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*Exposing Modern Deceptions, Counterfeit Christianity, and the
Church's Captivity to the Spirit of the Age*

PART II

RECONSTRUCTING GOD, THE GOSPEL, AND HUMANITY

CHAPTER 6

A God Remade in Humanity's Image

Prof. Sixbert SANGWA

Open Christian University | Center for Faith and Work
ORCID 0000-0001-8650-1444 | ssangwa@openchristian.education

Edited by Prof. Dr. Placide Mutabazi

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Abstract

This chapter examines the theological consequence of the sovereign self: humanity's recurrent attempt to remake God according to desire, fear, ideology, injury, ambition, national identity, economic aspiration, and spiritual preference. Building upon the previous chapters' account of autonomous authority, contested truth, naturalistic exclusion of the Creator, and therapeutic self-sovereignty, it argues that modern idolatry often retains Christian vocabulary while revising the character of the God who has revealed Himself. Through sustained exegesis of [Exodus 3:1–15](#), [Exodus 20:1–6](#), [Exodus 32:1–35](#), [Exodus 34:5–7](#), [Isaiah 6:1–8](#), [Romans 1:18–25](#), [Romans 11:33–36](#), [Hebrews 12:18–29](#), and [Revelation 4:1–11](#), the chapter presents the biblical God as self-existent, triune, holy, sovereign, loving, just, jealous, merciful, patient, and Judge. It then evaluates the therapeutic deity, impersonal energy or consciousness, prosperity provider, servant of personal destiny, national mascot, racial or ideological symbol, and permissive god who never judges. Feuerbachian, Freudian, Marxian, sociological, contextual, liberationist, and trauma-informed objections are represented fairly before being answered biblically, logically, historically, and pastorally. Contemporary evidence concerning spiritual eclecticism, civil religion, prosperity teaching, and African Christian syncretism is used with careful qualification. The chapter concludes that no projection can forgive sin, carry suffering, defeat death, or prepare the church for Christ's return. It calls deceived believers, wounded people, scholars, pastors, political Christians, prosperity teachers, and repentant sinners back to the God who names Himself, judges every culture, gives Himself in mercy, and must be worshipped in reverence, holiness, and truth.

Keywords: doctrine of God; idolatry; therapeutic Christianity; New Age spirituality; prosperity gospel; civil religion; rapture readiness

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When the Creature Opens a Workshop

Humanity has always possessed an extraordinary talent for reducing God to a size that will fit inside the human hand. Ancient craftsmen cut timber, shaped stone, poured metal, polished an image, and then bowed before the work of their own fingers. Modern people often consider themselves too educated for such religion. They may never kneel before a carved figure. Yet they enter a subtler workshop. They select the divine attributes they find consoling, discard those that offend contemporary morality, add the features demanded by political loyalty or personal ambition, and present the finished construction as the God of love.

The tools have changed. The workshop remains.

A generation may reject the word *idol* while manufacturing deities at industrial scale. One god never contradicts desire. Another exists to heal self-esteem. Another is energy without commandments, consciousness without judgment, or a universe that responds to visualisation. Another guarantees health, wealth, promotion, marriage, travel, influence, and visible success. Another blesses a nation, tribe, race, party, revolution, class, or empire with near-covenantal significance. Another supports justice but never judges the movement that invokes him. Another is called Father but is denied the authority to discipline. Another is called love because he has been stripped of holiness, wrath, jealousy, and the right to exclude unrepentant evil from His kingdom.

God remains in the vocabulary, yet the God who speaks, commands, exposes, judges, saves, and reigns has been replaced by a kinder reflection of the self.

This is not merely atheism. Open denial can be easier to recognise than religious reconstruction. The atheist says there is no God. The idolater may sing to God, pray in God's name, build institutions for God, and speak confidently about God's plan while quietly worshipping a projection. The altar remains. The name remains. The congregation remains. The decisive change occurs in the object of worship.

Chapter 5 traced the sovereign self through pleasure, consumerism, entertainment, comfort, self-expression, and therapeutic salvation. It showed that the self cannot bear the crown it claims. Yet the sovereign self faces a further obstacle. The God of Scripture commands repentance, judges desire, limits autonomy, owns the body, defines the good, and requires exclusive worship. Such a God cannot remain untouched in a culture where inward preference functions as revelation. He must either be rejected or revised.

Revision is often more attractive. It permits the worshipper to retain religious comfort without surrendering moral jurisdiction. God becomes an affirming therapist, a source of energy, a guarantor of prosperity, a sponsor of personal destiny, a mascot for the nation, an emblem of racial struggle, a chaplain to political ideology, or a universal consciousness large enough to include every contradiction. He is invoked but not obeyed, praised but not feared, consulted but not permitted to contradict.

The result is a theological marketplace of customised deities. One promises healing without holiness. Another offers justice without judgment of the movement that invokes him. Another guarantees wealth to those who master the proper spiritual transaction. Another blesses the flag, the tribe, the party, the revolution, or the empire. Another is described as energy because energy can be accessed without repentance. Another is called love because the age has defined love before allowing Scripture to speak.

The controlling claim of this chapter is that fallen humanity does not merely reject God. It continually reconstructs Him according to desire, fear, ideology, injury, ambition, cultural identity, and spiritual preference. Idolatry therefore includes both the worship of false gods and the false representation of the true God. A person may violate the first commandment by serving another god, or violate the second by claiming to worship the Lord while remaking His character and worship according to human imagination ([Exodus 20:1–6](#)).

The distinction is severe because every other doctrine depends upon the doctrine of God. A diminished God produces a diminished account of sin. A permissive God requires no atonement. An impersonal God cannot love, command, forgive, or judge. A national god turns political victory into salvation. A prosperity god makes suffering appear to be spiritual failure. A therapeutic god makes repentance sound abusive. Once God is reconstructed, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the cross, salvation, church, worship, and eternity must be reconstructed after Him.

This chapter is therefore not an abstract detour into theology proper. It concerns the God before whom every reader will stand. Theology becomes immediately practical when the question is no longer, “What idea of God helps me live?” but, “Who is the God who made me, knows me, commands me, offers mercy, and will judge me?”

The God Who Names Himself

The biblical story does not begin with humanity searching inward for the divine. It begins with God speaking. He creates by His Word, calls persons by name, establishes covenant, judges rebellion, and makes Himself known. Revelation is therefore not humanity's successful discovery of an otherwise silent deity. It is God's gracious initiative toward creatures who could never climb into His knowledge by their own power.

[Exodus 3:1–15](#) gives this truth historical and covenantal form. Moses encounters a bush burning without being consumed. Curiosity draws him, but revelation governs the meeting. God calls his name. Moses does not summon Him. The Lord declares the ground holy. Moses does not make it sacred through spiritual technique. The God who speaks identifies Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, remembers covenant, sees affliction, hears the cry of the oppressed, knows suffering, and comes down to deliver.

Divine transcendence and divine nearness meet without confusion. The ground is holy because God is present, yet God is not the ground, bush, flame, mountain, or human consciousness. He is not an energy diffused through creation. He is the living Lord who addresses Moses, declares purpose, sends a servant, judges an empire, and fulfils covenant promises.

When Moses asks for the divine name, God answers, “I AM WHO I AM” ([Exodus 3:14](#)). This statement should not be detached from the narrative and reduced to a philosophical formula, but neither should its theological weight be diminished. God is the One who is, the One whose being is not received from another, the One free from creaturely dependence, the One whose covenant presence will prove faithful in action. He does not become God through Israel's recognition. He does not require Pharaoh's permission. He does not draw identity from the needs of the oppressed, although He truly sees and delivers them. He names Himself and then acts according to His name.

Aseity, or divine self-existence, means that God depends upon nothing outside Himself for life, knowledge, goodness, purpose, or glory. Creation depends; God does not. Creatures receive; God possesses life in Himself. Human beings change, learn, forget, develop, weaken, and die.

God is neither a larger creature nor the most powerful member of a class called gods. He is the uncreated Creator, eternal and independent, from whom, through whom, and to whom are all things ([Romans 11:33–36](#)).

This truth destroys the fantasy of a manageable deity. A god produced by psychological need depends upon the mind that imagines him. A national god depends upon the nation that invokes him. A prosperity god depends upon the transaction that activates him. A therapeutic god depends upon the emotional expectations of the client. The Lord of Exodus depends upon none of them. He was God before every culture, church, government, market, therapist, theologian, or worshipper existed.

God's self-naming also limits theological power. Human beings may speak truthfully about God because He has revealed Himself, but they may not speak exhaustively or autonomously. The finite mind cannot contain the infinite Lord. Yet humility does not mean agnosticism. God has not revealed Himself merely to show that nothing can be known. He has spoken so that His people may know Him truly, worship Him rightly, trust His promises, obey His commands, and reject rivals.

