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Editorial

Christ, Christianity and the Church

As history progresses and the historical Jesus becomes more distant, every generation has the right to (and must) question his contemporary relevance—and hence also that of Christianity and the Church. The articles and book reviews in this issue generally deal with this relevance.

Of the three, of course the questions about Jesus Christ are the basic ones. As we deal with plural and conflicting claims concerning what is and ought to be, the real question turns out to be: Does the truth found in Jesus agree with, clash with, or surpass the truth in others? In turn, the question of Jesus' relevance boils down essentially to the question of his finality—whether we Christians believe that Jesus reigns and all authority has been given to him in earth and heaven. Modern Christological trends substantiate this (Bray). If this is so, then as Newbigin says, 'We shall not need to be told to let it be known. Rather we shall not be able to keep silent'. If anything evangelism is about Jesus Christ (Hattori).

Christianity (as in the *History of the Expansion of Christianity*—a steady, automatic and inevitable expansion, like that of leaven in the dough) is neither greater than nor equal to Christ, but *less than* Christ. Not in the sense that Christ spills over into other religions and ideologies but rather that Christianity and the Christian church have not yet exhausted their grasp of Him. This is the burden behind finding an authentic indigenous Christianity (Omulokoli), or its grappling with the rise of secularization (Conn). It is unfortunate that Christianity has been moulded into a system, a religion. As a system, like every other system Christianity also is human and imperfect. But in fact it is a way of life; for Jesus came not to found a religion but to show the way to live, the way to God Himself.

The church is an institution. As such it cannot avoid being in constant tension with other institutions such as the state. The article on the church and state (Chao) gives an entirely different approach to the problem from those European debates majoring on the Constantine Christendom 'idea'. While an exegetical article (Coleman) reveals how the fellowship of the church goes beyond the sociological solidarities, [p. 4](#) another research (Trembath) demonstrates the crucial role the Church has to play in religious authority, in the very inspiration of the Scriptures.

On advice of many, henceforth two issues of ERT will be multithematic every year. And I trust you will empathise with us as the subscription cost has had to be slightly raised to meet the rising costs.

Editor [p. 5](#)

Evangelism—The Bible's Primary Message

Yoshiaki Hattori

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Basing his findings on the exegesis of Joel's passage on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit Hattori makes an interesting case for evangelism as the message of the Scriptures. This is a typical approach of a growing 2/3rds world Christianity. It is a parallel to C. S. Song's systematisation of theology on the basis of Christian Mission. With his solid trinitarian faith Hattori concludes, 'Not only Ministers but every member of Christian church without any exception is to be ... a witness of Christ and of His Gospel to this world ... The theology of Evangelism is the theology of the Bible as well as the theology of the Christian church.'

Editor

The greatest commission entrusted both to us Christians and to the church is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and to make disciples of the same Jesus Christ ([Matt. 28:19–20](#), [Mark 16:15](#), [Luke 24:48](#)). You may call it in one word 'Evangelism'. Accordingly it must have been the very essential reason for the existence of a Christian church which is based upon the Bible, the fully inspired and infallible Word of God. Here we see very closely the undeniable triangular corelationship: Bible—Church—Mission.¹ Through her long history, Christian church has been endeavouring after the fulfilment of the entrusted task of evangelism in various ways and means but always in accordance with the orthodox trinitarian doctrine of God which is the core of the Christian church. The abundant love of God the Father, the wonderful advent of the Messiah for the work of redemption in Christ the Son, and the mighty descending of the Holy Spirit upon the people of God as the generating power of sending forth the witnesses of the saving p. 6 grace of the gospel in Christ Jesus unto the uttermost part of the world, have been the basic doctrine of the church.

Here in this paper, I present a biblical concept that evangelism is the main theme of the Bible from the beginning to the end in terms of theology of evangelism. Theologically speaking, world-evangelism entrusted to us Christians is neither Jewish-Jehovaism, nor humanitarian Jesusism, nor merely charismatic spiritualism, but the Biblical concept of mission based upon the orthodox trinitarian doctrine of Godhead in the Christian church.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

Trinity in the Old Testament

The concept of God in the Old Testament is definitely monotheistic and there is no pluralistic concept as allegedly seen in [Deuteronomy 6:4](#). Such is the orthodox position of the Christian church, at least of the evangelical church. So it is neither polytheism nor even henotheism but monotheism through and through. In the Old Testament the concept of trinitarian monotheism is well presented as the basic norm (though the term 'trinity' is used neither in the Old Testament nor the New). The concept of God the Father is manifested as the Creator in [Genesis 1:1](#). As to the third Person of Godhead in the Old Testament, though not in the most precise way of expression, it is seen in expressions like 'the Spirit of God' ([Genesis 1:2](#)). In addition, 'angel' ([Exodus 23:20](#), [32:34](#), [33:2](#), etc.) or

¹ Robert J. Schreiter says in the beginning of his recommendatory preface in *The Biblical Foundations for Mission* by D. Senior and C. Stuhlmuller, 'Christians have always turned to the Bible as the charter document for their missionary activity. In so doing they have mined those rich resources in many ways, and for a variety of reasons. Sometimes they have been guided for personal reasons, seeking inspiration to rekindle and guide their missionary motivation. At other times the reasons have been practical or apologetic, to address specific problems or to underwrite certain strategies. In still other instances they have looked to the Scriptures for blue-prints of missionary action or criteria for the establishment of the Christian community.' Donald Senior/Carroll Stuhlmuller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983, p. xi.

'the angel of the Lord' ([Genesis 16:7](#), [22:15](#), [Exodus 14:19](#), [Numbers 22:22](#), etc.) is the being which works with God and gives direction and may also be understood as an indirect expression indicating the work of the third Person of Godhead ('the Spirit of the Lord' [II Samuel 23:2](#)).

The concept of the second Person of Godhead, God the Son, may be seen in the expressions such as 'word' ([Psalms 33:6](#)), 'wisdom' ([Proverbs 8:12](#)), and [Isaiah 48:16](#) may be taken for an indication of the Triune God in the course of the progressive revelation in terms of Biblical theology.² It is a theological necessity that the idea of Messianic prophecy is to be viewed, if one is to see the doctrine of the second Person of Godhead (God the Son) in the Old Testament, in its relationship to the full revelation seen in the New Testament. [p. 7](#) Moreover, the essential unity between the Old and the New Testaments has been well accepted in this theological relationship between the doctrines of God the Father and of God the Son by the church. This may be expressed in terms of 'prophecy and fulfilment'. Accordingly, on the basis of progressive revelation both the doctrine of God the Son and the doctrine of God the Holy Spirit are to be most manifestly revealed in the New Testament. The second and the third Persons of Godhead are revealed in the Old Testament only within the frame of prophecy; therefore, both varied and flexible understanding or expression may seem necessary for these two Persons of Godhead, at least in the economy of the Old Testament. It seems to be more so in the case of the third Person of Godhead; and theologically speaking, that may be considered to be the significant order in progressive revelation.³

However, although the understanding on the plural form of the divine name *Elohim*, 'God', in the Old Testament on the basis of the doctrine of triune God may not be rejected decisively or denied completely, it may be much more objectively and positively accepted as Biblical understanding on the philological/cultural basis of the so-called '*pluralis excellentiae*' or '*pluralis magnitudinis*'.⁴

Evangelism and the 'Elect' in the OT

As clearly indicated at the beginning of the Bible, [Genesis 1:1](#), God is the Creator of the world (heavens and earth), and the covenant of creation intrinsically embodied in His work of creation is the fundamental principle of a Biblical world-view. However, as a tragic reality in history man's rebellion against the Creator-God in terms of the fall of man did break the covenant (the covenant of creation), and immediately God did begin to institute the covenant of redemption for [p. 8](#) the fallen man and World through His divine revelation. Since then, this covenant of redemption has been the very central message of the entire Biblical revelation both in the Old and the New Testaments.⁵

² G. W. Bromiley, 'The Trinity,' *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, (editor-in-chief, E. F. Harrison), Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960, pp. 531–532. For more details, cf. J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1962, pp. 172–176.

³ General references to the 'Spirit' in the Old Testament indicate this clearly, e.g., Loyd Neve, *The Spirit of God in the Old Testament*, Tokyo: Seibunsha, 1972.

⁴ Cf. Otto Kirn, 'Doctrine of the Trinity,' *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, edited by S. M. Jackson (editor-in-chief), New York/London: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1912, Vol. XII, p. 18; Payne, *op. cit.*, pp. 146, 167; E. Kautzsch/A. E. Cowley, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957 impression (of 2nd English edition, 1910), pp. 398–399 (§124-g-h).

⁵ J. H. Bavinck voices that God's creation is the foundation of our mission principle, saying, '... [Genesis 1:1](#) is obviously the necessary basis of the great commission of [Matthew 28:19–20](#).' J. H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, trans. by D. H. Freedman, Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1964,

Therefore, the message of redemption (evangelism) originated out of the very concept of the *proto-evangelium* ([Genesis 3:15, 21](#)) has always been keeping its focus on the salvation of ‘this fallen world’ of ours, which had been once in the abundant blessing of God under the covenant of creation. In addition to the Adamic covenant, the Noahic covenant ([Gen. 9:17](#)), Abrahamic covenant ([Gen. 12:3, 17:4–5, 18:18, 26:4, 28:14](#)), and Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple ([1 Kings 8:23, 41–43, 60](#)) indicate well such theological truth. So, the consciousness of the co-relationship between the trinitarian concept of God and the principle of evangelism⁶ among the people of Israel has been acknowledged as a transitional/progressive development⁷ derived from the concept of the almighty sovereign God, the Creator and the Ruler of the world.⁸ Among the prophets in Old Testament times, such evangelism/mission consciousness had become much more manifest and their identity as the people of God both in word and life required them to be holy and righteous. In fact, it was considered to be their witness/mission/evangelism to their surrounding world ([Isaiah 9:1–2, 34:1, 40:28, 41:1, 49:1, Jeremiah 1:10, Ezekiel 28:25–26](#), etc.). In the Book of Psalms, some good examples which show us such evangelism/mission consciousness among the people of Israel may be found: God’s majesty over the entire world ([Ps. 8](#)), judgement upon the entire world ([Ps. 9:8](#)), creation of the entire world ([Ps. 19](#)), God’s dominion over the world ([Ps. 33](#)), call for praise to the entire world ([Ps. 66:8, Ps. 96](#)), joy for the world ([Ps. 67](#)), call to all the people of the world ([Ps. 98, 100](#)), proclamation of God’s work ([Ps. 105](#)), praise of God in the world ([Ps. 117](#)), etc. Therefore, in the course of God’s people, Israel, their understanding on God did bring forth the sense of evangelism to themselves as a sort of self-consciousness of the elect.⁹ Eventually, their identity or their life-style as the people of God became necessary to be propagated in various ways; then along with the increasing expectation for the promised Messiah some sorts of specialized offices or services were in demand for carrying such a task of evangelism to the world. The appearance of prophets may be considered as one of the most apparent results of this trend under God’s sovereign providence.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

The Development from the Elect-Consciousness to the Evangelism Consciousness

p. 12. Cf. also Richard R. DeRidder, ‘The Old Testament Roots of Mission,’ in Wilbert R. Shenk, *Exploring Church Growth*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1983, pp. 173–174.

⁶ ‘The Old Testament basis for the Christian mission must surely center, then, in its doctrine of God, in its revelation of the nature of the first Person of the Trinity and of the very ground of the Trinity itself.’ G. Ernest Wright, ‘The Old Testament Basis for the Christian Mission,’ in G. H. Anderson, ed., *The Theology of the Christian Mission*, New York/Toronto/London: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1961, p. 22.

⁷ Such consciousness in the history of Israel is usually acknowledged in Abraham, but it could be further traced back to Noah. Cf. Johannes Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church*, New York/Toronto/London: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1962, pp. 19–21, 25ff.; Bengt Sundkler, *The World of Mission*, London: Lutterworth Press, 1965, p. 11.

⁸ Cf. Donald Senior/Carroll Stuhlmuehler, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983, p. 321. ‘The Bible gives awesome witness to the universal sovereignty of God. His lordship and provident care transcend every human boundary—even those of Israel and the church ... Thus the biblical God is the ultimate source of mission and the ultimate catalyst to the church’s instinct to move beyond the boundaries of a particular culture or national group.’ *op. cit.*, p. 339.

⁹ Sundkler, *op. cit.*, pp. 12–15; Blauw, *op. cit.*, pp. 44ff.

When evangelism consciousness derived from the elect-consciousness becomes stabilized both collectively and-individually, as H. H. Rowley says,¹⁰ theologically speaking, service becomes the focal point of election. Even more specifically Blauw states, 'Therefore election is not primarily a privilege but a responsibility.'¹¹ The term *bāḥar*, 'to choose or to elect', in its usage in the Old Testament connotes the evangelistic mission of the people of Israel as God's chosen people toward all other peoples of the world.¹² This is the principle of expansion in evangelism and this principle is based upon p. 10 the evangelistic or missionary responsibility and consciousness on the part of God's chosen people with both phases, centripetal and centrifugal.¹³

This evangelism—oriented movement may be seen in the prophets in Old Testament times. The task and responsibility of evangelism committed to them did necessitate the most effective means or approach toward its fulfilment. As we have seen in the course of history, until the appearance of so-called prophets¹⁴ the judges along with the priests were in leadership through the periods of the conquest and of the settlement of the people of Israel in the land of Canaan. However, for the people of Israel the experience of the conquest of the land of Canaan and of the settlement there in the land was their first evangelism-oriented step with many lessons toward the great God-given task of world-evangelism,¹⁵ because through the experiences they had to cope with the crucial issues related to today's great missiological theme, namely the cross-cultural problems of evangelism. As God's chosen people they had to keep their identity and had to model the God-given way of life to the surrounding people of different culture in the land of Canaan. The so-called 'Amphictyony' (socio-religious tribal league of the Israelite people in Canaan) may be considered to be one of the methods they had to utilize under such

¹⁰ 'The purpose of the election is service, and when the service is withheld the election loses its meaning, and therefore fails.' H. H. Rowley, *The Biblical Doctrine of Election*, London: Lutterworth Press, 1953, p. 52. Cf. also, *ibid.*, pp. 42, 53–54, 117–118; and Senior/Stuhlmüller, *op. cit.*, p. 83. Similar aspect may be seen in the prophetic consciousness among Old Testament prophets. Cf. Susumu Higuchi, 'Call-Narratives of the Prophets,' *Shingaku Kenkyu* (Bulletin of the School of Theology, Kansei-Gakuin Univ.), XXIII (1975), 1–28 (Japanese).

¹¹ Blauw, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

¹² 'Thus throughout, *bḥr* includes the idea of separating, but in the sense that the one separated by *bh\r*, 'choosing, selection,' stood that much more clearly in the service of the whole. In my opinion election of the people in the OT is to be treated in a similar way. The horizon of election of the people of Israel is the peoples of the world, in relationship to which as a whole the 'individual' Israel was chosen, *bhr* as a technical term for the election of the people of Israel stands under the symbol of universalism.' Horst Seebass, 'bacher, II–III', *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. by G. Johannes Bottenweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. by J. T. Willis, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1977 revised ed., Vol. II, p. 83; cf. also p. 87.

¹³ cf. Stuhlmüller, *op. cit.*, pp. 10–11. Stuhlmüller divides the application of this principle into four stages: 1) Election, the basis and the dangers of election, 2) Israel's various reactions to the nations, 3) The development of Israel's sense of election, 4) an outreach toward universal salvation. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

¹⁴ Although (*nb'*) has been usually considered to be the most basic philological background for its meaning of 'prophet', that has recently been questioned in terms of the application of the term to all the prophets of Old Testament times. Cf. Bruce Vawter, 'Were the Prophets *nābī's?*,' *Biblica*, LXVI (1985), 206–220. Yet, the decisive view on the matter seems to be remained in further study in future.

¹⁵ For some detailed discussions on the significance of Israelites' conquest and settlement in Canaan from the view of Biblical theology, cf. Yoshiaki Hattori, 'On the Biblical Significance of the Crossing the Jordan-river in the History of Israel,' *Tojyo* (Research Journal on Thoughts and Christianity), VII (1976), 69–85 (Japanese).

circumstances.¹⁶ The people of Israel might, in one sense, be said to be destined for world-evangelism under His sovereign providence.

The leaders among the people of Israel in the period of the Judges, at least most of them, experienced some sort of charismatic gift and they p. 11 were playing the role of prophet,¹⁷ such as Gideon with extraordinary skills in military strategy, Samson with the mighty power, Jephthah with bandit-like leadership, etc. However, in the revealed history of the people of Israel the nature of the leaders, those in prophetic office in particular,¹⁸ had been gradually but progressively shifted from charismatic to word-oriented spokesman-type.¹⁹ The prophets with some sort of charismatic gifts could offer good leadership at the particular time of their involvement, but the prophets with a word-oriented spokesman type of nature might be able to offer more long-lasting leadership. In this transitional process, the role played by both Elijah and Elisha was very crucial; in fact one form of training-institution for prophetic office was beginning to be socially recognized under the name of ‘the sons of the prophets’ ([II Kings 2:3–18](#)). With such professional training, in the course of the revealed history of Israel seen in the Old Testament, the essential element of prophetic office became ‘to speak forth’ the word of the Lord as spokesman *for* and *of* God.

Considering that the revealed truth under the Old Testament economy was nothing but the preparation for the revealed truth under the New Testament economy, it is extremely significant for us to observe that God in His wonderful provision had been working toward the complete New Testament principle of world-evangelism by all His people. It was through the prophet Joel that God marvellously revealed the great principle of world-evangelism.

This may be indicated by diagram A:



God the Father should be preached to this world because of His greatness and His immeasurable love toward us. ‘For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life’ ([John 3:16](#)). He is the One who made the decisive provision for the lost world by providing the prophetic message for the coming of the Messiah, God the Son. As the very Son of God, Jesus

¹⁶ However, the validity of ‘Amphictyony’ in the history of Israel has been recently questioned due to the Hellenistic elements included in the term. Cf. Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel, Its Life and Institution*, trans. by J. McHugh New York/Toronto/London: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1961, pp. 92–93; William Sanford LaSor/David Allan Hubbard/Frederic Wm. Bush, *Old Testament Survey*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1982, pp. 219–220.

¹⁷ Cf. [I Samuel 9:9](#).

¹⁸ Of course, the origin of the prophetic office or prophetism is to be found in Moses. [Exodus 4:10–17](#), [Deuteronomy 18:18](#).

¹⁹ The priestly office, though not powerful in leadership, had played some significant roles; however, the aspect of evangelism might be found more clearly and positively in the prophetic office rather than in the priestly office. The Christian church today needs to have both—prophetic/evangelistic and priestly/pastoral—in good balance.

manifested that He Himself was sent by and from God the Father ([John 10:38](#), [14:10–11](#), [17:21–23](#)). Then, what was needed was the energetic power by which the work of the Messiah (the gospel of Jesus Christ) be preached world-wide by all God’s people ([John 14:16–17](#), [15:26](#), [16:12–13](#), [Luke 24–49](#), [Acts 1:4–5](#), [8](#)). And that took nothing less than the descending of the Spirit of God in the form of the Holy Spirit, the third Person of Godhead.

Joel 2:27–29 and Acts 2:14–21

The birthday of the Christian church was on the day of Pentecost, because the affirmation by the believing Christian community that they were the followers of Jesus Christ with their confession of Christ’s lordship was made on that day. And the community consciousness of Christians did become decisive on that day of Pentecost by the work of the Holy Spirit as recorded in the second chapter of the Book of Acts.

Then, a question to be asked is: ‘If it was the birthday of the Christian church, was there not any Christian church before the event of Pentecost?’ In terms of ‘Christian church’ as such the answer might be negative; but in another sense the answer could be affirmative, because there were the people of God, community of believers—the people of Israel in earlier time and the followers of the Messiah Jesus Christ later in history. Then, what happened at the time of Pentecost? This is information we should learn from the text ([Joel 2:27–29](#)) of the inspired Word of God, the Bible. On the day of Pentecost, unspeakable blessing from God was brought to the people of God, who had known only the joy of being the believers in God so to speak, and that unspeakable blessing on the day of Pentecost did make a great difference among the believers in God. Here we see a parallelism in the revealed truth between the advent of Jesus Christ and the advent of the Holy Spirit.

Just as the advent of Christ (including His death on the cross and His resurrection on the third day) did make the great difference in the experience of the people of God, so the advent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost did make the other great difference in the life of Christian people in the early church. If we fail to observe this great p. 13 parallelism as a revealed truth in the Word of God, the Bible, we are Christians but only half or partial Christians (one might say ‘nominal Christians’) and we are missing a great thrill, the exciting blessing of being witnessing Christians.

The Book of Joel in its form and structure reveals, as a prophecy on world-evangelism, what was most needed after the advent of the Messiah. The over-all contents of the Book of Joel may be indicated by diagram B. As we read the section [2:14–27](#), we find God’s answer to the request of the people of God and the promise of various kinds of material blessing. This is a Biblical and theistic view of the world. Every good in this world, every material blessing is under the sovereign control of our God the Almighty, and they are available to all those who walk with God. The most typical expressions used in the Old Testament are the blessings of ‘land’ and of ‘descendant’.²⁰ The prophet Joel knew well that truth as God’s divine revelation.

Diagram B

The Book of Joel

God’s judgement

God’s blessings

²⁰ [Genesis 12:1–7](#), [13:14–18](#), [15:1–7](#), [17:1–8](#), etc.

Exhortation repentance	for	Material blessings	Spiritual blessings (Prophecy Pentecost)	Prophecy of the Lord's Day
1:1-20		2:12-17	2:18-27	2:28-29
				2:30-32
2:1-11				3:1-21
Hebrew		Hebrew		Hebrew
O.T. ch. 1		O.T. ch. 2		O.T. ch. 3 "after this ..."
				O.T. ch. 4

Now, let us look into the text: 'And it will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions' (v. [28](#)). The meaning of the expression 'after this' in the context is that in addition to what have been mentioned in the preceding section (vv. [14-27](#)), namely the material blessings, 'now I will ...' In fact, it is interesting to observe, though this itself may not be conclusive, that the Hebrew Bible which was most probably used [p. 14](#) by Jesus ends chapter [2](#) at v. [27](#). Therefore, v. [27](#) is the conclusion of the section dealing with the material blessings of God: 'Thus you will know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the Lord your God and there is no other; and My people will never be put to shame' (vs. [27](#)). In another word, God blesses those people who walk with Him as His people with much material blessing. If we do work hard as His people (Christians), not for our own sake but for God's glory, He does bless us with His abundant blessings. This is the biblical view of work.

