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Editorial

On Being an Evangelical Theologian

In his opening convocation address to the students of Princeton Theological Seminary, September 17, 1996, President Thomas W Gillespie spoke of the challenge and shaking of the self that comes to theological students as they move from the self-confident assurance of faith to doubt and confusion and then hopefully by graduation, to maturity of faith and selfhood and to theological conviction. He urged that becoming theologians was more than speaking in the first person of pietistic subjectivity or in the third person of Enlightenment objectivity; it is an ongoing dialogue with God and truth.

Becoming a theologian ought to be the goal of every evangelical committed to Christ and to the gospel. It is a process that grows out of a personal relationship with God in Christ and with the Holy Spirit, for a theologian who doesn't burn with the love and righteousness of God will soon become 'a sounding gong or a clanging cymbal'. But equally, evangelical theologians are those who learn to exegete faithfully the Scriptures as the Word of God in their own biblical context and then let them speak to us in our many cultural contexts, so that we can effectively communicate to others. Theology is both universal and local. It is the meeting point of all that is good and true in Pietism and in the Enlightenment, or to put it into contemporary language, modernity and post-modernity.

Becoming an evangelical theologian does not take place in a spiritual vacuum. It is born out of the struggles of the community of faith, the church as the people of God. It is also a hermeneutical process of critical analysis of the church in mission and at the same time identifying with her 'warts and all'. Many a failure in cross-cultural mission reflects a failure to understand church dogmatics and to engage in the life of the church. Becoming an evangelical theologian takes shape in the heat of engagement with the world in all its achievements and failures, ugliness and beauty, poverty and riches, lostness and transformation. In becoming an evangelical theologian, one faces many agonizing questions that remain unanswered, such as 'Has God always been at work in cultures not exposed to the gospel?' 'How is he at work in the market place today?' These and other questions are raised in this issue of ERT.

'How great and unsearchable are the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God.'

What is Evangelical Theology?

Klaas Runia

Is the Evangelical Movement a mood or a system of beliefs or propositions? Are evangelicals agreed on the essentials? What issues are unanswered? These are themes Professor Runia, the well known European theologian, addresses in this wide ranging article. He notes that the modern Evangelical Movement has produced few confessions of faith and argues for the need to see divine revelation as a whole.
Editor

This paper was originally written as a chapter in a book about the Evangelical Movement in The Netherlands. During the last twenty years this movement has been

growing considerably, and what I like in particular is the fact that in recent years it has been growing within the historical churches. Of late they have even organized a fellowship of evangelical ministers within these historical churches. And to present themselves to the churches and to their colleagues they wrote a book on evangelicalism.

They asked me to write a chapter on the question: 'What is evangelical theology?' In itself this seems to be a very simple question, but in reality it is hard to answer.

I begin with some general remarks.

First of all we have to ask ourselves: Is there really an evangelical theology? Is this movement and its theology not too complex and too variegated for us to be able to speak of evangelical theology as a clearly definable entity?

A Dutch sociologist of religion who studied the movement in the Netherlands arrived at the following description: 'It is a conglomerate of fundamentalists, premillennialists, moderate and radical evangelicals, in short: groups of believers who differ from each other on many points of their beliefs.'¹

This corresponds with my own experiences in FEET, the Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians which was founded after The Lausanne Congress in 1974 and of which I have been chairman for fourteen years. At our biennial conference there is always a great variety of theologians and theologies. From England there are Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists and Pentecostals. From Germany there are Lutheran, Reformed, Baptist and Pentecostal theologians. Among the Dutch participants we encounter various kinds of Reformed theologians (belonging to different Reformed churches) and also some Baptists. All these people are very much aware of their theological 'roots', and from conviction they stand in their own theological tradition. At the same time they consider themselves evangelicals.

