return to Kruyt’s description of the episode where his converts were not willing to make an individual decision about how much money to give to the church on a regular basis, but gave willingly when an amount was agreed on together. This was a question of agency for Kruyt, because genuine gospel liberty requires the ability to author one’s own application of moral principles, rather than depending on others.

The biblical background to Kruyt’s discussion is 2 Cor 8–9, where Paul encourages the Corinthian congregation to give generously to his collection for the saints in Jerusalem, currently experiencing poverty. Kruyt was alluding to 2 Cor 8:12 when he told them to give according to their means, but the question of agency finds its key expression in 2 Cor 9:7. Here Paul tells them to give according to a decision of the heart. That he is talking about individual decision is clear enough from his use of “each” (ἐκαστοῖς). This decision is opposed to compulsion, and further described as full of positive affect: God loves a cheerful giver. On reading this verse, what is prominent for the Western reader is the individuality of the decision, with cheerfulness being evidence that the individual decision was made freely, given that compulsion and cheerfulness are incompatible in an autonomous self. This reading is

65Ibid., 290.
67Hollan and Wellenkamp, Contentment and Suffering, 141.
68See page 118.
so obvious that it affects the translation of the term Paul uses to describe the affect which is contrary to the cheerful voluntary decision Paul is commending, namely λύπη. This word is usually glossed with ‘grief’, ‘sorrow’ or ‘affliction’, expressing mental pain. These terms presumably seem excessive for the feeling of being forced to conform to social pressure that is assumed to be Paul’s point here, and so it is generally translated ‘reluctantly’ in this verse.

The paradox for Kruyt was that his flock gave cheerfully based on a collective decision, as a result of each one knowing their place within the church. But aspects of Paul’s argument opens up space for that kind of collective response. He wants to collect a single gift from the congregation as a whole (2 Cor 9:5), and compares them with another group (namely the Macedonian churches, 2 Cor 8:1), along with an explicit appeal to shame (2 Cor 9:4). We suggest, then, that his emphasis on individual decision is not about agency, but about economic means, as already signalled in 2 Cor 8:12 mentioned earlier. Paul’s rebuke concerning the way the well-off members of the congregation celebrate the Lord’s supper shows us that the congregation is socio-economically diverse (1 Cor 11:22). If those without means were expected to give the same as those with means, that would well explain Paul’s strong language about compulsion, and make reference to an affect of grief appropriate. By contrast, Kruyt notes that economic solidarity within families meant that none of the Poso congregation were poor, and so there was no economic reason in his context why his congregation members would need to give different amounts.

What is important for Paul is that the giving be “based on blessings” (ἐπ’ εὐλογίας), that is, deriving from a desire to share one’s bounty with others. This in turn stems from

---


70So, for example, NRSV, NIV, ESV.


72Ibid., 209.

73So “εὐλογία” §4, Bauer et al., *BDAG* on 2 Cor 9:6.
a sense of God’s own abundant provision, the divine economy of grace (2 Cor 9:8) seen most clearly in the generosity of Christ’s sharing in the poverty of the human condition (2 Cor 8:9). In other words, the genuineness of the Corinthian Christians’ response will be found not in the individuality of their agency, but rather in their connection to the theo-drama. Nor is this connection to operate just within their individual minds, as if Paul had sent the letter to each individual member of the church for their individual edification. This is evident not just from the dynamics of the letter being read aloud to the congregation, thereby making the connection to the theo-drama a shared value, but also in Paul’s explicit appeal to the shame that will accrue to him and to them if their participation lacking (2 Cor 9:3–4). This shame is itself grounded in the theo-drama, in the example of the generosity of the Macedonian churches who “gave themselves . . . to the Lord” (2 Cor 8:5). It is not, therefore, an alternative in case they are unable to understand the connection to the theo-drama well enough to act on it, but rather one way of presenting that connection and its importance.

This shows that socio-centric motivations do not necessarily imply a lack of genuine theo-
dramatic agency. For the Poso, then, we suggest that the issue was not mindless conformity but lack of connection to the local culture. What was for Kruyt and his fellow missionaries a rich act of devotion was for the Poso culturally thin. Kruyt actually notes that there were no significant expenses that needed to be covered for church services, and so even a pragmatic need was not apparent.\textsuperscript{74} The “mindlessness” of the Poso on that issue was a lack of meaning to be minded about, rather than a lack of ability to think for themselves. We might compare this with the Toraja bringing pigs or buffalo to a relative’s funeral. There are rules about what is appropriate to bring, but these are not substitutes for making mindful decisions but rather provide the shared meanings that enable such actions both to express and to affect relations between different branches of the family.\textsuperscript{75} They enable agency in an area of life that is rich with meaning.

\textsuperscript{74}Kruyt, \textit{Keluar}, 209.
In sum, genuine theo-dramatic performance can proceed in a collective culture with both understanding and formation of dispositions occurring through collective processes. This opens up the possibilities for a wider range of ethical systems than that implied by Kruyt’s introspective focus on motivation.

10.6 Conclusion

We began with the need to turn our account of the Bible into an approach to biblical texts. We characterised understanding the text as a kind of thick description, whereby local meanings are made sense of from within another horizon, and concrete meanings point to wider networks of meaning. Thick description assumes the ability of one action to convey multiple illocutions, whether synecdochically (e.g., as part of the theo-drama), in parallel (with local ethos selecting the illocution it needs), or in a layered fashion, this being how a locally ethical action becomes simultaneously a theo-dramatic action. We illustrated this with a thick description of Jesus’ death.

We then examined the issue of thick connection through a discussion of mismatched ethical codes, demonstrating that ethos must be expressed in local ways. We described this in terms of ethical concept application, drawing on Vanhoozer’s discussion of cross-modal similarity and the canon as training ground for such application. We illustrated this through an initial discussion of the ethical illocutions of Hebrews.

Cross-modal similarity turned out to require more than looking at moral code, and so we turned to examine three kinds of conscience identified by missiologists, namely guilt, shame, and fear. Here, too, a mismatch occurred if, for example, justification by faith was presented in a guilt-oriented manner, since it did not explain the relational inclusion that is necessary from a shame-oriented perspective. Wiher’s discussion explicitly rejected the life-force system we saw in the Poso as a separate system, but we noted that in fact it was precisely there that Kruyt saw some success in the gospel taking effect. We argued, rather, that the different ethical systems, while overlapping, having different theo-dramatic scopes. We noted that
transpositions of these ethical systems (interpretation of one in terms of another) occurred in the Bible itself, a process we concluded was necessary due to the affective power of such systems.

The remaining issue was whether a non-interior system provided adequate agency. We argued (in dialogue with Kruyt and 2 Cor 9 in relation to giving money) that theo-dramatic sincerity is a matter of thick connection to local and theo-dramatic meanings, rather than to consciously shaped internal motivations. Furthermore, these connections occur in the body of Christ, both at the cognitive level (teaching being a gift not given to all), and at the ethical level of recognising wrong dispositions, which in Hebrews happens through fellow believers as well as the Word. Making those connections in a culturally coherent way is the task of the next chapter.
Chapter 11

Toraja Ethos in Hebrews

11.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter will be discussing the kinds of prejudgments that would aid interpretation in a traditional Toraja context in relation to ethos. To this end, we will draw on a framework for ethical analysis which will enable us to analyse both the ethical content of Hebrews and the ethical systems of Toraja. This will show that Hebrews does not require a particular ethical substance, and so the ethical systems of Toraja can function as prejudgments for the letter. The other kind of prejudgment we will investigate is a local leadership role, and whether it can be used to help the mythos of the letter to be grasped.

11.2 A framework for analysis of ethical systems

In order to provide greater clarity in comparing ethical systems, we will return to Faubion’s adaptation of Foucault’s framework for analysing ethical systems, used briefly to begin examining the mismatch of Kruyt’s ethos with his local converts.¹ Faubion developed the framework to guide ethnographic description and comparison. As our discussion on thick description makes clear, our prime focus of comparison is not between local cultures and the

¹See page 119.
theo-drama, but between different local cultures, namely the West and the culture where Western missionaries brought the gospel.² To what extent the theo-drama conveys different systems, and to what extent it allows transposition between them, is part of our inquiry in this chapter. Our goal is not a definitive answer to these questions (which would be to return to essentialist assumptions), but a worked example oriented to Hebrews and the traditional Toraja culture.

Faubion’s framework is consistent with Geertz’s model of religion in that it requires a sacred ground for ethics and assumes that ethics works as a cultural system through the production of reproducible dispositions. As we discussed above, these dispositions are in general implicit, though some of them may become the focus of ethical attention and action. It is broader than Geertz’s model in that ritual is just one of many possible forms of the askēsis that forms dispositions. This enables his model to encompass ritual and sincerity modes. Faubion explains the sacred ground as a “floating signifier” which, like Rappaport’s Ultimate Sacred Postulates, lacks determinate meaning and for that reason is highly productive of meaning.³ This finds expression in the “chrism” present in certain individuals—his examples are Achilles and Jesus, following Weber’s discussion of charisma—which must be seen as divine within their respective cultures.⁴ Nevertheless, this chrism needs translation into a socially reproducible system. This always represents a reduction of the chrism, but at the same time the chrism stands above the system, allowing for significant change backed by sacral continuity, as with Rappaport’s system of levels with increasing generality. In Hebrews, the Creator God of Israel remains the Ultimate Sacred Postulate, but the Cosmological Axioms of the Mosaic Law are all reinterpreted in Christ.

Rappaport’s Cosmological Axioms and Rules become part of the code of that system, the rules and values which enable valuation and justification of ethical behaviour. However,

⁴Ibid., 80–83, 97.
social reproduction requires more than a code, and hence Faubion develops Foucault’s ethical framework, which applies Aristotle’s four modes of causality to the ethical domain. The code is part of the form of subjectivation. Subjectivation refers to how a person comes to identify as an ethical subject, but, Faubion argues, this is inseparable from the apparatus of ethical judgment (the rules and values of the code), since that apparatus defines what it means to fill that ethical role. Once a person identifies with an ethical role, there is an ethical telos or ideal, effected through ethical work (askēsis; importantly Faubion distinguishes pedagogical and reflexive askēsis) on an ethical substance. For our purposes, this means that the chrism, mediated through the form of subjectivation, becomes a part of the thick description of anything done as a part of that role, whether as obedience of a code, emulation of a hero, or some other kind of connection.