Prof. Sangwa's recent doctrinal treatment makes this point with precision: a god fully contained by human categories would be an idol of the mind, while true theology receives God's self-disclosure and ends in worship rather than intellectual possession (Sangwa, 2026a). This is the opposite of theological reconstruction. The faithful theologian does not stand over revelation with a knife, cutting away whatever the age finds unacceptable. He stands beneath the Word, asking for light, correction, and courage to confess what God has said.

The One God Whose Perfections Cannot Be Edited

Modern distortions often begin by separating attributes that Scripture holds together. Some proclaim love without holiness, mercy without truth, patience without judgment, and fatherhood without kingship. Others speak of sovereignty without tenderness, wrath without compassion, authority without accountability, and obedience without grace. The first produces permissiveness. The second can produce spiritual tyranny. Both misrepresent the same God.

God is not assembled from parts. His holiness, love, justice, mercy, wisdom, power, and faithfulness are not competing departments within the divine life. Classical theology has described this unity through the doctrine of divine simplicity, not to make God abstract, but to deny that He is a composite being whose attributes can be separated or placed in conflict. God is wholly holy, wholly loving, wholly just, wholly merciful, and wholly true in every act.

The distinction between incommunicable and communicable attributes can help if handled carefully. God's self-existence, eternity, infinity, omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence belong to Him uniquely. Creatures do not possess them in reduced quantity as though the difference were merely one of degree. God's love, justice, mercy, truthfulness, wisdom, and holiness are reflected in creatures analogically and dependently because humanity bears His image. Even here, God remains the original and measure. Human love must be judged by divine love, not divine love reconstructed by human feeling.

God is Spirit ([John 4:24](#)), but “Spirit” does not mean impersonal energy. He speaks, wills, knows, loves, grieves, commands, covenants, sends, and judges. The biblical God is personal without being a magnified human personality. He is relational without being needy. The eternal Father, Son, and Holy Spirit possess perfect fellowship before creation. God did not create because He lacked companionship, needed validation, or required worship to become complete.

Christian confession is irreducibly Trinitarian. There is one God, and the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct divine Persons, coequal and coeternal, sharing the one undivided divine essence. The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father. Yet Christianity does not confess three gods. The doctrine is not an imported philosophical puzzle placed upon Scripture. It arises from Scripture's simultaneous witness to the oneness of God, the full deity of the Father, Son, and Spirit, and their personal distinction (Letham, 2019; Sangwa, 2026a).

This matters for modern reconstruction because an impersonal “divine” cannot sustain the biblical account of love. Love is not an energy circulating through the universe. Before creation, the Father loved the Son ([John 17:24](#)). The living God is not solitary force but eternal, holy communion. Salvation brings sinners into fellowship with the Father through the Son by the Spirit. No vibration, law of attraction, political symbol, or psychological archetype can replace this reality.

God is Creator and Sustainer. [Acts 17:24–31](#) declares that the Lord of heaven and earth does not live in shrines made by hands and is not served by human hands as though He needed anything. He gives everyone life and breath. Nations, boundaries, histories, and opportunities exist beneath His providence. Yet Paul's proclamation does not end with generic spirituality. God commands all people everywhere to repent because He has appointed a day of judgment through the risen Man.

The passage refuses two opposite errors. God is near enough that humanity lives and moves in dependence upon Him, but distinct enough that creation is not divine. God orders national histories, but no nation owns Him. God gives life and provision, but He is not a prosperity mechanism. God receives worship, but not because He lacks anything. God is patient, but history moves toward a fixed judgment.

Holy, Holy, Holy

[Isaiah 6:1–8](#) does not permit a casual doctrine of God. Isaiah sees the Lord high and lifted up. The hem of His robe fills the temple. Seraphim cover themselves and cry, “Holy, holy, holy.” The thresholds shake. Smoke fills the house. The prophet does not interpret the encounter as confirmation of his authentic self. He cries, “Woe is me, for I am ruined.”

Holiness names God's absolute moral purity, majestic otherness, and separation from evil. It does not mean cold distance. The Holy One cleanses Isaiah and sends him. Yet cleansing follows confession, and commission follows cleansing. The sequence cannot be reversed without changing the gospel. A therapeutic religion may begin by assuring the worshipper that nothing is fundamentally wrong. Isaiah's vision begins by exposing uncleanness in the presence of uncreated holiness.

The coal from the altar does not teach salvation by human pain. God provides the cleansing Isaiah cannot produce. The prophet is not annihilated by holiness; he is purified for service. This is why preaching holiness without mercy drives sinners toward despair, while preaching mercy without holiness leaves them unclean and unprepared. The biblical God wounds pride in order to heal the person.

God's holiness marks all His attributes. His power is holy power, never arbitrary domination. His love is holy love, never complicity with sin. His wisdom is holy wisdom, never manipulation. His jealousy is holy jealousy, never insecurity. His wrath is holy wrath, never uncontrolled temper. His mercy is holy mercy, never moral carelessness.

[Exodus 34:5–7](#) provides one of Scripture's central declarations of the divine character. The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in faithful love and truth, maintaining faithful love to a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, rebellion, and sin. The same revelation declares that He will not leave the guilty unpunished. Mercy and justice occur within one name.

The passage does not portray two gods or two moods. God's patience is not reluctance to be holy, and His judgment is not failure to be compassionate. He forgives guilty people through covenant mercy, yet He never declares evil good. The cross will later show how forgiveness can be granted without moral denial: God remains just while justifying the one who has faith in Jesus ([Romans 3:25–26](#)).

Divine jealousy belongs within this covenant holiness. [Deuteronomy 4:15–24](#) warns Israel not to make images because the Lord is a consuming fire, a jealous God. Human envy covets what belongs to another. Divine jealousy protects what rightly belongs to God: His glory, the truth of His name, and the exclusive covenant loyalty of His people. The idol destroys the worshipper by turning trust toward what cannot give life. God's jealousy is therefore not wounded vanity. It is righteous opposition to spiritual adultery.

The modern church often desires God's compassion without His jealousy because jealousy makes exclusive claims. Yet a God who is never jealous cannot say, “You shall have no other gods before me.” He cannot object when politics, money, race, sexuality, celebrity, energy spirituality, ancestors, or the self receive the devotion owed to Him. Such a god may be tolerant, but he is not the Lord of covenant.

The Golden Calf Wears the Covenant Name

The most dangerous idol may be the one presented as a faithful representation of the true God. [Exodus 32:1–35](#) exposes this danger with terrifying clarity.

Moses has delayed on the mountain. The people become impatient with an unseen God mediated through a missing servant. They demand gods who will go before them. Aaron receives their gold, fashions a calf, builds an altar, and announces, “There will be a festival to the LORD tomorrow.” The covenant name is retained. The worship is not presented simply as a formal conversion to an unrelated religion. The Lord who delivered Israel is represented through an image borrowed from the religious world around them.

The event therefore violates more than the first commandment. It corrupts the identity and worship of the true God. Israel wants a deity that can be seen, carried, localised, celebrated, and placed beneath communal control. The invisible Lord who speaks from fire and cloud is replaced by a manageable symbol. The people do not cease being religious. They become religious on their own terms.

Several features make the scene permanently relevant. First, impatience remakes God. The people cannot endure delay, uncertainty, or the apparent absence of leadership. A god is manufactured to meet the emotional demand for immediacy. Modern believers can act similarly when unanswered prayer, prolonged illness, singleness, financial pressure, persecution, or delayed fulfilment becomes evidence that the biblical God must be supplemented by techniques, prophets, rituals, declarations, or alternative spiritual powers.

Second, religious leadership yields to consumer demand. Aaron does not correct the crowd. He gives it a god shaped by its appetite. The shepherd becomes artisan of the congregation's preferred deity. A pastor may do the same without touching gold. He studies what attracts

attendance, protects revenue, avoids offence, and maintains applause. He then edits preaching until God becomes market-compatible.

Third, worship becomes spectacle and indulgence. The people eat, drink, and rise to revel. Celebration as such is not condemned in Scripture. Israel had God-given feasts. The problem is celebration detached from revealed worship and covenant obedience. Music, movement, media, emotional intensity, cultural expression, and beauty are not idols by definition. They become idolatrous when the experience replaces the God who defined the gathering.

Fourth, the idol is made from gifts received through deliverance. The gold likely came from Egypt, provision granted through God's redemptive action. Blessing is converted into rebellion. Churches may likewise use talent, wealth, technology, architecture, education, political access, or spiritual gifts to construct a religious system that conceals the God who gave them.