It is quite obvious that within the context of such a wide variety it is impossible to speak of a *united* and *uniform* evangelical theology. The American evangelical Donald Bloesch says that evangelicalism is a 'mood' rather than a 'theological system'. Carl Henry expresses it somewhat differently: 'Evangelicalism is as much a temperament as a theology.' Ralph Winter says it very succinctly: 'It is a movement, not a theology.'²

In spite of all this it is possible to enumerate a number of features which can be found in nearly all evangelical theologians. I shall come back to that presently.

My second observation is that the growing interest in theology among evangelical theologians is a matter for rejoicing. In the past, in both the English-speaking and the German-speaking world, there was often an attitude of reluctance with regard to academic theology. Bloesch even speaks of an 'anti-theological bias'.

The main reason for this bias was the fact that in most universities and seminaries liberal theology dominated the scene and, unfortunately, all too often this liberal theology pulled evangelical students from their evangelical moorings. Naturally, by this negative attitude the Evangelical Movement itself strengthened the dominant stance of liberal theology. By turning their back on solid academic work they left the field to the others and forgot to arm their congregations and their own children against the attacks on the evangelical tradition. Too often the most intelligent among the evangelical young people were drawn into the liberal camp.

Thirdly, in their defence the evangelicals quite often resorted to a simplistic and literalistic quoting of Scripture. They would say: 'Yes, but Scripture says . . .' What they

¹ H. C. Stoffels, *Wandelen in het licht*, (1990), p. 72.

² R. Winter, *Christianity Today*, (1976), pp. 37ff.

often did not realize was that they themselves were also using glasses for reading Scripture, namely, the glasses of their own tradition.

In our reading of Scripture we nearly always use the tinted glasses that were handed down to us by our spiritual ancestors. The German evangelical theologian W. Schlichting wrote: 'The blind spot of the biblicists is that they do not realize to what extent their own thinking is influenced by the time in which they live, by their predecessors and their surroundings—while they criticize this attitude severely in others.'³ We should always remember that all theology, including our own evangelical theology, is 'contextual', that is, influenced and sometimes even shaped by the culture we live in.

My fourth and last observation is that evangelicals are often inclined to summarize the Christian faith in a number of 'main truths' or 'central propositions'. These more or less isolated and disconnected truths and propositions constitute the platform upon which evangelicals meet and recognize each other.

This occurred at the foundation of the first Evangelical Alliance in Britain, in the year 1846. The founding fathers selected nine propositions from their Protestant heritage and adopted them as the basis of the Alliance. Nearly all Evangelical Alliances and many other Evangelical Associations have followed this example.

The propositions adopted in 1846 were the following:

(1) The Divine Inspiration, Authority, and Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures. (2) The Right and Duty of Private Judgment in the Interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. (3) The Unity of the Godhead, and the Trinity of Persons therein. (4) The utter Depravity of Human Nature, in consequence of the Fall. (5) The Incarnation of the Son of God, His work of Atonement for sinners of mankind, and His Mediatorial Intercession and Reign. (6) The Justification of the sinner by Faith alone. (7) The Work of the Spirit in the Conversion and Sanctification of the sinner. (8) The Immortality of the Soul, the Resurrection of the Body, the Judgment of the World by our Lord Jesus Christ, with the Eternal Blessedness of the Righteous, and the Eternal Punishment of the Wicked. (9) The Divine Institution of the Christian Ministry, and the obligation and perpetuity of the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.⁴

TRADITIONS OF THE EVANGELICAL MOVEMENT

Naturally these central propositions were not selected at random. There is a theological interrelationship between them, an interrelationship which results from the fact that the Evangelical Movement has its own 'tradition'.

One can discern at least three main 'layers' in this tradition.

a. The bottom-layer is the *Reformation of the 16th century*. Nearly all evangelicals trace their pedigree back to this Reformation. As a matter of fact, originally the term 'evangelical' was synonymous with 'reformational' and was the opposite of 'poperish' or 'papistic'. Evangelicals like to speak of the *solas* of the Reformation: *sola fide, sola gratia, solus Christus* and *sola Scriptura*.

b. The second layer has a different name in the various European countries, but in each case there is a definite kinship between the movements concerned. For the English-speaking world I am thinking of *Puritanism*, for the German-speaking world of *Pietism* and for the Netherlands of the soc. '*Nadere Reformatie*', which literally means: the More Precise or Further Reformation with a view to both personal piety and personal morality.