This scheme connects to the theo-drama both because Christ is the chrism, and because the turning point of the theo-drama is Christ dying for sins; movement towards an ethical telos is at the heart of the theo-drama. In providing a structure to the ethical domain, it allows us to analyse in greater detail the possibilities for native Toraja systems to convey this aspect of the theo-drama. It also allows for the possibility that adoption of one aspect of it does not imply adoption of the whole. This is what we saw in Poso: the local believers took on Christian codes of conduct, but their ethical substance remained mana with the telos of ecological harmony. This is also what we proposed for interpreting Hebrews with respect to access to God through Christ: Christ’s blood can be understood as providing pardon for transgressions, and also as purifying the harmony-disrupting power of defilement. The scheme can therefore enable a more precise description of transposition of ethical systems. Subjectivation and the telos will largely be defined theo-dramatically, but the ethical substance and askēsis will also draw from local culture.

---

5Ibid., 70.
6Ibid., 115–6.
7Robbins, Becoming Sinners, 217.
Hebrews projects an ethical role that we will term the Believer. This is the role that is assumed of the implied hearers of the letter, and their staying in that role is the major concern of the letter. The role assumes the ethical ultimacy implicit in creational monotheism (which the writer affirms in ch. 11:2), namely that it encompasses and takes priority over all other subject positions. This is expressed in the first Great Commandment of the Law in Dt ch. 6:5, which immediately follows the confession of God’s uniqueness in Dt ch. 6:4. As Faubion notes, this is not a universal pattern.\(^8\) For the traditional Toraja, the *aluk to dolo* did encompass all of life, but the emotionally salient gods (the Ancestors as family, and the field spirits with their vitality) are strongly separated ritually, and so loyalty is divided, though not usually in conflict.\(^9\)

The role is entered by responding to a message derived from Jesus himself (Heb 2:3). The message is a call from God, and so those who respond are called (ch. 9:15) and have a heavenly calling (ch. 3:1). The writer assumes the same for Israel, who also needed to pay attention to God’s command in ch. 2:2. Even though Israelites were born into God’s people, God’s command came into conflict with local ethos, as Israel’s continual history of injustice and idolatry confirms. This conflict was even more marked for Gentile Christians of the first century, as we have discussed. This is what made Christian belief an ethical position requiring conscious deliberation, and not simply a naturalised response to the social facts presented (or created) in ritual.

The role implies membership of God’s people. There are two basic metaphors here that are of importance to us. The first is that of family. Jesus is God’s first-born Son (ch. 1:5–6), and Believers are his younger siblings (ch. 2:11), under his authority as (first-born) Son in God’s household (ch. 3:6). In the eschatological picture of ch. 12:23, Believers take on the status of first-borns themselves (ch. 12:23). God is only called “father” twice. The


\(^9\)See, for example, the tabu against attending a marriage and funeral ceremony on the same day in Douglas Hollan and Jane C. Wellenkamp, *Contentment and Suffering: Culture and Experience in Toraja* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 44.
first time is at ch. 1:5, as the writer quotes the highly significant promise to David from 2 Sam 7:14, as the beginning of the catena of quotes establishing Jesus’ supremacy over angels. It is therefore implied in the many references to Jesus as Son. The second time is in relation to Believers in ch. 12:9. The other metaphor is that of God’s people (λαός). Many of these usages refer to Israel in the Old Testament, but in the first (ch. 2:17) and the last (ch. 13:12), the people are those who benefit from Jesus’ ministry, and in several other uses, an application to the Christian community is on view (ch. 4:9; ch. 8:10; ch. 10:30).10 The ethical context is fundamentally corporate, with plural address throughout. That this corporate context is not in opposition to individual agency is hinted at by the “each” in ch. 6:11, and comes into focus in the many stories of individuals exercising faith in ch. 11. It is not made clear, however, whether the potential falling away of ch. 6:6 is corporate or individual.

Membership of God’s people is marked by the single act of baptism, based on Jesus’ single act of purification. A single act of baptism is not stated unambiguously in the letter. However, the “foundation” of ch. 6:1a includes the well-attested New Testament themes of repentance and faith (ch. 6:1b), and resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment (ch. 6:2b); the writer is working with the general tradition of the early church. This gives good grounds for seeing baptism as one of the “baptisms” of ch. 6:2a. This is also the likely reference of the bodily washing with pure water in ch. 10:22.11 This latter reference is in parallel with the sprinkling of the heart from an evil conscience, which must be referring to the application of Jesus’ blood to the conscience in ch. 9:14. This makes Jesus’ cleansing an aspect of subjectivation;12 we will argue below that this is in fact the key distinction of the new covenant, not interiority.

---


CHAPTER 11. TORAJA ETHOS IN HEBREWS

This is the picture Hebrews presents of the mode of subjectivation. Connected with this is the mode of judgment, which includes the code (not necessarily in the form of rules) and mode of justification. That Jesus functions as the chrism is clear. As the divine Son he is God’s means of creating and restoring the world (ch. 1:2–3) as he exercises God’s rule (ch. 1:5–13). As the human Jesus, he restores in his own person humanity’s lost rule over creation through the path of suffering (ch. 2:9), and leads “many sons” to that same glory. Son here presumably marks inheritance rather than gender; this is true first of all of Jesus (ch. 1:4) and then of Believers (ch. 1:14; ch. 6:12). This is a process of sanctification, of setting them apart (ch. 2:11) as members of God’s household (ch. 3:6). This chrism is developed into a code in at least two directions. The journey implied in Jesus’ leading is developed in the typology of Israel’s journey in the wilderness towards the promised land, which represents the the community’s journey towards its eschatological destination (ch. 3:7–4:10). This holds up (by counter-example) the importance of continued faithfulness. The testimonies of faith in ch. 11 provide positive examples of the same orientation towards an eschatological destination. This faithfulness, then, is the primary value of the writer’s code (hence our term “Believer”), and twice the hearers are exhorted to imitate those who exercise this value (ch. 6:12, immediately illustrated with Abraham, and ch. 13:7 with reference to past leaders of the community). However, this journey is done as a people being sanctified, who have repented from dead works (ch. 6:1) that defile (ch. 9:14). Standard New Testament ethical values emerge in ch. 13:4–5, namely contentment with respect to money, and exclusive monogamy, two areas where the Christian code usually conflicts with local ethos (or at least, local practice). This entire final part of Hebrews can be seen as the expression of being sanctified, from the care of neighbour in ch. 13:1–3 (compare Lev 19:18) to the offering of praise and good works as sacrifices in ch. 13:15–16.13 Joining these two aspects of the code together is ch. 13:12–14, where Jesus sanctifies his people outside of the gate; sanctification requires a faith that will share Jesus’ disgrace because it seeks the eschatological city. As

this survey suggests, the main mode of justifying ethical code is God’s word, both through
the prophets and in his Son (ch. 1:1–2a). However, it is the Son as the human Jesus who
becomes the chief point of reference.

As expected, our survey of subjectivation has shown it to be mostly at the level of the
mythos, what God has done in Christ, the exception being the code (faith and key moral
values). This shows that the writer sees the gospel as creating a specific human and social
identity. The question of how that mythos can be appropriated (using a local social structure
as an extended metaphor) will be the subject of the final section of this chapter.

Here we are concerned with ethical substance, telos, and askēsis. Since these necessarily
involve the local context, we begin with the two Toraja ethical systems that can be deduced
from the anthropological evidence we have surveyed. One is an honour-oriented relational
system, whose sacred foundation is the high god who gave to the ancestors the rituals in
which honour is indexed, along with the deceased ancestors who provide blessing for their
descendants. The form of an honourable life is expressed in the funeral ceremony, including
the ma’badong dirge which traces the life of the person “from conception through worldly
success, death, the stages of the funeral, and the journey to Puya.”

Snapshots of honour occur during the distribution of meat, as we have related, but attendance during the several
days of the funeral ceremony provides the final index of the esteem the person was held in.
Hence, if honour is the ethical substance, a well-attended and enthusiastic funeral ceremony
with the appropriate ritual is the telos. This honour is maintained through participation in
ritual exchange, such as attendance (with pigs or water buffalo if appropriate) at funerals of
relatives, neighbours, or fellow members of one’s saroan.

We have already compared this to the Mediterranean honour-shame system, and noted

---

14 Toby Alice Volkman, Feasts of Honor: Ritual and Change in the Toraja Highlands (Illinois studies in

15 See page 72.

16 Jane Cathleen Wellenkamp, “A Psychocultural Study of Loss and Death Among the Toraja” (Ph.D.,
University of California, 1984), 220.

17 See page 63.
that this has been applied to Hebrews.\textsuperscript{18} DeSilva’s commentary shows how this system permeates the letter. It is, however, self-consciously breaking new ground, indicating that this ethical system was transposed into more familiar Western categories in previous commentaries. This will no doubt continue being the case. Johnson, for example, claims to be “deeply influenced” by deSilva’s honour-shame reading,\textsuperscript{19} but his ethical system remains one of interiority, appropriate to his intended audience; for example, the purpose of the new covenant is “a relationship with God that is direct and internal.”\textsuperscript{20} For the Toraja, the honour-shame dynamic in the letter will prove cogent. (The difference that we identified between the Toraja and Mediterranean honour systems—in the former, honour is received rather than asserted—is not relevant to Hebrews, since the letter concerns a patron-client relationship, not one between equals.)\textsuperscript{21} We provide a detailed example of the exegetical difference this can make at our discussion of ch. 2: 1–4, where the implied connection between retribution in v. 2 and neglecting salvation in v. 3 is understood legally by many, and as a matter of honour by deSilva.\textsuperscript{22}

The second Toraja ethical system is similar to the life-force oriented system we identified with the Poso. The major Toraja term for the life-force is \\textit{sumanga‘}. Dimitri Tsintjilonis suggests that control of this life-force is a major aim of Toraja rituals: the \\textit{Rambu Solo’} (death ceremonies) return \\textit{sumanga‘} to the cosmos, while the \\textit{Rambu Tuka’} ceremonies purify and replenish it, as we saw with the \\textit{deata} called to possess certain people in the \\textit{maro} ceremony.\textsuperscript{23} For this system we suggested a \\textit{telos} of ecological harmony, which is worked on through various ritual forms. This is epitomised by the Toraja in the three forms of wealth (\	extit{tallu lolona}):

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{18}deSilva, \textit{Perseverance in Gratitude}.
  \item \textsuperscript{20}Ibid., 203–4.
  \item \textsuperscript{21}See page 65.
  \item \textsuperscript{22}See page 263.
\end{itemize}
children, livestock (chiefly water buffaloes), and rice. An important ritual for this askēsis of the life-force is the massurū’ ceremony, which cleanses transgressions that have resulted in misfortune. This is derived from the word for comb (suru’), and suggests the straightening out of the disorder caused by the transgression. For a sick person, the ritual specialist (to minaa) conducts a detailed interview of the person and of neighbours to determine the transgression which caused the illness. Having determined the cause, this confession may be sufficient, or a sacrifice may be needed. Hollan et al. quotes some local metaphors for what is achieved by this: the person is “clean as a plate,” free due to their payment of debt, and the sacrificed animal functions as a medicine.