Fifth, the people assign God's saving work to the image. "These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt." Idolatry rewrites memory. It attributes deliverance to what was created after the deliverance occurred. Modern people credit autonomous reason, markets, states, nations, therapeutic systems, technology, movements, or charismatic leaders with powers that belong finally to providence.

The calf could not hear, command, forgive, or judge. It could only reflect the needs of those who made it. This is why human beings prefer idols. The idol has a mouth but cannot contradict. It has eyes but cannot expose. It has ears but cannot hear the oppressed. It has hands but cannot discipline. It exists to carry the worshipper's desires. The living God, by contrast, carries His people while refusing to become their possession ([Isaiah 46:1–4](#)).

Idolatry as Exchange, Projection, and Submission

[Romans 1:18–25](#) interprets idolatry as exchange. Humanity knows enough of God through creation to owe gratitude and worship, yet suppresses truth in unrighteousness. The glory of the immortal God is exchanged for images. The truth of God is exchanged for a lie. The Creator is exchanged for the creature.

The exchange is not intellectual neutrality. When worship leaves God, it settles upon something made. Nature, nation, race, sexuality, power, wealth, health, science, therapy, technology, political liberation, family, church, or self can become ultimate. The object need not be evil in itself. Idolatry often begins with a good thing forced to carry the weight of godhood.

Projection is one form of this exchange. The worshipper enlarges fear, desire, aspiration, injury, or social identity and calls the result divine. Yet projection is not always deliberate. A child raised under violent authority may instinctively imagine God as volatile. A believer shaped by neglect may struggle to receive divine fatherhood. A community formed under colonial domination may hear Christian language through memories of imposed power. A poor congregation may find prosperity promises plausible because ordinary life offers little visible hope. Moral seriousness requires distinguishing the wounded person's distorted perception from the teacher who knowingly monetises distortion.

Idolatry also involves submission. What we treat as ultimate trains conduct. A prosperity god creates transactional prayer. A therapeutic god creates resistance to correction. A national god creates enemies who appear to be enemies of heaven. An energy god creates spiritual technique. A permissive god creates sinners who presume upon patience. A harsh god created in the image of an abuser can create fear, secrecy, and despair.

The doctrine of God therefore forms moral life before formal ethics begins. People become like what they worship ([Psalm 115:1–8](#)). A mute idol produces people who cannot hear truth. A blind idol produces moral blindness. A self-made god produces self-justification. The true God produces repentance, worship, courage, mercy, justice, holiness, and hope because His Spirit conforms believers to His Son.

Projection Theory: A Half-Truth Turned Against Revelation

Modern critics of religion have often claimed that God is humanity written large. Ludwig Feuerbach argued that theology is anthropology, with divine attributes representing the externalised essence and aspirations of humanity (Feuerbach, 1841/1989). Sigmund Freud interpreted religious belief as wish fulfilment shaped by helplessness, paternal longing, and the desire for protection (Freud, 1927/1961). Karl Marx described religion within structures of suffering, alienation, and social power, famously treating it as consolation within an unjust world while calling for the transformation of the conditions that produce such consolation (Marx, 1844/1978). Émile Durkheim examined religion as society representing and venerating its own collective life (Durkheim, 1912/1995). Later psychological and sociological approaches continued to explore how religious images reflect family experience, social location, cultural memory, and political organisation.

These theories should not be answered by pretending that projection never occurs. Scripture made the accusation before modern philosophy. Israel imagined a calf and called it the Lord. Nations shaped gods from wood, stone, animals, rulers, fertility, violence, and fear. [Psalm 50:21](#) records God's rebuke to the wicked: "You thought I was just like you." The Bible does not flatter religious humanity. It declares that people routinely create gods in their own image.

The logical error appears when an explanation of why someone believes is treated as proof that the belief is false. This is the genetic fallacy. A person may believe that fire burns because a parent warned him, because he was injured, because his culture taught caution, or because he conducted an experiment. The causal history of the belief does not by itself determine its truth. Likewise, demonstrating that some people believe in God because they desire protection does not establish that God does not exist. Hunger does not prove that food is imaginary. A longing for justice does not prove that judgment is unreal. Psychological function and ontological truth are different questions.

Projection theories also face a reflexive problem. If Christian belief is reduced to social interest, psychological need, or cultural location, the same analysis applies to unbelief. A person may reject God because judgment threatens autonomy, because an institution rewards secular conclusions, because suffering has produced anger, because a political identity requires religious suspicion, or because personal conduct would be condemned by revelation. None of these causes proves atheism false, but neither does the discovery of religious motivation prove theism false. Every thinker has a social and psychological history. Arguments must still be assessed according to truth and evidence.

The biblical God is also an inconvenient projection. He repeatedly contradicts the desires of those who claim Him. He condemns Israel's kings, priests, merchants, prophets, sexual immorality, oppression, idolatry, and presumption. He refuses ethnic possession. He chooses the weak, humbles the proud, demands love for enemies, commands generosity, exposes secret lust, requires forgiveness, and judges religious hypocrisy. He does not reliably serve the interests of any class, nation, sex, party, or empire.

The cross is especially resistant to projection. Humanity might imagine a god who confirms strength, prosperity, national triumph, philosophical respectability, or moral superiority. The crucified Messiah exposes all such boasting. God saves through apparent weakness, condemns sin in the flesh, justifies the ungodly by grace, and creates a people who cannot claim salvation as cultural achievement. The gospel is capable of comforting human longing, but it does so by first contradicting human self-salvation.

Projection theory therefore contributes a diagnostic insight without supplying a final verdict. It helps expose counterfeit gods, including those inside churches. It cannot determine whether the God who judges projections has revealed Himself. That question requires attention to creation, Scripture, history, Christ, the resurrection, and the coherent testimony of the whole counsel of God.

The God Who Never Says No

Therapeutic culture did not arise from a simple desire to rebel against God. It addressed real injuries. Mental illness was often stigmatised. Trauma was minimised. Children were shamed. Victims were told to remain silent. Depression was reduced to prayerlessness. Anxiety was treated as moral failure without attention to embodiment, context, or suffering. Abusive leaders used guilt, fear, and divine authority to control vulnerable people. Professional counselling, clinical research, medication, safeguarding, and trauma-informed care have therefore served many genuine goods.

The theological danger begins when therapy becomes a total anthropology and emotional wellbeing becomes the highest good. In this framework, the self is fundamentally innocent but wounded, guilt is usually pathology, correction is invalidation, repentance is shame, authority is threat, and salvation is integration, affirmation, safety, and self-acceptance. God remains useful if He supports this process. He becomes a transcendent therapist whose principal duty is to protect self-esteem and remove distress.

Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton named a related pattern “moralistic therapeutic deism” in their study of American adolescents. The deity in this pattern wants people to be nice and happy, intervenes when needed, and remains otherwise distant from ordinary life (Smith & Denton, 2005). The concept emerged from a particular population and should not be universalised mechanically. Yet its theological pattern is recognisable far beyond adolescents and the United States. God is retained as supportive background rather than worshipped as holy Lord.

Contemporary data show that spirituality remains widespread even where biblical doctrine weakens. Pew Research Center's 2023–2024 Religious Landscape Study found that 79 percent of U.S. adults believed there is something spiritual beyond the natural world, while nearly three-quarters described themselves as at least somewhat spiritual (Pew Research Center, 2025a, 2025b). Earlier Pew research found that Americans who identified as spiritual but not religious were much less likely than those who were both religious and spiritual to believe in the God of the Bible and much more likely to affirm another higher power or spiritual force (Pew Research Center, 2023). The figures describe the United States, not humanity as a whole, but they reveal an important trend: the decline of doctrinal religion does not necessarily produce metaphysical emptiness. It can produce customised spirituality.

The therapeutic god rarely contradicts the client's moral narrative. He validates the inward self, protects “peace,” removes “toxic” people, opens doors, and confirms that the deepest desire

is authentic. He may comfort, but does not discipline. He heals wounds, but does not expose the sins committed from within woundedness. He forgives, but without atonement. He loves, but His love has been defined as unconditional approval.

This god is attractive because pain is real. A person leaving an abusive church may fear any language of submission. A woman harmed by a violent father may struggle to hear “Father” without terror. A survivor of sexual exploitation may associate purity teaching with shame because it was weaponised against victims rather than offenders. A believer with obsessive fear may be harmed by manipulative preaching that treats every mistake as evidence of damnation. Pastoral care must listen, protect, investigate, and distinguish the character of God from the sins of those who claimed to represent Him.

The remedy, however, is not a permissive projection. It is the true God whose tenderness cannot be used to hide evil. [Psalm 34:18](#) declares that the Lord is near the brokenhearted. [Isaiah 42:3](#) portrays the Servant as one who will not break a bruised reed. Jesus receives the weary and burdened ([Matthew 11:28–30](#)). Yet the same Jesus commands repentance, exposes hypocrisy, defines discipleship through self-denial, and warns of judgment.

