

**THE DEFINING OF REDEMPTIVE TRUTH AS A POTENTIAL  
FOR RESEARCH ACROSS THE DIVERSE WORLD AND LIFE  
VIEW ASSUMPTIONS OF DIFFERENT CULTURES.**

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### **Abstract**

*The research methodologies that have prevailed in the academe have flowed generally from modernist and postmodernist assumptions concerning reality. These assumptions regarding the discovery of truth not only have permeated all Western educational institutions but have colonised also those in non-Western countries. Other cultures, however, have different ways of judging truth—as do Christians. Research from a biblical perspective should recognise an holistic, relational epistemology and should be seen as the unhiding of truth about God and His works while declaring, or reclaiming, truths to be of Godly origin, value and purpose. In doing this, such research would endeavour to follow God’s commands and His will for His Creation by providing restorative solutions to Fall-induced problems.*

### **Keywords**

Research, truth, unhiding, cultures, psycho-epistemological priorities, relational epistemology, *telos*, ontology.

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years in the West, social researchers have emerged somewhat from the so-called quantitative versus qualitative research methodology wars. The current era has presented itself with many methodologies and nuanced sub-methodologies, as well as the various computer software spinoffs to support these. The stated motivations given by Christians for research, however, usually lack any intentionality regarding references to, or apparent directions from, biblical thinking. The eschewing by Christian educators of the dualistic notion of cosmology that artificially divides the sacred and secular, has been a topic of recent years for many Christian academics. Yet one finds with regard to *research* that this divide persists. Research is seen merely as a neutral tool that may be used to sacred or secular ends. However, as Neil Postman<sup>1</sup> wrote: “Embedded in every tool is an ideological bias, a presupposition to construct the world as one thing rather than another, to value one thing over another, to amplify one sense or skill or attitude more loudly than another”.

For much of the 20th century, in the Western world, the research tools of quantitative methodologies were deemed to be the quintessential truth definers and this ideology has been spread very effectively to the non-Western world. In their comparative investigation of research practices in North-South universities (United Kingdom and Cameroon), Barrett, Crossley and Fon reflected that they,

had not anticipated the extent to which individuals’ careers and professional identities were invested in maintaining the supremacy of their particular approach to quantitative research. The debate on methodologies became

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<sup>1</sup> N Postman, *Technopoly: The surrender of culture to technology*, Knopf, New York, 1992, p. 13.

polarised as individuals presented epistemologies as paradigmatic, excluding the possibility of epistemological diversity.<sup>2</sup>

With regard to an African context, Obasi, Flores and James-Meyers described a situation where,

Western science dictates what epistemology and methodology are deemed credible for uncovering ontological relationships. Given this imposed ethic (cultural universal) inherent in Western science, limitations in researching African deep thought become inevitable when epistemological and ontological relationships rooted in consubstantiation (spirit as the first principle) come into conflict with research methods that are fundamentally grounded in a materialistic-based Western worldview.<sup>3</sup>

Gonzalez noted that within non-Western contexts, “The scientific knowledge of people not governed exclusively by positivist rules for knowing is oftentimes disregarded due to the implicit and tacit forms of their accustomed methodologies”<sup>4</sup>. Capra and Steindl-Rast<sup>5</sup> considered this form of indoctrination with a particular set of methodologies as being linked to imperialism, power and control by the West. In recent times, in the West, a very wide range of qualitative methodologies have emerged into the mainstream—particularly in social science contexts, and some of

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<sup>2</sup> AM Barrett, M Crossley & TP Fon, ‘North-South research partnerships in higher education: Perspectives from South and North’ in B Streitwieser (ed.), *Internationalisation of higher education and global mobility*, Symposium Books, Oxford, 2014, p. 67.

<sup>3</sup> EM Obasi, LY Flores & L James-Meyers, ‘Construction and initial validation of the Worldview Analysis Scale (WAS)’, *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 39, no. 6, 2009, p. 938.

<sup>4</sup> MC Gonzalez, ‘The four seasons of ethnography: A creation centered ontology for ethnography’. *Journal of Intercultural Relations*, vol. 24, 2000, p. 626.