A theocentric version of this system is what Milgrom discerned in Leviticus, which forms the background to the central section of Hebrews, especially chs. 9–10. In Leviticus, as well as in Toraja, the sacrifices function as the askēsis, removing the defilement and enabling worship of God. Hebrews draws on this, but clearly envisages something new. Chs. 7–8 establishes the Old Testament scripture’s promise of a new priesthood with a new law, temple, and liturgy. This all happens as part of the new covenant promised in Jer 31:31–34, quoted in full in Heb 8:8–12. This is what justifies the change in the mode of subjectivation, as having faith in the final word of God replaces (or better, fulfils) having faith in the previous words of the Mosaic covenant.

The new covenant promise is also often taken to imply a change in ethical substance (as with Johnson above). When the promise is partially repeated at ch. 10:16–17, providing a thematic inclusio, the laws being written on the heart and mind is one of only three elements repeated. That this is a shift to an interior ethical substance finds support in the opposition of flesh and conscience. Conscience is explicitly connected to the heart in ch. 10:22, and is in opposition to flesh in ch. 9:9–10 and ch. 9:13–14. The old system of sacrifices is incapable of bringing perfection with respect to the conscience (ch. 9:9),

---

24 Hollan and Wellenkamp, Contentment and Suffering, 206–10.


26 See page 40.
consisting as it does of regulations of the flesh (ch. 9:10).\textsuperscript{27} Similarly, the blood of animals cleanses the flesh (ch. 9:13), but the blood of Jesus cleanses the conscience (ch. 9:14). On this reading, the external ritual \textit{askēsis} is replaced by the internal \textit{askēsis} of Jesus’ blood, and this is what is new about the new covenant. Thus, Johnson interprets the cleansing of the conscience by Christ’s blood in ch. 9:14 as “moral transformation of the worshiper,”\textsuperscript{28} drawing on the connection of conscience with the perfecting of the worshiper in ch. 9:9.\textsuperscript{29} On this reading, Hebrews is using Leviticus as an image of the theo-dramatic reality that moral defect raises a barrier to approaching God, but is explicitly replacing the ritual ethical system that accompanies it.

That Leviticus provides a central metaphor for the writer’s theo-dramatic argument is clear, and that there is something new is also clear. It is less clear that what is new is a change in ethical substance. The writer shows no evidence of opposing ritual forms as such, or of deprecating physical bodies, since ch. 10:22 itself implies baptism, ch. 10:25 commends meeting together, and ch. 13:1–5 imply concrete responses to physical concerns.\textsuperscript{30} The writer also implicitly acknowledges that obedience of the heart is not new to the new covenant, since those whose faith is testified in the Scriptures in ch. 11 are all Old Testament believers. In Deuteronomy, at least, ritual obedience is something that can be from the heart (ch. 26:16).

Nor does language of the heart, or even of conscience, establish that an interiorised ethical system is in view. We have argued that dispositions are central to any ethical account, without implying reflexive \textit{askēsis}. We have also argued that conscience means application of moral concepts to oneself with appropriate moral affect. Certainly, in a guilt culture or sub-culture (such as formed around Greek philosophy), conscience can come to be understood as a self-grounded alternative to the consciousness of social sanctions that affects behaviour

\textsuperscript{27}This takes δικαίωμα, strongly supported as the original reading by Bruce M. Metzger, \textit{A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament} (2nd ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), ad. loc, as nominative in apposition to δοξά της καὶ θυσίας. See Attridge, \textit{The Epistle to the Hebrews}, 231.

\textsuperscript{28}Johnson, \textit{Hebrews}, 238.

\textsuperscript{29}Ibid., 226.

in a shame-oriented culture. DeSilva notes the presence in the first century of such an understanding of conscience as a moral guide, or even moral source.\textsuperscript{31} In explicit opposition to such an understanding, Johnsson describes the conscience being assumed by the writer as a numinous unease.\textsuperscript{32} We have argued that either are acceptable. In order to decide this question, we will examine below what kind of askēsis is required of the readers in the letter, and whether it requires a particular understanding of the ethical substance.

What is new, with implications for the answer to that, is that the blood sacrifice is no longer a means of askēsis. We have already noted that the application of Jesus’ blood is parallel to baptism in ch. 10:22,\textsuperscript{33} suggesting that application of Jesus’ blood is a part of subjectivation. This parallel is supported by the logic of the whole argument, which is that Jesus’ sacrifice is once for all time. It thus provides a state (as the perfect tense suggests) of sanctification (ch. 10:10) and perfection (ch. 10:14).\textsuperscript{34} Becoming a Believer includes accepting Jesus’ once for all time sacrifice as the foundation of that identity.

This poses its own difficulties for a life-force oriented culture to grasp. The one-time purification of Jesus’ death stands in contrast to the cycle of defilement and cleansing that constitutes the usual cultural pattern.\textsuperscript{35} That cycle reflects experienced reality, the continued presence of disorder in social relations, human life, and the local environment, and the continuation of life in the midst of this.\textsuperscript{36} Jesus’ once for all dealing with disorder seems to remove purification from the empirical world where, for a ritual culture, it is most needed. An example of this is the complaint of aluk adherents in Hollan et al.’s village that Christians

\textsuperscript{31}DeSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 301 n.16.


\textsuperscript{33}See Christian A. Eberhart, “Characteristics of Sacrificial Metaphors in Hebrews,” in Hebrews: Contemporary Methods, New Insights (Biblical interpretation series v. 75; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 37–64 for the application of blood being the significant aspect of sacrifices.

\textsuperscript{34}Johnsson, “Defilement,” 261.

\textsuperscript{35}Ibid., 267–8.

are said to “hide their mistakes in their pockets,” since confession is done privately before God, not in public as with the massaru’ ceremony.\textsuperscript{37} The once-for-all-time purification has been understood in concrete practice in a way that abstracts it from its social and ecological connections. Hollan et al.’s further commentary suggests that in the short term this lack of a concrete askēsis of defilement may result in lingering unease.\textsuperscript{38} The longer term consequence he projects is an ethical individualism that de-emphasises corporate and ecological solidarity.\textsuperscript{39} This provides an interesting parallel to Wiher’s analysis of justification by faith in a shame-oriented context, where the abstraction of personal pardon from the theo-dramatic context of restoration to God’s people does not effectively deal with shame.\textsuperscript{40} Here, in addition to reducing social solidarity, it does not effectively deal with the sense of unease brought on by defilement.

That this is a misunderstanding of Hebrews’ understanding of the implications of Jesus’ once-for-all-time death seems clear, given that the letter is premised on the continuing frailty of the receiving community in the world. We therefore turn to the letter itself, to see to what extent there are means of askēsis, and whether they imply a particular kind of ethical substance. This will give some pointers as to how to approach the letter from the two Toraja perspectives we have outlined.

\section*{11.3 Ethical systems in Hebrews}

In the framework we are using, askēsis implies a telos. This aspect of the ethical systems in Hebrews is a clearer starting point for our investigation, and we can identify three possible answers.\textsuperscript{41} The first is what we might term personal maturity. As we have noted, the writer

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{37} Hollan and Wellenkamp, \textit{Contentment and Suffering}, 211.
  \item \textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 211.
  \item \textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 211–2.
  \item \textsuperscript{40} See page 226.
  \item \textsuperscript{41} Compare 1944- Peterson, D. G. (David Gilbert), \textit{Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the ‘Epistle to the Hebrews’} (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1982),
\end{itemize}
draws on common Hellenistic vocabulary to present a concept of maturity (τελείος) in ch. 5:14 and τελειότης in ch. 6:1) which is associated with trained moral discernment. This training occurs in part through God’s fatherly discipline (ch. 12: 4–11; γυμνόζευν occurs only at ch. 5:14 and ch. 12:11), resulting in sharing in divine holiness (ch. 12:10) which is the prerequisite for seeing the Lord (ch. 12:14).\(^\text{42}\) Clearly, the writer hopes to see the formation of personal dispositions, but this does not imply that those dispositions are valued and worked on directly as internal attributes. Rather, the askēsis here is clearly pedagogical, not reflexive. In ch. 12:15, the possibility of not being trained by suffering but rather becoming bitter is addressed not by a reflexive practice but by looking out for each other (the singular τις referring to the bitter person is distinguished from the plural ἐπισκοποῦντες). Similarly, in ch. 10:24–25, the provocation to good works is a result of paying attention to each other and meeting for encouragement. Whatever the ability of the hearers for reflexive ethical work, the writer focusses on collective processes. Theo-dramatically, there is a concern for individual development, but the ethical substance is left open.

A second answer is salvation. Salvation is the goal the first time the readers are addressed in ch. 1:14, and the writer uses τέλος twice in connection with reaching the end of the journey of faith (Heb 3:14; ch. 6:11). The content of this salvation is only gradually revealed. In ch. 2:10, Jesus leads “many sons” to glory. This introduces a section demonstrating the solidarity of Jesus with his people; the term “son” suggests heir (especially in the light of the theme of inheriting in ch. 1:14), and the glory is the restoration of the rule and authority that was the original intention for humanity (ch. 2:6–7). This is the theo-dramatic removal of shame. The connotations of Israel inheriting the promised land are confirmed in ch. 3:7–4:10. That eschatological salvation is intended becomes explicit in ch. 5:9,\(^\text{43}\) and in ch. 6:2b the writer affirms a traditional understanding of it, namely resurrection of the dead and

\(^{129}\)who notes a single goal with aspects of sharing Christ’s glory (ch. 2:10), entering God’s rest (ch. 4:11), seeing the Lord (ch. 12:14), and inhabiting the heavenly Jerusalem (ch. 12:22; ch. 13:14).

\(^{42}\)Johnson, Hebrews, 324.

\(^{43}\)For αἰώνιος meaning “eschatological” in Hebrews, see John J. Hughes, Hebrews IX 15ff. and Galatians III 15ff.: A Study in Covenant Practice and Procedure (n.p.: BRILL, 1979), 33.
eschatological judgment (the latter also at ch. 9:27). The writer presents a vivid picture of this as the heavenly Jerusalem thronging with angels and humans (ch. 12:22–24), a current reality which will become the primary reality of Believers when God shakes off what is only temporary (ch. 12:26–27). Here we have the theo-dramatic restoration of all things.