In addition to this biblical idea, the text here in the following two verses (vv. [28-29](#)), as God's promise, talks about the spiritual blessing which is considered to be much superior to any of the material blessings mentioned in the preceding verses of chapter [2](#). This is an extremely important biblical and theological concept of God's creation. Whatever the philosophy may be or whoever the critic may be, the Bible clearly indicates that spiritual matters are more essential than material matters. Any material prosperity without faith in the Almighty, sovereign God is doomed to tragedy sooner or later as we have seen in history. That is the very reason why the text of this portion of the Scriptures 'And it will come about *after this* I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind ...' is crucially important.

Yes, the promise of God in the time of the prophet Joel was to be fulfilled in the days of New Testament grace, and it was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. That is the reason why Jesus Christ Himself 'commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the father had promised', ([Acts 1:4](#)) and said, '... You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth' ([Acts 1:8](#)). It is by the Spirit that man is vitalized.²¹ In the time of the Old Testament, material blessings were considered to be

²¹ The process of the renewal of people in terms of the exiled people of Israel seen in the revelation to the prophet Ezekiel indicates this truth ([Ezekiel 37:5-10](#)). A somewhat similar concept may be seen in the

available (God willing) to *all of His people* without distinction. But not so in spiritual matters; spiritual blessings were considered to be given *only to a special class of people* such as priests, Levites, prophets, etc. However the promise was that when the time came spiritual blessings would become available to all of God's people. This was really unbelievable to the people of the time of Joel the prophet. Therefore, it was a tremendous promise of God, a promise for an entirely different new age—'the age of the Holy Spirit'.

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The text (v. 28) says first, 'I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind', then, 'and your *sons* and *daughters* will prophesy'. That means no distinction of sex. Then the text continues, 'Your *old men* will dream dreams, your *young men* will see visions.' That means no distinction of age. 'Prophesying', 'dreaming' and 'seeing visions'²² were considered to be connected with the offices or the works given to special classes of people, not to everybody, in Old Testament times. But when God sent the Holy Spirit on the day of the Pentecost fulfilling the promise made through the Son Jesus Christ, every believer as Christian became eligible for spiritual blessings.

Let's look into the text again in v. 29 where it is said: 'And even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.' This was rather a shocking but amazing promise of God. In the days of the prophet Joel, it was just unbelievable that even servants both male and female might be eligible for spiritual blessings. When the age of the Holy Spirit came as the fulfillment of God's promise through the prophet Joel, there began a new dispensation under which there is no distinction in receiving God's spiritual blessings between, not only two sexes man and woman, nor two ages old and young, but even among servants male and female.

PENTECOST AND WORLD-EVANGELISM

Now, since Christian church had already experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of the Pentecost as the fulfilment of that promise given to the prophet Joel, the blessing of the Holy Spirit is today available to all of us *without any exception*. That means each one of us is to receive the Holy Spirit in order that we, each of us, may become the Spirit-filled witnesses of the gospel of Jesus Christ to our neighbours and to all other peoples of the world.

This is the message of the text, and is also the message of Pentecost, the message of the amazing grace of receiving the Holy Spirit. Then, this is nothing else but the message of world-evangelism. Not only ministers but every member of the Christian church without any exception is to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to be a witness of Christ and of His gospel to this world. So the spirit of Pentecost is the spirit of world-evangelism. There is a beautiful and theological unity between the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit.²³ Let us say repeatedly and loudly that God promised

creation process of man ([Genesis 2:7](#)). Cf. Walther Zimmerli, *A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, trans. by J. D. Martin, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983, Vol. II, pp. 260–262.

²² The revelation through dreams and visions is essentially the same as the revelation through words, especially in terms of prophecy in the Old Testament. For more detailed discussion, cf. Yoshiaki Hattori, 'Dreams and Revelation in the Old Testament,' *Evangelical Theology*, X (1979), 4–25 (Japanese but resumé in English).

²³ 'The Christian fellowship was born in the context of apostolic preaching. The power of that preaching stemmed from the truth of the biblical message, the centrality of the person and work of Jesus Christ, and the dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit.... The heart of Christian persuasion lies in 'words which the Holy Ghost teacheth' ([I Cor. 2–13](#), KJV). Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority* (Vol. IV God Who Speaks and Shows), Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1979, p. 476.

through the prophet Joel that in the age of the Holy Spirit (in which we are now) there is no distinction whatsoever in receiving spiritual blessings, therefore the Holy Spirit is available to all of us. However, caution needs to be taken here because we may be falling into or making a limitation by ourselves! That limitation could be in me and in you unless we are careful, and it would be a tragedy. What then, is the limitation? Simply this—whether we are willing to seek after the Holy Spirit or not.

Conclusion

Hence, we all need to receive the Holy Spirit to go out and to be witnesses of our Lord Jesus Christ and to evangelize the world. A tragedy of making self-limitations after the event of Pentecost is recorded as a great warning to us: Ananias and his wife Sapphira ([Acts 5:1-11](#)).

Truly, the theology of evangelism is the theology of the Bible as well as the theology of the Christian church. The concept of trinitarian missiology is the divine revelation seen all through the entire course of the revealed history of the Bible from the beginning to the end, and accordingly it should be the goal of both Christians and the church.

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The Fellowship of the Church in the Book of Acts

Robert E. Coleman

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In this fine exegetical study Coleman analyses the various aspects of Christian fellowship, such as unity, mutual supports, corporate meetings, their places and time, internal tensions and relationships, nurture of the believers, etc. His call to reemphasize the element of fellowship in all our carefully ordered modern worship services is urgent and relevant. The emphasis on family and personal relationships in the early church fellowship is something that present day congregations can learn with benefit.

Editor

BODY LIFE

Responding to the Gospel invitation brought one into association with other persons of like faith. This fellowship of kindred spirits constituted ‘the church of the Lord’ ([20:28](#)), those called out from the world to follow Christ, and as such was the primary means by which disciples were trained. Just as Jesus had lived closely with His followers, so now the gathered community of believers formed an ongoing communion with His Spirit.

In a visible present sense, the church filled the role of Christ's body in the world ([1 Cor. 12:27](#)).¹ Christ was the head ([Eph. 1:22](#); [Col. 1:18](#); [2:19](#)), with the redeemed functioning as vital members of the body, and thereby 'severally members one of another' ([Rom. 12:5](#); cf. [12:4](#); [1 Cor. 12:20](#)). Not all the believers had the same office ([Rom. 12:4](#)), but 'according to the grace that was given' ([Rom. 12:6](#)), all served in some useful way the work of the body ([Eph. 4:12](#)). Within this ministering fellowship, as followers of their Lord, they helped each other grow and mature in 'the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ' ([Eph. 4:13](#)). p. 18

It was like a loving family. God was their Father ([Rom. 3:15](#); [Gal. 3:26](#)), and as His sons and daughters ([II Cor. 6:18](#); [Gal. 3:26](#)), they shared equally the inheritance of Christ ([Rom. 8:17](#)). Quite appropriately, then, members addressed each other as 'brother' and referred to themselves as 'brethren.'² Such love among themselves, a quality derived from their Lord, became the seal of their witness to the world.³ Christ had said: 'By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another' ([John 13:34](#), [35](#)).

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Complementing this love was a spirit of unity within the body (cf. [John 17:21-23](#)). The church in Jerusalem, numbering into the thousands, was 'of one heart and soul' ([4:32](#)), a beautiful description of their solidarity. Again and again this community was said to be 'with one accord' ([2:46](#); [4:24](#); [5:12](#), [15:25](#)). That they came to this unity of heart and mind in the meeting preceding Pentecost would indicate that unity provides a fertile soil for the Spirit of God to work ([1:14](#); [2:1](#)).

However, as the church expanded, their unity was threatened by internal division between the Hebrew Christians and new Gentile believers.⁴ Some Judaizers insisted that all Gentile converts must adhere to their Jewish customs, particularly circumcision. It was not an easy problem to work through, even after God decisively intervened to get Peter and Cornelius together, and confirmed their meetings by pouring out His Spirit upon them

¹ The description of the church as the functioning 'body' of Christ appears repeatedly in the New Testament. It is a figurative or metaphorical expression, and not to be interpreted literally as an extension of Christ's incarnation. An excellent discussion of the church in this image is by Stan Cole, *The Body of Christ* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1964). For a helpful treatment of other biblical figures used for the church, see Paul Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970). More than 80 images are cited, though the focus is on the concepts of the body of Christ, people of God, the new Creation, and fellowship in faith. A more limited study, ably summarized, is by Robert L. Saucy, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-56.

² This term is used more than 40 times in Acts alone. It describes persons that share a common heritage, like citizens of the same country, though it carries the additional force of brethren born of the same Spirit when applied to Christians. Note [1:16](#); [6:3](#); [9:17](#); [10:23](#); [11:1](#), [12](#), [29](#); [12:17](#); [14:2](#); [15:1](#), [3](#), [23](#), [32](#), [33](#), [36](#), [40](#); [16:2](#), [40](#); [17:6](#), [10](#), [14](#); [18:18](#), [27](#); [20:32](#); [21:7](#), [17](#), [20](#); [22:13](#); [28:14](#), [15](#), [17](#), [21](#), and others. The word also appears all through the letters of Paul and the General Epistles.

³ Gene A. Getz notes that this loving concern for one another is a concept that appears over fifty times in the Epistles alone, often in relation to church body life, e.g., [Rom. 12:10](#), [16](#); [13:8](#); [14:13](#), [10](#); [15:5](#), [7](#), [14](#); [1 Cor. 12:25](#); [Gal. 5:13](#); [6:2](#); [Eph. 1:15](#); [4:1](#), [2](#), [32](#); [5:18-21](#); [Col. 1:3](#), [4](#); [3:9](#), [12](#), [13](#), [16](#); [I Thess. 3:12](#); [4:18](#); [Heb. 3:13](#); [10:23-25](#); [James 4:11](#); [5:9](#), [16](#); [I Peter 1:22](#); [4:9](#); [5:5](#); [I John 3:11](#), [23](#); [4:7](#), [11](#), [12](#); [II John 5](#). *Sharpening the Focus of the Church* (Chicago: Moody, 1974), pp. 115-116.

⁴ It is well to note that the church grew up in a Jewish system where already there was tension between contending factions, such as the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes and Zealots. Each of these groups had their own distinctive cultural and theological emphases, though they shared a basic faith. So the rise of the Judaistic spirit in the church was no reason to break fellowship with the Gentile Christians. Jews had already learned to live together amid diversity.

(10:1-48). The legalists still were not satisfied, notwithstanding the evidence of God's direction (11:1-18). p. 19 The issue came up again at the Jerusalem Council, where after rehearsing the previous events, all agreed that the church should not impose Jewish rites upon the Gentile Christians (15:1-29). Grace prevailed. Facing this question early in the life of the movement opened the way for the evangelization of the whole world. Had the narrow Judaizers won the day, Christianity would have become an ethnic rather than a universal faith.⁵

Not only was it recognized that God made 'no distinction' between Jew and Gentile (15:9; cf. Eph. 2:14-18), but in the larger dimension of fellowship, every other artificial barrier to unity was broken down, whether of race, national origin, social and economic position, language or sex. In the family of God, there was no Greek or barbarian, rich or poor, slave or free, male or female, but all were one in Christ (Col. 3:10, 11; Gal. 3:28).

INTERNAL TENSIONS

This is not to imply that all was peaceful within the church. The Acts is careful to record continual problems coming up in the community. Early they had to deal with hypocritical members (5:1-11). As believers multiplied in Jerusalem, some Grecian Jews murmured because their widows were not receiving a fair distribution of provisions, a crisis which required swift administrative action (6:1-6). Then there were the tensions occasioned by lack of understanding and forgiveness, as seen in the hesitancy of the church immediately to accept Paul into the fellowship after his conversion (9:26). Though Barnabas resolved the problem (9:27), it did not prevent friction from developing later between Paul and John Mark (13:13), nor contention even with Barnabas in the way Paul handled the situation (15:36-40).⁶

Paul's letters also mention internal strife in the churches, of which the Corinthian congregation seems most negligent. A member of that fellowship was living in open immorality. Others were taking each other to court over petty disputes. Disorders were occurring in the p. 20 worship services. There were doctrinal differences, and a tendency for people to take sides around charismatic personalities. His letters reveal power struggles in other churches, including his own role of leadership. There are warnings against false teaching, as well as synthesizing Christian and pagan customs. The General Epistles of James, Peter and John indicate many of the same difficulties, as also the descriptions of the seven churches of Asia Minor recorded in the Book of Revelation.

Clearly churches, even growing, vibrant congregations, have problems, if nothing else, just the sheer logistic pressure occasioned by a rapidly expanding fellowship precipitates tensions. When limited knowledge and spiritual immaturity are added to this, conditions always with us, we can understand why problems constantly need resolution in the church. The issues need to be honestly faced, and dealt with. To ignore them invites disaster. But to meet them in the sufficiency of God's grace makes the difficulties stepping stones to progress. Essential to the reconciling process, however, is the mutual concern of the church where problems can be addressed in a context of love.

⁵ As a matter of historical interest, the Judaizers continued to maintain their position, and create tension in the church. Paul's letter to the Galatians, and to a lesser extent, Romans, speaks to the issues in this controversy. According to Eusebius, in 66 AD they left the Jerusalem church, and went to Pella, where, removed from society, they followed their Jewish way of life. The community lost an evangelistic thrust, and eventually faded away into oblivion. See Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. I (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926), p. 201.

⁶ A good discussion of these internal problems in Acts may be found in C. E. Autrey, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-56.

MUTUAL SUPPORT

This willingness to bear one another's burdens is seen in their care of members with physical needs. It was like a family, where each person felt responsibility for the others. 'All that believed were together, and had all things common' (2:44). 'Not one of them said that ought of the things which he possessed was his own' (4:32). To provide for those without the basic necessities of life, persons with means, like Barnabas, 'sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, according as any man had need' (2:45; cf., 4:34-37). The apostles distributed the provisions in an orderly manner, so that no one among them lacked (4:34; cf. 6:1).⁷

This generous giving to brethren in need is noted again when the disciples at Antioch, 'every man according to his ability,' sent relief to the famine stricken community in Judea (11:27-30). Paul, too, is a recipient of offerings from the churches concerned for his welfare (Phil. 4:15, 16). Mention also is made in his second letter to the p.21 Corinthians of the Macedonian churches being allowed to give money to the Jerusalem saints, even out of extreme poverty (II Cor. 8:1-4).

Let it be stressed, however, that nothing in the common life of the church is compatible to practice of materialistic socialism today. State communism is a legislated and forced sharing, imposed from the top down. By contrast, the apostolic church sees sharing as an individual choice, a consequence of love and self-denial, which comes from the bottom up. It was a spontaneous act of worship, giving as unto the Lord.

CORPORATE MEETINGS

The closeness of the church at Pentecost set the pattern. 'They continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers' (2:42). Emphasis is upon a constancy of faith and devotion as they meet regularly for instruction, sharing of experiences and worship.⁸

Specific information about the format of these meetings is not given, though it seems apparent that it was very simple. There was a time for reading the Scriptures (2:42; 15:21, 30, 31; Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27), and perhaps a sermon or exhortation, as was the custom in the synagogue (cf. 20:7, 17, 18). Of course, these meetings allowed for corporate prayer (1:14; 2:42; 4:24, 31; 12:5, 12; Rom. 12:10, 13; 1 Thess. 5:14-18; James 5:13-16). From allusions to hymns and praise in the church, singing, also, seems to have been a part of the service (2:47; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). In these spiritual songs the members edified each other while also expressing their love to God out of thankful hearts.

Normally, too, a fellowship meal, called the 'agape' or 'love feast' was observed, recalling the Last Supper of Christ with His disciples (2:42, 46; 20:7; 1 Cor. 10:16, 17). This practice led to abuses at Corinth, with some unworthy members using the meal for their own pleasure by overeating, a situation which Paul strongly reprovved (1 Cor. 11:27-34).

⁷ The need for assistance was especially acute in this early period of the Jerusalem church, where Jewish believers were ostracized from society, which deprived many of their economic support. The pressure was somewhat diminished as Christians moved out into the Gentile world.

⁸ The purpose of this study is not served by elaborating on the forms meetings took in the early church. Those who may be interested in pursuing this subject will find helpful the books by Oscar Cullman, *Early Christian Worship* (Naperville: Allenson, 1953); Alexander R. Hay, *The New Testament Order for the Church and Mission* (Audubon: New Testament Missionary Union, 1947); Maurice Goguel, *The Primitive Church* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1963); and Ralph P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (Westwood: Flemming H. Revell, 1964). A shorter treatment is in Gary Inrig, *life in His Body* (Wheaton: Harold Shaw, 1975), esp. pp. 66-100.

Properly observed, however, the sharing of their food [p. 22](#) and drink in remembrance of the Lord's passion was a beautiful experience of holy communion.⁹

Throughout the meeting ample opportunity seems to have been given for personal participation. Each believer was free to exercise his or her spiritual gift, ask questions, and share any concern, as the Spirit might lead. Officers in the local fellowship doubtless provided some direction to the service, but the worshippers were not dependent on them.

Worship patterns gradually become more stereotyped toward the close of the first century. The same trend was apparent in the development of catechisms and creeds, as well as the communion meal, which took a more sacramental character. This is not to disparage formality, nor belittle the need for defining doctrine, for an increasingly complex body must have some stabilizing order. But in the formalizing process we must preserve the fellowship which gives heart to the structure.

GATHERING PLACES

During this early period the Christians did not have church buildings in which to meet. Those living in Jerusalem would gather in the temple area, especially at times of prayer ([2:56](#); [3:1](#); [5:12](#), [21](#), [42](#)), but this became difficult as Jewish opposition increased. The same pertained to the use of synagogues in other cities. Sometimes the Christians would assemble in the public halls that were available to them, as in 'the upper chamber' at Troas ([20:8](#)), but the use of such facilities does not appear to be a pattern.

Their normal place of meeting was in the home. The first gathering was in the upper chamber in the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, which became a familiar prayer site for the brethren ([1:13](#); [12:12](#)). With the large increase of members many houses in the city became meeting places for church groups ([2:46](#)). The home of Phillip in Caesarea is mentioned as a rendezvous for the saints ([21:8](#)). A [p. 23](#) church met in the house of Philemon ([Philemon 2](#)). Jason's house in Thessalonica served the same purpose ([17:5](#)). At Corinth both the Houses of Titus, Justus and Stephanas were used as centres of fellowship ([18:7](#); [1 Cor. 1:16](#)). So also the house of Lydia and the jailer in Philippi ([16:15](#), [32-34](#)), and Nympha at Laodicea ([Col. 4:15](#)). Wherever Aquila and Priscilla move, it appears, too, that their house becomes a church site at Corinth, Ephesus and Rome ([18:26](#); [II Tim. 4:19](#); [I Cor. 16:19](#); [Rom. 16:5](#)).

One has to ask in all honesty why the Christians did not erect special buildings for their corporate meetings, especially after leaving the synagogues. Not until near the end of the second century is there any record of a church edifice being constructed.¹⁰ This stands in marked contrast to the other religions of the time. Granted, permission to build may have

⁹ The common meal continued to be observed in the church for several centuries, though the practice gradually decayed, due largely to mixing the Christian purpose with worldly elements. It should be kept in mind, too, that while the table fellowship provided a relaxed setting for the Eucharist instituted by Christ, the meal was not a necessary part of the observance, which centred in the partaking of the bread and the cup ([I Cor. 11:23-26](#)). A good discussion of this whole practice is by J. F. Keating, *The Agape and the Eucharist in the Early Church* (New York: AMS Press, 1969). Also helpful is the succinct work of Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: Dacre Press, 1945), pp. 48-102.

¹⁰ To my knowledge, the earliest known church building was in Dura-Europos on the River Euphrates, where a house dating from AD 232 was adapted to make a larger assembly hall for worship. More recent discoveries have led some authorities to believe an even earlier church edifice may have existed at Capernaum, perhaps in what was once the house of Peter. Interestingly, in both of these instances, the building seems to have been a renovated home. Colin J. Hemer, 'Archaeological Light on Earliest Christianity,' *The History of Christianity*, ed. by Tim Dowley (Herts, England: Lion Publishing, 1977), p. 58; cf. Michael Green, *op. cit.* p. 194.

been difficult to obtain in the hostile environment, though there were doubtless ways this problem could have been surmounted, at least, in friendly areas of the Empire. Perhaps, too, costly building programmes would have been hard to finance with their limited resources. But it seems also probable that the Christians simply saw no compelling reason to erect buildings for worship. They were able to get along quite well without them.

Could there be a more natural setting for the Christian family to meet? It was at home where they lived their faith every day. In this relaxed atmosphere they learned together even as they shared one another's burdens. What better place could there be for the people of God to experience the closeness of their love.

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

The fellowship fostered in the church meetings was even more obvious in the daily relationships of Christians on the personal level. Reading the Acts one gets the impression that the Christians just enjoyed doing things together. In these casual relationships, probably more than in their gathered meetings, they learned what it meant to follow Christ in the daily routine of life. **P. 24**

Much of this fellowship centred in home visitation ([5:42](#)). For example, attention is called to Peter's visit with Simon at Joppa, an occasion doubtless used to strengthen the tanner's faith ([9:43](#); [10:6](#)). The practice frequently comes out in Paul's ministry, as he receives the hospitality of friends. In his case, not having a settled parsonage, it was a providential way for him to have his needs met while also ministering to the needs of others.

His stay with Lydia and her family after their conversions is characteristic. Not only did Paul and Silas accept her invitation to abide in her house ([16:15](#)), but they returned later for a visit following their release from prison ([16:40](#)). In the interval, after the conversion of the Philippian jailer, they stayed in his house, where the whole family came to Christ ([16:34](#)).

These visits with the brethren often were for extended periods. Sometimes for a few days ([20:6, 7](#); [21:4, 7, 8, 10](#); [27:3](#); [28:4](#); [13:14](#)); at other times they lasted for many months. At Corinth he lived with Aquila and Priscilla for more than a year and a half ([18:3](#)), establishing them in the faith, while also teaching the disciples meeting in Jason's house ([18:3, 7, 8, 11, 18, 19](#)). Altogether Paul stayed with the Ephesian church three years ([20:31](#)); and nearly that long during his confinement in Rome, where Christians regularly came to visit him ([28:30](#)). The spiritual life of the Christian community clearly is interwoven with their continuous interpersonal association.

TRAVELLING TOGETHER

Periods of travel were no interruption to fellowship. On his trip to Caesarea, we are told that Peter was accompanied by some of the Joppa Christians, along with the three men who had come to seek him ([10:23, 45](#); [11:12](#)). Likewise Paul, when persecution became intolerable in Damascus, was escorted by Barnabas to Jerusalem ([9:27](#)), then taken by the brethren to Caesarea ([9:30](#)). Later Barnabas brought him back to Antioch ([11:26](#)).