³ W. Schlichting, *Theologische Beiträge*, (1975), pp. 163ff.

⁴ Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement*, (1954), p. 320.

c. The third layer is formed by the various *Revival Movements* in the 18th and 19th centuries. These movements occurred mainly in the English-speaking world, but in Germany and the Netherlands there were similar revivals.

In addition to these three main layers which are common to all evangelicals throughout the whole world, there are two more movements which had their beginnings in our own century and which have deeply influenced certain quarters of the Evangelical Movement.

In the first place I am thinking of the movement of *Fundamentalism* which in the period of 1910–1930, in reaction against liberal theology, had a great impact on American evangelicalism and, from America, also on European evangelicalism.

In the second place there is the *Pentecostal Movement*, which in the very first year of our century also started in America and gradually spread over the entire world. In the second half of this century it acquired its own place within the Evangelical Movement. The initial antagonism, especially among British evangelicals and German ‘Evangelikalen’, has little by little given way to a sympathetic hearing and tolerance. This happened in particular in the sixties when Pentecostal ideas, in the form of the so-called *Charismatic Movement*, acquired their own legitimate place within the historical churches.

A good and helpful summary of the main tenets of the evangelical faith and theology is to be found in the so-called Lausanne Covenant of 1974, which was drafted largely by John Stott.

Without wanting to minimize the influences of Fundamentalism and Pentecostalism, I still believe that the first three layers are decisive for the entire Evangelical Movement. One can trace the main emphases of evangelical theology via these three layers.

Naturally, they always exist within the various traditions of the countries concerned, and are therefore always coloured by their particular context. Anglican evangelicals are usually deeply influenced by the Calvinistic tradition and in many ways are rather ‘Reformed’ in their theology. British evangelicals belonging to the Free Churches or to the so-called Free Groups are usually more Arminian in their theology—often more unwittingly than intentionally—, while the Free Groups also show many marks of the Revival Movements.

German ‘Evangelikalen’ (the name was transliterated from the English word ‘evangelicals’, because in Germany the term ‘evangelical’ was already used by the Lutheran State Churches) find their roots in particular in Pietism and to a great extent also in the revival movements. Scandinavian evangelicals usually belong to the Lutheran State Churches, although there are also strong Free Churches, in particular in Norway.

The Dutch Evangelical Alliance consists mainly of people belonging to the so-called Free Groups who are usually deeply influenced by the ideas and ideals of the revival movement. At the same time there is an increasing number of ministers in the historical churches who consider themselves evangelicals. Last year they organized themselves in an association which has as its aim the spreading of evangelical ideas within the United Protestant Church, which will be a union of the two largest Reformed Churches and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Netherlands.

ESSENTIALS OF THE EVANGELICAL MOVEMENT

In spite of all the differences, which largely result from the differing national, cultural and theological contexts, the threefold stratification of the tradition, which I mentioned before, means that most evangelicals do have certain common traits. They commonly consist of the following essentials.

(a) The unconditional acceptance of *Holy Scripture* as the authoritative Word of God for us.

(b) Personal faith in *Jesus Christ* and his work of salvation and a personal relationship with him by the work of the *Holy Spirit*.

(c) The emphasis on the *missionary task* of the individual believer and of the congregation as a whole.

These three essentials are obviously due to the historical development I sketched before. These three main tenets of the Evangelical Movement clearly emerge from the three-layered tradition. The first essential goes back to the Reformation of the 16th century with its *sola Scriptura*. The second goes back to Puritanism in Great Britain, to Pietism in Germany and Scandinavia, and to the 'More Precise' Reformation in the Netherlands.

As is to be expected, this threefold theological harmony does not mean uniformity. Again and again one notices different emphases within the common background. And yet, in spite of these differences in ecclesiastical tradition, the common characteristics are so manifest that one evangelical recognizes the other as a fellow-evangelical. When theologians from different European countries and from different ecclesiastical traditions meet each other every two years at the FEET Conference, they have no difficulty at all in accepting each other as fellow evangelicals.