This goal is primarily concerned with faith, since this is what determines reaching the goal or not. Faith is not an ethical substance, but a disposition. While it can be approached in a reflexive way, deSilva’s exposition of the letter shows that faith can also be formed in terms of an appeal to honour God as divine patron, and to remain loyal to the mediator Jesus Christ who has brought such worthy benefits.44 The primary askēsis associated with faith is paying attention to God’s word (ch. 2:1–4; ch. 4:12–13). This is not just an individual matter, as the need for mutual encouragement to guard against unbelief shows (ch. 3:13); paying attention is probably also implicit in the meeting together of ch. 10:25. The exhortation to hold fast to one’s confession may also be intended as a means of strengthening faith (ch. 4:14; ch. 10:23).45

However, in ch. 4:16, it is prayer understood as drawing near to God’s very throne that will provide the essential resources to reach the goal of salvation, just as Jesus’ prayer enabled him to become the eternal source of salvation (ch. 5:7–9). This introduces the central section of the letter (ch. 4:14–10:25), with its declaration of renewed hearts and cleansed consciences. The call to maturity we discussed above begins this section (ch. 5:11–6:14), but in the following argument, perfection is something that Jesus does for Believers through his one sacrifice (ch. 10:13). The language of perfecting (τελειώσις in ch. 7:11, otherwise τελειούν), has the sense of bringing something to its appropriate τέλος or end.46 This happened first to Jesus through his sufferings (ch. 2:10; ch. 5:9) with an eternal result (ch. 7:28). For the Believer, being perfected is what the Levitical priesthood (ch. 7:11) and

44 deSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 61–64.


46 deSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 196.
CHAPTER 11. TORAJA ETHOS IN HEBREWS

the Law (ch. 7:19a) could not attain, and the ends in view are drawing near to God (ch. 7:19b), and having a cleansed conscience (ch. 9:9; ch. 10:1–2).

In the theo-dramatic image taken from Leviticus, drawing near to God is a corporate activity; God is in the midst of his people, rather than in individual hearts. Drawing near to a holy God is dangerous, hence there is the need for cleansing and sanctification.47 The old system only enabled access to the court, or to the outer tent for priests, or to the inner tent just once a year for the High Priest (ch. 9:6–10). The sanctification provided by the blood of animals was sufficient for this task, but Jesus’ blood provides access to the heavenly tabernacle (ch. 10:19–20). It does this by cleansing the conscience (ch. 9:14) and by inaugurating the new covenant (ch. 9:15–23) in which both Jesus’ high priestly ministry and access to the heavenly tabernacle make sense. In ch. 10:1–4, συνείδησις is the consciousness of sins that is implied in the repetition of sacrifice, that is, the consciousness of the threat that disorder brings to the people’s relationship with God. The cleansing of the conscience is most simply understood as the removal of that consciousness.48 The threat has been removed because sins have been set aside in the new covenant (ch. 9:26): even heaven has been cleansed (ch. 9:23); even God does not remember sins (ch. 10:18).

Throughout this section, the writer offers nothing that could be construed as askēsis (pedagogical or reflexive), such as we found for the other aspects above. Perfecting (in the sense of providing access to God) happens with Christ as the actor and Believers as the recipients, and is given with the role of Believer. Cleansing of the conscience is not askēsis, but rather provides the theo-dramatic basis for those practices that do support maturity and persevering in faith, particularly the practice of approaching God for the needed help (ch. 4:16). Thus, the perfecting of chs. 7–10 is about subjectivation, not about an ethical telos.

This finds support in the remaining uses of τέλοῦν in the letter. The chapter on faith ends with an explanation that the Old Testament examples of faith will be perfected with New Testament believers (ch. 11:40). Since they have already died, this can only be referring

47Ibid., 299.

to reaching the *telos* of eschatological salvation. It is therefore no surprise when the writer portrays the spirits of the perfected righteous ones in his eschatological vision (ch. 12:23). Jesus’ high-priestly ministry is also tied into this goal with the mention of redemption in ch. 9:12 & 15, and ch. 9:27–28, which makes this ministry the grounds for a positive expectation concerning post-mortem judgment.

This means that approaching God for help is not the *telos* of the Believer, but rather one of the forms of *askēsis*, of formation as a Believer who perseveres in faith. This is important for our purposes, because in ch. 10:22 God is approached in heaven, not in a physical location. If this were the goal of being a believer, it might suggest that an ability to pray in private through imagination without external props is part of being a mature Christian. Rather the goal is the heavenly Jerusalem. It is important that the writer provides a picture of this, and helpful that the picture is of a festival with a grandeur surpassing the largest Toraja festivals (ch. 12:22–24). It is also important that this concrete picture is what survives the eschatological shaking of ch. 12:26–27. As in Rev 21, the major passage talking about the heavenly Jerusalem, this gives warrant for understanding the eschatological hope as a bodily, social, and ecological existence. This means that the unseen nature of approach to God is not permanent, not part of the Believer’s *telos*. It is therefore consistent with maturity if ritual plays a significant role in how the Believer approaches God; at the least the writer mentions baptism(s) and laying on of hands in ch. 6:2, and regular meeting together in ch. 10:25.

In conclusion, no ethical substance is mandated by the writer; the theo-dramatic realities he conveys can be appropriated by those whose consciousness of sin is oriented to guilt, shame, or numinous unease. For the traditional Toraja, it will be important that the once-for-all-time nature of the application of Jesus’ blood is tied into the wider honour-shame system of perseverance in gratitude,\(^49\) and the willingness to learn in fellowship and in suffering. The ‘ecology’ in which life is to be preserved is the fellowship of believers in communion with God; hence apostasy is likened to land that is cursed, and the blessing of fruitful land is parallel

---

\(^49\)The apt title of deSilva’s commentary.
with a community of mutual care (ch. 6:4–10). Like the Levitical sacrifice, the massuru’ ceremony points to what Christ’s sacrifice achieves, but the practice of public confession contained in it potentially provides a means for the corporate askēsis of ch. 3:13 and ch. 12:15, the latter making explicit (in defilement language) that defection of faith is a corporate as well as an individual issue.

11.4 Jesus as Village Founder

Our focus so far has been on understanding ethos in Toraja context, and now we turn to mythos. We will draw here on the dissertation of Kobong that we introduced earlier. After extensive discussion of Toraja culture and a Synthetic model of contextualisation, he arrives at the formulation of Jesus as the new Pangala Tondok. A pangala tondok is the founder of a village (tondok). He brings his family and possessions to the new place, and founds a way of life (aluk) there. Central to this is the establishment of a tongkonan, a term referring both to the fellowship of an extended family, and the traditional house which provides its physical focus. This fellowship finds its focus in the pangala tondok, as expressed in the following proverbial sayings: Alukna dipoaluk (his religion is our religion), Uainna ditimba (his water is drawn), Kayunna dire’tok (his wood is split, that is, for fuel), Padangna dikumba’ (his land is worked on), Utanna dikalette’ (his vegetables are picked). It is this provision which legitimises the leadership function of the pangala tondok (and his descendants).

In focusing on the pangala tondok, Kobong captures a figure who stands behind both the fellowship structure of the tongkonan, and leadership in the tondok community. The church

---

50See page 26.
52Ibid., 68–69.
53See page 22.
54Ibid., 71.
55Ibid., 92.
is likened to the *tongkonan* as a fellowship, not the *tondok*. Kobong discusses the possible implication that becoming a Christian means choosing Christ and the gospel instead of the *pangala tondok* and his *aluk*, thereby rejecting the local culture. However, he argues that Christ’s incarnation means that he took on the role of *pangala tondok* as being rightfully his, based on a reading of “he came to his own” in John 1:11 as applying to all cultures. The proverbial sayings above then point to the meaning of joining with Christ’s fellowship, that is, taking on his way of life in a whole-of-life dependence on what he provides.

This conception uses a local leadership structure to provide an extended metaphor which encompasses both Christ and the Church. Kobong does not develop the Christological implications any further, but rather addresses to what extent the values expressed in the local leadership structure can be understood in relation to the fellowship of the local church. This concerns church leadership carrying on Jesus’ way of life in the same way that local leadership carries on the way of life determined by the *pangala tondok*. The main local value that is rejected is the caste system as the basis for the local hierarchy, since it is grounded in an understanding that the slave caste are humans of lesser worth. Hence, Kobong reinterprets the leadership qualification of being of noble descent with the qualification of being a child of God by faith. The three essential local leadership attributes of being rich, brave, and wise are also interpreted “spiritually.”

Our hermeneutical account invites us to develop this metaphor as a way of understanding the theo-drama in Hebrews. Heb 1–4 can be seen as defending Jesus as the true *pangala*.

---

56Ibid., 320.
57Ibid., 321.
58Ibid., 213.
59Ibid., 322.
62“dalam arti rohani”. See ibid., 325.
tondok, and being so as the Son of the divine pangala tondok. To describe God as pangala tondok is straightforward if creation is seen as the founding of the world as the place for human habitation and fellowship. God’s Law is the Law to be followed; the earth with its water, wood, and vegetables is what humans depend on. However, God can be understood more concretely as pangala tondok of Israel, too. Heb 3:1–4:10 places God as the founder of the house of Israel (ch. 3:4), the Old Testament tongkonan. Moses was but a servant (Heb 3:1–6), and God was the one who lead Israel to the promised land, and against whom they rebelled (ch. 3:7–4:10). Jesus, then, is the true pangala tondok as God’s Son over God’s household (ch. 3:6), who will lead many sons to glory (ch. 2:10). The eschatological conception of salvation which, as we have seen, develops through the letter is the new village to which Jesus is leading his people. The festive throng of Heb 12:22–24 can perhaps, then, be understood as an eschatological ma’bua* for Jesus’ tongkonan, the ma’bua* house renewal ceremony being perhaps the grandest of the traditional Toraja ceremonies.\(^63\)

The concept of a new village, then, provides an entry point to understanding the eschatology of the book of Hebrews. A central aspect of this eschatology is that Jesus’ coming brought about the turning point of a new covenant, with its new aluk. The difficult and strange idea that the divinely established order could change is actually present in the concept of the pangala tondok establishing a new aluk in the new village. No doubt, this new aluk was in much greater material continuity with that of the previous village than the new aluk of Jesus, which does away with both sacrifice and tabu, but the concept is at least made graspable.