Moving about was a team exercise. As the narrative unfolds, the focus is upon the journeys of Paul, and his companions. But the principle of travelling together pertained to all the others, like Barnabas and Mark, Silas and Timothy, and Timothy and Erastus. Frequently, too, local brethren would join them (e.g. [21:15, 16](#)). No less than seven disciples were with Paul on his trip through Macedonia, making it a mobile school

(20:4).¹¹ Even when Paul was a p. 25 prisoner in transit to Rome, he was able to have Aristarchus and Luke go with him (27:2-8; 28:1, 10-15). When finally they reached the city of Caesar, brethren from the church came out to meet them, and they walked into town together (28:15).

There was safety in numbers, of course. Marauding robbers along the road made travelling in companies necessary for protection. But more importantly, it facilitated fellowship in a natural setting. By teacher and pupil being together, they were continually able to learn in the real laboratory of the world. Whatever happened along the way presented an occasion for teaching and reflection. Though unassuming, it was a powerful experience of discipleship.

FOLLOW UP OF BELIEVERS

As can be observed, all the way through there was a special effort to bring new Christians without delay into close relationships with other believers, both on the corporate and personal level. This was the way their growth was sustained. The three thousand converts at Pentecost were immediately amalgamated into the church life, and this pattern continued daily with others as they were being saved (2:46, 47; 4:32). When the lame man is healed at the Temple gate, Peter and John keep him with them as they continue their ministry (3:8; 4:14). With this same astuteness the apostles in Jerusalem quickly dispatched Peter and John to the Samaritan believers when they heard that 'Samaria had received the word of God' (8:14-25). Similar nurture was given by Peter to the household of Cornelius following their reception of the Holy Spirit (10:48).

The emphasis given to Paul's follow-up after his conversion certainly underscores this need. Not only is he taken into a fellowship of disciples at Damascus, but he is joined by a man sent by God to give special instruction (9:8-19, 25). When taken later to Jerusalem, he remained with the apostles for a period of time 'going in and going out' among them (9:28). Doubtless Paul learned more during these days than just getting to know the leaders; he learned an indispensable lesson in the care of new believers. For the rest of his life he made it a policy to stay with beginning disciples. He understood their need for p. 26 personal follow-up, a desire which apparently they also felt, for believers sometimes 'clave' to him (17:34), and 'followed' him home wanting to learn more of Christ (e.g. 13:43).

As they matured in the faith, he continued to relate to them as much as possible. Again and again he would go back to visit them, actually planning his missionary trips so that he could retrace much of the territory covered before. In these return calls he would meet with the church, 'confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith' (14:21, 22). He was particularly anxious after each mission to spend time with the Christians at Antioch, where having served on the church staff, he must have developed some deep roots along with a sense of accountability (13:1-4; 14:27-28; 15:30-35; 18:22).

When circumstances were such that he could not give the personal attention desired, he often arranged for others to take his place. Silas and Timothy, for example, were left behind at Berea when he had to leave (17:14); and Timothy and Erastus were sent into

¹¹ These men came from different areas of the world: Sopater from Berea; Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica; Gaius and Timothy from Derbe; and Tychicus and Trophemus from Asia. The special reference to their diverse homelands suggests that their inclusion in the company had significance in the development of the church. Probably they were training for leadership roles.

Macedonia in response to their urgent request since he could not go himself ([19:22](#)). Such missions are alluded to repeatedly in his letters.

It is clear that in his deepening relationships Paul was conscious of a priority in spending time with persons training for leadership in the church. Hence much of his travels are in association with these maturing disciples. For example, Paul developed a close friendship with Priscilla and Aquila with whom he stayed at Corinth ([18:2, 3](#)). There was a natural interest between them, in that they were fellow tentmakers. But more than that, they had a heart for God ([Rom. 16:3](#)). His hosts learned well, for when later Paul departed for Ephesus, taking with him this lovely couple, they did the same thing Paul had done with them—found a disciple, got with him, and patiently helped him know ‘the way of God more accurately’ ([18:19–26](#)). It wasn’t long before Apollos, in turn, went forth preaching Christ, and helping others to grow in grace ([18:27, 28](#)).

The letters of Paul reflect a personal concern for these growing leaders. Some sixty or more persons are mentioned by name in the epistles. They are referred to as ‘friends,’ ‘partners,’ ‘fellow workers,’ ‘teammates,’ ‘faithful helpers,’ those who laboured ‘side by side’ with him. Obviously he had developed very close relationships with many of the brethren.

His farewell message to the elders of Ephesus, much like that of his follow-up letters, reflects this burden he carried for their development. Calling to mind how he was with them ‘all the time,’ he mentioned that he had faithfully taught them ‘publicly and from house to house’ p. 27 everything that was profitable ([20:18, 20](#)). Nothing was withheld, as he ‘ceased not to admonish’ them ‘night and day with tears’ ([20:31](#)). This is the concern of a loving father zealous that his children in the faith attain to the full stature of Christ. The elders knew that his love for them was real, for when he had spoken, and prayed with them, ‘they all wept sore, and fell on Paul’s neck and kissed him,’ knowing that they would see his face no more ([20:36–38](#)).

A LEARNING FELLOWSHIP

This relationship provided the environment for their training. The apostolic church did not erect colleges or theological seminaries, nor even set up educational seminars. They had instruction in the tenets of the Christian faith and life, but not in formal classes or institutional programmes. To mold the life of their members, they simply got learners and teachers together in natural settings where they lived and worked every day.

Nothing was new in this approach. The church as the body of Christ was following the same approach to education as their Lord had used with His disciples. It is the principle of the family, by which most of our basic values are learned in this life. That is why all of us still reflect influences exerted upon us by our parents and other family members, especially in the formative years of early childhood.

Any effective method of education must incorporate this dynamic. It has been said that a college is a professor on one end of a log, and a student on the other end. This may be an over-simplification, but the point cannot be missed. When all is said and done, our education will not be much better than our teachers, nor the opportunity to learn much more than the way the teacher and student can be together.

This is what the apostolic church was doing in their development of disciples. In their community life, there was an atmosphere conducive to growth. Questions could be asked and issues clarified without intimidation. There was mutual trust. Whether in organized group meetings or informal friendly fellowship, the church was translating theory into practice. To a remarkable degree, truth was demonstrated in real life. What they said and did was an object lesson in reality.

Nowhere was this more pronounced than in the beginning steps of persons just coming to Christ. These spiritual babes were immediately surrounded with love, and made to feel a part of the family circle. No one could feel left out. Here was a community in which they all shared the bonds of an everlasting covenant. [p. 28](#)

APPLICATION TODAY

The implications of this upon the life of the church today dare not be missed. In our stress upon carefully ordered public services and organized campaigns, we may overlook the basic apostolic ingredient of fellowship. Times have become more complex with the passing centuries, to be sure, but the principle of association never changes.

However structured, we must relate closely with each other. There are ways this can be encouraged in the regular worship services, even in formal sacramental settings. Auxiliary meetings offer other opportunities for fellowship, especially in small group gatherings. In this connection, the Sunday School provides many options. Emphasis must be given to the home and family in the programme. And through it all, personal relationships need continual cultivation in the ongoing discipling process.

This is crucial in helping new believers get established. In their first steps of faith, they are particularly vulnerable to doubts and temptations, and need someone with them to give counsel. How fortunate it is when this person can be a more mature Christian with whom they already have some identity. That the church has often neglected such guardian care explains why so many converts fall away, or at least, never seem to grow in the likeness of their Lord.

Maturing in Christ takes time. There is no way that children can be raised in a hurry. To try to get it over quickly can lead only to frustration. The hectic way that churches have tried to force this into a few weeks of confirmation classes, if at all, is entirely inadequate. Disciples must have devoted Christian friends to follow, and the only way this can be facilitated is by being together over a period of time.

The church in Acts can teach us much about living as the body of Christ. If we would learn by their example, the Great Commission can become for us, as it was with them, the pattern of the church.

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Evangelicals and Biblical Inspiration

Kern R. Trembath

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Dr. Trembath has recently completed a doctoral dissertation on 'Evangelical theories on Biblical Inspiration: a review and proposal' at the University of Notre Dame and the following is his summary of the research: Approving the tripartite conception of inspiration (involving God as the initiative agent, the Bible as the inspired agent and believers as the

medium through which the inspiration is communicated). Trembath demonstrates the crucial role the church, the community of believers, has to play in the Bible's authority and interpretation. To quote him: 'The distinctiveness of biblical inspiration is thus not formal as the tradition claims by its bipartite analysis but by its rather material ... distinctiveness (as seen in the church's claim that its salvation, its being located in a process of transcendence is both initiated by God and congruent with the experience of salvation enjoyed by the apostolic generations of Christians to which we have access in the Bible.'

Editor

The past decade has seen an energetic resurgence of books and articles by Protestants on the subject of biblical inspiration.¹ For many prior decades, the topic lay dormant, a condition fostered by uncritical repetition from church 'conservatives' and outright dismissal from church 'liberals'. The current renaissance of interest in inspiration may thus be seen as a judgment by both wings of the church upon their former ways of treating the subject, one which, like all honest reappraisals, carries with it the potential for significant advances in theological understanding. As such, it is reason enough to justify the effort. p. 30

Another and perhaps more positive reason exists, though, as to why this subject deserves greater attention within the church. James T. Burtchaell notes in his *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration Since 1810* that 'the controversy over biblical inspiration is an excellent test case whereby to diagnose many of the ills that have weakened Catholic theology, especially since the Reformation. The real issue here is what confounds scholars in so many areas; the manner in which individual human events are jointly caused by both God and man.'² He then goes on to suggest that 'today the most easily examined instance of divine-human responsibility is the Bible.' This diagnosis and suggested therapy is one with which we heartily agree, not just for Catholics, but for Orthodox and Protestants as well. The topic of inspiration gives theologians the opportunity to conjoin many discrete fields of inquiry: theology proper (the doctrine of God), theological anthropology (Christian reflection upon human beings), scriptural exegesis (the art of text criticism and hermeneutics), and ecclesiology (the doctrine of the church). Inspiration thus calls for specialists in each of these fields to expand their horizons to include the others, for at this conjunction as at few others, near sightedness guarantees superficiality.

We believe that it is the shift in emphasis from seeing the focus of inspiration as the miraculous production of words on a page to seeing it as the best test case for 'joint causation' which has in many circles rejuvenated the theology of biblical inspiration. To use a popular metaphor, the shift has opened up the possibility of addressing inspiration

¹ For a representative sampling, the reader is directed to William J. Abraham, *The Divine Inspiration of Holy Scripture* (Oxford, 1981); Paul Achtemeier, *The Inspiration of Scripture; Problems and Proposals* (Philadelphia, 1980); James Bart, *Fundamentalism* (Philadelphia, 1977) and his subsequent *The Scope and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia, 1980); Robert K. Johnston, *Evangelicals At An Impasse* (Atlanta, 1979), esp. Ch. 2 and the extensive notes on pp. 160–164; I. Howard Marshall, *Biblical Inspiration* (Grand Rapids, 1982); Jack Rogers and Donald McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible* (San Francisco, 1979) and a criticism of Rogers and McKim by John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids, 1982). Two Catholic analyses of notes are James T. Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration Since 1810* (see below, note 2), and Thomas J. Hoffman, 'inspiration, Normativeness, Canonicity, and the Unique Sacred Character of the Bible,' *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44, 1982, 447–469.

² Cambridge, 1969, 279f.

'from below' rather than 'from above'.³ That is, it is now seen to be useful to begin by analyzing the reception of inspiration within the Christianity community, and then proceed to reflect upon what must be true of the Bible itself, and of God, in order to account for that reception. We believe that a helpful way of rethinking the issue has been to analyze the concept of inspiration *per se*, and then modify that concept in ways necessary to reflect the religious particularities of *biblical* inspiration. William J. Abraham exhibits such an approach in his *The Divine Inspiration of Holy Scripture*,⁴ an approach which we shall first inspect and then employ. p. 31

Abraham draws our attention to the tripartite structure of the concept of inspiration.⁵ In any act of inspiration, he says, there are three discrete categories or aspects: the inspiring agent, the inspired agent, and the medium or means through which the inspiration is communicated. Each of these categories in principle may have many members, but still they remain the categories within which all of those members will fall. When considering aesthetic inspiration, for example, the members of the three categories are 'the artists,' 'the audience,' and 'the work of art' such as a painting. We will refer to these categories as the initiating agent, the receiving agent, and the means.

This insight into the nature of inspiration is important because traditionally the concept of biblical inspiration has been conceived of as bipartite rather than tripartite. The two categories were God as the initiating agent and the Bible as the receiving agent. The latter category was variously described as the words on the page, the author or authorial community, the content or message, and so on, but all of these alternatives were only various ways of referring to the specialness of the process which extends directly from God to the biblical words. Thus they altogether ignored what we have called the third category of the receiving agent.⁶

Inspection of the concept of inspiration, notes Abraham, leads to the conclusion that one is not justified in claiming that *inspiration* is present if inspired or receiving agents cannot be identified. That is, while inspiration moves temporally from initiating agent through means to receiving agent, critically it is moot to begin to reflect upon inspiration in any category other than the final one since in the p. 32 absence of inspired agents there is no reason to consider either inspiring agents or inspired means. If no audience exists which can claim to be inspired by (means of) a certain painting, then it is useless to discuss the 'inspiration' of that painting and even more useless to discuss its artist as an inspiring artist. With inspiration as with so many other areas of intellectual reflection, the mind

³ Thus the present 'new look' is in line with similar methodological shifts in other theological locales. For a helpful chart summarizing the shift in christology, see *Horizons* 1 (1974), p. 38. Two very good examples of the same reorientation in theology proper are Victor Preller, *Divine Science and the Science of God* (Princeton, 1967), esp. Ch. 4, and David Burrell, *Aquinas* (Notre Dame, 1979).

⁴ Oxford, 1981. Many will note the resonance of this method with that of Aquinas, who in the *Summa Theologiae* 1.3. Introduction says: 'The ways in which God does not exist will become apparent if we rule out from him everything inappropriate, such as compositeness, change and the like.' In an unpublished review of Achtemeier's previously-mentioned *The Inspiration of Scripture*, Abraham writes with respect to the divine activity in inspiration: 'At this point there is no alternative, in my mind, to going back and covering the ground so marvellously opened up by Aquinas and his doctrine of analogy ...'

⁵ This may be found in Ch. 3.

⁶ Abraham notes that the traditional bipartite conception of biblical inspiration characteristically takes the mode of divine inspiration as 'speaking,' with the normative illustration of such inspiration being the Old Testament prophet's 'Thus saith the Lord.' But the mode of speaking precisely obscures what is at the heart of the concept of inspiration, which is the indirectness or mediation by which the initiating agent communicates with the receiving agent. He therefore suggests that the model of the prophet not be used to illustrate biblical inspiration, a suggestion with which we entirely agree.

facilitates understanding by reversing what occurs in the external world and considering the 'latest' events first. Here, such a procedure brings to light the fact that analysis of the concept of inspiration begins by considering those who claim to be inspired. Thus we see that the approach which appears most promising in accounting for biblical inspiration is that which echoes Aristotle's 'final causality'; the concept of inspiration is best understood beginning with the inspired agents.

We shall now modify the general concern of inspiration in a way that we believe does justice to the particularities of biblical inspiration. First we shall discuss such inspiration in terms of what it accomplishes, and shall claim that the product of inspiration is better seen as salvation than as the miraculous production of words upon a page. Then, in line with our methodological orientation, we shall track the 'movement' of salvation within the three categories of inspiration from receiving agent through means to initiating agent.⁷

Abraham's analysis of inspiration reminds us that inspiration is a mediated enhancement of one agent by another. That is, to be inspired means that one person or group has been positively enhanced by another person or group, not directly but rather through some form of means. Although the great majority of the Christian tradition has understood biblical inspiration as a property of the words of the Bible,⁸ we may now see that this understanding is faulty in that words are not personal agents at all and thus cannot be said to 'receive' enhancement in any relevant sense. The property or concept of enhancement is one which attaches to persons, not to words. True enough, it is often said that one set of words used to explain a given matter is 'enriched' or 'enhanced' as over against a second set, but we believe that this is p.33 merely an ellipsis for saying that our understanding of the matter was facilitated more by the first set than by the second. Words are words; their meaning and use is 'enhanced' only if our understanding of the world is enhanced by them.

We would propose this as the conceptual explanation for the tremendous confusion as to precisely *which* 'word' it is that is said to receive inspiration and thus be inspired. The ambiguity present within the Christian tradition with respect to identifying 'the inspired word' is due, we suggest, to designating the wrong aspect as the receiver of inspiration. When separated from the human mind, words are merely ink molecules on a page, and strictly speaking can no more 'receive' inspiration than can the oil molecules with which an artist covers a canvas. It is more in line with the concept of inspiration to see human beings as the receivers, with God as initiator and the words of the Bible as means. To be 'biblically inspired' would thus mean that persons receive enhancement by God through the Bible.

We would claim that 'salvation' is the most traditional and the clearest way to refer to the enhancement which believers receive from God through the Bible. That is, the only enhancement universally present within the church over time is salvation initiated by the Father of Jesus, mediated through the Bible, and received by the church as the community of believers. Although there are many ways to think of salvation, we would argue in this

⁷ We take this way of breaking down the concept of inspiration to be more helpful than Achtemeier's three categories of 'tradition', situation and respondent' (*op. cit.*, 124-134). This is not only because his categorization leaves no obvious place for God, but in addition because for him 'the respondent' is the authorial community responsible for the final redaction of a biblical work, rather than the present Christian community. Thus, at root his proposal is bipartite; it is but another way to discuss the specialness of the production of the words of the Bible rather than the specialness of its product within the Christian community.

⁸ Especially the property of inerrancy or complete truthfulness.

context that it be taken in its broadest possible sense of health, peace and fullness of life.⁹ To say that salvation is the product or effect of biblical inspiration is thus at root a confession that God is ultimately responsible for initiating salvation within the church, and that the primary means used to mediate that salvation is the Bible. Stated the other way around, the confession of the Bible as inspired is an admission of the community which thus confesses it that it is incapable of initiating its own conditions of health and fullness of life. The salvation which it both enjoys and proclaims, therefore, it confesses as a gift from God mediated through the Bible.

Thus far we have considered the claim that reflection upon the concept of inspiration invites us to reconstrue the notion of biblical inspiration in a way that first considers how the receiving (or believing) community has been enhanced. We have proposed that 'salvation' is both the broadest and the most useful term the church has to describe its enhancement from God. Thus, claims concerning biblical inspiration are primarily claims to be saved in ways that correspond to the p. 34 ways that believing communities in the Bible were saved. Only secondarily is 'biblical inspiration' an assertion about qualities of the Bible itself.

We may now move on to discuss the second element of the concept of inspiration, the means or medium through which the initiating agent enhances the lives of the receiving agent. For Christians this element is the Bible received and accepted as Scripture. Here we shall build upon a technical distinction to help make the point once again that the presence of salvation within the believing community is what is of primary significance to the notion of biblical inspiration.

Let us distinguish between 'Bible' and 'Scripture,' with the first referring to the collection of books called by that name and the second referring to the way that the church receives those books, i.e., as religiously foundational and normative.¹⁰ With this distinction in mind, we may now note that only Christians call the Bible 'Scripture'. They do this because the Bible for them is, in addition to being a collection of books, an authoritative collection of books, whose authority is ultimately seen as coming from God. However this 'coming from God' is accounted for, for Christians the Bible is God's Word.

The point we wish to make here is that it is only that community which is saved which calls the Bible 'Scripture'. Thus the presence or absence of salvation is the criterion which differentiates between reading the book as Scripture and reading it only as Bible. (To say the same thing the other way around, believers and non-believers read the Bible differently, and that difference is accounted for by whether or not p. 35 salvation is present within them. This echoes Wittgenstein's comment that a happy person and a sad

⁹ See *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 'eirene' (II, 400–420) and 'sozo etc.' (VII, 965–1024).

¹⁰ For this way of defining 'scripture,' see James D. G. Dunn's *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (Philadelphia, 1977), 81. Although he does not further define 'foundational and normative,' we may by saying that what is foundational is what was constitutively significant to the earliest Christian communities, which we know as constitutively significant by virtue of its presence in New Testament books. What is normative is that which has (trans)formed the character of the Christian community over history, and which is also that which the church expects to guide it in the future. Both of these poles, the chronological and the prescriptive, must be present in order for a work to be scripture. This allows us to account for why a work such as *Imitation of Christ* has had great normative significance in the church but would never become canonical scripture; it can claim to be normative but not foundational. It must be admitted that this definition does not help us to see why works such as 2 Peter and Jude are a part of Christian scripture; they are foundational but have hardly been normative or influential in the church over history. Like James for Luther, they are 'straw epistles.' Probably the best we can say is that the church has chosen to err on the side of safety; it officially includes these books because of their antiquity but rarely uses them normatively or authoritatively. For a similar distinction between Bible and Scripture, see Leander Keck, *Taking the Bible Seriously* (Nashville, 1979).

person walking together on the sidewalk are in two entirely different worlds.) This allows us to see once again the centrality of salvation to the notion of biblical inspiration. What God inspires through the Bible is salvation, and it is only those in whom salvation has been inspired who have any reason to refer to the Bible itself as inspired. What they mean when they say 'the Bible is inspired' is that the Bible serves as the ultimate means through which they have received, and continue to receive, salvation from God. As we noted earlier, for Christians to say that the Bible is inspired is an elliptical way of saying that it is the means of the divine salvation which they possess and enjoy. For all other persons or communities the question is moot, as we saw with respect to aesthetic inspiration.

The second point to be made with respect to the middle component of the concept of inspiration is that to say that God inspired salvation through the Bible means that present communities of believers understand salvation in ways that are based upon, and can demonstrate continuity with, the ways that New Testament communities of believers understood salvation. In the broadest legitimate terms, therefore, 'salvation' is fullness of life from God through Christ. Again, we may take a clue here from James Dunn, who shows that the only belief which all first century Christian communities held in common was that the Jesus of history was, and is, the risen and exalted Lord.¹¹ In the present day we do not have any independent access to the experience of salvation within these earliest communities, of course, but we do have access to some of their reflections upon it: the New Testament. To put the matter somewhat oddly, therefore, the only enhancement which can claim to be biblically inspired today is that which is consonant with the ways that the earliest communities of Christians used to write about their salvation in Christ. For communities today which confess Jesus as Saviour and thus see the Bible as Scripture, the Bible is inspired precisely because it has served as the vehicle through which God has inspired Christian salvation within them. p. 36

We may now proceed to consider the final category of the concept of inspiration, the initiating agent. This agent is God, and thus we need to ask how to think of God in ways which are consonant with the 'movement' of salvation in inspiration. Here we would cast our lot with the so-called transcendental subjectivists, whose proposals we shall outline below.