Divine comfort and divine correction are not enemies. [Hebrews 12:5–11](#) describes discipline as fatherly love ordered toward holiness. Discipline is not abuse. It is neither humiliation nor uncontrolled anger. It is purposeful correction from the perfectly wise Father. Human authorities may misuse the language, which is why pastoral discipline must be accountable, proportionate, scriptural, and protective of the vulnerable. Abuse of fatherhood does not prove that fatherhood is evil. It proves that false fathers require judgment.

A God who never says no cannot rescue a person from desires that destroy. A therapist who affirmed every compulsion would be negligent. A physician who concealed a lethal diagnosis to protect emotional comfort would not be compassionate. Love seeks the actual good of the beloved, not merely relief from contradiction. God's Word may cut because a tumour cannot be removed by flattery.

Therapeutic Christianity also misunderstands shame. Scripture distinguishes destructive humiliation from godly grief. Toxic shame says, “I am beyond mercy.” The gospel answers with justification and adoption. Presumption says, “I need no repentance.” The gospel answers with truth. Godly grief produces repentance without regret ([2 Corinthians 7:9–11](#)). Grace neither annihilates the sinner nor baptises the sin. It receives the guilty, forgives through Christ, and begins transformation.

The therapeutic god can therefore soothe without saving. He protects the self from the very verdict that would lead it to mercy. The living God does something better: He names the wound, judges the evil, exposes the sinner, bears the guilt in Christ, gives the Spirit, and forms a new life.

When Energy Replaces the Father

The language of “energy,” “vibration,” “frequency,” “the universe,” “higher consciousness,” and “the divine within” now circulates through wellness industries, social media, motivational teaching, alternative spirituality, and Christianised self-help. Not everyone using such terms holds a developed metaphysical system. “Energy” may refer loosely to mood, vitality, atmosphere, or interpersonal intensity. Responsible criticism must define the claim before judging it.

The theological problem appears when God is reduced to an impersonal principle, cosmic substance, universal mind, or force that can be accessed and directed. Pantheism identifies God with the totality of reality. Panentheism places the world within God while maintaining that God exceeds it. Monistic systems interpret reality as ultimately one substance or consciousness. New Age spirituality often combines elements of these positions with reincarnation, esoteric development, astrology, healing systems, manifestation, and the awakening of a supposedly divine self (Hanegraaff, 1998; Heelas, 1996; Sangwa, 2024a, 2025b, 2026c).

Pew's 2023–2024 international survey illustrates the breadth of spiritual beliefs that do not fit simple categories of institutional religion. Across 35 countries, a median of 83 percent of adults said they believed in God, while substantial shares also attributed spiritual energies or spirits to parts of nature, animals, or objects (Pew Research Center, 2025c). Such findings do not establish New Age theology and should not be used to label ordinary people as occultists. They do show that the modern world is not simply disenchanted. Spiritual belief often survives by becoming eclectic.

Biblical language about divine presence must not be confused with pantheism. Paul tells the Athenians that in God “we live and move and have our being” ([Acts 17:28](#)). Yet the same sermon distinguishes God from temples and images, identifies Him as Creator and Lord, commands repentance, and announces judgment through the risen Christ ([Acts 17:24–31](#)). Divine immanence means that God is present to and active within creation. It does not mean creation is part of God's essence.

The Holy Spirit is not an energy. He speaks, sends, wills, intercedes, teaches, can be grieved, and glorifies Christ ([Acts 13:2](#); [Romans 8:26–27](#); [1 Corinthians 12:11](#); [Ephesians 4:30](#); [John 16:13–14](#)). These are personal actions. The Spirit is fully divine, not a created power, psychological state, collective atmosphere, or substance transmitted by spiritual technicians.

The impersonal god solves a moral problem for autonomy. Energy cannot command repentance. Consciousness cannot accuse the conscience. “The universe” cannot enter covenant, defend victims, expose hidden abuse, or judge the dead. A force can be accessed, channelled, balanced, activated, and used. The living God must be worshipped and obeyed.

Manifestation culture makes the usefulness explicit. Desire, visualisation, affirmation, emotional alignment, and expectation are presented as means of attracting desired realities. Some activities associated with manifestation are ordinary practices wrongly clothed in metaphysics. Clarifying a goal, writing a plan, rehearsing a presentation, developing confidence, and persevering can affect behaviour and outcomes. No supernatural doctrine is required.

The error begins when thought is granted quasi-divine causal power, when the universe is treated as responsive intelligence, or when faith becomes certainty that reality must yield to desire. The Christian version may replace “the universe” with “God” while keeping the mechanism. Positive confession becomes a force. Words are said to create reality because God created by speaking. This collapses the Creator-creature distinction. God's speech is effective because God is sovereign. Human words have genuine moral, relational, and social power, but they do not possess divine omnipotence.

Biblical prayer is not manifestation addressed to a Christian name. Prayer asks, seeks, laments, confesses, thanks, intercedes, and submits. Jesus teaches, “Your will be done” ([Matthew 6:10](#)). John says confidence in prayer is according to God's will ([1 John 5:14](#)). Paul prays repeatedly for suffering to be removed and receives the answer that grace will sustain him ([2 Corinthians 12:7–10](#)). Faith does not force God to comply. It trusts Him when the answer contradicts preference.

Prof. Sangwa's work on New Age syncretism repeatedly insists that spiritual practices must be tested by Scripture rather than baptised because they promise wellness, peace, healing, or personal development (Sangwa, 2024a, 2024b, 2026c). This testing must remain precise. Ordinary breathing exercises are not automatically occult. Clinical attention practices may be detached from religious cosmology. Appreciation of nature can awaken worship of the Creator. The decisive questions concern metaphysics, allegiance, spiritual technique, claimed power, and fruit.

The universe is not a Father who loves. Energy is not a Judge who vindicates. Consciousness is not a covenant Lord who forgives. Vibration did not enter history, bear sin, and rise bodily. An impersonal absolute can be contemplated, but it cannot save.

The Provider Who Becomes an Employee

Scripture presents God as generous provider. He gives life, rain, harvest, wisdom, skill, work, community, and daily bread. Jesus teaches disciples to ask the Father for their needs. The early church practises generosity. Paul commands work, contentment, and care for the poor. Any critique that portrays material need as spiritually unimportant contradicts the compassion of God.

Prosperity theology begins with genuine biblical themes and rearranges them around human entitlement. Covenant blessing, Abraham's wealth, Israel's land promises, royal success, healing narratives, sowing and reaping, answered prayer, and statements about faith are detached from redemptive history and turned into a general mechanism. God becomes a transaction partner whose duty is to reward giving, declarations, loyalty, positive expectation, or submission to a ministry.

Prof. Sangwa's earlier work identifies the central exchange: the true riches of Christ are displaced by temporal material gain, and the suffering, holiness, and eternal hope of the gospel are subordinated to health, wealth, and visible success (Sangwa, 2024c, 2025a). The Lausanne Theology Working Group similarly warned that prosperity teaching often distorts Scripture, exploits vulnerable people, and confuses God's blessing with material accumulation (Lausanne Movement, 2010).

The attraction is understandable, especially where unemployment, illness, political instability, weak public services, and unequal opportunity make ordinary life precarious. A preacher who promises divine breakthrough may appear to offer hope where institutions have failed. In some settings, prosperity churches provide community, entrepreneurial encouragement, disciplined habits, mutual aid, and confidence. These goods should be acknowledged. The theological question remains whether they require a god contractually bound to worldly success.

The prosperity provider is smaller than the God of Scripture because he cannot remain good when the believer suffers. If wealth proves favour, poverty suggests divine displeasure. If healing proves faith, chronic illness becomes accusation. If promotion proves obedience, the martyrs appear abandoned. If giving guarantees return, generosity becomes investment rather than love.

The New Testament refuses this equation. Jesus is beloved by the Father and rejected by the world. The apostles possess little by the standards of empire. Paul knows hunger, imprisonment, beatings, danger, and loss while remaining within God's will ([2 Corinthians 11:23–28](#)). The

faithful in [Hebrews 11:35–40](#) endure torture, imprisonment, poverty, and death without receiving the earthly fulfilment of promise. Their suffering is not evidence that faith failed.

Prosperity theology often invokes [3 John 2](#), a greeting expressing a wish for health, as though it were a universal covenant guarantee. It turns [Malachi 3:10](#), addressed within Israel's covenant obligations, into a formula binding God to donors. It treats [Mark 11:24](#) as autonomous mental certainty while neglecting forgiveness, submission to God, and the broader biblical theology of prayer. Chapter 11 will examine these hermeneutical claims fully. Here the doctrinal point is sufficient: the living God becomes an employee of desire.