This strangeness is brought out in the strangeness of Melchizedek, who points to the very different priesthood of Jesus. This priesthood transcends more than fulfils the Levitical priesthood, since Levi in Abraham’s womb gives a tithe to the non-Israelite Melchizedek (Heb 7:4–10). The Melchizedekian priesthood operates outside the Israeliite Law, and therefore by extension beyond any Law. The writer rather bases Jesus’ priesthood on an indestructible life (ch. 7:16), that is, the embodiment of an unfailing life-force.

\(^{63}\)Volkman, Feasts of Honor, 56–58.
Along with these significant benefits in understanding the theo-drama in Hebrews, the metaphor of Jesus as *pangala tondok* connects with both the ethical systems we have mentioned. David deSilva’s exposition of Hebrews in terms of God as a Greco-Roman patron finds straightforward transposition to the reciprocal grace and faithfulness implied in the relation of the *pangala tondok* to the *tongkonan* he founds. The fact that Jesus has not yet brought his *tongkonan* to the new earth explains why vitality is seen primarily in the congregation. The metaphor provides a structure in which to integrate the givenness of purification with the restoration of the individual in community and environment that provides its wider meaning.

11.5 Conclusion

We began our development of local prejudices by looking at ethos using Faubion’s framework for ethical analysis. Hebrews gave a rich account of the mode of subjectivation of the role of Believer, a role whose scope covers the whole of life, is based on responding to a message from outside the local culture and joining a new family or people, and entrance to which is marked by baptism. Jesus functions as the chrism of this role, with faith at the centre of its code, along with some general ethical principles. As expected, the role is grounded in the mythos.

We then surveyed two ethical systems in Toraja. The honour-oriented relational system is seen ritually in meat distribution, and chiefly in the final funeral ceremony, and is maintained through participation in ritual exchange. We saw that this is a close parallel to the patronage ethos which is brought out in deSilva’s commentary. We also identified a life-force oriented system similar to that in Poso, noting the *telos* of ecological harmony, and describing the *massuru*’ ceremony as a suitable representative means of *askēsis*. This connects to Hebrews via its theocentric version in Leviticus.

This led to a discussion of ethical substance in Hebrews, and in particular whether the newness of the new covenant promised by Jeremiah was interiority. We argued that the
newness was found in sacrifice moving from askēsis to subjectivation, as Jesus dies once for all time. It does not therefore stand on its own in constructing the role of Believer, and we saw the importance of integrating atonement with social and ecological connections. When studied, Hebrews itself showed no evidence of requiring a particular ethical substance. We saw that its goals are maturity and salvation, the latter including incorporation into the redeemed community and the restoration of all things. The exhortations of the letter provide askēsis to those ends. The middle section describes the new form of subjectivation brought about by the new covenant. In particular, conscience is simply consciousness of sin, which can take culturally appropriate forms.

We then turned to a local cultural role, that of pangala tondok, or village founder, as a means for grasping the mythos of Hebrews. This captured the importance of local values such as fellowship, but we saw that the founding of a village could be a metaphor for the eschatology of the letter. This role also encompasses the two ethical systems above.

This discussion showed the initial plausibility of these frameworks to function as prejudgments for a Toraja interpretation of the text. However, the test of a prejudgment is its ability to enable genuine questions to arise from the text, that is, questions the text poses to the culturally situated readers. The next chapter will examine this by looking at the letter in its rhetorical flow.
Chapter 12

The Letter to the Hebrews

12.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we have showed how understanding Jesus as *pangala tondok* can help open up the implied story-line of Hebrews and what it says about Jesus and the church, and suggested that the call to be faithful and to grow in faith as a community can be integrated into this conception. These provide some basic frameworks for understanding the letter. Our task in this chapter is to show how these frameworks can function as prejudices that enable genuine questions to arise from the text in its rhetorical movement, in contrast to the thematic approach of the previous chapter.

We have already indicated that ch. 4:14–10:25 forms a central section with its focus on mythos, what Christ’s sacrifice achieved for his people. We will therefore look at the letter in three major sections. The first section, chs. 1–4, establishes Jesus as the true *pangala tondok*, leading his people to establish the new village in the place of rest. The central section shows how he has brought them into a permanent state of cleansing that provides the basis for working towards maturity, that is, the vitality of a fellowship of mutual help and encouragement. The third section, ch. 10:19 to the end of the letter, describes how to be a part of this fellowship, though we include the latter half of ch. 10 in our exposition of the central section.
12.2 Jesus the true *pangala tondok* (Hebrews 1–4)

The question of Jesus being the true *pangala tondok* is broken into several parts in these opening chapters. The writer addresses the question of whose words will bring salvation (ch. 1:1–2:4), then identifies Jesus as the Son over God’s *tongkonan* who is in genuine solidarity with his people (ch. 2:5–3:6), and then shows them as engaged in the same process of journeying to a new place of God’s rest as Israel was (ch. 3:7–4:10). This leads to the first set of exhortations.

The question of a divine word is raised in the opening sentence of the letter. Theodramatically, the writer assumes that God gave various words through the prophets (ch. 1:1), and in particular gave the Law through angels (ch. 2:2), but has now given the final word in his Son (ch. 2:2). The question this section poses is whether the hearers will pay attention to this final word (ch. 2:1). For traditional Toraja, the main words that have been taken as divine are the ‘fixed’ revelation from *Puang Matua* of the *aluk*. Like the Torah, this is what enabled the community to maintain blessing in the midst of the forces of decay and to give ethical structure to the community. The Toraja Bible\(^1\) adds “our” to the fathers in ch. 1:1 (as do many English versions, e.g., NRSV, NIV), which may lead a Toraja hearer to assume that God spoke through *aluk*. As the subsequent exposition makes clear, the writer is talking about the Old Testament revelation, which our theo-dramatic account takes to be concrete and non-transposable. Nevertheless, it is in relation to the Toraja divine words that the question of the passage will have its force: How can there be a new word that works better at bringing blessing?

The writer answers this by revealing this final word as God’s glorious Son. This is a family metaphor which becomes a family story in vv. 2b–3, where the appointment as heir is fulfilled in the Son sitting at God’s right hand. This story begins with the Son being involved in creating the world, and an implied disruption to that creation is death with by the Son in providing purification of sins. At the centre of this presentation of the Son, marked off

\(^1\) *Sura’ Mudatu (Alkitab Toraja)* (Jakarta: LAI, 1995).
syntactically as present tense participles in the midst of aorist indicatives, the Son represents God’s glory and his being, mediating both honour and truth (ch. 1:3a). He is *pangala tondok* from *pangala tondok*. In particular, this means that he is *sugi’* (wealthy) in the divine sense of sustaining the earth. (Taking up the Toraja concept of wealth in this invites it to be purified theo-dramatically.)

The parallel of creation and purification appears not to be obvious to Western commentators. We can compare two commentators with the structure implied in the explanation above in the following table.

|     | Lane | Ellingworth | Revised | 1:2a | “God spoke...by his Son” | A | A 2b | “Whom he appointed heir of everything” | B | B 2c | “…through whom he created the world” | C | C 3a | “…radiance...exact representation” | C’ | D | D 3b | “…sustaining...” | B 4 | “...purification for sins” | B’ | ( ) | C’ 3cβ | “…sat down at the right hand” | B’ | B’ 4 | “having been exalted...” | A’ | A’

Paul Ellingworth places purification in brackets as possibly an addition to an original hymn, whereas Lane elides it with sitting at God’s right hand. However, purification for sins provides restoration of creation in both Levitical and Toraja conceptions.

This implies the greater name of the Son compared to angels (ch. 1:4). It is this name that will give credibility to the word of the Son. The writer establishes this through a catena of quotations from the Old Testament that are part of the various ways God spoke in v. 1. This demonstrates how that revelation finds its unity in the Son. It does not, of course, do the same for the Toraja words; rather, it is Israel’s story which provides the backdrop to the

---


revelation of the Son. The catena does, however, establish that the Son’s role is communal: the Son is inaugurated (v. 5) to be a ruler who brings joy to his companions (v. 9b). Only so does the role of pangala tondok make sense as a metaphor. The values of this rule also fit with Toraja values, particularly the emphasis on integrity and justice in vv. 8–9a. It therefore establishes the Son as kinaa, wise. What is claimed here that is clearly greater is the divinity of the Son, expressed directly in v. 8a, and implied in the Son’s permanence in contrast to the world that is perishing (vv. 10–12). The Son brings order not just at the level of the community, but also of the cosmos. This name is summed up in the Son’s session at God’s right hand.

In ch. 1:14, the writer comes back to eschatology, namely inheriting salvation. The pangala tondok metaphor leads hearers to assume correctly that this is sharing in the inheritance of the Son, whatever exactly the content of that salvation will turn out to be. The appeal of ch. 2:1–4 draws on Israel’s example to establish the importance of paying attention to the word of the Son. There is, however, a lacuna in the text. In ch. 2:2, it is a transgression that is punished. However, neither drifting away (v. 1) nor neglecting the salvation (v. 3) are obviously transgressions. Hence we find commentators interpreting v. 3 in a legal sense. Lane talks about “the preaching of the gospel” as “a juridical activity,” and Bruce talks of “sanctions” to which the hearers might become “liable.” DeSilva connects Israel’s transgression and the readers’ drifting as both being responses that dishonour God by spurning his benefaction, and therefore invite retribution. This makes good sense both exegetically and historically (and finds ample support in ch. 10:26–31), but its “feudal” tone may be unconvincing to a Western ethos. For the Toraja, though, there is a further lacuna between v. 2 and the context of the hearers, that is, the nature of the consequences. Exodus–Numbers, which is where Hebrews always places Israel, presents a world of prompt divine retaliation

---

7Douglas Hollan, “‘Disruptive’ Behavior in a Toraja Community” (Ph.D., University of California, 1984), 107.

8Lane, Hebrews 9–13, 41.

9F. F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews (Rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 68.

10DeSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 105–6.
to transgression, a world akin to the Toraja understanding. However, eschatological punishment is not prompt. For the Western exegete, v. 2 supports v. 3 simply by establishing that God does punish. However, for the Toraja, it is important that the writer supplements a logic of empirical experience with an argument about God’s character. Spurned benefaction provides a rich and compelling account of why the threat of post-mortem judgment should be taken seriously, even though it is not immediate. (Likewise, a legal interpretation needs to take care not to divorce the wrongness of drifting away from the God who offers salvation.)

In these ways, the writer ties the importance of God’s final word to the person of the Son. Since the pangala tondok establishes a new aluk, a word which grounds and directs a way of life, this rhetorical strategy will be effective to the extent that the evidence in the section of the text for Jesus’ credentials as pangala tondok are clearly conveyed.