Transcendental subjectivism is an approach to the doctrine of God which commends critical reflection upon the human subject as the clearest avenue to understanding the nature of God.¹² That is, instead of beginning with God, who the Christian tradition has

¹¹ To be more precise, Dunn showed that a Christian confession concerning Jesus must identify the historical person and the present exalted person in ways that are appropriate to the particular community confessing faith in him. For some in the first century, that appropriate way was Messiah, for others it was Son of God, Lord, Savior, and so on. Regardless of the term used, though, a confession was (and is) Christian only if it identifies the historical and exalted persons in ways that appropriately reflect and capture the salvation experienced by the community.

¹² We scarcely wish to imply that 'transcendental subjectivism' is monolithically able to be characterized, nor that all proponents of it agree in all ways of construing it. Rather, our intention here is to indicate the general shape of this approach, especially with respect to its implications for the concept of inspiration. For those who wish to explore this approach as represented by Karl Rahner, the best place to begin is his *Foundations of Christian Thought: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York, 1978). Two very helpful secondary works on Rahner are Karl-Heinz Weger, *Karl Rahner: An Introduction to His Theology* (New York, 1980) and Leo O'Donovan, ed., *A World of Grace: An Introduction to the Themes and Foundations of Karl Rahner's Theology* (New York, 1980). The beginner will be aided in coming to grips with Rahner's methodology by reading Francis P. Fiorenza's 'Introduction' in Rahner, *Spirit in the World* (New York, 1968), xix-xlv, Gerald A. McCool's 'Introduction' in his *A Rahner Reader* (New York, 1975), xiii-xxviii, and Preller, *op. cit.*, (n. 3). See also the author's dissertation, *Evangelical Theories of Biblical Inspiration: A Review and Proposal*, University of Notre Dame, 1984, Ch. 5.

insisted is incomprehensible and of whom we thus know relatively little, this approach begins with human beings (of whom we know a great deal more) as the receivers of divine acts and intentions.¹³ Critical reflection upon anthropology provides greater possibilities for discovering what God is like, nor *per se*, as the tradition attempted to articulate, but rather as the one whose character accounts for and thus corresponds, to what believers have received from him, namely, salvation through Christ.

Transcendental subjectivism seeks to account for how God interacts or co-acts with all human acts in such a way that humans are not denied primary responsibility for them, and God is not made into another mere actor in the world. These two erroneous alternatives are the Scylla and Charybdis of traditional accounts of the nature of God, and may be seen to account for hyper-Calvinistic double predestination on the one hand and for most forms of fundamentalism on the [p. 37](#) other. We shall attempt to summarize transcendentalism as an approach which avoids both of these false views. We shall do so by reflecting on a very characteristic human action, that of asking and answering questions.

Reflection upon the phenomenon of asking questions leads to the observation that questions reveal the self-recognized limitations of the questioner. Questions by definition intend to draw the questioner beyond present limitations into territory not bounded by the finitude which made the question appropriate in the first place. Additionally, while it is surely true that ‘all questions contain the seeds of their own answers,’ we may also note that the *characteristic* activity of questioning implies that humans are characteristically open to being drawn beyond now-present boundaries. Thus, to use somewhat technical language, the condition of the possibility of asking questions is self-recognized finitude *and* genuine openness to receiving answers to those questions. Apart from these two fundamental conditions, there could be no phenomenon of questioning as we know it.

The ‘transcendentalist’ aspect of this approach intends to reflect this relatively straightforward facet of human existence; human existence is both bounded and open. In principle it is never more the one than the other, although in fact many persons cease asking questions and thereby signal that they have accepted their present boundaries and are no longer open to change. For those who do not accept such boundaries, though, their finitude is transcended by minute increments each time a question is answered and a particular boundary is thus overcome. Although this is referred to as self-transcendence, it is not a transcendence of the self *by* the self, and so the issue we now need to address is how this is informative to a doctrine of God. How does God fit into this relatively tame process of self-transcendence?

Transcendental subjectivism suggests that the participation or co-activity of God in the process of human self-transcendence is best seen at the point where a question is answered. For any given question there are several possible responses. The answer (or answers) to that question is drawn from this set of possible responses, and thus the set of answers is always smaller than the set of responses. But what criterion distinguishes between them? How are answers seen *as* answers?

An answer arises out of the set of possible responses when it, more than they, satisfies the notion of goodness most relevant to the context of the question. That is, whatever answers a question to the satisfaction of the questioner does so precisely because it is perceived as good, i.e., better than all other possibilities. Fundamentally, therefore, [p. 38](#) goodness is the criterion which all answers have implicitly satisfied once they are seen *as*

¹³ Note the difference between this approach and that of Charles A. Hodge, B. B. Warfield’s mentor and colleague, who *begins* his three-volume systematic theology with a 454 page discussion of God and only then commences his anthropology: *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, 1977).

answers. Logically, goodness exists both prior and subsequent to the answering of a question. It exists prior because the phenomenology of questioning presupposes the possibility of a criterion for answering, and it exists subsequent because an answered question allows the questioner to transcend a previous boundary, an end which is itself good. So, goodness is seen to be both the origin and intention of all acts of answered questions.

We may now see how it is that God is involved in the process of asking and answering questions, and thus in the process of human self-transcendence. One of the most enduring attributes of God is God's goodness: 'No one is good except the one God' ([Mk. 10:18](#)).¹⁴ However, God's goodness cannot be identical with the goodness of anything else since all other things are assessed as good only after being measured by some prior standard of goodness. Such cannot be the case with God, though, since faith denies that anything exists prior to God against which his character could be measured and assessed as good. What must be the case, then, is that 'God is good' *means* 'God is goodness'; the character of God is that by which humans discriminate between good and evil generally, and between answers and responses in particular.¹⁵ Whenever human beings choose an answer from among possible responses, what they are concurrently doing, consciously or otherwise, is referring to and depending upon the character of God as the measure of goodness. The character of God as 'good' is affirmed in principle whenever people make choices, and thus God co-acts with humans in all acts of choosing.

What this signifies with respect to the notion of inspiration is that all acts of inspiration (i.e., enhancement or self-transcendence) are in principle initiated by God since transcendence is by definition a transition from a less-good state to a more-good state. What it signifies with respect to the notion of *biblical* inspiration is that God initiates the enhancement known as salvation which the Christian community confesses that it receives through the Bible. Biblical inspiration is thus formally similar to all acts of inspiration in which the receiver transcends self-recognized boundaries. The distinctiveness of *biblical* inspiration is thus not formal, as the tradition claimed by its bipartite [p. 39](#) analysis, but rather material.¹⁶ The material distinctiveness of biblical inspiration is seen in the church's claim that its salvation, its being-located in a process of transcendence, is both initiated by God *and* congruent with the experience of salvation enjoyed by the apostolic generations of Christians to which we have access in the Bible.

It is in this final category of the concept of inspiration that we are best able to see the 'joint causation' of the Bible that Burtchaell earlier brought to our attention. Faith affirms all acts of knowledge as joint ventures of God and humans. It thus especially affirms those acts by which believers grow in the knowledge and understanding of God as joint

¹⁴ A more literal translation here is 'No one is good except the one God.' An interpreting perspective is opened to us if we choose to translate the Greek words for 'except' (*ei me*) literally rather than idiomatically; the verse would then read 'No one is good if the one God is not [good].'

¹⁵ See David Burrell's discussion of Thomas' understanding of God's goodness (*ST* 1.5, 6) in *Exercises in Religious Understanding* (Notre Dame, 1974), 106–113.

¹⁶ That is, the tradition attempted to decipher what was empirically unique about the Bible that only God could account for and which would thus validate the Bible's unique normativity. The response here was, as often noted, empirical inerrancy. We believe that this completely misses what is genuinely central to Christianity, namely, human salvation by God the Father of Jesus through the Bible. In grounding the Bible's normativity upon inerrancy rather than upon salvation, the tradition elevated something of very little religious importance to a position of supreme religious importance. Sadder still, in making salvation dependent upon inerrancy, it unintentionally 'postponed' salvation until inerrancy claims could all be adjudicated, a postponement which is both interminable and pointless because by definition Christians already possess salvation.

ventures. When these latter acts are consonant with the ways that the earliest Christians wrote about their experiences of knowing God, then such acts are said to be biblically inspired. The present church continues to confess 'the inspiration of the Bible,' meaning by that confession that its salvation is mediated through the Bible by the Father of Jesus.

A final note will serve to distinguish more precisely between divine (or general) inspiration and biblical inspiration. We have already said that what specifies biblical inspiration is a saving enhancement understood and experienced in ways commended within the Bible. The following formula makes this point more concisely: 'Biblical inspiration is normative and foundational divine enhancement with respect to human salvation.' This formulation has several advantages: it employs the definition of 'scripture' which we took to be a most successful one, it distinguishes but also relates God's acts in general and God's acts through the Bible, and it does not ignore the personal experience of salvation which we have insisted upon as a constituent of the definition of biblical inspiration. The church must not explain the specialness of its Scripture on grounds that are equally significant outside the church.

The genius of the Christian doctrine of biblical inspiration is the insight that the Bible conveys God's character and intention to the [p. 40](#) world. We have referred to possession of this insight as salvation, for the character of God is to love those who hate him and relentlessly to pursue even those who will be lost. Those persons and communities from whom this insight sprang, and their written products, are properly called inspired by those who presently possess it. Without that original insight and those written products, we would not have the saving knowledge of God which we do have. And, without that saving knowledge, the Bible would be just another book. [p. 41](#)

The Quest for Authentic African Christianity

Watson Omulokoli

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Here is one more attempt by an African Christian in the perennial search for authentic indigenous Christianity. Basing his article on the hypothesis that the Christianity which was introduced to Africa is neither African nor Christian, Omulokoli analyses the historical (especially politico-social) causes for such a lapse. His search for an African Christianity valid in all African countries, although somewhat idealistic, has its merits in furthering African evangelical unity.

Editor

In January, 1953, Kwame Nkrumah paid a state visit to Liberia at the invitation of President William Tubman. Addressing a mass rally at the Centennial Pavilion in Monrovia, the future President of Ghana took as his theme: 'The Vision That I See.' He pointed out that, '... it is better to be free to manage, or mismanage your own affairs, than not to be free to mismanage or manage your own affairs.' He went on to explain that it

was this conviction which motivated him in 1949 to found a political newspaper, the *Accra Evening News*. The guiding philosophy of those who were behind the paper was contained in its motto: 'We prefer self-government with danger to servitude in tranquillity.'¹

It was this kind of attitude which governed those who fought for freedom in pre-independence Africa. At the moment most African countries have extricated themselves from the shackles of colonialism and oppression as the 'wind of change' has already blown by, sweeping away with it the manacles of foreign domination. In its wake it has left, instead, governments run and controlled by the indigenous peoples of those nations. Underlying this attainment of sovereignty is the drive for the kind of power which enables these independent states to control and shape their own destinies. Hand in hand with the achievement of self-determination is the ability to mobilize and harness their resources, with a view to channelling them to productive ends for their respective peoples. On the ecclesiastical front, similar cries are being voiced and echoed throughout the length and breadth of the African continent. p. 42

Resulting essentially from European Christian missionary activities in the last few centuries, the Christian faith has found root in Africa. In consequence of this reality, Christianity has become part and parcel of the prevailing pattern in many parts of the continent today. In 1970 it was estimated that by the year 2000, the Christian population in Africa would stand at about 350 million or 46% of the entire population of the continent.² To ensure that this largely nascent manifestation of Christianity attains its own authenticity and distinctive dignity, countless African thinkers and practitioners are engaged in the exercise of trying to analyze it, with a view to helping share its course and identity for the days ahead.

At the root of this search for authentic African Christianity in many quarters on the African scene are two main premises. One of these premises arises from the widely-shared suspicion that the European purveyors of the Christian faith to Africa did not take it to the continent pure and unalloyed, but rather carried it there clothed in Western European garb. The contention then is that to reclaim the core of the Christian faith, it is necessary that the prevalent forms of Christianity be stripped to the bone to rid the continent of any objectionable manifestations therein. But this is just one side of the coin, the obverse side of it, we may say. The corollary to this is the second premise which represents the reverse side of this coin. Here it is strongly held that apart from stripping the current brand of African Christianity of its foreign matter, and therefore, leaving it bare, pure and unadulterated, we need to dress it in African clothing if it is to be of any lasting significance to the indigenous peoples. The reason for this approach is the firm belief that there are certain indispensable African cultural distinctives which must form part of the totality of the experience of any African, even when he espouses the Christian faith.

In this vein, Professor E. A. Ayandele articulates the nature of the problem before us when he points out that there are four challenges facing the Christian Church in Africa which must be dealt with if its future is to be ensured. To a large extent, the last two of the problems he postulates, i.e., myopic nationalism, and the type of ecclesiastical sectionalism which disavows genuine ecumenism are subjects which ought to be ironed out in the context of the Church throughout the world as these cancerous tendencies are not the exclusive preserves of African Christianity. Taking his focal point as the state of

¹ Kwame Nkrumah *Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd, 1959), p. 152.

² David B. Barrett, 'A.D. 2000: 350 Million Christians in Africa', in *International Review of Mission* (New York, January, 1970), p. 47.

affairs in the mainline institutionalized Christianity, he perceptively puts forth the case in the right order of priority when he states, p. 43

Perhaps the most important of these problems to which the attention of those genuinely concerned about the Church in Africa has been drawn increasingly in our generation, is how the transplanted churches from Europe and the New World are to be transformed into the Church of God in which African culture can integrate, in which the African can worship uninhibited emotionally or psychologically 'in spirit and in truth.'³

Having spelt out the first issue, he then follows this with the second in which he wonders how 'institutionalized Christianity in Africa' can take its unique and dignified role as a recognizable entity in the body politic of the world-wide Church of Christ. This quest for authenticity in Africa's brand of Christian thought and practice has been sounded and echoed in widely divergent quarters.

In his own way, the President of the Republic of Zambia, Dr. Kenneth D. Kaunda, refers to this when he says, 'The more sensitive theologians are beginning to explore what it means to be a Christian in a genuinely African or Asian way.'⁴ From a slightly different perspective, it is to this same issue that the Bishop of the Diocese of Maseno South in Kenya, The Rt. Rev. J. Henry Okullu, addresses himself when in a section on the 'Indigenisation of Christianity' he contends that, 'If the Church in East Africa is to make its voice effectively heard in the spheres of public life of these nations, then it must speak the language of Africa.'⁵ Still at another level of analysis, Professor John S. Mbiti argues that we need to recognize the tragedy that when 'organized Christianity' went to the African, it failed him in that it alienated him from what would have been the ideal totality of his religious existence. Mbiti sees this as '... the bitter pill which we must swallow in all honesty. But it is the tragic situation which we as Christians and intellectuals must seek to remedy.'⁶ Spelling this task out more pointedly he continues to maintain:

We have to Africanise Christianity, that is, give it an indelible African character. It is not enough to transplant prefabricated Christianity from Rome or Geneva to Kampala or Lagos: that period is now over. We have to produce a type of Christianity here which will bear the imprint *made in Africa* and which will not be a cheap imitation of the type of Christianity found elsewhere or at periods in the past. This involves Africanising church p. 44 structures, personnel, theology, planning, commitment, worship, transaction of its mission, and financial independence.⁷

Briefly stated then, the problem on hand is that the Christianity which was introduced to Africa is by and large not African in flavour, and often not Christian in its centre.

It is at this point that Professor Ayandele, for one, is very instructive when he draws our attention to some West African Christians of the past who grappled with these same questions which so engagingly occupy our attention today. One need not look very far to discover that such examples could be duplicated many times over on the Eastern, Central, and Southern Africa scenes.

³ Emmanuel Ayankanmi Ayandele, *A Visionary of the African Church: Mojola Agbebi, 1860–1917* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1971), p. 3.

⁴ Kenneth David Kaunda, *Letter to My Children* (London: Longman, 1973), p. 17.

⁵ John Henry Okullu, *Church and Politics in East Africa* (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1974), p. 52 (1975 Reprint).

⁶ John S. Mbiti, 'Our Stand Towards African Traditional Religion', in *Write: Journal for Christian Writers in Africa* (Kitwe, African Literature Centre, 1973), p. 13.

⁷ Mbiti, *The Crisis of Mission in Africa* (Mukono, Uganda, Uganda Church Press, 1971), p. 2.

As for West Africa, we learn of how between 1892 and 1914 the phenomenal increase in the number of Christians in Nigeria resulted in more responsibilities being shouldered by the indigenous Christians. These men were ready to be Christians but not to be Europeans. They set out to be vibrant Christians, and at the same time, authentically African. The leading voices in this struggle in the West African context were James Johnson, Edward Blyden and Mojola Agbebi.

It is clear that what these Christian African nationalists were fighting was not so much the Christian faith *per se*, as Western European civilization camouflaged under the cloak of Christianity. Indeed, "There was no thought of questioning Christianity itself, but cultural nationalists sought to discover the "pure milk of the Gospel" and give it characteristics of the Nigerian situation. When discovered, they argued, Africans should "demonstrate in practice the Christianity which the white man only theorizes." ⁸

In this quest the battle was fought on two fronts or levels. One level was that which dealt with the superficial non-essential that Europeans had introduced into Africa in the name of Christianity. These included such paraphernalia as mode of dress, names, life-style, and the bulk of the apparatus used in worship. These were to be discarded as useless, and if anything, substituted with their African equivalents. Then there was that level of the essential and fundamental aspects of the Christian faith. The tenets embodied therein were to be taken seriously and accordingly adapted to the African milieu, as they were embraced as the epitome of Christianity. In this way, the essence of the Gospel of Christ could find its own level in the context of the more serious considerations of African institutions and culture. [p. 45](#)

In all seriousness, they no longer wanted the prevalence of a situation where the distinctive feature of a 'Christian is not moral character or allegiance to Christ, but outward dress'. They were tired of the emerging 'superficiality of Christianity in West Africa' which was a veneer in which, once one had gone through the motions of the proper ecclesiastical ceremonies, what mattered most was the respectability and acceptability that one attained as a ticket to cherished social functions. The end result was that, 'This failure of Christianity to be deeply rooted in the people impelled educated Africans to study their religion in order to see how much features of indigenous worship could be grafted on the "pure milk of the Gospel" '.

While James Johnson and Edward Blyden were champions in these spheres, Ayandele faults them for failing to put many of their convictions into practice. Instead he singles out David Brown Vincent, later known as Mojola Agbebi, as the most thorough-going of these Christian African cultural nationalists. He says of him,

The only educated African who approximated a practical cultural nationalist was D. B. Vincent, leader of the native Baptist Church. From 1891 onwards he refused to work for any Christian mission in spite of high positions promised by Bishop Tugwell. Convinced that it was a 'curse' to depend on foreign missions, 'doing the baby for aye', he preferred to be poor but independent. In 1894, while in Liberia, he changed his name to Mojola Agbebi. He cast off European clothing ...

What was unique about men like Mojola Agbebi was that disavowing European Christianity did not mean dispensing with Christianity as such. One of his more forceful views came in 1902 when he attempted to make some distinction between the essentials and non-essentials of the Christian faith. In his view,

Prayer-books and hymn books, harmonium dedications, pew constructions, surpliced choir, the white man's style, the white man's name, the white man's dress, are so many

⁸ Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria*, p. 263 ff.

non-essentials, so many props and crutches affecting the religious manhood of the Christian African. Among the great essentials of religion are that the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached unto them.

COMPREHENSIVELY AFRICAN

Coupled with this task of exhaustive investigation is the need for clearcut definitions. It is along these lines that it must be obvious that a proper understanding of what is meant by authentic African Christianity **p.46** is fundamental as it will help us avoid the employment of any misnomers in our discussion. This raised the necessity of much care so that in our concept of African Christianity we do not end up sowing and dispensing half-baked and ill-digested ideas in which the Africa we posit is that which only exists in the realm of the abstract and imaginary. Such a faulty perception could mislead us into finding ourselves embroiled in a struggle against a non-existent enemy who happens to be merely a figment of our own imagination.

All too often, we are tempted to anachronistically lag behind by speaking to a selected Africa, which, although very real, yet is not fully representative of the dynamic Africa of all time in its many and varied forms. If we adopted this comprehensive view, we would be saved from the tendency of extolling one period of Africa over the others or one sector of even our present sub-cultures at the expense of the rest. The rationale for this larger view is that even in the midst of the drifting sands brought about by the furiously blowing winds of change, there still remains that central strand with the barest modicum of a common denominator which distinguishes the sum of Africa culture and personality in all its shades and facets as something readily identifiable.

Of course our task in this connection would be made eternally easier if, instead of dealing with a dynamic reality, we were confined to a static entity. As it is, however, the bedevilling factor of change has played havoc on the entire state of affairs and dictated otherwise. Consequently, whether we like it or not, we are called upon to confront the new situation that we have been forced into. Under these circumstances, as the core of the indisputably recognizable Africa culture faces the winds of change, we have three options before us. We can stand acquiescently helpless in the path of this wind, and therefore open ourselves up to be blown by it however and wherever it desires; we can resist it head on, and be prepared to face the resultant consequences; or we can hoist our sails deftly in such a manner that while being affected by the impact of the wind's force, we convert it into our willing servant.

This latter alternative could prove to be our best way out of the present dilemma. Adjusting to this attitude can help us to inculcate the Christian faith into our lives, while at the same time emerging out with our African identity intact. To do this effectively we will need to realize with Okulla that

... making Christianity indigenous does not mean engaging in a cultural excavation to resuscitate the Africa of a hundred years before Christianity came. African culture is what we are today and tomorrow. The Church's task is to speak to the people of East Africa and here and now in the varied **p.47** forms and degrees of their development ... It must speak to him in today's language and his today's situation and his today's aspiration.⁹

CENTRED IN JESUS CHRIST

⁹ Okullu, *Church and Politics*, p. 52.

The task before us is truly awe-inspiring in that while taking into account the African milieu, it has to highlight Jesus Christ as the focal point in the Christian faith. As precedents elsewhere in the world have shown, the answer to this challenge will not be a once for all solution. It will be a problem which will recur time and again each time that the essence of the Christian faith becomes blurred by its interaction with the relevant cultural manifestation. Throughout the history of Christianity there have been those alert voices that have periodically called upon the Church in their respective times and localities to re-align itself with the centrality of Jesus Christ in all of its functions.