For this reason it is worthwhile to elaborate on these common features.

I Holy Scripture as the Word of God

The unconditional acceptance of the Bible as the Word of God is characteristic of all evangelicals and this puts them clearly in line with the 16th century Reformers. The Reformation was a movement 'back to Scripture' and to the gospel proclaimed in it. In the course of the centuries all kinds of ecclesiastical and theological traditions had been added to the Bible, with the result that the gospel of free grace had been obscured.

In his defence of this gospel Luther time and again appealed to Scripture. He refused to be silenced by an appeal to the Church Fathers or to important medieval theologians. When this was demanded of him, he replied: 'Only if you can show me on the basis of Holy Scripture that I am wrong, I will recant. But if you can't do this, I will adhere to this gospel, even if it may cost me my life.' Calvin, and the other Reformers as well, was a Scriptural theologian too. For him the Bible was the final court of appeal. It is not surprising, therefore, that nearly all Reformed Confessions contain a long chapter or article on Holy Scripture as the inspired and authoritative Word of God.

From its very beginning the Evangelical Movement emphasized this authority of Holy Scripture as the Word of God and its normativity as to both doctrine and the Christian life. As we have already seen, the first article of the basis of the British Evangelical Alliance speaks of: 'the Divine Inspiration, Authority, and Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures'⁵. This does not mean that these people were blind to the humanity or, if you prefer, the human side of the Bible (although perhaps they paid too little attention to it). In the face of the prevailing liberalism of the day their main concern was the sufficiency, the clarity or perspicuity and the normativity or authority of Holy Scripture.

⁵ Cf. the second paragraph of the Lausanne Covenant, which deals with the authority and power of the Bible and opens with the statement: 'We affirm the divine inspiration, truthfulness and authority of both Old and New Testament Scriptures in their entirety as the only written Word of God, without error in all that it affirms and the only infallible rule of faith and practice.' J. D. Douglas ed., *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, (1975), p. 3).

However, more has to be said here. As we will presently see, when we deal with the other main features of evangelical theology, the strong points of the Evangelical Movement often reveal their weakness as well. This is quite clear in the case of Holy Scripture.

Making a careful study of evangelical theology, one soon discovers that in spite of the common recognition of the *formal* authority of Scripture, there often are far-reaching differences in the interpretation of Scripture. At this very point it becomes manifest that, indeed, there is no common evangelical theology. What is often lacking is the recognition of the *unity* of Scripture.

This may also be the reason why the bases of evangelical associations often consist of a number of more or less 'loose', disconnected points of doctrine. Within the Evangelical Movement there have been very few, if any, attempts to produce a confession of faith. A typical feature of the ecclesiastical confessions was and is that the truth, proclaimed in Scripture, is seen as an organic whole. One can easily discover this unity in both the confessions of the various churches (such as the Thirty-Nine Articles or the Westminster Confession) and the catechisms (such as the Heidelberg Catechism and the Shorter and Larger Catechism of Westminster). Compared with this unity of the various confessions and catechisms evangelical thinking is often rather fragmentary. The closest the movement has come to a confession is perhaps the so-called Lausanne Covenant, which shows that as a world-wide movement the Evangelical Movement is also able to draft a joint and united confessional statement.

Many evangelicals are inclined to adopt a *biblicistic* approach to the Bible. In particular in eschatology there is a tendency to collect and mix all kinds of statements from very different biblical contexts and to take them literally, which often leads to strange conceptions, such as two Second Comings, two or even three Resurrections from the dead, etc. Fortunately the days are gone where evangelicals judged each other by their acceptance or non-acceptance of the rapture before, during or after the great tribulation.

Another point that has to be mentioned here is that although all Evangelicals share the conviction that the writings of the Old and New Testaments are *inspired by the Holy Spirit*, they are by no means unanimous as to what we must understand by this inspiration.