The second part of the opening section, ch. 2:5–3:6, establishes solidarity between this exalted Son and believers. Its central promise is that the Son who has been through suffering to glory will lead many sons along the same path (ch. 2:10). The question this raises is that Jesus’ path to glory was through a lowering of status and suffering. The writer answers this by establishing that Jesus’ death was for others (ch. 2:9). This establishes him as being barani, courageous, completing the trio of leadership qualities. How he helps others is presented in two important ways in the following verses. We have already noted that this promise of glory is the theo-dramatic answer to shame, which becomes explicit in the strong language of inclusion in vv. 11–13. The defeat of the devil also provides a theo-dramatic answer to the problem of disorder which, however understood locally, finds its most universal expression in death (ch. 2:14–15). This is complemented by his atonement for sins and help in temptation (ch. 2:17–18). Jesus’ tongkonan offers inclusion into God’s holy people, and freedom from the fear of deathly forces. He does so as Son, rather than servant (ch. 3:1–6).

The third part of the opening section, ch. 3:7–4:10 uses Israel’s wilderness journey as a picture of the journey that the tongkonan (“house”) of the Son is undertaking. It shows the failure of Israel’s Law to provide for blessing for Israel due to their hardness of heart (ch. 4:2–12).

11 Compare ibid., 111.
3:7–11), a hardness that was essentially ingratitude, testing God despite his works (ch. 3:9), and repaying his generosity with the insult of unbelief (ch. 3:16–19).\footnote{Ibid., 144.} It is this hardness of heart which explains why the “rest” (κατάπαυσις) from Ps 95:11 has three contexts: creation, the land of Canaan, and the rest that is still open (ch. 4:4–10), the “world to come” of ch. 2:5. In terms of our local metaphor, the pangala tondok presumably moves to a new village because of problems in the old. Hardness of heart is the continuing problem in the theo-drama. It meant that the earth that God founded needed renewing, and that the land of Israel needed renewing. Hence, Jesus has set out on his journey, to the rest that will finally achieve God’s intention for creation. But unbelief remains the main threat to his people achieving that goal, and hence the community is to correct each other (ch. 3:13).

The writer summarises the argument so far in the final verses of this section, ch. 4:11–16, with a three-fold exhortation, which we have described as askēsis.\footnote{Cynthia Long Westfall, A Discourse Analysis of the Letter to the Hebrews: The Relationship Between Form and Meaning (London: T & T Clark, 2005), 139.} The first exhortation is to endeavour to enter the rest that is the goal (v. 11a). Not to reach this goal is the great disaster to which sickness, pestilence, and death point. The main obstacle to achieving that goal is disobedience (v. 11b). Here, the writer presents the living word of God as the solution. This has the power to penetrate a stony heart and discern the deceits of sin that lead to unbelief (v. 12, connected to v. 11 with γαρ).\footnote{Luke Timothy Johnson, Hebrews: A Commentary (1st ed.; The New Testament library; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 134–5.} This means that God sees not just what is done in secret,\footnote{This is a conventional belief in Toraja, see Douglas Hollan and Jane C. Wellenkamp, Contentment and Suffering: Culture and Experience in Toraja (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 138.} but also thoughts that may lie below conscious awareness.\footnote{G. W. Trompf, “The Conception of God in Hebrews 4: 12–13,” Studia Theologica 25 (1971): 125.} This word is presumably the main means of the mutual encouragement of ch. 3:13.

The second exhortation is for his hearers to hold fast to their identification with Jesus that they have made before others, beginning with their baptism.\footnote{Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 140.} V. 14–15 provide a summary
of both Jesus’ greatness and his solidarity, reasons to choose to identify primarily with his tongkonan rather than another.

This leads directly to the third exhortation, to approach the throne of grace (v. 16). Jesus provides mediation to the divine throne: like the divinised ancestors in the traditional Toraja, he has experienced the trials of life. Jesus’ followers are therefore authorised to pray with boldness, the term παρρησία denoting open communication, especially towards those of high rank.\footnote{\textit{παρρησία}, W. Bauer et al., \textit{A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature} (3rd ed.; Electronic text by OakTree Software, Inc., version 2.1; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).}

This opening section presents Christ as the true pangala tondok, raising questions of ultimate loyalty, direction of life, and the ability to persevere in faithfulness. It is Jesus as Melchizedekian high priest who provides the answer to this last question in the next major section.

### 12.3 Permanent cleansing (Hebrews 5–10)

As we have discussed, this central section explains the changed mode of subjectivation of the new covenant. Since, from the information available, the pangala tondok was not a Melchizedekian figure combining kingship and priesthood, the transition in ch. 5: 5–6 from Son to Melchizedekian priest functions to introduce an aspect of Jesus’ role which goes beyond the local metaphor. Rather, it is the Levitical priesthood which provides the concrete picture of what Christ’s self-offering has done, and that partly by contrast. One major aspect of that priesthood is found also in Toraja sacrifices, namely, repetition. However, one other aspect, the spatial organisation of the temple which its graded access to God’s presence, is not. The salient details of the Levitical system do, however, form concrete pictures which form a part of the substance of the writer’s arguments.

This is the section from which most of our material about different ethical systems was drawn. We will focus on the life-force or ecological system, since the honour-shame is con-
siently expounded in deSilva’s commentary. The call to maturity (ch. 5:11–6:12) comes immediately after the theme of priesthood has been introduced, with Jesus’ priesthood described in terms of learning obedience through suffering (ch. 5:9). We suggested that this can be understood in terms of a call to a vital community, a call that gives context to the metaphor of growing up in ch. 5:13–14, rather than being an alternative to it. Faithfulness and apostasy are likened to a blessed or cursed land (ch. 6:7–8), and the story of Israel in ch. 3:7–4:10 served as a warning that the threat of curse is real. By contrast, the state of blessing which they have experienced is described as a sharing in the Spirit (ch. 6:4–5) shown in mutual love (ch. 6:10) and eagerness (ch. 6:11). The ethical work that is commended to them is not sacrifice but joining with the many people who by faith have inherited the promises (ch. 6:12).

A promise is inherently intangible, and the writer appeals to two ritualised actions to give it substance. First, God swears an oath (ch. 6:13); trusting this promise is part of loyalty to him as the divine pangala tondok. However, if blessing and curse is being refocussed around community vitality, how is that to be maintained? At what point does sluggishness put the community under God’s curse, no longer beneficiaries of God’s promise? Something like this is presumably how Johnsson’s uneasy corporate conscience will operate if it begins to grasp the vision of Jesus as the true pangala tondok. Hence the writer’s second point: Jesus has gone behind the temple curtain as an anchor for our souls (ch. 6:19–20). What this means, and how it functions to guarantee God’s promise to sluggish Christians, is the substance of the subsequent exposition of this central section.

Heb 7–8 prepares the writer’s answer by laying the groundwork of a new covenant with its distinctive priesthood, law, and temple. As the perfection language points to, this will achieve what the old covenant could not, that is, a people who persevere in faithfulness until they reach the eschatological goal, the new village. The Melchizedekian priesthood is also based on God’s oath (ch. 7:20) One aspect of this is that it is grounded in Jesus’ embodiment of an unfailing life-force, in contrast to priesthood “according to the law of the fleshly commandment” (ch. 7:16). Human priests mediate spiritual power from elsewhere
according to the regulations or customs given in a law or \textit{aluk}, and they themselves fall sick and die.\footnote{Johnson, \textit{Hebrews}, 188.} Jesus is able to help people attain to a complete salvation (ch. 7:25).

The heart of the writer’s exposition is in ch. 9:1–10:14, much of which we have examined above. The writer begins with describing the furnishings of the temple, which point to the relationship of Israel with God, particularly God’s presence in the inner sanctuary (ch. 9:5), the source of blessing and life for the community. The Cherubim and mercy seat \textit{ιλαστήριον} express the same divine goals as the new covenant prophecy: God dwelling in the midst of his people (ch. 8:10),\footnote{Ibid., 221.} and the putting away of sins (Heb 8:12). However, the structure of the sanctuary showed the Levitical system’s limitation in providing access to God and dealing with that corporate consciousness of failure (ch. 9:6–10). Jesus’ blood, however, operates in the heavenly temple (v. 11–12), cleansing worshippers (v. 13–14), inaugurating the new covenant (vv. 15–20), and providing once for all time purification in God’s very presence (ch. 9:21–26). The new covenant means that the old regulations, whether Torah or \textit{aluk}, are no longer in force; the purification in heaven means that they are no longer necessary to maintain cosmic order. This entails a state of having been purified, with the result that Christ’s coming again is welcomed as the bringing of salvation, not judgment (ch. 9:27–28), and the consciousness of sin implied by repeated sacrifice (ch. 10:1–14) has been put away in accordance with God’s plan (ch. 10:5–9) achieving a state of sanctification or authorisation to enter God’s presence (ch. 10:10) as his people await the full realisation of salvation when his enemies have been subdued (ch. 10:11–14).

What this state of purification is dependent on is the monotheism of the Levitical system, which makes God the only arbiter of consequences for defilement, so that once the heavenly sanctuary has been decisively cleansed, consciousness of defilement as an existential threat is done away with. Traditional Toraja had a second reason to be conscious of the threat posed by defilement, namely the diversity of spiritual entities that could be offended. This
is a question the text raises for the Toraja second-hand as it were, since it is the more direct concern of the Levitical conception that the writer and his hearers have already accepted.

We have already discussed how this makes cleansing a matter of subjectivation, not a means of *askēsis*. The question of consciousness of sin and a fractured world is posed by this text, but the answer is incomplete before the following verses, where the state of purification given by Christ’s blood is seen to be not a static given but the grounds for continuing the journey of faith.

In the following verses, then, this purification is tied in with wider concerns. First, the maturity that the writer called for will now be a possibility: the new covenant means changed dispositions of the heart and mind, in accordance with Jeremiah’s prophecy (ch. 10: 16). How this is related to Jesus’ sacrifice is not made clear, other than the fact that Jesus’ sacrifice inaugurated the new covenant which this prophecy details.21 What has changed in ch. 9: 14 is the consciousness of dead works, that is, of their power to separate from God. If the use of *νεκρος* alludes to defiling power released by such works,22 particularly in a culture where the middle world is strong, it may also be necessary to argue that what is cleansed by Jesus’ blood includes those defiling powers. This is the life-force parallel to the argument that release from guilt enables new dispositions of the heart to develop.23

Second, the implications of the the state of being purified in ch. 10: 19–25 connect with the wider concerns of the letter. Drawing near to God (ch. 10: 19–22) includes asking for help (ch. 4: 16), holding fast to the confession of hope (ch. 10: 23 goes back to ch. 6: 13–20 and ch. 4: 14), and the encouragement to good works (ch. 10: 24–25) is a call to communal maturity and vitality (ch. 5: 11–6: 12). All of these can be done at all time and all places, since the ritual prerequisites have been achieved once for all by Christ’s sacrifice. It is these activities, rather than sacrifice, that do the ethical work on the spiritual vitality of the congregation, helping them towards maturity.