This reconstruction can also produce cruelty. Leaders display luxury as evidence of anointing while congregants conceal unanswered prayer. Testimonies of promotion and healing fill the platform; stories of faithful endurance, medical complexity, bereavement, and disappointment disappear. The person who remains sick may be told to give more, confess differently, reject “negative” speech, or locate hidden sin. God's sovereignty is replaced by the ministry's technique, and the victim carries the shame when the technique fails.

Biblical provision is better. The Father knows what His children need ([Matthew 6:25–34](#)). He may give abundance and commands stewardship. He may permit scarcity and promises presence. He may heal miraculously, work through medicine, sustain through disability, or receive the saint through death. He never ceases to be good because His goodness is not measured only by immediate ease.

The gospel does not promise that every believer will become prosperous before the rapture. It promises that those in Christ possess every spiritual blessing, cannot be separated from God's love, will be raised bodily, and will inherit a kingdom that cannot be shaken. The prosperity god offers gold that death will take. The Father gives Himself.

The God of Personal Destiny

A closely related reconstruction presents God as sponsor of personal greatness. Sermons promise that the listener was born to be exceptional, visible, influential, wealthy, famous, or historically significant. Biblical narratives become motivational case studies. Joseph becomes a career strategy. Esther becomes personal branding. David becomes confidence coaching. Jabez becomes expansion technique. The cross becomes evidence that the listener deserves a better lifestyle.

Biblical vocation is real. God gives gifts, calls people to service, appoints tasks, develops skill, opens doors, and entrusts influence. Christians should not confuse humility with laziness, incompetence, or fear of responsibility. A teacher may pursue excellence. An entrepreneur may build honestly. A scholar may seek discovery. A leader may accept public duty. The question is not whether a life has purpose. It is who defines the purpose and who receives the glory.

The God of personal destiny places the individual's narrative at the centre. “What God is doing in the world” becomes “what God is doing through my platform.” Calling is measured by visibility. Hidden service appears insignificant. Ordinary faithfulness feels like failure. The person may become unable to distinguish the Spirit's leading from ambition, impatience, envy, or the desire to be recognised.

Scripture defines greatness through service ([Mark 10:42–45](#)). Paul describes believers as servants entrusted with mysteries, whose central requirement is faithfulness ([1 Corinthians 4:1–5](#)). John the Baptist receives the difficult joy of decreasing while Christ increases ([John 3:30](#)). The widow's small offering matters to Jesus although it creates no visible empire. The unknown saint

who cares for a disabled relative may fulfil a calling more faithfully than the celebrated leader who builds a brand upon other people's labour.

The language of destiny can also make correction appear satanic. Every obstacle becomes enemy resistance. Every critic becomes jealous. Every failed plan becomes evidence that greater breakthrough is near. The leader's ambition acquires divine immunity because it has been labelled vision. In this way, the God of destiny becomes a shield for the sovereign self.

Prof. Sangwa's writings on titles, visibility, and the worship of self have repeatedly warned that public significance can compete with hidden obedience (Sangwa, 2026b). The concern is not that recognition is always sinful. It is that recognition becomes the reason to serve. When the mirror becomes a throne, the call of God becomes a spotlight.

The biblical alternative begins with belonging. "You are not your own, for you were bought at a price" ([1 Corinthians 6:19–20](#)). Purpose is not self-actualisation under spiritual language. It is conformity to Christ, love of neighbour, holiness, witness, work, suffering, generosity, and obedience within the providence of God. Some callings become public. Many remain hidden. None is small when received from the Lord.

Flags, Tribes, Parties, and Sacred Power

God rules nations, appoints authorities, judges rulers, commands justice, and calls believers to public faithfulness. Christians may love their country, honour lawful authority, serve in government, defend the vulnerable, vote according to conscience, resist injustice through lawful means, and give thanks for genuine national goods. Patriotism becomes idolatry only when the nation carries theological weight God has not given it.

Civil religion emerges when national identity is clothed in sacred language, public ritual, providential destiny, revered founders, redemptive sacrifice, and an account of national innocence. Robert Bellah's classic analysis showed how a society can develop a public religious framework distinct from formal church doctrine (Bellah, 1967). Such frameworks can provide moral memory and social cohesion. They can also baptise power.

A national mascot god blesses the country's wars, excuses its injustices, treats political opponents as enemies of heaven, and makes citizenship appear nearly covenantal. The nation may confess wrongdoing only in carefully selected forms that protect its heroic self-image. National suffering becomes persecution. National success becomes divine approval. The flag approaches the altar, and the cross is asked to serve it.

The danger is not limited to one country or political direction. Revolutionary movements may make God the patron of class struggle. Ethnic nationalists may present blood, soil, or ancestry as sacred. Postcolonial governments may invoke divine destiny to protect corrupt leadership. Western democracies may describe their political order as the moral culmination of history. Global movements may use universal religious language to sanctify programmes that remain unsubmitted to Christ. Conservative and progressive coalitions can both conscript God.

Recent public-opinion research illustrates the political force of Christian-nationalist ideas in the United States. PRRI's analysis of more than 22,000 interviews in its 2025 American Values Atlas found substantial support for statements combining national identity with a particular Christian political vision (Public Religion Research Institute, 2026). The categories and measures remain debated, and the data should not be used to label every patriotic Christian. They do show that fusion of religious and national identity is not a theoretical concern.

Prof. Sangwa's treatment of civil religion draws a careful boundary. Public prayer, gratitude for national blessings, and lawful patriotism are not automatically idolatrous. The danger begins when national destiny becomes sacred destiny, political renewal is presented as spiritual revival, and loyalty to an earthly order competes with allegiance to Christ (Sangwa, 2026e). This boundary is essential because careless accusation can be as misleading as naive celebration.

Scripture honours nations as real communities but refuses to deify them. God made the nations and determined their times and boundaries ([Acts 17:26](#)). He also commands all people everywhere to repent. Israel possessed a unique covenant role that cannot be transferred wholesale to a modern state. The church is a transnational people drawn from every tribe, language, people, and nation ([Revelation 5:9–10](#)). No flag can contain this kingdom.

The national mascot god is morally dangerous because he rarely judges the nation that created him. The prophets, by contrast, confront Israel precisely because covenant privilege increases accountability. Amos announces judgment not only against surrounding nations but against Israel. Isaiah exposes religious ceremony joined to injustice. Jeremiah refuses royal propaganda. John the Baptist rebukes Herod. The apostles confess Jesus as Lord within an empire that claimed ultimate authority.

A nation may print God's name, declare days of prayer, host public worship, and still oppress the weak, reward corruption, protect abuse, shed innocent blood, worship wealth, and normalise sexual immorality. Public piety cannot bribe the Judge. [Psalm 50:16–23](#) warns those who recite covenant words while hating discipline and joining thieves and adulterers. God rejects religious speech used to cover disobedience.

The church must therefore resist partisan captivity. It should praise justice wherever it appears, condemn evil wherever it appears, pray for rulers, honour lawful authority, protect conscience, serve neighbours, and proclaim that every government is temporary. When a party becomes incapable of being judged by Scripture, it has become an idol. When a preacher's moral vocabulary changes according to which coalition holds power, he no longer serves as prophet but as chaplain.

Justice Without the Judge

Political and liberation theologies often arise from real suffering. Communities facing racial domination, poverty, colonial violence, land dispossession, gendered abuse, or state repression have sometimes encountered churches more interested in protecting order than defending victims. The prophets' condemnation of exploitation, Jesus' proclamation of good news to the poor, and the church's duty to seek justice cannot be dismissed as secondary concerns.

Gustavo Gutiérrez and other liberation theologians emphasised God's concern for the poor and interpreted salvation in relation to historical liberation (Gutiérrez, 1988). Black theology, feminist theology, postcolonial theology, and other contextual approaches have similarly exposed ways in which supposedly neutral theology can reflect the interests of dominant communities. These critiques have sometimes identified real hypocrisy, selective exegesis, and institutional sin.

The reconstruction occurs when God becomes principally the divine representative of a social identity or political programme. Sin is relocated mainly into oppressive structures, while the movement claiming liberation receives inadequate judgment. Salvation becomes emancipation from a historical enemy. The oppressed group carries redemptive innocence. Revelation is assessed by whether it serves the approved account of liberation.

Scripture refuses a god who belongs to the oppressor. It also refuses a god who belongs to the revolutionary. The Lord hears the blood of Abel and judges Cain. He delivers Israel from Pharaoh and later judges Israel for oppressing the poor. He condemns wealthy exploitation and poor deceit. He judges kings and crowds. Class position, race, sex, nationality, historical injury, or political marginalisation may explain vulnerability, but none confers sinlessness.