Evangelical theologians of a former generation were often not far removed from a mechanical conception of inspiration. At times they gave the impression that the Holy Spirit had 'dictated' the contents of Scripture. The theologians of the 'Old Princeton School' (Hodge Sr and Jr, and Warfield) liked to speak of 'verbal' inspiration.⁶ I am happy to see that today very few evangelical theologians are willing to go that far. In his new dogmatics Donald Bloesch emphasizes that Scripture is both the Word of God and the word of men. He appeals to the way Calvin used the concept of 'accommodation' in his doctrine of revelation. God is like a nurse who bows down to the child and chatters with

⁶ Cf. also Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book 9, 11, 20–25

If any answerable style I can obtain
Of my celestial Patroness, who deigns
Her nightly visitation unimplored,
And dictates to me slumbering, or inspires
Easy my unpremeditated verse. . . .

His nephew Eduard Philips tells us that Milton used to wake up in the morning with lines of poetry fully formed in his head. Blind, he then dictated them.

it in a child's limited language. In a similar way the Spirit has given to the writers of the Bible 'a reliable but incomplete knowledge of God's will and purpose'⁷.

We have also noticed that in recent years quite a few evangelical theologians have been willing to make use of some of the methods and results of the so-called historical-critical research of Scripture, while at the same time they refuse to share the often hyper-critical approach to Scripture. Initially there was a strong opposition to this historical-critical approach to Scripture, because it started from presuppositions that were contrary to the self-testimony of Scripture. But it cannot be denied that the advocates of this approach had come upon a real problem.

Another point, related to the foregoing, is the question of whether we should speak of the *inerrancy* of the Bible. Champions of inerrancy usually claim that the Bible is inerrant in all respects, not only in its theological contents but also in all geographical and historical details. Others prefer to speak of the reliability, veracity and truthfulness of the Bible, taking these terms in their original historical sense: the Bible *never fails* to fulfil the promises it offers in the name of God. In the words of Wayne Grudem: 'The Bible is as trustworthy and reliable as the God who speaks in it.'⁸

II Jesus Christ and His Saving Work

The second main emphasis in evangelical theology is on *Jesus Christ and his saving work*. At this point, too, evangelicals stand wholly and intentionally within the tradition of the entire Christian church. They believe that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, who, for us and our salvation, became man (the Nicene Creed) and who through his suffering and death on the Cross reconciled us with God. They insist that we may not give up any of the so-called saving facts: the Virgin Birth, the Cross, the Resurrection, the Ascension, the Session at God's right hand and the Second Coming (the Apostles' Creed). With the Lausanne Covenant they confess that there is only one Redeemer and only one gospel.

This emphasis on the saving work of Christ is linked to a deep awareness of the sinfulness of man. Such texts as [Isa. 6:5](#)—'Woe to me, I am ruined. For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips . . .'; and [Luke 5:8](#)—'Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man'; and [Rom. 7:24](#)—'I am an unspiritual man, sold as a slave to sin', strike a deep chord in evangelicals, because they know these feelings from personal experience. They believe that Jesus Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, by becoming a curse in our stead ([Gal. 3:13](#)). For the same reason, the idea of substitution is a central tenet of their Christian faith.

All this is not a matter of abstract theoretical knowledge only. It is a matter of the heart, which has been touched by the *Holy Spirit*. Being a nominal member of the church, even attending church services regularly and participating in the sacraments is not enough. Faith has to be a living faith and should be accompanied by personal experience. In other words, there has to be an awareness of the work of the Spirit in one's life. There has to be a knowledge of being born again and of conversion.

When it comes to the 'form' of conversion, there are some differences of opinion among evangelicals (is conversion instantaneous, so that one can mention time and place, or is it more in the nature of a process?), but generally evangelicals do not prescribe a particular method or a particular emotional manifestation. The emphasis is on the *fact* of conversion, not on its particular form.

⁷ Donald G. Bloesch, *Christian Foundations*, part 2, *Holy Scripture*, (1994), p. 121.