21 deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 325.

22 Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 252.

23 deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 327.
We note, however, that these activities will still find their clearest expression in a ritual context. The grounds of drawing near, the blood of Jesus that constitutes a person as a Believer, is experienced ritually in baptism in ch. 10:22, which marks the individual as a beneficiary of that blood. Drawing near in prayer may also be exercised in the meeting, as well as in other contexts. The confession of hope may also include public confession in the meeting, but the very fact of participating in the meeting indicates acceptance of the order expressed therein, that is, of identifying with Jesus as the true pangala tondok, where true purification is found. The meeting is also the context for the mutual askēsis towards love, the chief characteristic of maturity (ch. 10:24–25). The call to pay attention to one another implies making this group the prime place for exercising solidarity, that is, the group becomes the primary tongkonan.

Third, while being cleansed is a state and not cyclical, the warning of ch. 10:26–31 makes clear that it is not automatic. There is the possibility of sinning deliberately, that is, definitively rejecting the salvation that has been offered. This is the spiritual equivalent of leaving the village, with its shelter and protection. Doing so profanes Christ’s blood, turning its life-giving power into one of destruction. It is also a personal insult to Christ, the courageous and self-sacrificial pangala tondok.

The status of being cleansed is not, therefore, an end in itself, but a means to building a community of faith, love, and hope which will persevere to the end and enjoy the promise (ch. 10:32–39). This perseverance becomes the theme of the following discussion.

---


12.4 Living in hope (Hebrews 11–13)

While we have argued that the askēsis of Heb 10:19–25 can take ritual form, it is still the case that no longer doing sacrifices and keeping tabus removes much of the ritual support that structures life in a ritual context. 28 Heb 11:1 makes faith, rather than ritual, the substance and proof of what is unseen. This is not a logical proof, but rather a question of honour and of what is valued.

The question of honour is first raised in ch. 11:2, in explanation (γαρ) of the opening verse. The Toraja translation for ἐμαρτυρήθησαν means “their names are spoken well of” (dipokada melo tu sanganna). As commentators point out, 29 this testimony occurs in Scripture, and can therefore be seen as a divine passive. The Toraja translation captures the complementary aspect that the scriptural testimony creates a framework for seeking honour in a way that pleases God. That theological concepts (here the divine evaluation) work through social processes was a primary lesson of our pragmatic account of theological language.

At dispute, then, is who is truly honourable, and God’s testimony is that it is those who live by faith. 30 Being honoured by God is unseen, but it also points to the unseen eschatological consequences of life or destruction (ch. 10:39). Having faith is evidence of being honoured by God, and being honoured by God is the seal of full possession of life in the age to come.

The writer then grounds his talk of unseen things in creation (v. 3): God is the single divine source of everything that is, both in the current age, and in the age to come (hence the plural αἰῶνας). 31 Having created the current age by his word out of what is unseen, he will be able to bring into being the as yet unseen hoped for age to come. 32 It is this hoped

---

28 See page 138.
29 Johnson, Hebrews, 279.
30 deSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 385.
32 deSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 387.
for age of which faith is the sign and seal, and so the creating power of God’s word is basic to faith as the writer presents it. This is not completely alien for traditional Toraja. There were (many) unseen entities, including the high god *Puang Matua* who fashioned the Toraja world and gave the *aluk* code. However, those entities were empirical in two ways which do not apply to the writer’s creational monotheism. First, the various divine beings were all to some extent empirically accessible through ritual, whether the spirits who possessed people in various *Rambu Tuka’* ceremonies, or the recently divinised ancestors whose earthly life and divinisation ritual were still in human memory, or the high god whose *aluk* explained both blessing and misfortune.\(^{33}\) The writer’s creational monotheism requires believing that the whole creation as an undifferentiated whole is the product of God’s word, a belief with no empirical correlates. Second, their existence and power were confirmed empirically when the misfortune caused by a transgression ceased after the *massuru’* ceremony, or prayer to a divinised ancestor brought results. For the writer, the restoration of order will occur when the unseen hoped for age comes.

We see this deferral of the restoration of order in the first example of Abel (ch. 11:4). It is not clear (in the letter or in Gen 4) how God’s approval was conveyed, though it was apparent to Cain as well. But, while Abel gains God’s approval, he is then murdered, an apparent failure to gain blessing. What he does obtain is voice that still speaks, which is an aspect of the honour of being commended in Scripture. Enoch, by contrast, escapes death, and the writer notes that he pleased God (this being how the LXX translated “walked with God” in Gen 5: 22 & 24). This leads to the writer’s first clarification of his description of faith (v. 6). First, it is motivated by the need to please God, which implies approaching him (as in ch. 4:16; ch. 10:22). Approaching God requires the belief that he exists, presumably in the sense of v. 3, but also that there is reward rather than danger or punishment in approaching him. This reward is what is hoped for in v. 1, meaning that it is precisely the non-empirical unseen hope that the writer has been expounding (ch. 10:35).

\(^{33}\)See page 23.
The following examples build up a picture of how this faith works. Noah’s story shows the structure of this hope: at the time it needs to be prepared for, it is unseen, but when it comes, it is very real (v. 7). Abraham goes to an unknown country with a set of promises, only one of which (descendants) he sees in his lifetime (vv. 8–12). The writer sums this up by saying that they “saw from afar” (v. 13a). Faith is a sign of what is hoped for in that it treats it as real, as before one’s eyes. The writer’s strategy is this: while the promised world is not yet seen, it is made concrete in the lives of those who lived in the light of its reality. Lives of faith make the unseen observable in the same way that meat division makes status observable.

The writer then explains further the sense of hope and reward. The patriarchs not only saw from afar, they also desired what they saw more than this age (v. 16). In doing so, they made God their God, and God’s tongkonan their primary family, and so the writer concludes that God is not ashamed to be their God, in contrast to the rebellious Israel of ch. 8:9 (Jer 31:32). The good name of the faithful is thus a name of which God is proud, though this only works as a motivation for those who hope for God’s unseen reward.

The writer continues to show faith in action through the biblical history. In some cases, faith saw a result in the present age: Moses brought Israel to the promised land (ch. 11:27–29); Jericho fell (ch. 11:30); and Rahab received the spies and was saved (ch. 11:31). The writer concludes with an impressive list of what the people of faith achieved from the time of the Judges, culminating in the resurrection of dead sons of widows (ch. 11:32–35a). However, the writer also sharpens the choice between honour in this world or honour before God. Moses denies his adopted family and chooses disgrace like that of Christ, because he sees and desires his reward (ch. 11:24–26). Beginning in v. 35b, the writer presents a list of disgrace and suffering. If widows saw dead children being raised, these people of faith looked for a better resurrection.

The point of this list in that the world was not worthy of these people of faith (v. 38a). Grasping this reorientation of value, of what is truly honourable, is the key to this chapter for honour-oriented listeners. For in the last two verses, the writer includes his hearers in
CHAPTER 12. THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

this list: God will fulfil his promises to these believers of old along with believers in Jesus Christ (v. 39–40).

This, then, is the question the text poses to Toraja listeners. It is not just a matter of seeing what has not yet appeared, it is also valuing what is promised over what is available now, and for the present, seeking God’s approval even over approval from one’s family. The whole life of traditional Toraja is oriented towards their funeral ceremony, which lies in their empirical future their whole lives. Joining God’s tongkonan means looking forward to a different festival, as the writer will shortly come to (ch. 12:22–23).

Before this, however, the writer addresses the other aspect of perseverance, enduring suffering and shame. Recalling ch. 2:10, the hearers are to focus on Jesus, the one who has pioneered the path (ἀρχηγός) to salvation (ch. 12:2). Now, however, it is clear that the path of exaltation through shame is one that his followers also need to go through. The cross was a place of shame to be endured, but Jesus endured it because he saw from afar the seat at God’s right hand that awaited him, a seat that made the shame of the cross that was so powerful in the Roman Empire seem but a trifle. The hearers of the homily need to choose between the crowd that despised the crucified Jesus (in Jerusalem and to this day), and the crowd of witnesses looking for the same joy as Jesus. They need to consider Jesus’ perseverance, and not be discouraged by opposition (v. 3).

Suffering is not just unpleasant, it can also be seen as a sign of divine displeasure. The following verses (ch. 12:4–11) give an alternative (indeed, opposite) interpretation: suffering is divine discipline indicating that we are true sons, that is, heirs (ch. 12:8). When believers have this understanding, and let themselves be trained by it, there is a reward (v. 11). This time, however, the reward is not the unseen things of the future age, but the harvest of fruit consisting of a righteousness which brings peace (v. 11). This fruit is the evidence of land which is blessed by God (ch. 6:7). Its absence indicates a root of bitterness, which left unchecked threatens to spread (ch. 12:15); it is therefore the responsibility of the community to encourage the weak and look out for those falling away from grace (ch. 12:12–15). The
function of combing out disorder performed by the public confession of sins in the *massuru’* procedure is one way of exercising this *askēsis*.\(^{34}\)

The writer concludes with his picture of the eschatological feast, where the Jesus *tongkonan* turns out to be a large crowd of angels and redeemed humans (ch. 12: 22). Here the glory to which Jesus is leading the “sons” (ch. 2: 10), here “first-born”, is revealed (ch. 12: 23–24). First, like the genealogy of ancestors bringing honour to the *tongkonan*, the names of these heirs of the promise are written in heaven. This is a concrete way of saying that God is not ashamed to be their God; their inclusion is complete. Second, their having been perfected in Jesus means that they are have been publicly declared righteous by God the Judge. Third, this realisation of harmony and joy is founded on the new covenant established by Jesus’ blood, and therefore shares in the vitality of his indestructible life. This is what will survive the eschatological shaking of the world (ch. 12: 26–27).