<sup>5</sup> F Capra & D Steindl-Rast, *Belonging to the universe: Explorations on the frontiers of science and spirituality*. Harper, San Francisco, CA, 1992.

these have made their way to the non-Western world. Gonzalez commented, however, that he would become frustrated when enthusiastic, non-Western students began to work in qualitative research methodologies, noting that their work appeared to do no more than 'dress up' otherwise linear, western thinking.

The West's promulgation of the modernist, quantitative perspective on research is predicated on the notion that truth is derived empirically and rationally. This was the accepted understanding for a considerable time but eventually we began to understand in the social sciences that human beings are extraordinarily complex and their motivations, reactions and relationships cannot be adequately described by numerical data. This is not to dismiss quantitative methodologies. They have a very important place in the canon of truth-revealing research tools. Many would claim, however, that the search for deeper truth, when dealing with human subjects, is found more appropriately in qualitative methodologies. These qualitative methodologies allow the researcher to examine the verbal and non-verbal communication of research participants in order to observe a wide array of phenomena and their interconnectedness. Inductive and deductive reasoning may then be used to draw particular conclusions based on the researcher's analysis of the data.

In the West, however, this process is still driven by Western modes of reasoning and truth determination. In other cultures this may not be as intuitive as it appears to be to Westerners. Phenomenological studies based on the analysis of human relationships, for example, while holding to one pattern in the individualistic West, will be different qualitatively from studies undertaken within the complex relational

structures of the various types of collectivist cultures in the Middle East, South America, or Asia, or in the Ubuntu thinking contexts in Africa. Perhaps a more complex example may be research within animistic cultures where thinking is governed by dividualism<sup>6</sup>—where human subjects are seen in relationship not only with other humans but with inanimate objects as well as the spirit world. These relationship networks contribute to the world picture and worldview of the research subjects and include their epistemology.

#### PSYCHO-EPISTEMOLOGICAL PRIORITIES IN DIFFERENT CULTURAL CONTEXTS

Between individuals or across cultures, not all truth is derived from the same sources or interpreted in the same way. Philosophers and sociologists have described human differences in epistemological style using a range of terms such as: realism, romanticism, constructionism, empiricism, rationalism, pragmatism, dualism, relativism, positivism, humanism, emotionalism, transcendentalism, and individualism<sup>7</sup>. Wilkinson and Migotsky described these epistemological styles as “individual differences in beliefs about what knowledge is and how it is acquired”<sup>8</sup>. In a similar vein, in the 1960s, Royce and Smith<sup>9</sup> proposed the notion of psycho-epistemological priorities, or the value we place on truth-revealing sources. To use

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<sup>6</sup> N Bird-David, “‘Animism’ revisited: Personhood, environment, and relational epistemology”, *Current Anthropology*, vol. 40, 1999, pp. 67–91.

<sup>7</sup> WK Wilkinson & CP Migotsky, ‘A factor analytic study of epistemological style inventories’, *The Journal of Psychology*, vol. 128, no. 5, 1964, pp. 499–516.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 500.

<sup>9</sup> RJ Royce & WAS Smith, ‘A note on the development of the psycho-epistemological profile (PEP)’, *Psychological Reports*, vol. 14, 1964, pp. 297–298.

their schema as an example, four fundamental approaches to reality that influence our understanding of potential sources of truth and the strength of our trust in them were proposed.<sup>10</sup> The level of faith that we have in the reliability or validity of these truth-revealing sources will differ between individuals and also between cultures. The four approaches suggested by Royce and Smith were:

- Rationalism-thinking: Faith in the evidence provided by reason or cognitive processes
- Empiricism-sensing: Faith in the evidence provided by our senses
- Intuitionism-feeling: Faith in the evidence provided by feeling but also including revelation such as divine revelation, dreams, etc.
- Authoritarianism-believing: Faith in the authority of an individual or individuals in positions of influence

Although each of us relies on all of these approaches to determine our perception of the truthfulness of information, there are stark differences among individuals and cultures in the prioritization of our reliance upon each. In order to function effectively we are all able to reason, trust in our senses, rely on feelings and intuitions, and rely on information provided by experts.<sup>11</sup> Early last century, the French anthropologist, Lévy-Bruhl wrote patronizingly of a ‘primitive mentality’

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<sup>10</sup> Young and others contested the reliability of the original research that defined these categories, yet there was a general agreement that such prioritizations seem to exist. In particular, Young noted that the responses of subjects were usually mixed rather than providing what could be proposed as a clear, culturally defined prioritization. (RE Young, ‘The epistemic discourse of teachers: An ethnographic study’, *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, vol. 12, no. 2, 1981, pp. 122–144.)