On the European continent, one of the most under-rated voices in this direction was that of the Danish thinker, Søren Kierkegaard. Charging that the Church of his day had failed to grasp and live up to the demands of Christ, he felt that while most of its members were comfortably happy with their station in Christendom, real Christianity was alien to them. In opposition to the open-ended approach of those around him, he put forth a masterly summation of the exclusiveness of the Christian faith when he said of Jesus Christ, 'He himself is the way, that is in order to make sure that there is no deceit as to there being several ways, and that Christ went on one of them—no, Christ is the way'.¹⁰

In the United States of America, the eminent church historian, Martin E. Marty, wrote disapprovingly of the new shape of American religion as it appeared to be in the latter part of the 1950's, criticising it as the Christianity which had been so much eroded and corroded¹¹ to the point of remaining nothing but 'religion-in-general', he challenged it to return to the centre by recapturing 'the Biblical view of man in community; the revelation of God in the form of a servant; and the Remnant motif as an impulse for the sacred community.' With all due credit to Martin Marty's proposal of a Christian 'culture ethic' for the United States of America, it was left to the Christian statesman, Martin Luther King, Jr., to give the most pungent directive to conformist p. 48 American Christianity. Convinced that 'if the church of Jesus Christ is to regain once more its power, message, and authentic ring, it must conform only to the demands of the gospel,'¹² he went on to explain,

Living in the colony of time, we are ultimately responsible to the empire of eternity. As Christians we must never surrender our supreme loyalty to any time-bound custom or earth bound idea, for at the heart of our universe is a higher reality—God and his kingdom of love—to which we must be conformed.

It is clear that even in the Western and European world, there are those, who having come to grips with the Gospel of Christ, have not wanted to settle for the caricature they are presented with in the name of Christianity. They have spoken against the practice of parading Western civilization and culture, coated with a razor-thin layer of Christianity as a poor substitute and fake imitation of the real thing—faith in Christ. In his usual skilful way, C. S. Lewis dismisses the popular European conception of Christianity as merely a commendable ethico-moral system. As he points out, 'If Christianity only means one more bit of good advice, then Christianity is of no importance.'¹³ Rather than view Jesus Christ

¹⁰ *The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 1852, Section 1277. (A selection edited and translated by Alexander Dru).

¹¹ Martin E. Marty *The New Shape of American Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), p. 1.

¹² Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love* (New York: Pocket Books, 1968 Printing) p. 15 (first published in 1963 by Harper & Row).

¹³ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Glasgow: Collins, 1979), p. 133 (First published in 1952).

'as a great moral teacher,' He should be seen for what He is as the one to whom we must surrender 'and call Him Lord and God.'

If Christianity is truly universal, as we claim it is, then it must recommend itself to every culture in an amicable way, while at the same time transcending the limitations of the particular cultural set-up. The man in Australasia, in the Americas, in Europe, and in Africa should be comfortably Christian without surrendering his own cultural distinctives to any other culture but that of Jesus Christ. By the same token, the central core of Christianity as manifested in any given locality should be such that it is readily identifiable by others from outside it as truly Christian. As the Bible tells us, in [1 Corinthians 3:11](#), where Christianity is concerned, 'There can be no other foundation beyond that which is already laid: Jesus Christ Himself'. For us in Africa our battles in this sphere would be in vain if we reject European Christianity for being non-Christian only to replace it with an African Christianity which is so overlaid with our own cultural matter that it fails to meet the tests of true Christianity when it is subjected to close scrutiny. To wind up with the kind of end-product which is African at [p. 49](#) the expense of being Christian would be self-defeating as all the endeavours of our exercise would boomerang in our very faces.

Professor Mbiti believes that even where organized European Christianity failed to fulfil the religious-aspirations of the African man, 'Christianity can do this, not as a religion but as a way of life ... Our Lord Jesus Christ did not start a religion. He called men to become citizens of the Kingdom of God ... To be a disciple of Christ meant to be so intimately united with Him that Paul could rightly speak of Christians as "the Body of Christ"'.¹⁴ Bishop Okullu concurs with this view when he recognizes that the new African Christianity which we construct in the place of the corrupt one that we are setting out to discard 'must be Christ-centred in order to enable the theologian to communicate with all Christians for the building and establishing of the Church'.¹⁵ When we are anchored on this solid ground our adventures in the quest for authentic African Christianity will be more liberating than it would have been otherwise. With Bishop Stephen Neill we join the chorus that 'the old saying "Christianity is Christ" is almost true. The historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth is the criterion by which every Christian affirmation has to be judged, and in the light of which it stands or falls'.¹⁶ Even the hallowed and cherished African Christianity that we set out to erect must conform to this central prerequisite, that it be Christo-centric above all else.

CONCLUSION

In the same way in which we criticize the Christian preaching and teaching of yesteryear, and instead applaud trends in our day, there are those who censure present-day preaching while nostalgically looking back on the patterns of bygone generations. In this vein, in a perceptively interesting commentary, President Kaunda of Zambia compares and contrasts the preaching and overall Christian approach of his earlier growing-up years with those of his adult years. Asserting that much of present-day preaching is deficient in passionate conviction, he points out that its chief characteristic is that it 'consists of a bout of moralizing about world affairs or some agile juggling with

¹⁴ Mbiti, 'Our Stand Towards A. T. R.,' in *Write*, p. 14.

¹⁵ Okullu, *Church and Politics*, p. 53.

¹⁶ Stephen Neill, *Christian Faith and Other Faiths* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 9.

intellectual propositions which chase each other's tails until the congregation is dizzy'.¹⁷ While abreast of its times, this one-dimensional P. 50 approach does not get to grips with the total needs of the man in the pew.

In contrast to this, there is the Christian faith as practised by his parents and their peers in his childhood. Although by our standards some of their religious perceptions would be outdated, 'crude and over simple', yet they stand out as giant, in that inherent in their Christian approach was that efficacious element of redemption which made an impact on all who were involved in it. This is why it is contended that whatever else it may have lacked, its greatest asset was that it had the power of transforming the lives of countless men who came in contact with it. Kaunda observes,

It was this power of the Gospel which enabled humble, and often unlettered village men to stand in the pulpit of the old brick church at Lubwa and speak with tongues of fire. They had passion, real passion, a quality noticeably lacking in much modern preaching ...

President Kaunda confesses that even today, his life has been profoundly moulded by the power of the Gospel that he encountered, in his earliest days. Firmly wedded to what his parents taught him about God, he considers it to be so much part of his personality that in times of crisis he finds himself reverting 'instinctively to the passionate simplicity of the old religion.'

As the very basis and foundation of his life, he finds that these moments of reflection open up a fresh desire in him 'to share the certainty and assurance of those village Christians—the hope against hope that the God they never doubted will not let me down either in my hour of need.'

What is filtering through in all this is the fact that the Christian faith as Europeans had introduced it has gone through the sieve of the African mind and being, undergone such tremendous changes that it has emerged as no longer Western European Christianity but rather as something truly African and unashamedly Christian. This is the picture portrayed in these further words.

There was nothing sophisticated about their faith, but it was real and strong and wholesome. And it was a Gospel with power which changed men. There was power in my father's preaching and in our lusty hymn-singing. When those Lubwa Christians sang the old chorus—'There is power, power, wonder-working power in the blood of the Lamb'—they meant it. And they could point to members of their family, neighbours and friends who had been brought to Jesus and freed from all the dark forces of evil and superstition which never seemed far from the surface of the old life. My father died when I was eight years of age and no one who was part of the p. 51 great congregation who attended his funeral could doubt the reality of Eternity.

It used to be anathematic in many circles to consider this portrait of Christianity and the allied mood of Independent African Churches as representing the Christian faith. Although they have been despised by the mainstream of Christianity in Africa as being driven by excessive enthusiasm, they have in their own way found the kind of equilibrium which had made the Christian faith they embrace African, without sacrificing for once its central distinctives. However humbling, demeaning and unpalatable it may be, we need to turn to these forms for lessons which may be helpful to us in the days ahead. Ranger is right when he says that in the past these churches have been viewed,

... as though they were an abnormality, almost a disease which needed some special explanation, which might be diagnosed and perhaps cured. It seems to me to be more

¹⁷ Kaunda, *Letter to My Children*, p. 19.

sensible to regard African independency rather as one of the many different forms of African Christian initiative.¹⁸

Now the tables are slightly turned in certain circles—namely academia—where it is now in vogue to consider these same groups, albeit from the safe distance of academic and intellectual non-involvement, as the epitome of African Christianity. Either attitude is regrettable. If they are truly Christian, they should not be discriminated against as obsolete and obscurantist. At the same time, it is indecently dishonest for the so-called African Christian intellectuals to endorse them wholesale uncritically for the persons who need the throbbing of the drum while they themselves find comfortable sanctuary in the dull, sleep-inducing music of our elitist cathedrals, churches and chapels. No, we cannot have our cake and eat it too in the hypocrisy of academic research. The religious sphere, particularly in the African context, is the last arena for those seeking mere intellectual titillation.

It was the African political theoretician and practical revolutionary Amilcar Cabral (1924–1973) who said, 'I am a simple African man, doing my duty in my own country in the context of our time.'¹⁹ We too need to emulate him in our Christian vocation with all that this practical idealism involves in our endeavour to arrive at authentic African Christianity.

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Recent Trends in Christology

Gerald L. Bray

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Since the heart of Christian theology is Christology, taking stock of this field in every generation is a vital task. Bray does such a survey in a most scholarly way. The issues he tackles include, starting from The Myth of God Incarnate by John Hick, the quest for the historical Jesus, the relationship of the Gospels to scientific history, the nature of new Testament Myth, the validity of the re-interpretation of Chalcedonian formula, the soteriological function of Christ, the question of the Trinity. It is a good summary of the development of Christology in the past couple of decades.

Editor

In the eyes of a British student there can be little doubt that a study of recent trends in Christology ought to begin with the symposium *The Myth of God Incarnate* which

¹⁸ T. O. Ranger, *The African Churches of Tanzania* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1972 Reprint), p. 4.

¹⁹ Amilcar Cabral, *Return to the Source: Selected Speeches*, edited by Africa Information Service (London: Monthly Review Press, 1973), p. 2.

appeared in July 1977.¹ Ten years later the book is still in print, and although it is neither a particularly original nor a particularly profound Christological study, it did manage to create an atmosphere which has provided a talking-point for the subsequent decade. The ‘myth-makers’, as the contributors to the symposium were irreverently dubbed, were quickly and almost universally criticized by most scholars working in the field, and a number of studies soon appeared which did their best to demonstrate that they were on the wrong track.² Before long there were even secondary symposia dedicated to an examination of the ‘myth debate’, in which proponents and opponents of the original work met each other and agreed to differ, often sharply, from one another.³

The *Myth* was criticized for two main reasons. First, the contributors were not agreed about what they meant by the word itself, and this led to some confusion in the minds of readers. Behind the verbal uncertainty lay an uncertain approach to historical facts which revealed itself in the cavalier approach which some of the contributors took to the evidence of the gospels. On the whole it would probably be fair to say that for most of them, as good post-Bultmannians, the historical Jesus had little or no importance for the development of Christology. But in this respect the symposiasts were out of step with a p. 53 large section of scholarly opinion, and they were criticized for naïvely swallowing an approach to the biblical data which was strongly reminiscent of classical (*i.e.* pre-1914) liberalism and which is now generally regarded as obsolete.⁴

The *Myth’s* influence on Christology had therefore little to do with its actual content. Rather what the book did was to bring into view the problem of whether and to what extent traditional dogmatic Christology ought to be revised in the light of the findings of biblical scholars and the speculations of modern theologians. Indeed, one might go so far as to say that it was precisely the *Myth’s* failure to handle either of these matters satisfactorily which produced a spate of material endeavouring to correct and supplement its shortcomings. To that extent the book opened up an area which had been too long neglected, and which urgently needed serious attention.

HISTORY AND THE GOSPELS

The precise relationship of the gospels to scientific history has long been recognized to lie at the heart of much Christological debate. The authors of the *Myth* were basically complaining that the early church took the biblical texts at face value and out of them constructed a dogmatic structure which, whilst it was internally coherent, was based on a false assumption. In saying this they were following in the footsteps of Rudolf Bultmann, who had died the previous year, but ignoring the widespread reaction to his ideas which had come to dominate Christological studies in Germany. Käsemann’s ‘new quest’ for the historical Jesus, Pannenberg’s assertion that the resurrection must be regarded as a scientifically historical event, and Hengel’s wide-ranging and generally conservative studies of the New Testament church—all these were simply ignored. This astonishing oversight can perhaps be explained by the fact that German historical and archaeological studies have usually fitted comfortably within a liberal theological framework. They have

¹ J. Hick (ed.), *The Myth of God Incarnate* (London, 1977).

² For discussion of this see J. Ziesler, *The Jesus Question* (London, 1980), pp. 108–119; K. Runia, *The Present-Day Christological Debate* (Leicester, 1984), pp. 78–86.

³ M. Goulder (ed.), *Incarnation and Myth: The Debate Continued* (London, 1979); A. E. Harvey (ed.), *God Incarnate: Story and Belief* (London, 1981).

⁴ See A. Heron, article review in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 31 (1978), pp. 51–71.

not been designed, as they have been in English-speaking world, to support the historical trustworthiness of the gospels as the chief prop of classical orthodoxy. The myth-makers, coming as they did from an Anglo-Saxon environment, understood only a radically anti-historical approach could serve as a persuasive basis for their theological reconstruction. Thus they were [p. 54](#) obliged to overstate their case and ignore developments in Germany which might be interpreted as evidence against it.

But in spite of its lingering attachment to orthodoxy, the main characteristic of recent Anglo-Saxon historical study has been its relative detachment from theological questions, and this tradition has reasserted itself in the debates of the past decade, which found many in the conservative camp un-prepared to argue on the myth-makers' chosen ground. The *Myth* appeared too soon after John Robinson's *Redating the New Testament*⁵ for the latter to have exerted any influence upon it, but the contrast between them was soon perceived and commented upon.⁶ Robinson was a theological radical schooled in the English tradition of conservative biblical criticism, and in his book he managed to present a case for saying that the entire New Testament canon was in existence by AD 70 without ever suggesting what implications that might have for a radical rejection of the gospels as historical evidence. Robinson subsequently went even further and attempted to demonstrate that the fourth gospel was the one closest to the original *kerygma*, although here he was prepared to admit that there may have been a long period in which John was able to meditate on Jesus and develop his Christology before committing it to writing.⁷

From the conservative side came John Wenham's *Easter Enigma*, which was an attempted harmonization of the four gospels in their accounts of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus.⁸ Wenham was criticized for his forays into speculation, but impartial readers also pointed out that this is inevitable if harmonization is ever to be achieved. What Wenham did was to show that harmonization is not impossible, so that the claim of the gospels to historicity deserves to be taken more seriously than it has sometimes been. Furthermore, it was generally recognized that Wenham was writing in defence of traditional orthodoxy, though he nowhere attempted to develop this. Even so, this reaction demonstrates the degree to which it is still assumed that the historicity of the gospels and traditional orthodoxy stand or fall together, and it reminds us why John Robinson failed to carry conviction when he tried to unite a radical theology to a conservative biblical criticism. [p. 55](#)

Specific attempts to unite a conservative view of the reliability of the gospels as historical narrative with a fairly traditional theological position which nevertheless was prepared to take the modern debates into account were made by I. H. Marshall⁹ and C. F. D. Moule.¹⁰ Marshall's study is more limited in scope, being primarily an examination of Jesus' self-understanding, using the main titles of divinity which are applied to him in the New Testament. He concludes that New Testament Christology makes sense only if we posit the belief that Jesus himself taught that he was the Son of Man, the Son of God, the

⁵ J. A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (London, 1976).

⁶ See E. L. Mascall, *Theology and the Gospel of Christ* (London, 1977), pp. 111–120.

⁷ J. A. T. Robinson, *The Priority of John* (London, 1985).

⁸ J. Wenham, *Easter Enigma* (Exeter, 1984). A similar approach to this can be found in M. J. Harris, *Easter in Durham* (Exeter, 1985), which is a scholarly rebuttal of the Bishop of Durham's denial of the historical resurrection of Jesus.

⁹ I. H. Marshall, *The Origins of New Testament Christology* (Leicester, 1976).

¹⁰ C. F. D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge, 1977).

Messiah-Christ and Lord. Moule endorses the same view, though perhaps somewhat more cautiously, and goes on to develop the idea of the 'corporate Christ', in which Jesus ceases to be merely an historical individual and becomes, in the understanding of the New Testament church, a cosmic figure who transcends individual person-hood to embrace a new humanity in himself.

It is at this point that Moule deserts orthodox Christology, which says that each believer has a relationship with Christ, who enables him to approach the Father in the trinitarian communion which is our inheritance in the Holy Spirit, and opts instead for an all-embracing, essentially eschatological view, according to which Christ is the agent of the transformation of the entire creation—a universalism not all that distant from the teaching of Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor, although Moule acknowledges no specific debt to either of them.

Far more radical than Moule is J. D. G. Dunn,¹¹ who reduces his Christological understanding of the New Testament to two fundamental presuppositions. First, he argues that the early church worshipped Jesus as Lord, which soon came to mean God, even if this was not necessarily immediately clear at first. Second, Dunn argues for an ontological continuity between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith; in other words, whatever happened on the first Easter morning, the early Christians believed that the Christ whom they met in the post-resurrection appearances was the same person as the Jesus whom they had known before the crucifixion. These two assumptions allow Dunn to claim a kind of minimalist orthodoxy whilst accepting the main substance of the classical liberal position on the composition of the New Testament writings, the emergence of early Catholicism, and so on. In a sense, therefore, he may be called the diametric opposite of p. 56 John Robinson, and the perceived incongruity in his position has similarly failed to carry conviction.

Finally, representing an even more radical line, there is J. Mackey,¹² who accepted all the most anti-historical beliefs of the myth-makers and endeavoured to give their views a systematic framework rooted in the New Testament. It is Mackey's contention that Jesus was himself a myth-maker propounding a highly symbolic 'kingdom of God', and that the task of his followers, especially the apostle Paul, was to substitute a myth based on Jesus for the one created by him! Mackey's work is valuable chiefly because it shows us how far it is possible to go in rejecting history when constructing a Christological theory. In purely intellectual terms it represents a considerable achievement, but one which is too weakly grounded to be regarded as a serious contribution to theology.

ORTHODOXY

Mackey comes from a Roman Catholic background, which may explain why he takes the myth-building of the early church far beyond the New Testament. According to him the Pauline myth did not finally become orthodoxy until the defeat of Arius, which thus represents a watershed in Christological development.

The attempted rehabilitation of ancient heretics is a recurring feature of modern Christology, though until recently the figures usually selected for this honour have been either Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428), whose case rests on the fact that he was not condemned until 553, and Nestorius, who has been shown to have expressed agreement with the *Tome* of Leo, a document which was used at the Council of Chalcedon to reinforce

¹¹ J. D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making* (London, 1980).

¹² J. P. Mackey, *Jesus: The Man and the Myth* (London, 1979).

his condemnation at Ephesus in 431. Scholars continue to argue over the merits of Nestorius' case,¹³ but it seems as if the main efforts at rehabilitation may have shifted to the famous arch-heretic Arius. Certainly this was the intention of Robert Gregg and Dennis Groh¹⁴ who argued that Arianism owed its distinctive Christology to soteriological considerations whose strength was such that the 'orthodox' opposition was reduced to a handful of diehards around Athanasius of Alexandria.

The belief that soteriology determined Christology in the Arian p. 57 controversy represents an ingenious attempt to read a modern situation back into ancient times. Gregg and Groh have taken the 'functional' approach to Christology which is common in Germany, where Oscar Cullmann and Ferdinand Hahn have been its leading exponents, and applied it to the fourth-century debate. It is interesting in this connection to note that whereas Cullmann believes that the functional Christology characteristic of the New Testament gave way to a more ontological approach later on, Gregg and Groh seem to be saying that the Arian controversy was the moment when matters came to a head and the 'biblical' Christology represented by the functional soteriology of Arius finally succumbed to the ontological approach now associated with orthodoxy.

This view has been seriously challenged by Rowan Williams¹⁵ who argues that it misrepresents the thrust of Arius' teaching. Arius, says Williams, was primarily concerned to deny the (faulty) ontological assertions of the church of Alexandria, which seemed to him to be raising Christ to such a level of divinity that the person of the Father and his rôle as *fons deitatis* were being compromised. Instead of this, Arius proposed an alternative ontology which would leave the Father's uniqueness intact and at the centre of Christian theology. In general terms, Williams is certainly correct in his assessment of Arius' mind, though he may have underestimated the appeal of soteriological factors to some, at least, of his many followers.

One interesting feature of recent discussion is that traditional orthodoxy has come to be associated with the Council of Chalcedon, perhaps because it is the usual stopping place in university courses on early church history, even though that Council has little claim to such a distinction. This has been forcefully pointed out by E. L. Mascall¹⁶ and two timely, though little known, studies bear him out.¹⁷ More recently, however, there are signs that the neglect of post-Chalcedonian developments is being repaired, at least to some extent. David Calvert¹⁸ extends his rejection of classical Christological terms to the period beyond Chalcedon, and Glenn Chesnut¹⁹ does his best to refashion post-Chalcedonian terminology into distinctively modern p. 58 concepts. Chesnut is particularly concerned to demonstrate that the exponents of Chalcedon, and in particular Maximus the Confessor, had a theology which can quite easily be transferred into existentialist terms. It is a brave attempt, but apart from the fact that it assumes that existentialism is *the* modern philosophy, it is open to the same kind of objection that Rowan Williams has levelled at

¹³ For a full discussion see A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition I* (rev. edn, 1975), pp. 559–568.

¹⁴ R. C. Gregg and D. E. Groh, *Early Arianism: A View of Salvation* (London, 1981).

¹⁵ R. Williams, 'The Logic of Arianism', in *Journal of Theological Studies* 34 (1983), pp. 56–81.

¹⁶ E. L. Mascall, *Whatever Happened to the Human Mind?* (London, 1980), pp. 28–53.

¹⁷ J. Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (Crestwood, NY, 1975); P. T. R. Gray, *The Defense of Chalcedon in the East (451–553)* (Leiden, 1979).

¹⁸ D. G. A. Calvert, *From Christ to God* (London, 1983).

¹⁹ G. F. Chesnut, *Images of Christ* (Minneapolis, 1984).

Gregg and Groh. Once again we are faced with an attempt to graft a modern way of thinking onto an ancient author whose own perspective was rather different.²⁰

MODERN RECONSTRUCTIONS

Nevertheless it is fair to say that 'Chalcedon' is now widely used as shorthand to represent traditional orthodox Christology, and that recent speculative work in the field can largely be divided according to whether it accepts or rejects this heritage. This in turn involves a preference for either an ontological or a functional approach to the figure of Jesus. In view of the tendency of biblical scholars to opt for the latter, it is scarcely surprising that the majority of recent studies have done the same, but the ontological approach is by no means dead and has recently acquired some notable exponents and defenders.