Grasping what is enduring and what is not is the basis for the final exhortations which give concrete expression to the service of God that Jesus’ blood has opened up (ch. 12: 28a; ch. 9: 14) Love is given concrete expression in ch. 13: 1–6, and past leaders provide concrete examples of living by unseen realities (ch. 13: 7). The writer then expresses the heart of the challenge of faith in unseen realities: being willing to bear reproach with Jesus outside the camp (ch. 13: 13), outside the structures which provide honour in the human *tongkonan*.\(^{35}\) This is the concrete manifestation of having seen the coming city (ch. 13: 14). Praise and good works are the concrete offerings to God that will maintain the vitality of the group (ch. 13: 15–16).

This final exposition of the meaning of Jesus’ death sharpens what the writer conveyed in ch. 11, that faith in what is unseen is not just a matter of imagination, but also of what is valued. Jesus, the *pangala tondok* who sacrificed himself, is so to be valued that shame in the earthly structures of honour is willingly borne in order to share in fellowship with him.

\(^{34}\)See page 247.

\(^{35}\)Ibid., 501.
12.5 Conclusion

We described the function of the first four chapters of Hebrews as establishing Jesus as the true *pangala tondok*, in genuine solidarity with his people, and leading them to the new village of God’s rest. It begins by declaring a new word from God, raising the question of which word will function as *aluk*, directing life. The writer answers by revealing this word to be God’s Son, tying the importance of that word to his status (ch. 1:1–2:4). As God’s Son, creating and purifying the world, he possesses the divine ability to provide for his followers, and as God’s appointed king, he demonstrates divine wisdom, thus fulfilling two criteria of a Toraja leader in a divine way.

The solidarity of Jesus is shown in his taking on the human condition, including dying. This raises the question of glory through suffering that only receives its full answer at the end of the latter, but at this stage the writer shows his death to be courageous self-sacrifice (completing the list of Toraja leadership qualities) which provide the theo-dramatic inclusion that answers the problem of shame, and the theo-dramatic atonement that answers the problem of disorder and death (ch. 2:1–3:6). Finally, Jesus is leading his group to God’s rest, and the major threat to sharing in that goal is unbelief. This leads to the initial exhortations to seek that rest, aided by the exposing power of God’s word, identify with Jesus, and pray with boldness.

The questions which arose out of this section in a Toraja context include the following. What is the true word that will sustain order and life in a chaotic world? What is the true social identity (*tongkonan*) where this blessing is to be found, and who is its founder (*pangala tondok*)? Where is this community headed, and how do we avoid becoming unfaithful and missing out?

The middle section look at the call to maturity in terms of the vitality of the congregation, and noted the call to hope as the necessary, but intangible, means of perseverance. Summarising chs. 7–10, we noted the assumed background of monotheism which becomes more salient from a traditional Toraja background. We also noted how the state of purification is
given practical meaning by being tied in to the new covenant promise of a new heart, the exhortations of ch. 10:19–25, and the warning of ch. 10:26–31.

The final section began with the exposition of faith in things unseen, and revealed that the question is not just imagining the unseen, but valuing it more than what is seen. This in turn means being able to endure shame in the light of future joy along with the present hope of the harvest of righteousness. After describing how people of faith show by their decisions the reality of the unseen, the writer finally provides a picture of the heavenly festival. The final chapter sharpens the finding of ch. 11: Jesus is so to be valued that his followers leave the earthly structures of honour to bear his disgrace.

This interpretation of Hebrews is clearly in continuity with Western interpretations, since it endeavours to present rather than transpose the myth or story: Jesus as pangala tondok is not making him a part of Toraja myth, but rather using a Toraja role to provide a means for understanding the theo-drama. However, the attempt to use the two Toraja ethical systems did result in different interpretations at points, with a less individualistic emphasis, and appeals to honour rather than truth. In terms of non-discursive representations, we mentioned baptism, ritual, and the tongkonan house, but not to any great extent. We will comment briefly on this in the Conclusion.
Chapter 13

Conclusion

We began with the need for a three-culture hermeneutic which would enable Hebrews to be grasped in a traditional Toraja context. A basic distinction we established in the Introduction was between mythos (understood as a theo-drama for Christianity) and ethos. A brief look at Heb 9–10 provided our first illustration of this, as we saw Western interpreters reinterpreting its defilement language in accordance with a Western ethos. A survey of value complexes provided opportunity to show the potential effects of cultural difference, and to provide more extensive descriptions of possible differences between that of the missionaries who came to Toraja and the Toraja themselves. The important difference between modern Western individualism and traditional Toraja relationalism was found in the sense of dependence on and vulnerability to others, human and spiritual. This was also experienced in the reciprocal giving that constituted relationships and was measured in honour, a system that was grounded in grace, consistent with that sense of dependence. The final value complex turned out to have cognitive implications, as the search for clarity grounded in the Greek philosophical tradition contrasted with an East Asian acceptance for ambiguity and apparent contradiction. In this way the first Part gave some initial pointers to potential cultural issues for contextualisation in a traditional Toraja context, showed that value complexes are persistent, and showed how they can affect how passages are read.

The next Part sought to establish what kinds of implications these differences have had in ministry of the gospel. Here we introduced the distinction of ritual and sincerity orientations,
sharpening our earlier finding on dependence, and illustrating how Protestant sincerity mode has had difficulties with the felt needs of a ritual culture that lead to use of magic. We similarly saw that Toraja ritual has a pragmatic orientation to the physical world, in contrast to a Protestant Sunday service which aims to build up individuals in a sincere faith. Our analysis of Kruyt’s ministry in Poso brought in two more frameworks that enabled more specific analysis of the issues pointed to by the ritual/sincerity distinction. Faubion’s ethical framework connected it with ethos, showing that the Poso were acting ethically with respect to external harmony, while the Dutch were acting with respect to their souls. Keane’s discussion of semiotic ideology further connected this with issues of meaning: the lack of interior focus of the Poso led to sub-Christian ethical agency.

The third Part took a turn to philosophy in order to develop a hermeneutic that would address these issues. We first demonstrated that the Protestant semiotic ideology was not biblically mandated, and showed the inability of a hermeneutic based on it to allow for the differences in interpretation whose need our previous discussion has demonstrated. We then adopted and developed a realist Christocentric pragmatic account of theological language. This makes getting the subject matter right the standard of truth, not a predetermined level of conceptual clarity, thus allowing for different ways of getting the subject matter right in different contexts. It provided a way of understanding the common contextual argument that the Bible is too rich to be captured by one culture: concepts always have implicit meaning that is broader than what can be made explicit, and so different contexts can bring out different aspects of this implicit meaning. By distinguishing reference and meaning, it allowed for real connection to the theo-drama despite conceptual confusion. This provided an account of local theology as the discourse of a community who speak the same theological language, that is, who form a community of intersubjective recognition for theological concepts. It also provided an account for non-discursive representations, and how they can form part of the process of interpretation.

The last chapter of the third Part built on this account with a dialogue between Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* and Vanhoozer’s theo-dramatic account. Gadamer’s account clarifies the
three-culture task as providing prejudgments that will enable questions from the text to arise that address the local context. This required working out what kind of hermeneutical object the Bible is, that is, what kinds of questions are suitable to it. Vanhoozer’s basic answer is double agency discourse, which does allow that God’s intention from a biblical text does not have to be identical for every context. However, his own account distinguishes the Christotope, the centre of the theo-drama which projects its own horizon encompassing all human horizons, from the variety of concrete ways that mythos is lived out in the Canon. We suggested, then, that the fusion of horizons for the mythos is weighted to the horizon of the theo-drama: the reality of what God has done is not dependent on the horizon of the interpreter, though its conceptualisation is. By contrast, the fusion of horizons for ethos results in a meaning that is more than what is found in the biblical text; the horizon of the interpreter forms part of the substance of its meaning. Vanhoozer’s account also showed that the Bible functions similarly to myth, combining mythos and ethos, and we connected this with our previous discussion of non-discursive symbols.

The final Part applied this account to Hebrews in Toraja perspective. An introductory chapter showed how connection to the theo-drama works at the level of interpretation, and argued that this connection to the theo-drama is the appropriate measure of genuine theodramatic performance, rather than sincerity. We then applied Faubion’s ethical framework to Hebrews, noting that the significant change is not towards an interior ethical substance, but rather that purification becomes a part of subjectivation, not askesis. It became clear that Hebrews does not imply a particular ethical substance, but at the same time it draws on themes of maturity, honour, and blessing and defilement which allow for different ethical system to operate. We noted the honour-shame and ecological harmony systems in Toraja, and showed how Kobong’s tongkonan theology conveyed these two ethical systems in a local extended metaphor.

The final chapter applied this to Hebrews, showing that the rhetorical flow and intention of the letter can be understood in this way, and thereby providing initial evidence of the usefulness of this hermeneutic. We were able to understand the appeals in the letter in terms
of honour and shame rather than truth and falsity, to cast maturity in terms of congregational vitality, and to provide an initial entry point into eschatology with the image of the *pangala tondok* who founds a new village.

It will be observed, however, that non-discursive representations did not play a significant role. This is the limitation of working with an abstraction of a culture, and not in the field. The hermeneutic itself would be greatly strengthened if it became a part of reading with non-scholarly congregation members, including non-literate ones (where reading becomes a metonym rather than synecdoche of the process of working towards meaning together). It is to be hoped that the still broad generalisations developed here would provide appropriate prejgments for the text as God’s word to address his people.
Bibliography


Caldwell, Larry W. “Towards the New Discipline of Ethnohermeneutics: Questioning the
Relevancy of Western Hermeneutical Methods in the Asian Context.” Journal of Asian


Cavallin, Clemens. Ritualization and Human Interiority. Denmark: Museum Tusculanum

Coville, Elizabeth. “‘A Single Word Brings to Life’: The Maro Ritual in Tana Toraja


deSilva, David Arthur. Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the

Douglas, Mary. Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo.

Downing, Francis Gerald. Making Sense in (and of) the First Christian Century. Sheffield,

Dumbrell, W. J. Hebrews: A New Covenant Commentary. North Parramatta, N.S.W.:

27–41.

Eberhard, Philippe. The Middle Voice in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics: A Basic Interpretation

Eberhart, Christian A. “Characteristics of Sacrificial Metaphors in Hebrews.” Pages 37–64
in Hebrews: Contemporary Methods, New Insights. Biblical interpretation series v. 75;


Edwards, M. J. ed. Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians. Ancient Christian commentary on

Ellingworth, Paul. The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text. The
New international Greek Testament commentary; Grand Rapids, Mich: W B Eerdmans,
1993.

Faubion, James D. An Anthropology of Ethics. New Departures in Anthropology; Cam-


Jensen, Peter F. “Calvin, Charismatics and Miracles.” *The Evangelical Quarterly* no. 3 (1979): 131–144.