<sup>11</sup> The rationality that pervades the West notwithstanding, we have well developed affective domains and can appreciate beauty, as well as marveling at the ‘inspiration that guides or drives artists and poets to produce work of exceptional quality as if some ‘other hand’ were guiding them.

attributed to those from many non-Western cultures. With an arrogance, perhaps typical of his time and origin, Lévy-Bruhl wrote dismissively of the thinking of these people in the following way: “The fact is that the primitive, whether he be an African or any other, never troubles to inquire into causal connections which are not self-evident, but straightway refers them to a mystic power”<sup>12</sup>. More recently, anthropologists and sociologists have begun to take a more enlightened view of the different styles of thinking commonly used in different cultures. Nisbett, for example, compared Western, individualistic thought with Eastern, collectivist thought.

Basically, what we find is that Westerners are analytic thinkers, by which I mean that in general they see and think about a single focal object (or person) and its attributes, and then use those attributes to categorize the object, and they use universal laws about categories to model and control events . . . . Westerners presume laws are deterministic; for example, they are always applicable. Moreover they are linear. . . . Easterners have little concern for universal laws, in the sense that Westerners do.<sup>13</sup>

The question then arises as to how research as truth discovery might be undertaken within cultures with different perceptions of how truth may be discovered and what sources are given more credibility. What, for example, may academic research done by someone embedded in an animistic culture look like? Would it of necessity have

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<sup>12</sup> L Lévy-Bruhl, *Primitive mentality*, AMS Press, New York, 1923, p. 36.

<sup>13</sup> R Nisbett, ‘Cognition East and West: Fundamental differences in reasoning and perception’, in LE Harrison, EG Jasin, VŠ Ekonomiki & P Samuel, *Culture matters in Russia - and everywhere: Backdrop for the Russia-Ukraine conflict*. Papers from the Samuel P. Huntington Memorial Symposium on Culture, Cultural Change and Economic Development held at the National Research University Higher School of Economics in Moscow on May 24 - 26, 2010, p. 303.

to look like research in a Western paradigm? If that were the case, then presumably for the researcher it must lack integrity in that the researcher is not actually seeking truth as she understands truth to be for his or her cultural perspective. If such an indigenous research methodology were to be established, this then begs the question as to how the results of the research may be published in a way that is comprehensible to those in other cultures, such as Westerners.

The same questions may be raised also in the Christian academy. This is because when considering different cultures and world and life views that flow out of different foundational assumptions, the Christian 'culture' may also be seen in this way. Obviously, there is constant criticism of Christian beliefs and the claim to a 'faith' base by those whose own faith-based ideological stance arises from the psycho-epistemological ascendancy that is given to rationalism or empiricism. How, then, might a Christian researcher undertake research that is grounded in biblical principles and produce results that are comprehensible to the other cultures that surround us? Furthermore, for a Christian, what is the underlying purpose in even seeking to do so?

#### PRESUPPOSITIONS OF BIBLICALLY-GROUNDED RESEARCH

Although each of the Western models of research methodology has much to offer, they all fall short of providing a biblically constructed understanding of research since each emanates from presuppositions that are defined as constructions of human cognition rather than divine revelation. While the common grace argument may be persuasive, it appears that for the undertaking of research from an authentically

biblical perspective, an overarching biblically grounded methodology is yet to be presented. There is no intention in this paper to formulate a research methodology “product” but, rather, to stimulate further thinking in this important area. For example, one may consider the use of a revelatory participation approach, making use of some of reformed critical realism's<sup>14</sup> philosophical assumptions regarding our perception of reality, a relational epistemology, and seeking to locate research-based truth-seeking within a biblical understanding of epistemology and ontology. This is not to say that all of the tools of research should be summarily rejected. As indicated in response to the question for schoolteachers, “Is there a Christian way to pick up a pencil?”<sup>15</sup>, it depends on a recognition of the source, value and purpose of the tool in question. If its source is acknowledged to have its origin in the God of the Bible, and it has an appropriate God-sourced value and Godly purpose, then the tool, sequestered as it may have been away from its true origin, value and purpose, becomes of use for Christians—though redemptive thinking may be required. The problem lies in the unthinking use of such tools under the presumption that they are in some way neutral or value free.