A justice detached from the Judge eventually depends upon power. If moral truth is produced by social location, the movement with sufficient institutional control can define righteousness. Today's victim may become tomorrow's ruler without losing the fallen heart. Revolutions can replace one hierarchy with another because pride, greed, lust, cruelty, fear, and self-justification survive structural change.

Biblical justice is richer than ideological conformity. It includes impartial judgment, truthful testimony, protection of life, honest weights, sexual integrity, care for the poor, punishment of violence, defence of the stranger, fulfilment of covenant, and refusal of bribery. It judges personal and structural evil without reducing one to the other. It is grounded in God's character, not in the moral innocence of a coalition.

The God of justice is therefore not a symbol available for political capture. He may affirm a movement's concern and condemn its anthropology. He may expose oppression and reject the proposed remedy. He may use imperfect governments while judging their idolatry. He may command the church to act publicly while forbidding it to confuse political success with the kingdom.

The Permissive God Who Cannot Judge

The most emotionally powerful reconstruction of God is often the permissive deity whose love excludes wrath, judgment, discipline, hell, and final separation. The argument appears morally serious. Human anger is frequently destructive. Religious leaders have manipulated fear. Preachers have speculated beyond Scripture, described punishment with theatrical cruelty, or threatened doubters to protect authority. Some people hear the word *Father* through violence and the word *judgment* through trauma.

These abuses require repentance. No preacher is authorised to delight in condemnation, invent details about hell, pronounce final sentences upon particular individuals without revelation, or use eternal danger to secure money and loyalty. Biblical warning must be governed by tears, truth, patience, and the desire that sinners repent.

The conclusion that love cannot judge does not follow. A love that never opposes evil is not morally serious. Parents who never restrain destructive conduct do not love well. Courts that refuse to judge violence abandon victims. A society that calls every boundary unloving will eventually protect the powerful person willing to violate the weak.

Divine judgment differs from human vengeance. God possesses complete knowledge. He cannot be deceived by public image, bribed by wealth, intimidated by office, misled by propaganda, or confused by incomplete evidence. He knows motive, opportunity, trauma, intention, consequence, and every hidden fact. His character is righteous. He cannot lie, deny Himself, or judge falsely.

The objection from disproportionality must also distinguish duration, gravity, and finality. Scripture describes final judgment through images of exclusion, destruction, punishment, fire, darkness, and the second death. Faithful interpreters debate how these images relate and whether they should be understood through eternal conscious punishment, conditional

immortality, or other models. This book maintains the historic conservative doctrine of eternal punishment while refusing imaginative details beyond the text. The essential truth is irreversible judgment under God.

Human beings naturally measure sin by immediate social harm. Scripture measures sin also by the majesty of the One rejected. Rebellion against the infinitely holy Creator is not a finite mistake merely because the act occurs in time. Sin is not only rule-breaking. It is refusal of rightful Lordship, corruption of worship, harm to image-bearers, and resistance to grace.

The moral seriousness of final judgment is inseparable from persistent rebellion. Revelation repeatedly portrays people refusing to repent even under judgment ([Revelation 9:20–21](#); [Revelation 16:9–11](#)). Hell is not presented as God delighting in the misery of morally neutral creatures. It is the final exposure of rebellion and the vindication of holiness.

Divine patience must not be mistaken for indifference. [Romans 2:4–5](#) says kindness is intended to lead to repentance, while hard and unrepentant hearts store up wrath. [2 Peter 3:9–10](#) joins patience with the coming day of the Lord. Delay is mercy, not cancellation.

Warnings of judgment can themselves become mercy. A road sign before a collapsed bridge does not hate the traveller. A physician who names terminal danger does not create the disease. The preacher must not manipulate fear, but silence can also be cruel. Prof. Sangwa's eschatological writing repeatedly insists that divine warning is a form of mercy and that readiness means sobriety, holiness, and hope rather than panic or date-setting (Sangwa, 2026d).

[Hebrews 10:26–31](#) speaks with deliberate severity about persistent rejection after receiving knowledge of truth. [Hebrews 12:18–29](#) contrasts Sinai and Zion without turning grace into casualness. Believers receive an unshakable kingdom and are therefore commanded to worship with gratitude, reverence, and awe, “for our God is a consuming fire.”

Grace does not shrink God. It brings guilty people safely near through the Mediator. The permissive god cannot finally comfort victims because he cannot judge their oppressors. He cannot grant mercy because he has abolished guilt. He cannot save because there is nothing from which to save. He offers immediate relief at the cost of eternal moral incoherence.

The Strongest Case for Reconstructing God

A responsible chapter must present the strongest defence of contextual reconstruction rather than attack a caricature. Several serious claims deserve attention.

First, all theology is culturally located. Human beings read Scripture through language, history, institutions, gender, class, wounds, traditions, and intellectual habits. No interpreter occupies a view from nowhere. African, Asian, Latin American, European, and North American Christians often ask different questions because their histories differ.

Second, human language about God is analogical, metaphorical, and finite. Scripture calls God Father, King, Judge, Shepherd, Rock, Fire, Fortress, and Bridegroom. These images arise from created realities. Since God exceeds every concept, it may seem presumptuous to treat inherited formulations as final or culturally neutral.

Third, doctrines of sovereignty, fatherhood, submission, providence, and judgment have been weaponised. Slaveholders appealed to providence. Colonial projects used Christian language. Abusive pastors have claimed divine authority. Violent fathers have distorted fatherhood. People injured by such religion may require language that restores compassion, dignity, safety, and truthful lament.

Fourth, contextual and liberation theologies often arise where comfortable orthodoxy failed to address suffering. Theologies formed in settings of privilege may appear abstract to communities facing poverty, political violence, racial oppression, displacement, or gendered abuse. A God discussed only through metaphysical categories can sound remote from the God who hears the cry of slaves in Egypt.

Fifth, mystical language may be an attempt to preserve divine nearness in a disenchanted age. Speaking of energy, presence, or consciousness can appear to resist materialism and express the intuition that reality is more than mechanism.

Sixth, prosperity preaching can seem hopeful in contexts where ordinary institutions offer little upward movement. It may motivate work, giving, resilience, and expectation. Critics who enjoy economic security can sound indifferent to the desperation that makes promises of breakthrough attractive.

These arguments contain truths that conservative Christians must receive. Interpretation is culturally situated. Human language is finite. Doctrine can be abused. The church has sometimes protected oppressive power. The poor need more than abstract sympathy. Wounded people require safety. God is near. Hope matters.

The errors begin when location becomes sovereignty, limitation becomes scepticism, abuse becomes refutation, compassion becomes revision, and context becomes a court above revelation.

Contextualisation Beneath Revelation

All Christian communication is contextual. Scripture itself speaks through Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek; through law, poetry, narrative, prophecy, proverb, Gospel, letter, and apocalypse; through agrarian, royal, temple, household, military, legal, and commercial images. Mission requires translation. Pastors must address actual people. African churches should not merely repeat European questions. Western churches should not treat their cultural assumptions as universal Christianity.

Stephen Bevans describes contextual theology as reflection attentive to Scripture, tradition, culture, social change, and human experience (Bevans, 2002). Properly ordered, this attention can illuminate neglected questions and expose imported customs mistaken for doctrine. Contextualisation becomes unfaithful when the context determines which parts of revelation may survive.

The difference can be stated simply. Faithful contextualisation asks, “How can the truth God has revealed be understood and obeyed here?” Reconstruction asks, “How must God be revised so that the context will approve Him?” The first translates. The second edits.

Human language about God is analogical, but analogy depends upon divine initiative. We do not begin with human fatherhood and construct God upward. Scripture reveals God as Father and then judges human fathers. We do not observe kings and infer that God resembles them in every respect. God's kingship becomes the standard that exposes tyranny. The analogy is true because God authorises it, not because the creature controls it.

The limitations of language therefore require humility, not doctrinal surrender. The statement “God is love” is not exhaustive, but it is true. The statement “God will judge” is not a complete account of judgment, but it is true. Mystery surrounds revelation; mystery does not cancel revelation.

Abuse of doctrine likewise demands reform under Scripture. A pastor who uses sovereignty to protect himself contradicts the sovereign God who judges shepherds. A father who uses submission to justify violence denies the Father who protects the weak. A ruler who invokes providence to excuse corruption will answer to the Lord who hates bribes. The remedy is not a weaker God, but the true God applied without partiality.

Trauma deserves particular care. A wounded nervous system can make theological language difficult to receive. The person may know intellectually that God is good while experiencing terror in prayer. Pastoral care should not demand immediate emotional conformity, blame the sufferer, or force reconciliation with an unsafe offender. Qualified professional care may be necessary. Lament belongs within faith. The Psalms give wounded people words that do not deny God while speaking honestly about fear, anger, confusion, and abandonment.