⁸ Wayne A. Grudem, in D. A. Carson and J. D. Woodbridge (eds), *Scripture and Truth*, (1983), p. 58.

In all these matters there is a close affinity between present-day evangelicals and the Puritans and the Pietists of the 17th and 18th centuries. They too used to put a strong emphasis on the work of the Spirit. It is he who regenerates and converts. It is he who causes a person to understand and believe the gospel. It is he who teaches and enables us to pray. Prayer itself is more than reciting a set form of prayers. Prayer is pouring out your heart before the heavenly Father. Furthermore, it is the Spirit who sanctifies us and enables us to fight against sin from within and temptation from without. It is the Spirit, too, who guides us in our personal decisions. All these convictions, which were typical of the Puritans and the Pietists, hold good for modern evangelical spirituality.

But there are also some problem areas as regards the work of the Spirit. I believe that evangelicals acknowledge the *sovereignty of God*. As to regeneration, conversion, sanctification, spirituality and guidance, they all admit that we are totally dependent on the Spirit. Yet, at this very same point we also encounter 'tensions' within the evangelical community. To a large extent these tensions date back to the Revival Movements of the 18th and 19th centuries.

In some sections of these movements strong emphasis was put on the human *free will* and its free decision to choose for God. For this reason John Wesley called the magazine he edited 'The Arminian Magazine'. But at this very point there was a deep division between him and other revivalists, such as George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards, who always emphasized God's electing purpose and believed that no person comes to Christ, unless he has been convinced by the Spirit. In the 19th century Charles G. Finney again emphasized the free will of man. It was he, too, who introduced the custom of asking people to come forward and of praying with them, in order to bring them to the right decision. He even believed that in this way conversion can be 'exacted' from God.

In our day, too, many evangelicals put so much emphasis on the human decision that they are almost blind to the work of God's electing love. Many of them are, quite often unintentionally, Arminian rather than Calvinistic. They actually follow the lead of John Wesley, who in his doctrine of grace distinguished two lines: (a) God's grace is *entirely free*, that is, grace comes from God alone. (b) God's grace is *free for all*, that is, all people are invited to accept it. Whether or not they do this, depends entirely on their own decision.

The Reformers had a different approach. They all saw *God's gracious and electing love* behind the human decision (which they did not deny). And this was not an alarming, but a liberating idea for them: the certainty of my salvation does not depend on my prayers, my reading of Scripture, my going to church, my sanctification or my witnessing, but it is anchored in the fact that God holds me in his loving hand. Indeed, that is the reason why I pray and read the Bible, why I go to church and fight against my sins and bear witness to the gospel.

Obviously, we have to keep in mind that the emphasis on personal experience, on regeneration and conversion, and on personal holiness may easily lead to *subjectivism*, personal experience becoming the central and decisive aspect of our faith. Our personal experience can also easily become the hermeneutical key for reading the Bible and the criterion by which we judge others. He or she who does not share our particular experience is only a second-rate Christian.

The emphasis on experience also explains why the *Charismatic Movement* is so influential in evangelical circles. There is a mutual recognition of a shared faith which is the fruit of personal experience. Even when one does not accept the specific charismatic tenets of a Spirit-baptism as a kind of 'second blessing' and evidenced by speaking in tongues, the very fact that the Charismatics (and the Pentecostals as well) appeal to the work of the Spirit is enough to make them acceptable as fellow-believers and fellow-

evangelicals. In 1974 they were prominently present at Lausanne and they are also always in attendance at the FEET Conferences.

The emphasis on personal experience may also lead to *individualism*. The idea of the *covenant*, which plays such a prominent part in the Bible (not only in the Old Testament, but in the background also in the New Testament, for instance in the baptism of entire families and in the fact that children are 'holy' in and with the believing partner, ([1 Cor. 7:14](#)), hardly plays any part in the thought and life of many evangelicals.

Related to this is the fact that to many of them the congregation is not so much an 'organism', composed of believing families rather than of believing individuals, but more a voluntary association of born-again people, who recognize each other as such and who want to celebrate the communion with God in common worship.