By way of a starting point, a biblical stance may reject the naïve realist ontology, or understanding of reality, of positivism and the subjective, relativistic, fabricated realities of postmodern constructivism along with much of humanistic, dialectically focused critical theory. Obviously, one does not have the convenience of a passage in

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<sup>14</sup> RJ Edlin & R Thompson, ‘Introduction: What’s with this “reformed” idea in Christian education?’, in RJ Edlin, J Ireland & GR Beech (eds.), *Engaging the culture: Christians at work in education* [2nd ed., Kindle version], National Institute for Christian Education, (2014).

<sup>15</sup> GR Beech, *Christians as teachers: What might it look like?* Wipf & Stock, Eugene, OR, 2015.

Scripture that specifically outlines a 21st Century research methodology<sup>16</sup>. The Scriptures do, however, provide some guidelines for what we may and may not do as researchers. In this context we would agree as to the importance of moral integrity in our research practice—from the collection of data to its analysis and the drawing of conclusions. But this does not deal with the significant essences of research nor the methodologies that we may be inclined to use.

If we use a broad brush to define what we mean by research, we could speak of it as the story of a phenomenon, told truthfully, contextualised, and given a suggested hermeneutical framework. We could say also that it involves the use of one or more research methodologies that assist in the discovery and systematic analysis of reliable, valid truth about persons, things or phenomena, which lead to drawing conclusions from the discovery and suggesting practical applications for this new knowledge. Even more importantly, if we claim to be biblically cognizant researchers, then our perspectives—both our presuppositions and our controlling beliefs— must be aligned with Scripture in very fundamental ways. This includes a concern with the practical implications of our theological orientations as they influence our thought and practice in academia. In other words, we must make an effort to give some critical attention to the *Weltanschauung* (world and life view) presuppositions underlying our research endeavours.

Another biblical consideration in research as truth seeking is the Koine Greek word for truth, *aletheia* (αλεθεια), which is used often in the New Testament. This word is

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<sup>16</sup> Using Numbers chapters 3 and 26 or 2 Chronicles 2 as examples or models of quantitative research, or Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon as “thick description” reports of Solomon’s research might be rather inappropriate use of Scripture.

related to the verb *to be hid*—and hence has the sense of ‘un-hiding’. For those in New Testament times the implication was to make something visible. Today, in English, we may use the terms *discover* (to dis-cover), *reveal* (revelation), or *realize* (to make real for us). If research is described as ‘the seeking of truth’ then, whether we conceptualize it in terms of propositional truth or the personal, revealed *aletheia* (the Greek word for truth used by Jesus of Himself in John 14:6), we first need to acknowledge that all *truth* belongs to God. As the oft (mis)quoted Augustinian aphorism says, “All truth is God’s truth.” Augustine also referred to the sequestering of God’s knowledge by others who

themselves did not create these things, but excavated them, as it were, from the mines of divine Providence, which is everywhere present, but they wickedly and unjustly misuse this treasure for the service of demons. When a Christian severs himself in spirit from a wretched association with these people, he ought to take these truths from them for the lawful service of preaching the Gospel.<sup>17</sup>

Seeking truth therefore becomes an uncovering of God’s knowledge—the knowledge of Him, of His Creation, including His created human beings, their words and actions, and reclaiming knowledge that has been given a different, non-God origin, value and *telos* (purpose) by others. Research should become a profoundly theological activity as it sites itself within a Creation-Fall-Redemption-Fulfilment context and also, as it unmask the ubiquitous, Fall-induced horrors and inspires reverential awe of the One who has the power to restore perfection. Framing research