Yet trauma cannot become an alternative canon. Experience must be heard, protected, and interpreted beneath truth. The character of the abuser is not the character of God. Healing occurs not by inventing a deity who never commands, but by learning that divine authority is unlike predatory power. The Lord's yoke is easy because He is gentle and humble, not because He has ceased to be Lord.

The church must also repent where orthodoxy became socially comfortable. A congregation can confess perfect doctrine while neglecting the poor, protecting ethnic hierarchy, tolerating domestic abuse, exploiting workers, or remaining silent before corruption. Such hypocrisy provides projection theory with evidence. It makes the God of Scripture appear to be the guardian of privilege. Repentance is therefore apologetic. The church defends God's character partly by refusing to use His name for evil.

The African Church Between Imported and Ancestral Idols

Sub-Saharan Africa now carries enormous significance for global Christianity. Pew estimates that Christians constituted about 62 percent of the region's population in 2020 and that the region contained roughly 31 percent of the world's Christians (Pew Research Center, 2025d). These demographic facts should produce neither triumphalism nor Western anxiety. Numerical growth does not automatically establish doctrinal health, and secular decline elsewhere does not make every African religious expression faithful.

African Christianity lives at the meeting point of Scripture, colonial memory, indigenous cosmologies, Pentecostal expansion, economic pressure, political instability, global media, urbanisation, and imported theological movements. The result is neither one "African theology" nor one uniform problem.

Traditional African religious worlds often take spiritual causation seriously. Ancestors, curses, witchcraft, spirits, ritual power, sacred objects, and protection from misfortune may remain culturally plausible even where Christian affiliation is strong. Older Pew research documented the coexistence of Christian or Muslim identity with some traditional beliefs and practices across several countries, although the data are now dated and should not be treated as a current measure for the whole continent (Pew Research Center, 2010). More recent scholarship on African Pentecostalism likewise describes both decisive conversion from older allegiances and continuing negotiation with spiritual fears (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005; Gifford, 2004; Kalu, 2008).

Syncretism occurs when Christian vocabulary is attached to assumptions that Scripture rejects. God may be treated primarily as protection from enemies, infertility, illness, poverty, curses, or ancestral displeasure. Prayer becomes spiritual insurance. The pastor or prophet becomes controller of access. Anointing oil, water, cloths, seeds, numbers, altars, or private revelations can acquire quasi-magical function. Chapter 14 will examine occult techniques fully. Here the doctrinal concern is that God becomes a power within a competitive spiritual economy.

The opposite error is imported secular superiority. Western modernity may dismiss African spiritual concerns as primitive while enthroning its own idols of therapy, technology, sexual autonomy, wealth, nationalism, and institutional expertise. The African church should not exchange ancestral fear for consumer Christianity, local divination for manifestation culture, or traditional chieftdom for celebrity ministry.

Prosperity theology often thrives where need is severe and testimonies of breakthrough carry social force. The promise that giving will produce wealth or that spiritual warfare will remove every economic barrier can exploit people who face genuine structural constraints. Yet critics must not insult the poor. People respond to prosperity preaching partly because it addresses food, work, health, family, school fees, housing, and dignity. The biblical answer must therefore include generous community, vocational formation, honest business, resistance to corruption, care for the sick, and patient discipleship, not only denunciation.

Political religion also takes distinctive forms. Leaders may be declared divinely chosen beyond criticism. Elections may be framed as prophetic warfare. Ethnic loyalties may enter churches through language, patronage, regional identity, or historical grievance. National deliverance narratives can turn rulers into messianic figures. The church must honour authority while retaining prophetic independence. No president, liberation movement, monarchy, military, party, or revolutionary hero becomes the mediator between God and the people.

Prof. Sangwa's writing on Pentecostal syncretism urges the African church to discern cultural influence without despising culture, and to uphold Scripture as the final standard (Sangwa, 2024b). This double refusal is essential. Culture is neither infallible nor worthless. Every culture contains created goods, common grace, inherited wisdom, fallen distortions, and spiritual danger. The Word judges all.

Africa does not need a Western god dressed in African symbols, an ancestral god renamed Jesus, or a prosperity god promising escape. It needs the living God who created every people, judges every idol, receives every tribe through Christ, and forms a holy church capable of truthful witness.

The Church's Theological Editing Room

Reconstructed views of God rarely appear first in formal creeds. They enter through emphasis, omission, atmosphere, and habit. A church may retain orthodox statements while its practical god differs from the one on paper.

Sermons may begin with human desire and use Scripture mainly as validation. Worship may pursue emotional intensity while neglecting reverence, truth, confession, and obedience. Prayer may be presented as technique for obtaining outcomes. Prophecies may repeatedly promise marriage, promotion, wealth, travel, influence, political victory, or protection while rarely calling the church to repentance. "God told me" may close examination rather than invite biblical testing.

The Fatherhood of God may be preached without kingship. Love may be separated from commands. Grace may be detached from training in holiness. Sovereignty may be used selectively to protect leaders while ignored when suffering contradicts prosperity claims. Judgment may be preached fiercely against cultural opponents while greed, pornography, domestic abuse, financial secrecy, racial pride, and clerical adultery remain protected inside the congregation.

The blessing of God may be measured through attendance, buildings, revenue, follower counts, political access, titles, conferences, media reach, and celebrity association. These may reflect faithful work or providential opportunity, but none proves divine approval. Sardis had a reputation for life while being dead ([Revelation 3:1](#)). Laodicea interpreted wealth as sufficiency while Christ described spiritual poverty ([Revelation 3:17](#)).

New Age assumptions may enter through Christian language. “Energy” becomes anointing, “alignment” becomes obedience, “manifestation” becomes faith, “the universe” becomes providence, and intuition becomes the voice of the Spirit. Similar vocabulary does not establish identical meaning. The church must examine the underlying view of God, person, power, prayer, and salvation.

Leaders can also construct a harsh god in their own image. Authoritarian pastors preach a deity who demands unquestioning loyalty to the leader, curses dissenters, exposes private sins selectively, and permits the shepherd comforts denied to the flock. This god is not conservative orthodoxy. It is the sovereign self wearing a robe. Chapter 13 will address this tyranny fully.

The corrective is the whole counsel of God. Pastors must preach texts that resist their temperament, politics, economic interests, and denominational habits. A gentle preacher must not avoid judgment. A severe preacher must not neglect mercy. A political preacher must let Scripture judge his coalition. A prosperity preacher must preach lament and martyrdom. A scholar must allow revelation to contradict academic fashion. A charismatic minister must test manifestations. A cessationist must not reduce the Spirit to an idea. Every tradition has preferred scissors.

What a Small God Produces

A reconstructed God may appear more humane, but the consequences are severe.

Doctrinally, the unity of Christian truth collapses. If God is primarily therapeutic, sin becomes injury and salvation becomes affirmation. If God is energy, the Trinity becomes an obstacle and the Spirit becomes force. If God guarantees prosperity, the cross becomes technique for success. If God belongs to the nation, the church becomes political tribe. If God never judges, atonement becomes unnecessary and hell becomes embarrassing metaphor.

Spiritually, worship becomes self-reference. The congregation asks what it felt, received, achieved, or attracted rather than whether God was known and obeyed. Prayer becomes demand. Scripture becomes raw material. The fear of the Lord disappears, and with it wisdom.

Morally, the self retains final authority. A god who always agrees cannot sanctify. Desire remains sovereign because divine approval has been built into the system. Repentance becomes difficult, not because grace is unavailable, but because guilt has been renamed oppression.

Pastorally, counterfeit gods fail precisely when suffering intensifies. The prosperity god cannot explain the hospital bed. The therapeutic god cannot prepare a believer for costly obedience. The national god cannot sustain the refugee when the nation collapses. Energy

cannot comfort a bereaved parent as a personal Father. An ideology cannot forgive the sins committed in its name.

Ecclesially, leaders gain power by controlling the image of God. Whoever defines what God wants can direct money, loyalty, votes, relationships, and conscience. A small god often produces a large religious intermediary. If God is accessible through technique, the technician becomes indispensable.

Socially and politically, divine language can sanctify coercion. Movements become incapable of repentance because criticism appears blasphemous. Opponents are not merely wrong; they are enemies of God's plan. Institutions may commit injustice while claiming sacred necessity.

Eternally, the consequence is worship of what cannot save. [Isaiah 44:6–20](#) mocks the contradiction of a man who burns part of a tree for warmth and uses the rest to make a god. Modern idols may be psychologically sophisticated, digitally amplified, and institutionally respected. They remain unable to deliver the soul.