Among the books devoted to a basically functional approach, we may mention the 1980 Sarum Lectures given by Schubert Ogden²¹ who argues for an understanding of Jesus as the man who has given us the key to achieve authentic personal freedom. Ogden's approach is reminiscent of the existentialist morality of the 1960s, and he is dearly sympathetic to the authors of the *Myth*. However his approach is so firmly tied to the supposed desire of 'modern man' for the subjective experience of 'freedom' that any reference to the historical Jesus is obliged to serve this fundamental point. Because of this it becomes difficult to know whether Ogden is really presenting a Christology at all, or merely using Jesus-language as a hangover from the past which might still be useful for expressing human emotions today.

Much less radical than this is the work of Anthony Tyrrell Hanson,²² who rejects the Chalcedonian framework without departing from the Bible or the theological tradition as a whole. Hanson argues that the p. 59 teaching and experience of Jesus which the early Christians received obliged them to develop a theology which allowed for distinctions within God. In particular, they were forced to develop a Logos, or Word, doctrine, according to which God could communicate with mankind through the activities of a particular human being. We appear to be on the road to a modern form of Arianism, though Hanson is careful to reject this. He also rejects the revamped adoptionism of Geoffrey Lampe,²³ though he is broadly sympathetic to the concerns which Lampe raises. In the end, Hanson pictures Jesus as the greatest of the saints, a man in whom God has revealed his Word but who nevertheless remains a finite creature who is not identical with that Word.

Hanson's work is especially notable for the amount of attention it gives to the question of Christ's pre-existence and the problem of the ongoing influence of his sacrifice as a mediatorial propitiation for our sins. Both of these concepts he resolutely denies, though in doing so he opens up the whole field of medieval and Reformation Christology, including the eucharistic controversies of the period, which have largely been left to one side in modern debates.

Roman Catholic theologians have also been prominent in advocating various forms of functional Christology, though their dogmatic commitment to Chalcedon has usually

²⁰ *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings* (London, 1985), gives some idea of his thought. But for a full treatment of the question see P. Piret, *le Christ et la Trinité selon Maxime le Confesseur* (Paris, 1983).

²¹ S. M. Ogden, *The Point of Christology* (London, 1982).

²² A. T. Hanson, *The Image of the Invisible God* (London, 1982).

²³ G. H. Lampe, *God as Spirit* (Oxford, 1980).

prevented them from being quite as radical as their Protestant counterparts. In general they have been content to stress the implications of Christ's complete humanity, particularly in the realm of his conscious self-awareness. 'A humanity completely open to God' is the way Piet Schoonenberg,²⁴ Karl Rahner,²⁵ Hans Küng²⁶ and most profoundly Edward Schillebeeckx²⁷ have described and developed their approach to Christ. For them the psychological experiences of a first-century Jew are all-important to our understanding of Christology, and it is the meeting of Jesus' self-consciousness with ours which makes him the model for us to follow in the pursuit of our salvation. To all of these writers, as to Hanson, the traditional ontological approach suffers from being drawn largely from the fourth gospel, which they all agree is a late and unreliable source.²⁸ p. 60

In opposition to this tendency there is the wide-ranging and solidly based work of Jean Galot, whose earlier writings were introduced to the English-speaking world by Eric Mascall,²⁹ and some of whose major work has now appeared in English.³⁰ Galot tackles the modern Christological debates head-on, and argues that only a return to the ontological categories of Chalcedon, suitably updated to embrace the concerns of modern psychological research, can solve the problems which theologians believe confront them. Galot insists that the biblical witness, taken as a whole, leads inevitably to the ontological definitions of Chalcedon, which he believes are sufficiently opened to accommodate modern concerns. He rightly criticizes many modern theologians for having rejected transitional terminology without either understanding it or bothering to investigate its hidden potential. Galot's work is a first-class restatement of traditional orthodoxy in modern terms, and deserves to be more widely known than is the case at present.

Another defender of the traditional ontological approach is Colin Gunton,³¹ who argues that to neglect it is to fall back into the dualistic approach to reality which characterized ancient tendencies towards adoptionism and docetism. As Gunton points out, modern reconstructions of Christology often bear more than a passing resemblance to ancient heresies, and he attributes this fact to the rather superficial rejection of the traditional orthodox inheritance on the part of modern theologians. Gunton's book is a fresh and learned philosophical approach to the subject and should be taken more seriously than it has been so far. Gunton does not appear to know Galot, but the two men have a good deal in common and their approaches complement each other in a quite remarkable way.

THE WORK OF CHRIST

The predominance of a functional, soteriological approach to Christology is a reminder of the importance of the work of Christ within the framework of the doctrine of his person

²⁴ P. Schoonenberg, *The Christ: A Study of the God-Man Relationship in the Whole of creation and in Jesus Christ* (New York, 1971).

²⁵ K. Rahner, *Theological Writings* vols 1, 13, 16, 17 (London, 1974–81).

²⁶ H. Küng, *On Being a Christian* (London, 1977).

²⁷ E. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus* (London, 1979); *Christ* (London, 1981).

²⁸ Hence the importance of J. A. T. Robinson's *The Priority of John* (London, 1985).

²⁹ E. L. Mascall, *Theology and the Gospel of Christ*, pp. 151–188.

³⁰ J. Galot, *Who is Christ?* (Rome, 1980).

³¹ C. Gunton, *Yesterday and Today. A Study of Continuities in Christology* (London, 1983).

and natures. As Colin Gunton points out, modern theologians frequently miss the fact that the classical two-natures Christology had a profoundly soteriological purpose in ensuring that Christ was an adequate saviour of mankind **P. 61** and mediator between man and God. But although the soteriological theme has received great prominence, its content has been left remarkably vague. Very often the most that is said is that Christ is our 'liberator', a term which is usually understood in terms of individual emotional and psychological experience, though of course it has also been applied to social and political freedom in the context of the liberation theology which has grown up on the frontiers of Christianity and Marxism.³²

The most serious critique of this from the traditional Roman Catholic perspective is that by Jean Galot,³³ who attempts a systematic application of Chalcedonian Christology to the saving work of Christ on the cross. Galot does not stop with the atonement, however, but extends his treatment to cover the resurrection and ascension of Christ, as well as the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Unfortunately, the wholeness of Galot's vision is compromised by a limitation of the substitutionary rôle of Christ's sacrifice to allow for a human contribution to the work of salvation, and a universalizing of redemption which has no place for the satisfaction of the Father's justice by the payment of the human debt of guilt.

It has been left to Protestant theologians to defend the classical teaching of the Reformation on the atonement, and this has been done in at least three works of substantial importance which have appeared in recent years. In Germany, Martin Hengel³⁴ has carefully demonstrated the validity of atonement language both within the circle of Jesus' followers and in the wider Graeco-Roman world. As it is often supposed that a concept of substitutionary sacrifice would not have fitted the socio-cultural context of earliest Christianity, this is a contribution of major importance. More strictly biblical in scope is the work of Leon Morris,³⁵ who shows in great detail just what the range of meaning inherent in Jewish and Christian concepts of atonement actually was. Morris' scholarship is unashamedly conservative, with a wealth of biblical reference and a constant concern to answer the charges levelled against the traditional teaching by scholars of an earlier generation like C. H. Dodd and Vincent Taylor.

Complementing Morris' work is the massive study by H. D. McDonald³⁶ who takes us through the traditional doctrine, the **p. 62** evidence of the New Testament for it, and the treatment which atonement has received in history. Complete chapters are devoted to the contributions of Anselm, Abelard, Dale, Forsyth, Aulén and Moberly, and no fewer than 28 theologians are briefly discussed in the last chapter, including Leon Morris (but not C. H. Dodd, for some curious reason). McDonald is a conservative in the Reformation mould, but he is always scrupulously fair to his opponents and his book is likely to become and remain a standard work of reference on its subject.

OTHER APPROACHES

³² A. Kirk, *Liberation Theology* (London, 1979).

³³ J. Galot, *Jesus, Our Liberator* (Rome, 1982).

³⁴ M. Hengel, *The Atonement*. (London, 1979).

³⁵ L. Morris, *The Atonement. Its meaning and significance* (Leicester, 1983).

³⁶ H. L. McDonald, *The Atonement of the Death of Christ in Faith, Revelation and History* (Grand Rapids, 1985).

One might expect, in an age dominated by Karl Barth, that there would be a steady stream of theological studies relating the doctrine of Christ to the Trinity, but although such studies have appeared from time to time, they have been surprisingly rare. No doubt the strong functional approach to Christology has had a lot to do with this neglect, but it is quite astonishing how far the issue has been left to the defenders of traditional credal positions. Since the appearance of James Dunn's *Jesus and the Spirit* there has been almost nothing of comparable significance, in spite of the widespread growth of charismatic and 'renewal' movements in the churches. Ecumenical interests have prompted the World Council of Churches to produce its excellent symposium on the *Filioque* dispute,³⁷ which has been supplemented more recently by Yves Congar,³⁸ but the only major work on the place of the Son within the Godhead is that by Louis Bouyer,³⁹ which has not had the circulation it deserves or will need if it is to make any serious impact on Anglo-Saxon Christology.

On a completely different track is Jaroslav Pelikan's recent work dealing with the place of Jesus in the history of culture.⁴⁰ This is an unusual subject which has seldom been studied, and never put together in such comprehensive detail. Pelikan takes eighteen different pictures of Christ which he sees as having dominated at successive periods in the history of the church, and he deals with each in the light of the theology, literature and art of its time. The book is a very useful p. 63 reminder that Jesus has never belonged to theologians, and it even suggests to us that theology has reacted to the forces of the age in which it has been written more frequently than we have often thought. It is a book which deserves to be read and pondered carefully by all students of Christology, whatever their own particular approach to the subject might be.

Lastly, something should be said about the Statement of the Pontifical Biblical Commission which appeared in Latin and French in 1984 and has recently been translated into English with a commentary by J. A. Fitzmyer.⁴¹ The Commission surveys the different trends which have appeared in modern Christology, and criticizes them for a one-sided approach to the Scriptures. Its remedy is a deeper and more comprehensive use of the Bible, including the Old Testament, for establishing a Christology which will have pastoral relevance in the church today. The document betrays no sign of denominational bias, though its comments on particular theologians are necessarily very brief. Here the commentary is a help because it fills in the background to the Commission's thinking as far as this can be done by one who was not a participant in the discussions. The document is valuable not only as a handy reference tool, but also because of the remarkable Part II, which outlines the framework of what the Commission believes is a truly biblical Christology. This turns out to rely heavily on the covenant offices of prophet, priest and king as the key to an Old Testament Christology, and insists that Jesus can be understood only by giving priority to his filial relationship to God. It is this consideration, says the Commission, which ought to be the criterion of investigation into the meaning of Christ for believers today. The Protestant observer can hardly help wondering whether he has stumbled back into the pages of Calvin by mistake, since that is certainly the impression which this Statement gives.

³⁷ L. Vischer (ed.), *Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ* (Geneva, 1981).

³⁸ Y. Congar, *The World and the Spirit* (London, 1986).

³⁹ L. Bouyer, *The Eternal Son. A Theology of the Word of God and Christology* (Huntingdon, Indiana, 1978).

⁴⁰ J. Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries. His Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven and London, 1985).

⁴¹ J. A. Fitzmyer, *Scripture and Christology* (London, 1986).

As a call to the church to develop a relevant Christology, the Statement of the Papal Commission makes a fitting conclusion to a survey of the past decade. No-one can dispute that much has been said and written during that time, but it remains very much an open question how much of what has appeared will eventually form part of that great tradition which is the witness of God's faithful saints in every age to the reality of his presence with us in the person of Jesus Christ.

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Church and State in Socialist China, 1949–1987—I

Jonathan Chao

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We are glad to publish Chao's Church and State in Socialist China in two parts. It is an excellent research analysing not only the historical but also the theological issues in mainland China during the past 40 years. The second part will be published in the next issue of ERT.

Editor

INTRODUCTION

Church and state may seem to be a settled question in Western, Christianized countries. But in socialist countries like China and in other third world countries where revolutions are still going on, church and state is usually the most important issue affecting the life and witness of the church.

In Hong Kong today, as the British colony makes its transition to Chinese sovereignty, church and state has become a matter of primary concern for the Christian church, both Catholic and Protestant. Recently a ghost writer by the name of Hsin Weisu (a Chinese pun for Hsin Hua-she, or New China News Agency) has written two articles suggesting that the principle of separation of church and state should be incorporated into the Basic Law, the constitution for Hong Kong as a Special Administrative Zone of the People's Republic of China after 1997.¹ Hsin's definition of the separation of church and state is essentially separation of religion from politics, and so he suggested that neither the church nor the clergy should become involved in politics and that the Basic Law should only guarantee 'normal religious activities'. Religion, he argued, belongs to the realm of the mind (thinking, the noumenal world), and politics deals with political power. Since

¹ 'Tsung-chiao Tzu-you yu Chi-pan-fa' [Religious Freedom and the Basic Law], *Ming-pao*, Dec. 5, 1986; Fee. 3, 4, 1987.

their purposes and sphere are different, religious clergy should confine themselves to matters of religion and should not comment on, or participate in, politics.

Hsin's articles elicited many Christian responses which appeared in Hong Kong Chinese-language newspapers. This debate on separation of religion from politics has yielded over twenty articles and is still going on. Many who disagreed with Hsin could not understand his logic, and thought his demands rather absurd. However, if one reads [p. 65](#) Hsin's articles from the perspective of the Chinese Communist attitude towards religion, one can see almost at once that his position is none other than a reflection of standard Chinese Communist religious policy.²

The people in Hong Kong are already feeling the pressure from China as their future is being shaped by the Basic Law Drafting Committee. The churches and their leaders are beginning to sense the coming of a new reality: that Hong Kong will soon come under Chinese Communist rule and that a new relationship between the churches and the new Hong Kong government will eventually emerge. What is it going to be like? How much of the current religious freedom will be extended beyond 1997, and for how long? These are questions of existential interest to the Christian community in Hong Kong. The issue of church and state has arrived at our door steps!

The churches in Hong Kong, therefore, are looking to the experiences of the church in China for some insights into how to prepare themselves for life and ministry beyond 1997, especially in the matter of church and state relations.

Churches in other parts of the world are becoming increasingly interested in China, in the story of the church in China, and in the future prospects for missions in China. To understand all these correctly, one must first return to the basic issues of church and state in China as a socialist country.

To understand the nature of church and state relations in China, we must first understand Chinese Communist religious policy. Secondly, we must understand the main ideological sources contributing to the development of that policy. Thirdly, we have to trace the historical development of the church and state relationship since 1949. We shall confine ourselves to the Protestant experience.

THE NATURE OF CHINESE COMMUNIST RELIGIOUS POLICY

In socialist China the party's religious policy forms the framework within which church and state relations take place. The stated policy is that 'citizens in the People's Republic of China (PRC) shall enjoy freedom of religious belief,' as stated in article 36 of the 1982 Constitution.³ This policy is more fully expounded in Document No. [P. 66](#) 19 of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Part (CCP) issued on March 31, 1982. However, 'freedom of religious belief' is defined in terms of freedom of inward faith: the right to

² See my response on this perspective in *Chiu-shih nientai* [The Nineties] (March 1987), pp. 46–48.

³ The full text of Article 36 reads: 'Citizens of the People's Republic of China shall have freedom of religious beliefs. No government organizations, or social groups, or individuals may force [other] citizens to believe in religion or not to believe in religion, nor can they discriminate against those citizens who believe in religion or who do not believe in religion. The state shall protect normal religious activities. No one may use religion to conduct activities that would disturb social order, harm to people's physical health, or frustrate the country's educational system. Religious organizations and religious affairs shall not be directed by foreign powers'.

believe or not to believe in one's heart.⁴ It does not include freedom of propagation or freedom to conduct church life as prescribed in the Scriptures, or as religious bodies wish to conduct it. Nor does freedom of religious belief include the social expressions of one's faith: religion must not interfere with politics, education, marriage and family life, etc. Religion is to be kept as a private matter and is not allowed to exert any influence on the society.⁵ Religious activities may be conducted so long as they are done under the control of the state and are carried out under the supervision of the patriotic religious organizations. These are called 'normal religious activities,' which are to be conducted in designated places, by designated religious personnel (clergy approved by the patriotic organizations such as the TSPM), and even approved clergy must work only in designated areas.⁶ This is called the 'three-designates' policy.⁷

All religious activities conducted by believers themselves outside the control of the state and its patriotic religious organizations are considered 'abnormal religious activities', and hence are regarded as illegal and anti-revolutionary. Such activities, like independent home meetings and itinerant preaching, are not considered as religious activities, but as political violations of state policy, and violators are dealt with as political criminals.⁸ p. 67

With this kind of definition of normal and abnormal religious activities, there is no room given for the believers' direct relationship With believers or churches in foreign countries. Foreign religious bodies are forbidden to develop a direct working relationship with churches in China.⁹ The independence of the Chinese church is stressed by the state and its patriotic organizations in the name of the former Protestant missionary goals of 'three selves': self-support, self-government, and self-propagation.¹⁰

However, the united front theory dictates that religion may be used as an avenue for winning international goodwill in order that China's national programme might be enhanced. For this purpose, patriotic organizations, such as the Three-self Patriotic

⁴ For the full text in Chinese see *San-chung-ch'uan-hui yi-lai-tsung-yao Wenhsien hsuan-p'ien* [Selected Important Documents Since the Third Plenum] (Tientsin: Jen-nin Jih-pao Ch'u-pan-she, 1982), pp. 1218-1240.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1226.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1230.

⁷ This term is used in the various local Three-self Patriotic Covenants. See, for example, 'Kuan-yu wei-hu cheng-ch'ang tsung-chiao huo-tung ti chueh-ting' [Concerning Resolutions on Maintaining Normal Religious Activities], published by the Yunnan Three-self Patriotic Movement Committee and the Yunnan Christian Council, March 29, 1982.

⁸ Section 10 of Document 19 reads: 'While we resolutely protect all normal religious activities, we must resolutely attack illegal criminal activities and antirevolutionary destructive activities under the cloak of religion, as well as various superstitious activities which do not fall under the realm of religion, but which are harmful to national interest and to the lives and properties of the people'. *Ibid.*, p. 1235. Section 11 reads: 'We must intensify our awareness, paying close attention to hostile foreign religious forces attempting to establish underground churches and other illegal organizations. Institutions where espionage activities are carried out under the cloak of religion, they must be resolutely attacked.' *Ibid.*, p. 1237.

⁹ Part of Section 11 of Document 19 reads: 'International reactionary forces, especially imperialist religious forces, including the Vatican and Protestant missions will attempt to use all kinds of opportunities to conduct infiltration activities, seeking to return to Mainland China. Our policy is to positively expand religious international friendly relations and, at the same time, resolutely resist the infiltration of all hostile foreign religious forces.' *Ibid.*, p. 1236.

¹⁰ See recent publications by the TSPM in its official organ: *Tien Feng*.

Movement and the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, are encouraged to receive foreign religious groups as well as to send delegations to other countries.¹¹ Domestically, united front thinking also directs government officials and patriotic church leaders to win the support of the religious masses to contribute towards the national programme of modernization.

These religious policies are formulated by the United Front Work Department of the Party's Central Committee in consultation with the Institute of World Religion in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) of the State, and the national leaders of the patriotic religious organizations.¹²

Religious policies are implemented by the Religious Affairs Bureau, which has a national bureau that directs provincial and major p. 68 municipal bureaux, which in turn direct the numerous county level bureaux.¹³ Under the directives of the RAB, policies are carried out by the major patriotic religious organizations, namely, (1) the Chinese Buddhist Association, (2) the Chinese Taoist Association, (3) the Chinese Islamic Association, (4) the Chinese Protestant Three-self Patriotic Movement (1954), which established the China Christian Council (1980), and (5) the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (1957), which also formed the College of Chinese Catholic Bishops and the Committee on Chinese Catholic Church Affairs.¹⁴

These patriotic associations report to the RAB, which is usually a part of the local united front office in the party branch bureau, which works closely with the Public Security Bureau (PSB). Religious policies are enforced by the Public Security Bureau (PSB). Without this enforcement, the policies and the patriotic organizations are powerless. Suspected violators of the policy are warned and interrogated by officials in the RAB. Sometimes they are arrested by the PSB and kept at its 'Retention Centres'. Often officials in the Three-self Patriotic Movement serve as the informants.¹⁵ Suspected violators so arrested are further interrogated by the PSB, and then the case is investigated by the Bureau of Investigation which then turns the case to the court. The district court would then either sentence the accused to some many years of imprisonment or release

¹¹ The TSPM has sent delegations to Hong Kong (March 1981), Canada and the US (October 1981), Scandinavian countries (1982), Australian and New Zealand (March, 1984); Japan (Sept., 1984), W. Germany, Hungary and Switzerland (Nov. 1983), and India (Feb. 1985).

¹² This process can be observed in the consolidation of the religious policy between December 1981, when consultation with TSPM leaders began, to December 1982, when the constitution was promulgated.

¹³ For a description of the inner workings of the RAB, see Chapter I in George Patterson's book, *Christianity in Communist China* (Waco, 1970) and Holmes Welch's *Buddhism Under Mao* (Cambridge, 1971), chapter I. The source for both appears to be the same person.

¹⁴ For the Chinese original, see Section 7 of Document No. 19. Ibid., p. 1231: 'The task of these patriotic organizations is to assist the party and the government in carrying out the policy of freedom of religious belief, to help the broad mass of believers and religious personages to continuously raise their patriotic and socialist consciousness, to represent the legal rights and interests of the religious, to organize normal religious activities and deal with religious affairs. All patriotic religious organizations should accept the leadership of the Party and the government, and Party and government cadres should become adept at supporting and assisting religious organizations in solving their own problems, and should not try to take over themselves.'

¹⁵ These inter-working relations between the TSPM, the RAB, and the PSB are commonly known by Christians in China who have gone through the experiences of interrogation and arrest, but seldom known outside China.

him.¹⁶ This process from arrest to p. 69 sentencing could take anywhere from half a year to two years or even longer. The sentenced are then transferred from the PSB's retention centre to various prisons.

There is an interlocking relationship between the United Front Work Department, the Religious Affairs Bureau, patriotic religious organizations, such as the Three-self Patriotic Movement, and the Public Security Bureau at the national, provincial, and county levels.

How, then, did these religious policies and practices develop? We must now turn the historical factors contributing to their formation.

HISTORICAL SOURCES OF CHINESE COMMUNIST RELIGIOUS POLICY AND PRACTICE

There are four major sources contributing to the formation of Chinese Communist religious policy. These interacted with each other, producing a blend of traditional and modern Chinese totalitarian policy of state control of religion, which is the essential nature of church and state relations in socialist China.