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<sup>17</sup> W Harmless, (ed.), *Augustine in his own words*, Catholic University of America Press Washington, DC, 2010, p. 183.

in this way would change many things including our attitude towards it, our motivation for conducting it and the suggested, practical application of the research results. The problem or question under investigation in our research projects may possibly, if not always, focus on the question of “What is wrong?” and this relates directly or indirectly to The Fall. The products of the research should naturally provide an obedient response to the greatest commandments as Jesus taught them (loving God and loving our neighbour, Mat 22: 37–40) and an unselfish response to the prayer that His kingdom may come and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Mat 6: 9–10). Also, the discovery of God, His person, His works and His kingdom purposes, in some degree should underwrite our research efforts as we use the knowledge of God, honest science and reflective aesthetics, as hermeneutics to interpret God’s revelation of Himself through His Creation (Rom 1:20).

#### RELATIONALITY AND EPISTEMOLOGY

The repetition of the “all things” phrase in Colossians 1:15–20, and many other passages throughout Scripture (Psa 119:91; Ecc 11:5; Jer 51:19; Joh 1:3; Rom 11:36; Eph 3:9, and others), is indicative of the pervasiveness of God’s power, control and interaction with and through His Creation. God Himself provides a personal connection to all things including human beings and everything else in Creation. This differs from the divination of animistic belief because of the understanding that there is reason, and purpose, for relatedness that is found in the Creator and Sustainer of all things. This embedded relationship that the Creator has with His

Creation, provides a relational ontology that then becomes the foundation for a relational epistemology.

So, by rejecting both classical (Enlightenment) foundationalism, and postmodern non-foundationalism, as well as the shallow “blessing” of our work by alluding to Scripture, and recognizing the primacy of a relational ontology, it may be possible to conceive of an epistemological basis for research that calls for a holistic framework with guiding reference to the declared ontological source—God. Such a framework for research would link the researcher, particularly in qualitative work, not only to the object of the research question as well as the human subject, but, in a network of relationships, would include also the ontological source, other relevant human beings, and other relevant contexts within Creation.

The Hebrew word we translate as 'knowledge' (עֵדוּת) often implies the entry into a relationship with the world we experience in such a way that we not only understand it but we also act on that understanding. The knowledge exchange between participant and researcher is contextualised within their relationship and has implications for the communication that takes place in a research interview as well as the interpretation of that information—facilitating the relationship and colouring understanding. When research participants are called on to comment on the communication or actions of others, a second network of relational knowledge is tapped. Collected data also reflect the relationship participants have with their particular culture so analysis should take that into account as well as the researcher’s relationship with his or her own culture and with the cultures or sub-cultures of the participants.

If there is warrant to establish a properly basic belief<sup>18</sup> in a God of biblical definition and character, then this faith foundation—as opposed to the faith foundations of the non-existence of God, or of a different god—provides a particular a priori or presuppositional springboard for the development of an epistemology that is all-encompassing in nature. Given the person and nature of the God of the Bible, and His created *Imago Dei*, such an epistemological viewpoint, must embody rational, relational and revelational knowledge.

The epistemic encounter we might have with another human being involves the full connectedness of that person—with the knower, with other knowers, with the rest of the created order and with an acknowledged Creator. Cross-culturally, or across sub-cultures, the ontological source, or perceived Creator—an *absolute origin*, an ἀρχή, as conceived by individuals and cultures will vary markedly. This may represent, for example, the Hindu pantheon of gods, the God of the Abrahamic faiths, or the “natural laws” of secular, Darwinian evolutionism. Researchers who do not take into account the fact that participants being interviewed may have a different perception of an *absolute origin* source from their own will have difficulty seeing the holistic field (*Gestalt*) of relationships and, to a degree, a comprehensive interpretation of this communication will remain elusive.