On the same grounds many evangelicals reject infant baptism. Only the person who has deliberately chosen for Christ and has experienced the work of the Spirit in his own life may be baptized.

Evangelicals are undoubtedly right in stressing the necessity of *personal sanctification*. Exactly at this point some of the ideas of John Wesley are still operative. He himself believed in the possibility of 'Christian perfection' as a kind of 'second blessing', although as far as I know he never claimed it for himself. Afterwards similar ideas were active in the so-called Keswick Movement.

Such a strong emphasis on personal sanctification has its drawbacks too. (a) In the first place it can easily lead to an attitude of legalism. Certain 'forms' of sanctification become normative and function as criteria for judging others. Quite often these 'forms' are negative: no drinking, no smoking, not keeping up with the latest fashion, no dancing, etc. There is a double risk here: (1) of using these criteria as a means of finding out whether the other people are true evangelicals and (2) of sifting out the gnat and swallowing the camel ([Matt. 23:24](#)). Leland D. Hine, an American evangelical, wrote some twenty-five years ago in the magazine *Eternity* that some evangelicals will never drink even the smallest nip of the weakest wine, but at the same time they may act discriminatingly against a fellow Christian, because he happens to belong to another race.

(b) Too many evangelicals are still heedless of 'structural evils', which abound in our society. They regard the 'free market' system almost as an integral part of the Christian life style. Fortunately much has changed during the last decades. In Lausanne the obligation to engage in social activities was mentioned immediately after the call to witness to the gospel.

III the Missionary Task of the People of God

This leads me to the third layer in the evangelical tradition: the *missionary calling*. This characteristic dates back to the 18th and 19th century Revival Movements, which initiated the modern Missionary Movement. Most evangelicals see witnessing to Christ as the first task of a believer. How should one who has been saved from the fire of God's righteous wrath not help other people to be saved as well?

Already in the introduction to the Lausanne Covenant we read that we are 'challenged by the unfinished task of evangelization. We believe that the gospel is God's good news for the whole world, and we are determined by his grace to obey Christ's commission to proclaim it to all mankind and to make disciples of all nations.'⁹

I am very happy to note that there is a growing awareness among evangelicals that witness and action belong together. More and more evangelicals realize that there are many social problems in our societies which cry out for a solution and that Christian social

⁹ J. D. Douglas, ed., *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, (1975), p. 3.

activity is a witness by itself. In the English-speaking world the impetus to social action comes mainly from the young 'radical' evangelicals in the USA and in Britain from people such as John Stott. And, of course, in many Third World countries evangelicals play a major role.

Unanswered Questions

The Nature of the Church

Unfortunately, in evangelical thinking there are a few more problem areas we have to face. The first one is the *doctrine of the church*. Evangelicals usually put the whole stress on the *spiritual* unity of all true believers, but often they do this at the expense of the *visible, institutional church*.

Of course, one ought to be a member of the local church or group, but at the same time one experiences the deepest level of spiritual fellowship in meetings with fellow-evangelicals in Bible study groups or larger evangelical conferences. It is quite customary to celebrate the Lord's Supper at such conferences, quite apart from any local congregation. In actual fact one is thinking and acting in terms of the so-called 'believers' church' and is more in line here with the 16th century Anabaptists than with the Reformers of that same century.

The Anabaptists were of the opinion that the Reformers did not go far enough in their reformation of church and society, as appeared clearly from the fact that they retained the ideas of a national church and of infant baptism. The Anabaptists themselves championed the idea of a 'congregation of born-again people', in which there is place only for believers' baptism, on the basis of a personal confession of faith.

This line of thinking recurs in its own particular form in the Baptists, the Quakers, the Brethren, Pentecostal Assemblies, etc. I am happy to note that in recent years many evangelicals begin to see the importance of the institutional church. They pray not only for a revival of the church, a work of the Spirit himself, but are also willing to engage in the duty of reforming of the church, a task in which we ourselves are always involved.