First, there is the tradition of state control of religions in traditional China. In imperial China, the state assumed a right of sovereignty over all aspects of the lives of its subjects. There was no separation of church and state as understood in the West, neither in theory nor in practice, and the Chinese people have never established their right to question such overall sovereignty of the state. Since the late Han period and definitely after the mid-T'ang, Confucianism enjoyed a status of 'official orthodoxy,' not only as a system of political philosophy, but also as a way of life.¹⁷ With this affirmation of Confucian orthodoxy, all other systems of beliefs were considered 'heterodox.' However, major institutional religions were tolerated so long as they were brought under the control of the state. On the one hand, through law codes and government control, the state reduced the influence of religious groups to a level of socio-political insignificance. On the other hand, the state developed a system of control whereby religious expansion was contained, and their activities strictly p. 70 controlled by the government, which used religious leaders who worked for the Board of Rites.¹⁸ All other sectarian groups were not only considered heterodox, but also as potential rebels, and hence were outlawed and often suppressed by force. Catholic Christianity suffered nearly 150 years of suppression as a

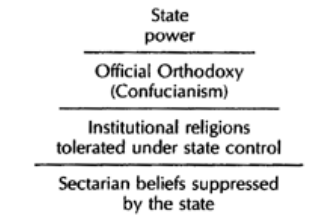
¹⁶ In a recent case a woman evangelist was arrested by the PSB in December 14, 1984 and charged with conducting anti-revolutionary activities. Her criminal activities were described as having joined an illegal Christian organization (house church), participated in an evangelistic team to Szechuan, engaged in itinerant preaching, and developed churches, etc. activities which 'deceived the masses and seriously disturbed social order'. On December 14, 1985, the Bureau of Investigation moved her case to the district court. In the Letter of Prosecution, the investigator stated that the accused 'by conducting illegal missionary activities and having seriously influenced social order, and production order, has violated Article 158 of the Criminal Code of the PRC and so is guilty of the crime of disturbing social order.' On January 28, 1986, the District Court released her on the ground of sections 1 and 2 of Article 158 of the Criminal Code. These facts are taken from the certificate of court decisions given to the accused.

¹⁷ For studies on Confucian official orthodoxy, see Paul A. Cohen, *China and Christianity* (Cambridge, 1961). See also Arthur Wright, *Buddhism in Chinese History* (Stanford, 1959), especially his section on the Sui dynasty.

¹⁸ For a description of the history of this control, see C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society* (Berkeley, 1961), p. 13.

foreign heterodox sect before it was tolerated in 1844.¹⁹ Protestant and Catholic Christianity enjoyed their freedom of propagation primarily on account of the toleration clause included in the Treaty of Tientsin (1858).

This tradition of state control, official orthodoxy, state toleration, and the suppression of heterodox sects, may be described by the following diagram:



The second source is the anti-religious thinking which arose from the New Culture Movement during 1920–1921. As a result of the debate on religion, Chinese intellectuals of the May Fourth era came to take a position that all realities must be tested by science and, in the process, rejected all religions as of no value for the building up of a modern China. Religious beliefs were considered a hindrance to the development of a young, modern China.²⁰ This anti-religious sentiment influenced many of the intellectuals and students from whom the Chinese Communist Party drew its first recruits.

Some intellectuals tried to make room for religion by relegating it to p. 71 the realm of subjectivity, acknowledging that science is the test for objective realities. This is why even today Chinese Communist theoreticians still relegate religion to the private sphere, denying it of any objective social value.²¹

The revolutionary view of religion that prevailed in the 19th century West greatly influenced Chinese intellectuals of the May Fourth Era. Religion was seen as a historical phenomenon in the evolution of human society: that religion has its own process of rise, development, and disappearance; that religion arose because primitive man could not understand the natural forces around him, and so developed a religious consciousness; that religion began to develop when man entered into a class society but could not free himself from its system of exploitation; and that religion will disappear when man enters into a socialist society when the social bases for its existence have been removed.²²

The third source is Lenin's theory of the imperialist nature of religion. Lenin believed that religion is an opium which the imperialists give to the people to dull their senses of resistance to exploitation. Therefore, to fight against imperialism, one must oppose religion. Lenin's view was imported into, and propagated widely throughout China by the Socialist Youth Corps under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party during 1922

¹⁹ See Searle M. Bates' unpublished paper on 'Church and State in Traditional China,' seminar on Modern China, Columbia University, November 1967, p. 13.

²⁰ For a fuller analysis of this debate on religion and the anti-religious sentiment in the May Fourth era, see chapter III of my thesis, 'The Chinese Indigenous Church Movement: Protestant Response to Anti-Christian Movements in Modern China, 1919–1927,' Ph.D. thesis in Oriental Studies, University of Pennsylvania, 1986. (See also Shao Yu-ming's article in the Notre Dame Conference book, 1978).

²¹ See the various responses of religious leaders to the article on religion in the Constitution, 'Kuo-chia pao-hu cheng-ch'ang ti tsung-chiao huo-tung,' *Jen-min Jih-pao*, July 3, 1982.

²² See Hsiao Hsien-fa [former director of RAB], Cheng-ch'ueh li-chieh ho kuan-ch'e tangti tsung-chiao hsin-yang chih-yu cheng-tzu yue' [Correctly Understanding and Implementing the Party's Policy of Freedom of Religious Belief], *Jen-min Jih-pao*, June 14, 1980. This interpretation was repeated in a similar article in *Kuang-ming Jih-pao*, February 18, 1985, the latest document on religious policy, which simply repeated what Hsiao said in 1980 and published in Document No. 19 of 1982.

and 1923. Later, during the years of Chinese Communist collaboration with the Kuomintang (1924–1927), Lenin’s anti-religious views were popularized by the anti-Christian movements which were carried out by the CCP and the KMT as part of their anti-imperialist campaign. Since then Christianity has been regarded by the Chinese Communists as the vanguard of foreign imperialism, and missionaries and Chinese pastors have been seen as the agents of cultural aggression. This view was so widely propagated, and for so long, that even today many Chinese people are still influenced by it.

The fourth source is Mao Tse-tung’s theory of contradictions and the united front policy. Mao asserted that there are antagonistic contradictions, p. 72 such as political and ideological contradictions, and non-antagonistic contradictions, such as religious differences among the people. Mao also differentiated primary contradictions from secondary contradictions, and he stressed the mobility of these contradictions according to changing historical situations. In this regard, religion was considered a non-antagonistic and secondary contradiction.

When applied to the united front policy, the task of the party is to unite with, or befriend, secondary contradictions in order to oppose the primary contradictions. For example, since 1969 China has been befriending the U.S. in order to oppose the Russian threat, which has become China’s primary contradiction. Similarly, the religious masses must be won over to fight against backwardness in the pursuit of modernization. While uniting or befriending secondary contradictions, religious people must also be educated so that they will gradually abandon their subjective worldview, and take on an ‘objective’ materialistic worldview, abandon their religious superstitions, and so be ‘won’ to the party’s side. These are the positive dimensions of the united front policy.

But the united policy also has its negative dimension, namely, those who refuse to accept the party’s soft, educational persuasion and insist on holding to their own views must be dealt with in a more aggressive manner, through criticisms, threats and, if necessary, force, so that in the end the recalcitrant person will be isolated and his influence minimized. But who is to determine what is a primary contradiction (so as to adopt a policy of attack) from a secondary contradiction (so as to apply a policy of friendly persuasion)? Historically, this has been determined by whoever holds power in the Party and in relation to what kind of national programme he desires to implement. The historical context, therefore, determines how the united front policy is to be implemented whether in the realm of religion or in other areas.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHURCH AND STATE RELATIONS AS SEEN FROM THE PROTESTANT EXPERIENCE, 1949–1987

How has the Chinese Communist Party been dealing with the Protestant church which it has all along regarded as an instrument of cultural imperialism? What procedures did the Party take to bring the pluralistic Protestant church in China under its control? How did the church leaders respond to government pressures? What kind of changing relationships have emerged during the long historical process since 1949? We shall now examine these questions in a historical manner. P. 73

During the initial stage (1949–50), the state sought to establish a patriotic agency to give direction to the Protestant church: the rise of the Three-self Movement

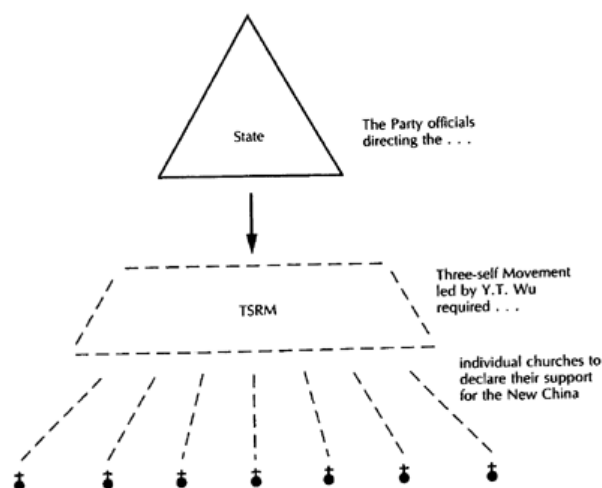
During the initial months after the Communist take over of China (October 1949 to July 1950), the new government was too busily involved with the establishment of economic and political order to bother with religious affairs, and churches were left alone to ‘do

their own thing' without much interference. Church activities, such as revival meetings, were carried on as usual. Many missionaries stayed with their Chinese colleagues. However, a small nucleus of progovernment church leaders was already in the making when these churchmen were invited to attend the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference held in Peking from September 23–30, 1949. At that Conference the new government was born, and on October 1st, Mao Tse-tung declared the formal beginning of the People's Republic of China. After the Conference the Protestant participants, headed by Y.T. Wu (the former Y.M.C.A. Publications Secretary), formed a 'Christian Visitation Team,' to visit the Protestant leaders in a few major cities, and to explain to them the new government's 'Common Programme' and its policy of freedom of religious belief.

During May 2, 6–21, 1950, when this group of leaders was visiting the churches in Peking, Premier Chou En-lai summoned its members to discuss the future course of Christianity in China. The end result of three nocturnal visits was the publication of a document called 'The Path of Endeavour for the Chinese Protestant Church during the Course of China's Construction', known in the West as the 'Christian Manifesto.' Published on July 28, 1950, this document was immediately circulated among church leaders throughout China for signature. The document basically called for Christians to oppose imperialism and to accept the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. It also called upon Protestant churches to become self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating, and hence it became the founding charter of the 'Three-self Movement'. The signature movement differentiated the 'patriotic' church leaders who signed it from those who refused to sign it.

Prior to Chou En-lai's summons, the National Christian Council (NCC) of China (formed in 1922) had already made plans on January 26, 1950, to hold a National Christian Conference during August 19-27th to discuss the appropriate Christian response to the new situation, but this plan was aborted soon after the May meeting between Chou and Y. T. Wu and his associates. The new body, which p. 74 took on the name 'Three-self Reform Movement', soon replaced the NCC as the national coordinating body representing Protestant Christianity in China.

The church and state relationship at this initial stage may be represented by the following chart:



During this stage individual churches still retained their autonomy. They could continue to conduct their regular religious activities. The state did not exercise its control directly over the churches, nor did it use existing Protestant channels, such as the NCC, to influence them, but created a new informal body made up of pro-government clergy and assisted by party secretaries. Through it the state made its position known to the

churches, and required their loyalty. This informal body, known as the 'Three-self Reform Movement', was not an ecclesiastical p.75 organization, but a 'political movement' which published a 'Manifesto' signed by 40 prominent church leaders.

This movement, headed by Y. T. Wu, began to give political direction to the Chinese Protestant Church on behalf of the new government, and church leaders had to reckon it as such accordingly.

During the 1951–1954 period, the state controlled the churches through the formation of the Chinese Protestant Anti-America and Aid Korea Three-self Reform Movement

After the Korean War broke out, especially after the Chinese People's Liberation Army crossed the Yalu River, America came to be regarded as an antagonistic contradiction in relation to China. On December 29 1950, the US froze Chinese assets in America, and China American assets in China. This change in Sino-American relations seriously affected the Chinese Communist government's attitude towards the Christian church, both Protestant and Catholic. All churches which had received, or were receiving, financial subsidy from America immediately came under suspicion, and were required to register themselves with the appropriate local authorities, to whom they had to make regular financial reports.

During April 16–20, 1951, the Religious Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Education and Culture summoned 151 Chinese Protestant leaders from churches which were receiving foreign subsidy. In this Peking conference, these church leaders were told to sever their relations with American imperialism. They were also taught how to conduct accusation meetings against 'reactionaries', missionaries and Chinese pastors who at one time or another had collaborated with Chiang Kai-shek or who had failed to pledge their support for the New China. Furthermore, at this meeting the 'Preparatory Committee of the Chinese Protestant Anti-America and Aid Korea Three-self Reform Movement Committee' was formally organized.

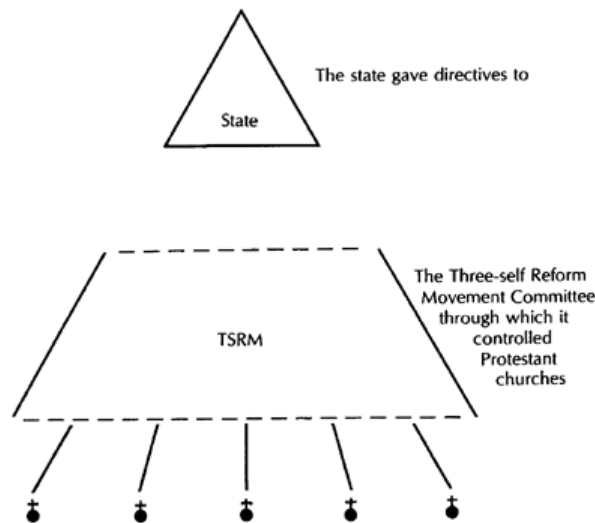
After the Peking Conference, the 151 delegates were told to carry out anti-imperialism accusation meetings in their own churches. Those who had successfully conducted such meetings were urged to join the Three-self Reform Movement. Simultaneously the TSRM also began to organize provincial and local committees. Such committees were made up of those church leaders who had declared their allegiance to the government. Meanwhile, the movement for signing the 'Christian Manifesto' continued. By 1953 nearly 400,000 out of a total of 840,000 Chinese Protestants signed this document. p.76

During this stage church and state relations may be described as follows:

Some of the ways by which the State exercised control over Protestant churches included the following: (1) Churches were required to hang the Five Star flag and/or Mao's picture; failure to do so could be used as evidence of reactionary attitudes, and such churches were tried. (2) Churches were required to sign the 'Manifesto', and to conduct anti-imperialist accusation meetings. (3) Christian educational and medical institutions founded by foreign missions were taken over by the state, and church boards disbanded by 1952. (4) Theological schools in the north were amalgamated into the Yen-ching School of Theology and those in the south into Nanking Theological Seminary. (5) Christian publishers were told to comply with the policies of the new China and most of them were closed down before 1954.

By 1953 all Protestant churches founded by foreign missions were brought under the control of the state through the agency of the TSRM. p.77 over by the state, and church boards disbanded by 1952. (4) Theological schools in the north were amalgamated into the Yen-ching School of Theology and those in the south into Nanking Theological

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The Secularization Myth

Harvie M. Conn

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In this article Harvie M. Conn explores the popular wisdom that faith and religion die in the city. As an expert in Urban Missions Conn brings out the difference between secularism and secularization, and rightly concludes that secularism is present in the city to no less extent than in the suburbs. That being the case, Conn calls upon Christians and churches to target the cities and not to flee from them, to analyse the felt needs behind the secularization process and to develop a holistic ministry for the city. With David Barrett's projection of 40% of world population living in the city by the year 2000, Conn's analyses become more imperative than ever.

Editor

Harvey Cox said in the 1960's 'The rise of urban civilization and the collapse of traditional religion are the two main hallmarks of our era and are closely related movements'.¹ Our urban world, he continued, is not persecuting religion. It simply bypasses and undercuts

¹ Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (London: SCM Press, 1965), p. 1.

it, going on to other things. Humanity is supposed to have come of age in the city but religion is no longer a part of that growing up process.

A graduate of the University of Tanzania underlines the argument. 'Where I come from religion is a natural part of life. But here, in the urban areas, everything is a hodgepodge. Family and traditional ties are broken, and other influences take over. The church suffers.' Timothy Monsma adds, 'Secularization is growing rapidly in Africa and those who benefit from upward mobility seem the most vulnerable.'² Is it true? Do 'urbanization and secularization go hand in hand as parallel processes'?³

In the United States there have even been some who wondered whether revivals would work in an urban setting. Early nineteenth-century revivalists had already noticed their success was greater in small towns than in cities. Charles Finney, the father of modern revivalism, expressed concern over city people too engrossed in worldly ambitions. 'See how crazy these are who are scrambling to get up ...,' he said, 'enlarging their houses, changing their styles of living ... It is like climbing up [the] masthead to be thrown off into the p. 79 ocean. To enjoy God you must come down, not go up there,' as the city continually tempted.⁴ The piety patterns of the rural church see the city as a secular menace.

CONFLICTING INFORMATION

But is this all true? is secularization one of the basic dimensions of urbanism, an urban part of 'the fundamental difference between ruralism and urbanism'?⁵

Even Harvey Cox has had to backtrack a bit. Almost twenty years after his vision of the modern technological city and its secular style, he has looked again.⁶ Religion seems alive and fresh in the secular city. The populist piety of Jerry Falwell and fundamentalism, and the uninvited voice of liberation theology, are said to have risen from the ashes to challenge our postmodern world. Religion may indeed be returning to the secular city.

The cities of the Third World seem not to have 'been administered such a massive dose of secularization. Those in Latin America are permeated by a popular religiosity with Christian tinting. The cities of Africa reflect the influence of traditional religions—Islamic and Christian—although the distinction between religion and religious institution has begun to make its presence felt. The cities of Asia have their own religious colouring (excluding perhaps Japan and Hong Kong); even Saigon and Hanoi allow Christian religious institutions to maintain a viable presence'.⁷ The resurgence of the Christian church in the People's Republic of China reminds us that faith dies hard. In spite of the Red Guards and the Cultural Revolution, in spite of a massive educational campaign launched by Maoist secularization, religious institutions refuse to stay buried in China's cities.

² Timothy Monsma, *An Urban Strategy for Africa* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1979), p. 74.

³ Benjamin Tonna, *A Gospel for the Cities* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1982), p. 91.

⁴ William C. McLaughlin, *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (New York: Ronald Press, 1955), p. 119.

⁵ Francis DuBose, *How Churches Grow in an Urban World* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1978), pp. 111, 117–119.

⁶ Harvey Cox, *Religion in the Secular City* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984).

⁷ Tonna, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

Massive migration patterns into the cities do not dissipate religious commitments. In Lagos, Nigeria, religious groups are among the first organizations sought out by migrants after they arrive in the city. While they ordinarily wait several years to join other types of voluntary associations, they usually find their religious groups within the first year.⁸ p. 80

Even migration patterns from the Third World to the United States show this same stability of commitment to the traditional faith of the homeland. The south end of Dearborn, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit, is a community of approximately 5,000 people, of which over half is of Arab-Muslim cultural descent. A low to middle income working class community, the majority of its members are immigrants. It is probably the largest Muslim community in the United States.

Has the city secularized their commitment to Islam? A 1964 doctoral dissertation emphasizes the contrary. Their faith has acted as a basis for the Unity of the community. The traditional groupings of Islam, both the Sunni and Shi'a sects, retain their integrity and separate identity even in the new setting. Religious adjustments are few.⁹

European migration patterns to the United States from Christian communities yield similar results. Czechs, Poles, Germans, Jews and Irish gathered together in cultural neighbourhoods in the New World. There they shaped the urban villages we call 'ghettoes' in the industrial centres of North America. Here they carried on Old World social, familial and religious customs. 'Carrying their beliefs with them to America, the immigrants attempted to recreate their communal life of the Old World by implanting their traditional religion in America ... With family and job, religion was the focal point of immigrant life.'¹⁰

What is the overall shape of church life in the central cities of the United States? How does it compare to rural America? Russell Hale, in his new book, *The Unchurched: Who They Are and Why They Stay Away*, spent a year studying and interviewing people in selected counties of the nation with exceptionally high rates of alienation from established churches. His 'findings would suggest that, contrary to popular opinion, the unchurched phenomenon in the United States may be primarily rural rather than urban. Such an hypothesis needs further testing. Provisionally, however, one is impressed that ten of the fifteen largest cities in the United States have unchurched rates well below the national average.'¹¹

What accounts for this strong Christian presence in the central cities? The tremendous achievement in evangelism and church p. 81 planting carried on by black churches and black church leaders throughout the century. In 1899, only five black churches were reported in Chicago, although the black population was near 30,000. By 1940, one count, and a very conservative one, located 250 black churches in that city with over 135,000 members. By 1982, Chaney estimates there are close to 1,750 black Baptist churches alone, with 350,000 members. 'Multiply this kind of pattern by all the American cities where there are large black communities—specially black communities that have

⁸ Josef Gugler and William G. Flanagan, *Urbanization and Social Change in West Africa* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 78.

⁹ Atif Amin Wasfi, 'Dearborn Arab-Moslem Community: A Study of Acculturation'. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University (1964), pp. 128–141.

¹⁰ Randall M. Miller and Thomas D. Marzik, eds., *Immigrants and Religion in Urban America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1977), p. xv.

¹¹ Russell Hale, *The Unchurched. Who They Are and Why They Stay Away* (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1980), p. 173. Compare also: Earl Parvin, *Missions USA* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), p. 249.

developed since 1945—and you'll have a picture of the accomplishment in church planting that has taken place.'¹²

It is a black community, as well, that has not locked up its faith behind church doors. The black 'Bible-believing' community, unlike its white evangelical counter-part, has not suffered as radical a break between a life of faith and its exhibition in urban society and politics. The civil rights movement of the 1960's was fed by churches in prayer on their knees in the streets of Selma and Birmingham. Passivity in the face of urban secularization cannot be charged to Martin Luther King, Jr., or Jesse Jackson. The black preacher has swayed churches in Watts and the Democratic National Convention in 1983. The largest congregation in Philadelphia, Deliverance Evangelistic church, has over forty separate evangelistic ministries and traces its roots to Pentecostal traditions still living in the church. This same congregation has negotiated the purchase of a large piece of property in an area regarded by some as one of the most economically deprived neighbourhoods of the city. In July, 1985, they broke ground for the first of the buildings to go up—not a church but a twenty-one store shopping centre. Following it will be a hospital for the poor, and a day care centre and school for the neighbourhood. And, as a last step, the church building will be relocated in the area where they began.