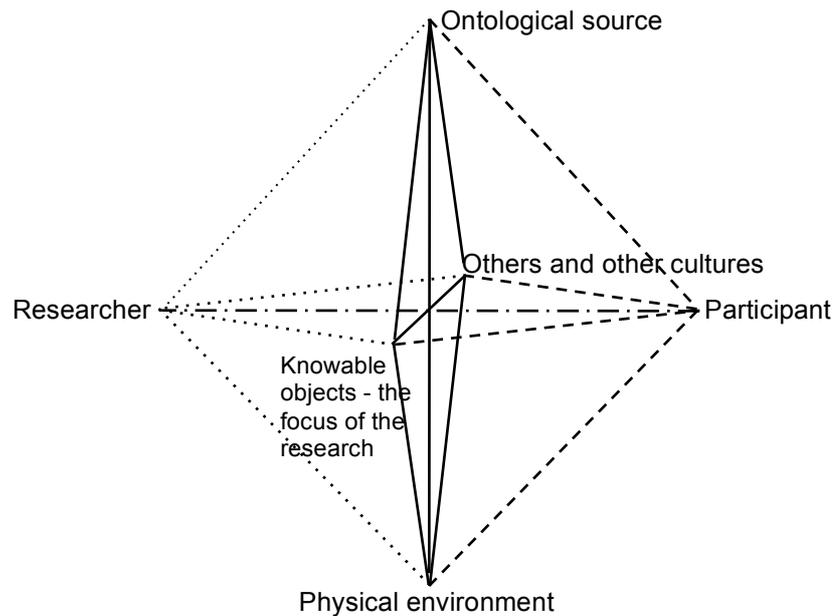
Diagrammatically, the relatedness network may be represented as follows in Figure 1. Dashed lines in the figure indicate the relationships pertinent to a research participant’s context regarding the object of the research and the dotted lines indicate the structure of relationships within which the researcher works. For simplicity, this

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<sup>18</sup> A Plantinga, *Warranted Christian belief*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000.

diagram indicates the same perceived ontological source for both researcher and participant<sup>19</sup> and does not include the movement of the relationships through time.

Figure 1 Ontological-epistemological relationships



The depth of these relationships is indicative of the depth of knowledge and has implications for education, social research, and for us, as human beings in a knowing relationship with God. Throughout the Scriptures, this link between knowledge and relationship is particularly strong. One example is the intimate *knowledge* relationship of Adam and Eve (Gen 4:1). It is evident also in His special revelation that to know God is to be in relationship with Him (Gal 4:9) and under the new covenant we see that salvation is linked with *knowing* God or Christ (Joh 17:3).

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<sup>19</sup> Members of some cultures, particularly those with an animistic belief set who see reality in terms of connected *dividuals* rather than isolated *individuals*, are more able to see the relational structures that pertain to knowledge (M Battiste & YJ Henderson, *Protecting Indigenous knowledge and heritage: A global challenge*, Purich Publishing, Saskatoon, SK, 2000.).

Attention may be drawn also to the fact that when working with people from the so-called collectivist cultures within a research context, relationship structures may be quite different from those in individualistic cultures. The level of trust granted to the researcher may depend on whether he or she is perceived as being a part of the subject's in-group or is viewed as being from an out-group. If from an out-group, the subject may display little trust and may even be in a position of providing false statements—a morally justified stance *vis-à-vis* someone from an out-group<sup>20</sup>.

#### RESEARCH WITH GODLY, REDEMPTIVE PURPOSE

We have already said that given a relational epistemology background for research, and given the significance placed on relationships and knowing in the Scriptures, it may be argued that, from the Christian perspective, the aim and end of research is not merely to gain knowledge for the sake of knowledge creation. Rather, it is to advance our knowledge of God through the development of a greater understanding of Him, of His Creation, of His created beings and of the relationships that bind them together. This becomes, then, the first *telos*, or purpose, for research. While it may be possible to explore the interpersonal interactions that are fundamental to symbolic interactionism, and while the subjective meanings that these are said to establish may be important, they wane in comparison to true, God-defined, objective reality. This divine reality, in many cases, may not be available to us as fallible creatures who will

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<sup>20</sup> LC Huff & L Kelley, *Trust formation in collectivist and individualist societies*, 1999, retrieved 18 March 2008 from <http://marketing.byu.edu/htmlpages/ccrs/proceedings99/huff.htm>.  
LC Huff & L Kelley, 'Levels of organizational trust in individualist versus collectivist societies: A seven-nation study', *Organizational Science*, vol. 14, no.1, 2003, pp. 81–90.