A Pastoral Word to Different Hearers

To the deceived believer: you may have inherited a distorted god without consciously choosing rebellion. Do not be ashamed to reopen Scripture. The Lord is not threatened by honest correction. Bring every sermon, prophecy, fear, family tradition, political loyalty, and spiritual experience beneath the Word. The discovery that you were mistaken can become the beginning of freedom.

To the wounded: the character of the person who harmed you is not the character of God. A violent father does not define the heavenly Father. A manipulative pastor does not define the Good Shepherd. A church that protected abuse does not define the holiness of Christ. Seek safety. Tell the truth. Receive qualified pastoral and professional care where needed. You are not required to call evil good in order to forgive. The God of justice sees what happened.

To the false teacher: if you knowingly reshape God to secure money, loyalty, sexual access, political influence, admiration, or immunity from examination, repent before the God whose name you have used. The pulpit cannot hide you. Titles cannot shield you. [James 3:1](#) warns that teachers receive stricter judgment. Restore what was taken, submit to discipline, and stop speaking until truth and fruit can be examined.

To the prosperity preacher: the living God is not a financial mechanism. Stop blaming the sick for your failed promises. Stop turning offerings into leverage. Preach work, generosity, provision, healing, lament, contentment, persecution, resurrection, and eternal treasure. Show the congregation a God worthy of worship when the cheque does not arrive.

To the political Christian: do not wrap the cross in a flag. Do not baptise a party, race, class, revolution, or national myth. Pray for rulers and judge their policies truthfully. Honour lawful authority and remember that Christ alone is Lord. The kingdom will not arrive through your coalition.

To the scholar and theologian: cultural location should make you humble, not sovereign. Academic fashion cannot revise divine revelation. Do not use complexity to hide unbelief. Represent opposing views fairly, welcome correction, and remember that theological brilliance without reverence can become an educated idol.

To conservative Christians: do not defend divine judgment against progressive revision while practising greed, pride, ethnic superiority, pornography, domestic cruelty, corruption, or authoritarian leadership. Practical atheism can inhabit doctrinal orthodoxy. The God you defend in public sees what you protect in private.

To pastors: preach the whole counsel of God. Do not train people to know only the attributes that protect attendance. Give them holiness and mercy, sovereignty and tenderness, judgment and patience, transcendence and nearness. A congregation with a small God will collapse under large trials.

To the repentant sinner: the exposure of idolatry is not the end. Christ receives those who turn from idols to serve the living and true God ([1 Thessalonians 1:9–10](#)). Confess the false image. Renounce the practice built upon it. Return to Scripture, prayer, fellowship, and obedience. Mercy is not controlled by your past. The Father does not merely destroy idols; He brings prodigals home.

Worshipping the God Who Is

The biblical alternative is not a colder, harsher, or more distant deity. It is the God whose majesty makes mercy astonishing.

[Revelation 4:1–11](#) opens heaven around a throne. The worship is not organised around the felt needs of the worshippers. The living creatures proclaim holiness. The elders cast their crowns before the One who created all things by His will. Worship is the surrender of derivative glory to its source.

This scene corrects every reconstruction. The therapeutic god is not on the throne; the Holy One is. The national god is absent; every earthly crown is cast down. The prosperity god is silent; the worshippers give rather than negotiate. The energy god disappears; a personal Lord receives praise. The self does not discover divinity within. It falls before the Creator.

True worship is the whole-person response to God's self-revelation. It includes reverence, joy, confession, gratitude, obedience, holiness, service, generosity, justice, prayer, witness, and endurance. Emotional experience may accompany worship, but emotion is not the object. Beauty may serve worship, but performance does not create divine presence. Cultural form may express worship, but culture cannot define God.

The fear of the Lord is central. It is not servile terror before an irrational tyrant. It is reverent awe, moral seriousness, humble dependence, and recognition that God is God and we are not. Fear and love belong together. The child who knows the Father's tenderness also refuses to treat Him casually. [1 Peter 1:17](#) commands believers who call on the Father to conduct themselves in reverence during their temporary residence.

The true God cannot be manipulated by rituals, offerings, declarations, spiritual intermediaries, or techniques. Yet He invites prayer. He is not owned by nations or churches, yet He dwells with the humble. He judges hidden evil, yet forgives repentant sinners. He provides according to wisdom, remains faithful in suffering, disciplines His children, and will renew creation.

Most importantly, God gives Himself. The greatest blessing is not wealth, health, influence, protection, or emotional relief. It is reconciliation and communion with God. The Psalmist can say, "Who do I have in heaven but you? And I desire nothing on earth but you" ([Psalm 73:25](#)). This is freedom from every transactional deity.

The Last Second Before the Trumpet

We are living in what may soberly be called the last second before midnight. This is a moral and spiritual image, not a timetable. No one knows the day or hour. Yet Scripture commands every generation to live ready, and the convergence of doctrinal confusion, spiritual eclecticism, political religion, commercialised ministry, synthetic authority, moral inversion, and global communication should awaken the church.

The pre-tribulation hope of the rapture teaches imminence: Christ may gather His church before the tribulation, and believers are called to expect Him rather than calculate a date ([1 Thessalonians 4:13–18](#); [1 Corinthians 15:50–58](#)). Readiness is not produced by consuming every rumour, attaching every technology to a prophetic symbol, or turning every conflict into a final chronology. Readiness is faith in Christ, repentance, holiness, love of truth, prayer, endurance, service, and watchfulness.

A reconstructed god leaves the church unprepared. A therapeutic god cannot prepare believers for persecution. A prosperity god cannot interpret suffering. A national god cannot gather the redeemed from every nation. An impersonal force cannot raise the dead. A permissive god cannot judge. A political god cannot forgive the sins of the movement that invokes him. A deity created by human imagination cannot carry humanity through death.

[Revelation 14:6–12](#) joins the eternal gospel with the command to fear God, give Him glory, worship the Creator, reject Babylon, and endure faithfully. In the last hour, worship becomes the dividing line. The final conflict is not merely technological or political. It concerns allegiance.

The church must therefore examine which attributes of God it quietly rejects. Do we want love without judgment, provision without sovereignty, presence without holiness, power without personhood, fatherhood without discipline, mercy without repentance, or kingdom without the King? The denied attribute often identifies the idol we protect.

Rapture readiness includes theological readiness. The wise virgins do not manufacture a bridegroom according to preference. They wait for the one who is coming ([Matthew 25:1–13](#)). The Bride prepares by knowing Christ, loving truth, rejecting idols, and keeping oil in the lamp.

To the careless church, the warning is direct: stop preaching a God who cannot interrupt the service plan, offend the donor, contradict the culture, judge the leader, or call the congregation to repentance. Such a god will not survive the appearing of Christ.

To the fearful believer, the hope is equally direct: the throne is not vacant. The Lord has not surrendered history to the powers of the age. Christ will gather His people. The dead in Christ will rise. Every false god will fall. Every hidden work will be judged. The faithful may therefore stand without panic.

Conclusion: The Idol Cannot Carry Its Maker

Humanity fashions idols because idols appear easier to carry than the living God. They can be placed within a programme, attached to a nation, used in a transaction, invoked by a movement, or adjusted to protect desire. Yet the idol's manageability is its uselessness. What can be controlled cannot save the controller.

This chapter has shown that modern reconstruction of God follows the logic of the sovereign self. When autonomy becomes sacred, God must be reduced to affirmation, energy, prosperity,

personal destiny, political legitimacy, ideological justice, or permissive love. Christian vocabulary may remain, but revelation has been replaced by projection.

The God of Scripture cannot be remade. He names Himself. He is self-existent, triune, holy, sovereign, loving, just, jealous, merciful, patient, and Judge. His attributes are not a menu. His presence does not erase His transcendence. His love does not abolish holiness. His mercy does not cancel truth. His patience does not remove judgment. His power cannot be activated as technique. His providence cannot be owned by a nation. His gifts cannot become evidence that He serves human ambition.

The proper response is not intellectual admiration but repentance and worship. Cast down the therapeutic idol that never corrects. Renounce the spiritual force that can be used. Release the prosperity contract. Remove the flag from the throne. Confess the ideology that made God a mascot. Reject the harsh image formed by abusive leaders. Return to the God who revealed Himself in the burning bush, the covenant name, the holy throne, the cross, the empty tomb, and the coming kingdom.

The hour is late, but mercy is still proclaimed. The Lord who judges idols receives idolaters who turn to Him. He cleanses unclean lips, binds the brokenhearted, disciplines children, exposes wolves, forgives the guilty, and keeps His people until the appearing of Christ. The Bride must not meet the Bridegroom carrying a god she designed herself.

Once humanity remakes God according to the age, it cannot leave Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, sin, the cross, repentance, and salvation unchanged. The next chapter must therefore confront the necessary offspring of the reconstructed deity: another Jesus, another spirit, and salvation without repentance.

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