All of this is certainly enough to question the full accuracy of a 'suburbanization', a concentration in the suburbs, of American religion. And, though a full study of religion in suburban life still remains to be written, enough information is in to question past generalizations. Some studies of church attendance indicate rates are higher for urban than suburban residents. And a 1968 study argues that 'the suburban return to religion resulted from the very forces that produced the suburban migration itself. In the case of religion, the postwar 'baby boom,' coupled with the traditional desire of American p. 82 parents to provide a religious education for their children, was the outstanding factor. As the number of school-aged children in the general population declined, so did the alleged religious revival'.¹³ Suburban Americans are no more prone to religiosity than their urban counterparts. People still bring to the suburbs the spiritual furniture of their previous residence. It has been rearranged, some of it reupholstered. But a chair is still a chair, not a sofa.

PERCEPTIONS AND MISPERCEPTIONS

Before us now are two apparently contradictory perceptions: secularism as the basic reality of urban life, and religion as alive and well in the city. Where does the truth lie?

Probably somewhere in between: the city as both religious and as secular, turning away from God and turning to Him as well. The secularist thesis needs many qualifications. (1) secularism touches rural life as well as urban, suburban and inner city life; (2) migration from a rural town to an urban setting does not automatically guarantee a loss of faith; (3) sometimes faith becomes stronger under urban pressures, more essential in preserving the links with home and kin; (4) some faith systems (like Islam) are more resistant than others to alleged urban corrosion; (5) not all cities in all cultures show the same degree of secularism; (6) secularism may not always be the strongest reason for what some see to be the failure of the church in the city.

¹² Charles L. Chaney, *Church Planting at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1982), pp. 102–105.

¹³ William M. Newman, 'Religion in Suburban America'. *The Changing Face of the Suburbs*. Barry Schwartz, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 267.

And in the same spirit, the religious revival thesis also needs its qualifications. (1) planting churches in the city is no simplistic guarantee of the conquest of secularism; (2) secularization can have a positive effect for church growth in addition to its negative impact; (3) secularism may make itself at home in the inner regions of a faith's worldview long before it shows in external rituals and institutions; (4) the contemporary worldwide spread of western lifestyle and technology is often the seedbed for the spread of secularism as well as an instrument in the propagation of the gospel.

Secularism, we are saying, is not exclusively an urban phenomenon, but it is most certainly a real one. It has a deteriorating effect on faith, sometimes mortal. At the same time, its strength and flexibility can be overemphasized by those already timid toward the city. Misperceptions can accelerate alarm and exaggerate the dangers. Outlining the sources of some of these mistaken generalizations can be [p. 83](#) helpful in keeping perspective. They can keep us from mythologizing the reality of secularism into some myth of overwhelming secularization.

1. Just recognizing that secularization may be mythologized is the first step in making progress. Myths, we argue, are not simply fairy stories created by unthinking 'primitives' to explain why lightning strikes or people dream. They are social fictions, created by the human heart out of its struggle with God, to represent what we want reality to be, not reflect what it is. They ideologize reality, using collected pieces of truth and bits of information (secularism in the city, in this case). And out of this they shape an illusion, something that will evoke vague and generalized images. And something that will help us flee God-given responsibility.

Is this what Harvey Cox has done with secularization in the city? Secularization has lost its negative edge under his handling. It seems interrelated, if not identical, with the Kingdom of God. Is he talking about the cities we are talking about or is he ideologizing an illusion about modern civilization? Is he talking about secularization in any negative sense or is he ideologizing an illusion about human potential and progress?

Do those who fear the loss of faith in the city do the same thing from a reverse direction? For Cox the city becomes a positive image of progress and secularizing change. For us it becomes the epitome of loss and corruption. But for both it is an illusion that motivates, Cox towards the city, we away from it.

In Pharisaic concern over cups and pitchers tainted by city use, we perceive the city as the source of our outside pollution and forget that 'whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him' ([Mark 7:18](#)). Worldliness is mythologized out of the human heart into a geographical area of heavy populations, density and heterogeneity. The Genesis history of Sodom is mythologized into an escape-from-the-city theology. But we forget that Lot's problem was not his making peace with the city; it was his making peace with the violence, the materialism and the sin of the city. That happened long before he went to dwell in Sodom. It happened in the country when he coveted the well-watered land that belonged to Abraham ([Genesis 13:5-13](#)). He could not see the wickedness for the water.

2. A deep part of the myth making comes from the way we see religion. Peter Glasner illustrates the various models created by the science of sociology to define the secularization process of human religions. The models are ideologized by science into social myths. And the myths, he continues, 'are based on the acceptance of reified [p. 84](#) categories produced outside sociological analysis without recognizing them as such'.¹⁴ So, for example, there is a preoccupation in much western sociology with the institutionalized aspects of 'religiosity'. The assumption here is that a usable definition of Christianity must

¹⁴ Peter Glasner, *The Sociology of Secularisation* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), pp. 7.

focus on function and be concerned with membership, ritual, attendance. These become crucial elements of a definition of religion. So any move away from this institutional participation involves religious decline and secularism.

Has Africa become secularized on this basis? One counts the number of lapsed Christians and says, 'Yes'. Or one counts the number of growing churches and says, 'No'.

If we are to break with this way of evaluating religion, we will have to see it in a more sweeping, a more holistic, way. Can we do it by saying that human life, in all its entirety, is religion, humanity's integral response action to God? Totalitarian in its scope because Gods demands are all embracing ([Deut. 10:11-12](#), [II Cor. 10:5](#)), its progress or decline cannot simply be measured by church buildings or a lack of them; its measuring stick becomes its commitment to the words of the Preacher: 'Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man' ([Eccles. 12:13](#)).¹⁵

Seen in this way, secularization becomes a problem older than modernity.¹⁶ And one also that cannot easily be identified simply with the lifestyle of the modern technological city only. It manifests itself wherever the human heart struggles to break free from the rule of God.

3. Identifying secularization with the city is an easy myth for North Americans to build. Generally we see ourselves sharply distinct from nature and all other forms of life. And guided by our stress on material things, nature's significance for us is defined in terms of that which can be harnessed for producing material welfare. Belief in the evil of human nature, even if an occasional American professes it, is overshadowed by the view of our ability to change our environment and be affected by it.¹⁷ When we are sick, there is aspirin. When we [p.85](#) are impoverished, there is work to get us what we need. The world and its cities are things we can control and use for self-improvement. The roots of secularism are all here.

How then does it become a myth? Myths are always self-defence mechanisms. Myths keep us from blaming ourselves as the guilty; they seek to fix responsibility elsewhere. Who can we blame? There is always the city. Blame the city for depersonalization, anarchy, anonymity, and crime.

4. The reality becomes the myth when the church is not there to question the function. And all too frequently that has been true. The picture is frequently the same in Africa and Asia. Churches 'have failed to realize fully the tremendous needs of the multitudes who left their homes and went to the cities. Not infrequently, Christians have moved to the cities before the church did so'.¹⁸ Has secularism created resistant cities? Or has church apathy fostered neglected cities? Are the urban unresponsive, resistant or neglected?

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

Secularism is present in the cities, as present as it is in the country or the suburbs. And it has a corroding impact we cannot minimize. How can we respond to it?

¹⁵ Paul G. Schrottenboer, *The Meaning of Religion* (Toronto: Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship, n.d.), pp. 4-6.

¹⁶ This is a point I have made earlier in 'The Kingdom of God and the City of Man: A History of the City/Church Dialogue', *Discipling the City*, Roger S. Greenway, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), pp. 17-53.

¹⁷ Edward C. Stewart, *American Cultural Patterns: A Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Washington, DC: Society for Intercultural Education Training, and Research, 1972), pp. 61-65.

¹⁸ Peter Falk, *The Growth of the Church in Africa* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), p. 426.

1. *Target the cities, do not flee them.* Here are some of the church's greatest challenges. Waldron Scott, onetime General Secretary of the World Evangelical Fellowship, tells of striking up a conversation with a young student in Bangkok. 'During our conversation I asked him, "Have you heard of Jesus Christ?" He responded, "Is that a new brand of soap?" At first I wanted to chuckle. Then I realized the enormity of what I had just heard: fully half of the world p. people today—and quite possibly as many as two-thirds—do not know the difference between Jesus Christ and a bar of soap! Yet Dr. George Peters, a well-travelled observer, says, "I find very few of the mission societies who are really specializing in city evangelism".'¹⁹ The question is not, Will the church lose the city? The question is, Will the church ever enter the city?

Everywhere the picture seems the same—not simply that of too many people or even too much secularism, but that of too few p. 86 churches. Bangkok boasts a population of 5.5 million, Protestants and Catholics numbering at most 45,000, but only 102 churches as of 1983. Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka, is the home of over 600,000 people from eight different ethnic groups. Only fifty-one local congregations exist to meet the needs of a land area spread over some 9,000 acres.

The problem is not primarily the dominance of secularism. It is the absence of the church and a Christian response to the need.

Charles Chaney suggests the problem is the same in the United States. He divides America's population into three groups—the Insiders (sincere, ardent believers in Christ), the Sometimers (nominal Christians whose commitment never seriously affects the way they think or act), and the Outsiders (those Who make no profession of faith in Christ at all). The vast majority of the Outsiders and Sometimers, he argues, are living in the great cities of our land. But 'these are the very places where we have the fewest number of churches, proportionately'.²⁰ Spotlighting the Southern Baptist commitment to the city, Chaney goes on to note that 35.4 percent of the American population lives in the twenty-five largest Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSA) but only 8.7 percent of the existing Southern Baptist churches are located in those SMSA's. Less than nine percent of those churches are responsible for evangelizing thirty-six percent of the population.

2. *Create a taxonomy of urban secularism.* Looking at opposing generalizations and misperceptions should say at least one thing to us clearly. Secularism and secularization at this point are categories more sermonic than scientific. The need of the hour is a careful and Christian examination of what makes secularism tick. And more specifically what makes it tick in the city. Until that study is undertaken, little positive good will come of essays like this.

What sort of questions need to be answered in this kind of research? Here are some from my growing list.

a. Does secularization need a more precise definition than the one we have suggested in this article? How can we develop a more precise definition and still retain an understanding of religion that cannot lose the biblical sense of wholeness we have argued for already?

b. Is there a point or points in this secularizing process where people can be said to be less 'closed' to the good news that God reigns in Christ? Does secularization help in the destruction of some faiths and thus remove roadblocks for the gospel? p. 87

It is certainly true that animism in the industrial cities tends to lose its grip on the adherent. Respondents in two Xhosa-speaking communities in South Africa, one relatively

¹⁹ Waldron Scott, *Bring Forth Justice* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), p. 19.

²⁰ Chaney, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

rural and the other urban, were asked whether they had ever suffered a misfortune and, if so, if it was caused mystically (by witch-craft, sorcery, ancestors). Seventy-three percent of the rural population attributed it to such sources but only forty-five percent of those from the city did. 'Rural residents were far more likely than their urban counterparts to mention mystical causes.'²¹

Singapore's recent history underlines this same pattern of the disintegration of animism in the city. The breakdown of traditional Chinese religion, basically animistic at its core, is widespread, people either become Christians or secularists.²² And among those who are so-called secularists, there remains a very positive attitude to religion. In a study of secularist opinion in 1970, reports H. Keith Hinton, it was found that 'eighty-three percent were still interested in religion though not affiliated with religion because Christianity has failed to reach them with the truth'.²³

Hinton's conclusion is a bit more enthusiastically optimistic than I think we can be now about the secularization process. No definition of what he calls 'pure secularism' is provided, no process of secularization is sketched. Instead of saying the secularists 'are mostly open', is the situation not better evaluated by saying they are 'less closed'? After all, judgments as to the winnability of a people for Christ are made not solely on the basis of how close they have come to Christ but also how far away they have moved. And secularization, in its basic thrust, is a movement away. A house swept clean of the demon of animism, unless filled with Christ, may find itself filled with three or five or seven demons of secularization.

3. *Search for the felt needs behind secularization.* What draws people to secularism as a way of life? What frustrates them about secularism as an answer to their questions? Are there social classes that seem more open to its influence? Answers to these queries can start us on the way to creative Christian responses and evangelistic strategies.

Keith Hinton's study of secularism in Singapore, for example, more than just a negative attitude towards all religions p.88 generally. The vast number of secularists in that society are just disenchanted with their old traditional religion. These people are not necessarily closed to the gospel nor even resistant to it.

All this points to what has been called a 'positive' advantage of secularization, an erosion of traditional faiths and a search for new perspectives. Even the Muslim community, one of the most secure religions, can show this same erosion. We noted earlier the general stability of that faith, even after migration to the United States. However, even this now needs qualifications. First generation new arrivals in Dearborn, Michigan maintain their old Muslim values. But among those with a longer history in the United States there is 'a very weak sense of religiosity'. In this group very few conduct daily prayers and participate in the annual fast during the season called Ramadan. None conduct the pilgrimage ritual to Mecca, although some of them are wealthy. The rigid, traditional religion no longer seems fully appropriate for the new social environment. Religion for these generations fulfils the need for nationalist sentiments. From this group an 'increasing number of persons ... convert to Christianity. Although their number is very small, it is increasing from time to time.'²⁴

²¹ William J. Hanna and Judith L. Hanna, *Urban Dynamics in Black Africa* (New York: Aldine Publ. Co., 1981), p. 60.

²² Keith Hinton, *Growing Churches Singapore Style, Ministry in an Urban Context* (Singapore: Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 1985), p. 85.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

²⁴ Atif, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

Tim Matheny has discovered similar circumstances among Arab Muslims of the Middle East. There, in a category of people he designates as transitional Arabs, one finds a people neither traditional nor modern. They are people in motion, people in between. A majority of them were born in the villages and have since moved to the urban centres. In fact, it is the cities of the Middle East that have the highest concentration of Transitionals. Willing to reexamine their faith, open to innovation, they are less bound by a weakening Islamic stronghold. From them comes the largest number of converts to Christianity in the Middle East. In Lebanon, eighty-five percent of the Muslims who have become Christians have been drawn from this group. In Jordan they number seventy-four percent and in Egypt sixty-eight percent.²⁵ Parallel to the secularists of Singapore, these transitional Arabs represent the vast majority of the high school and college students. It is not simply secularization alone that must be studied but the felt needs answered at that point by the secularizing process.

Among the working class people, for example, 'there are many p. 89 secularists whose felt needs refer more specifically to their experience of powerlessness, unemployment, environmental alienation, conflict between class solidarity and the expectations and pressures from the society as a whole. This is especially true in the context of the Third World. Christians should be engaged in solving these problems in their society. At the same time, these secularists need to sense and appropriate the power of the Holy Spirit through the salvation and Lordship of Jesus Christ in the midst of social insecurity and economic powerlessness.'²⁶

Again, many secularists are poor; secularization is not simply identifiable with the privileged. These poorer classes see Christianity either as a threat to their desire to become wealthy, or as a means to keep them forever poor. The Christianity that will best touch them will require 'costly involvement from Christians who exemplify in their own lives the words they speak concerning Jesus and wealth. It is, sadly, often the actions of affluent Christian churches and leaders which reinforce the secularist poor in his position'.²⁷

And how large in our urban societies is that class of secularist now disillusioned with secularism itself? Disenchanted with the very process of disenchantment they have initiated, they find the promises of science and materialism empty and unfulfilled. They turn to the cults in the United States and to the occult in the Caribbean. The revival of animism in the city may point to this kind of frustration. Driven to the point of despair, they may be missed in our diagnosis of symptoms rather than the disease.

4. *Develop a holistic ministry for the city.* 'The great problem stemming from increased urbanization', comments Howard Moody, a New York pastor, "is not that we do not have churches where the people are at or where the great masses are; rather, it is that the very folkways, activities and organizations of the church are irrelevant, sometimes actually anti-urban ... Our whole way of being the church in the twentieth century is shown to be inadequate.'²⁸

²⁵ Tim Matheny, *Reaching the Arabs. A Felt Need Approach* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1981), pp. 5-6.

²⁶ *Christian Witness to Secularized People*, (Wheaton: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1980), p. 18.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

²⁸ Quoted in Richard J. Tlapa, *The New Apostles. The Mission to the Inner City* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977), p. 73.

Secularization as a process leaves no part of urban life untouched; politics, economics, education, communication are moved by its impact. By contrast, in places like Latin America, 'evangelicals have failed to teach and apply a New Testament social ethic, leaving no p. 90 viable alternative other than Marxist revolution.'²⁹ Church growth, separated from these areas without intention by a strategy concern for numerical and organic growth, can become ecclesiastical obesity. New life in Christ is commonly interpreted negatively—no smoking, no drinking, no parties, no fornicating—and a sharp line of demarcation is drawn between the church (everything good) and urban society (everything bad). Secularization concerns itself with all of urban humanity. But the church reduces the totalistic dimensions of the gospel to a narrowed focus on 'saving souls.' As a result, the church cannot respond to secularization. It has already capitulated to it in the form of a disengagement of the gospel from society.

A biblical call to repentance and saving faith in Christ does not call us away from the city; it calls us to life under the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all areas of the city. Personal commitment to Jesus Christ is foundational. But on that foundation we erect a model house, demonstrating the full implications of the gospel for urban Christians where they live, work and spend their time. 'Occupying until he comes' does not mean we board up our house in the city, and stock it with enough spiritual food to last until the heavenly Landlord comes to break the siege. Between the coming of Christ and his coming again, the heirs of the earth and its cities are pilgrims and strangers. As pilgrims we share Christ's reproach as strangers in our own inheritance. But as heirs ([Matt. 5:5](#)), we exercise dominion over created things. Our stewardship over creation, given in the garden ([Genesis 1:28](#)), and misshapen by sin ([Genesis 3:17-19](#)), is not reduced by the saving work of Christ to keeping the church lawn cut and mimeographing the Sunday bulletin. Creation, and our stewardship of it, is restored in Christ. The tyrant of the creation city was dislodged at Calvary and the cities of the earth have been given back to the rightful Sovereign and his people. Our calling now is to affirm his stamp of ownership on every building, street and institution in the city. We are the city's voluntary tutorial staff, instructing the urban population to observe all that Jesus commanded ([Matt. 28:19](#)).

God's urban policy is more fully elaborated in the New Testament, and Jesus' theme of the Kingdom of God. Here we learn that 'the name of the Lord' we are to spray paint on the walls of the world's cities is Jesus. The name of the Lord has become the name of Jesus, 'the name which is above every name' ([Phil. 2:9](#)). To speak of the kingdom is to speak of Jesus, to enter the kingdom is to believe in Jesus ([John 3:3, 5](#)). p. 91 To see Jesus casting out demons is to see that the kingdom has come ([Matt. 12:28](#)). The preaching of Jesus is the seed of the kingdom ([Mark 4:3-14](#)), his miracles are signs of the power of the kingdom unleashed ([Luke 10:9](#)). The kingdom, in short, is the rule of the King Jesus.

As his kingdom disciples, we wait for his final coming and the consummation of that kingdom. And we wait by seeking first his kingdom and his righteousness ([Matt. 6:33](#)). What is the object of our quest? We are to seek God's righteousness—his sway, his rule, his reign in our lives, and in our cities. In anticipation of his coming, we pray, 'Thy kingdom come' ([Matt. 6:10](#)). Are we praying for heaven to come to earth? 'In a sense ... but heaven is an object of desire only because the reign of God is to be more perfectly realized than it is now ... Therefore, what we pray for is this, Thy kingdom come; *thy will be done* on earth as it is in heaven' ... In my church, as it is in heaven ... in my life, as it is in heaven ... The confidence that this prayer is to be answered when God brings human history to the divinely ordained consummation enables the Christian to retain his balance and sanity of

²⁹ Roger S. Greenway, *An Urban Strategy for Latin America* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), p. 117.

mind in this mad world in which we live'.³⁰ Secularization is to be assaulted day by day by the piercing light of the kingdom.

This is not 'unrealistic optimism' unless your theological perspective has no place for the reality of the kingdom now.³¹ It is balanced by remembering that we are 'people between the times', racked by the tension that still exists between the kingdom of God and the last ditch efforts of the kingdom of darkness in its death throes. In fact, the tension is stronger as we remember that everything now belongs to Christ and nothing can exist outside of him. Our kingdom task in the city is not easy. Jesus came to redeem the whole cosmos, to 'buy back' all things. But until he returns, our interim world is shared with non-Christians. And we are called on to recognize their rights to share with us in the development of the city. These rights, however, are 'founded, not in their fallacious assumption of human autonomy, but in the long suffering goodness of God, who has not withdrawn from the sinner the world his wickedness has forfeited, but has given him its fruit in toil and suffering'.³² p. 92

Sharing all those rights will make our struggle against secularization all the more difficult. But knowing that God has given them ([Matt. 5:45](#)), and that one day they will be taken away must always make our struggle hopeful.

How would we describe the ministry of the Madison Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Paterson, New Jersey? Made up largely of generations of Dutch immigrants to the United States, the church in the 1950's began to face a changing city. Would they stay and minister to their growing black community or would they leave for the suburbs? They decided to stay and be a community church.

Through the sixties, the church developed an intentional neighbourhood outreach and community ministry. 'In addition to the traditional congregational functions of worship and teaching, church members became involved in neighborhood nursery schools, youth groups, after-school centres and other programmes; unlike the denominational exclusiveness of the past, these new ministries were directed to people outside the congregation in the predominantly black neighbourhood.'³³

By the later sixties black adults began to join the church. Within fifteen years, this 'bastion of white Dutch ethnicity' was transformed into a diverse, integrated, multi-ethnic body of believers. Pre-evangelism had become evangelism.

Many of the church's outreach programmes begun in the sixties still function. Church members are involved as a Bread for the World 'covenant church' and help run a food pantry. Some members also work in a prison ministry and a local shelter for the homeless. More recently, members have begun participating in the recently formed Paterson chapter of Habitat for Humanity. Habitat has plans to construct twenty homes over the next five years—a much needed ministry in a city with severe housing problems.

The co-pastors, one black, one white, explain their philosophy of ministry in terms of the Calvinistic theology of their denomination. It is a faith which promotes holistic

³⁰ George E. Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publ. Comp., 1954), pp. 21–23.

³¹ An example of this very misunderstanding of the obligations of a present-future kingdom is evident in: Arthur Johnston, 'Essentials for Urban Ministry', *The Alliance Witness*, Vol. 120, No. 5 (February 27, 1985), 9–10.

³² E. P. Clowney, 'Secularism and the Christian Mission', *Westminster Theological Journal*, Vol. XXI, No. 1 (November, 1958), 51.

³³ 'Serving Christ in the City,' *The Other Side*, Vol. 21, No. 5 (July, 1985), 8.

ministry. 'An understanding of the word and the deed go together', says one of the two. 'We're trying to claim the Lordship of Christ in all segments of life.'

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