always suffer from an emic subjectivity, nested as we are within the research context, but God has given us the capacity to study His revelation of Himself through His Creation. Since we are created beings, related to Him and existing in His creation in communion with Him, this emic participation in the research task also implies the possibility of revealed knowledge and networks of relationships, of which we are a part and that are to be explored. The question of how this may be done in any truly objective sense, given our embeddedness in the Creation and in pre-existing relationship structures, has always been a key issue in discussions of research methodologies. All research, however, does become a theological endeavour—a *fides quaerens intellectum*—with the explicit purpose of participation in the un-hiding of revealed truth. This generates a revelatory participation approach to research that includes pragmatic, cogent and correspondence truth tests but that has a God-focused *telos*: an unveiling of truth as the reified will of God. The hiddenness of knowledge, in this sense, is something that is linked with our ignorance and we may use naturalistic techniques to un-hide it. The motivation for the research as well as the analysis and interpretation of the results, however, will be directed by a different *telos* and a different framework of presuppositions based on a relationship with the *Logos*.

A key component claimed for the application of critical realism in research is its transformative nature<sup>21</sup>. Applied to research, a critical realist approach implies the need for research to not merely unhide knowledge but to use the knowledge gained to transform or empower others—often those who are participants in the research.

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<sup>21</sup> B Egbo, 'Emergent paradigm: Critical realism and transformative research in education', *McGill Journal of Education*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2005, pp. 267–284.

This approach harmonizes with the biblical leitmotif of Creation, Fall, Redemption and Fulfilment and has spawned such versions as Critical Theological Realism<sup>22</sup>, Theological Critical Realism<sup>23</sup> and Reformed Critical Realism<sup>24</sup>. It also, once again, implies a practical application of the second commandment of Jesus (Mat 22:39) and is a practical response to a desire to see God's will evidenced on Earth (Mat 6:10). This leads to a further foundational purpose of research which, in this sense, is a call to transformation, reconstruction and renewal. "As Calvin pointed out, to know God is to be changed by God; true knowledge of God leads to worship, as the believer is caught up in a transforming and renewing encounter with the living God"<sup>25</sup>. This may be applied practically to both the researcher and the research participants using methodologies such as Critical Ethnography.

This bringing about of His purposes in research is done by recognizing that God is the source of all things, that truth is defined in relationships, and that we exist in a postlapsarian (post-Fall) world that, while marred by sin, is also blessed with God's common grace and the potential of redemption. The restorative nature of methodologies such as Critical Ethnography, when conceived from a biblical *Weltanschauung* basis, exhibits the biblical concept of the association of knowledge

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<sup>22</sup> JC Polkinghorne, *Belief in God in an age of Science*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1998.

<sup>23</sup> B Shipway, 'Critical realism and theological critical realism: Opportunities for dialogue', *Journal of Critical Realism, Aletheia*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2000, pp. 29–33.

B Shipway, *A critical realist perspective on education*, Routledge, Milton Park, UK, 2011.

<sup>24</sup> RJ Edlin, 'Inhabiting the mindfield: Why we think the way we do and what to do about it', in RJ Edlin & J Ireland (eds.), *Engaging the culture: Christians at work in education*, National Institute for Christian Education, Blacktown, NSW, 2006, pp. 53–74.

RJ Edlin, *Research in a worldview context*. Monograph, Edserv International, Warrawong, NSW, 2010.

RJ Edlin, *The cause of Christian education* (2nd ed.), Dordt College Press, Sioux City, IA, 2014.

<sup>25</sup> A McGrath, *The passion for truth: The intellectual coherency of evangelicalism*, Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 1996, p. 79.

with obedience or action. In this sense, research based on a critical ethnographic framework is not only designed to un-hide truth but also to solve, to recreate, to set right, and to empower. The researcher, therefore, is not simply an outside observer but a participant desiring to facilitate, aid, or enrich.

A note of caution should be added here regarding the promotion of a Western-conceived methodology or concept, such as Critical Ethnography, that has not arisen necessarily from a biblical foundation. The redirecting of the common grace truth embodied in Critical Ethnography does not assume that all of the theory is worth preserving in its critical theorist setting. For example, power differentials are an important part of critical theorists' understanding of relationship and these differentials are of particular significance for them in research contexts<sup>26</sup>. Of course, for Christians, these differentials may also be important considerations in our research but the various power differentiated relationships in our different cultures take on a somewhat different flavour when we involve an all-*powerful* God and the commands to love Him and our neighbour.

## COMMUNICATING RESULTS

How might research results based on a biblical understanding of reality be published so that those in the secular world might take note and not dismiss such results out of hand? Is it possible to speak the language of Athens without submitting to the philosophy or theology of Athens, or, indeed, use the very language of Athens to

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<sup>26</sup> FP Carspecken, *Critical ethnography in educational research*. Routledge, New York, 1996.

refute its philosophy and theology? Unfortunately, all too often we have bought into the dualistic construction of humanism that our Christian faith cannot provide concrete and reliable analysis of reality. If something is true in any absolute sense, however, then it is true regardless of whether the faith position of the researcher is Christian, secularist, or any other. The problem lies with the degree of warrant we wish to give it based on our worldview assumptions, prejudices and ideological preferences.

It would seem to be possible, therefore, for us to undertake research that may appear on the surface to be like that undertaken by secularists, or others, but that actually flows out of biblical principles—giving meaning to terminologies derived from biblical understandings and calling for restorative action. Of such research other Christians should say that it is good and they can see God in the work, while secularists and others should be able to say that it was of excellent quality.

## CONCLUSION

Our link to God as His image bearers and covenanters, our embeddedness in God's narrative and metanarrative, and our interaction within the community of God's image bearers, all provide the context within which relational knowledge may be sought. It has been proposed that these components and relationships must be considered holistically in our research. In life, we are called to go beyond an appreciation of a vague *sensus divinitatis*, to embrace a loving relationship with God and with our neighbour. This should provide the *telos* for our research: research that unhides God to us and to others, research that is redemptive and transformative,

research that is concerned that His Kingdom comes and that His will is done. In the process, our social science-related research needs also to align with the educative task of promoting and assisting with the information—formation—transformation—reformation processes.

Chilisa has said that, “we [non-Western researchers] are also cognizant of the need to bring indigenous methodologies into the research arena as a means of addressing the goals of enhanced human rights and social justice”<sup>27</sup>, yet research from a Christian perspective must be much more than that. While recognising human rights and issues of social justice, as commanded in Scripture, it must also recognise the connectedness pertaining to the structure of ontological and epistemological relationships made real by the God of all things.

The philosophical foundations for a Christian approach to research therefore include:

- An ontology that recognizes the researcher and the research subjects as created *Imago Dei* and that they, as well as the research object, exist in God’s narrative and metanarrative;
- An epistemology that credits God as the source of all knowledge and acknowledges the mandate God has given us to unhide His knowledge;
- An axiology (or value system) that recognizes that the highest values relating to the discovery of particular knowledge must be in concordance with the value God places on that knowledge and its value relating to His purposes;

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<sup>27</sup> B Chilisa, *Indigenous research methodologies*, SAGE Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA, 2012, p. xv.

- A sociology that recognizes the importance of relationships—between the researcher and the subject, and the relationship of both to God;
- A teleology that is founded on the commands to love God and our neighbour and to see God's will done.

This is not research undertaken from an 'alternative perspective', not 'standing in a different position' to view the research problem, it is seeing with *different eyes*, as it were, because the vision granted by those eyes is filtered, or interpreted, subconsciously, by a different framework of ontological and epistemological presuppositions. It involves the creation of new meanings, and is of particular importance when considering research from cultural perspectives other than our own. A Christian approach to research, then, would appear to be one through which we learn, within a loving relationship, of God and our neighbour and act redemptively, creatively or restoratively, in accordance with the knowledge that we have unhidden in the research process. Such research could be seen as having a theological construction, even a form of worship liturgy, as well as building up others and benefiting the research participants and the rest of the community—to the glory of God and for His Kingdom.