Eschatological Issues

The last problem area I want to mention is the *doctrine of eschatology*. Evangelicals wholeheartedly believe that at the end of history Jesus will come again and inaugurate the fullness of the kingdom of God, which already became manifest in his own words and acts. But there is much disagreement on some features of this doctrine, in particular on the topic of the Millennium. The fundamental questions here are of a hermeneutical nature. This is an added reason why I think that it is of paramount importance for the Evangelical Movement to reach a common hermeneutic.

Another item that will increasingly come to the fore is the question: What will be the *eternal fate* of human beings? In general there are three possibilities. (a) There will be an eternal divorce between believers and unbelievers: at death the former will go to heaven and will afterwards dwell on the new earth; the latter will go to hell, where they will be tormented in all eternity. (b) The second possibility is the idea of universalism: eventually all rational beings, including the demons and Satan himself, will be saved, most likely after a longer or shorter period of probation and purification, which will lead to their conversion and the acceptance of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. (c) The third possibility is that of annihilation (sometimes also called the doctrine of 'conditional immortality'). According to this view the believers will go to heaven in order to be eternally with God and the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Revel. [21:23](#); [22:3](#)), but after the general

resurrection of the dead, the unbelievers will be destroyed by God, so that they cease to exist.

Most evangelicals, in line with the tradition of the Early Church, of the Medieval Church, of the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Churches and the Churches of the Reformation, opt for the first possibility as the only scriptural view.¹⁰ Universalism, which was advocated in the Early Church by Origen, in the 16th century by the Socinians and in the 19th century by quite a few liberal theologians, but also by F. D. Maurice, and in our century is quite common among Liberal and Roman Catholic theologians¹¹, has never been a real option for evangelicals. In recent years, however, we see that the third option is gaining ground among evangelicals. It is defended by such evangelical stalwarts as John Wenham¹² and John Stott.¹³

I would like to end this short and incomplete survey of evangelical theology with a twofold conclusion.

1. It is definitely possible to speak of an evangelical theology, at least as far as the main tenets of the Christian faith are concerned.

2. There are still many areas where evangelicals disagree. In other words, there is still much to be done by evangelical theologians. They have to study hard and should make the results of their study available in scholarly publications. I for one would be inclined to give special attention to the doctrine of Scripture and to hermeneutics. The different hermeneutical conceptions used within the Evangelical Movement are the main cause of the theological differences we have noted in this paper.

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Christian Faith in the New Millennium

Eshetu Abate

In this brief article, Dr Eshetu Abate, an evangelical Lutheran theologian from Ethiopia, focuses on two essentials for the Christian Faith in the new millennium—continuity in the Apostolic Faith and concern for others, especially the poor. In the context of the suffering of churches across Africa today, this simple but clear statement speaks to the heart of evangelical mission now and in the future.
Editor

¹⁰ Cf. for instance, Leon Morris, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, (1984), pp. 369–70.

¹¹ Cf. John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths* (1973) and *ibid.*, *God has Many Faces* (1980), and Paul Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Towards the World Religions* (1985). See also: John Hick and Paul Knitter ed., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* (1987).

¹² John Wenham, *The Enigma of Evil*, (1985), pp. 27ff.

¹³ John Stott, in David L. Edwards/John Stott, *Evangelical Essentials*, (1988), pp. 312ff.

At the end of the present millennium we find peoples of the world with their different cultures opening up to each other. Peoples and cultures of the world are not so remote from each other as they used to be in the first century or even in the last century. Modern communication systems bring people from every corner of the world to individual homes even if the people themselves have not got a chance to travel. As it has been often said we live more and more in a 'Global Village'. Even if the term village may sound a bit exaggerated we can feel that there is something unifying or identifying the peoples of the earth with each other as if they belonged to one nation.

On the other hand, in spite of all that brings the people of the earth closer to each other, their unique cultural and social heritage still remains. This makes wondering at and learning from each other an enjoyable possibility. The new millennium into which we are entering is at the threshold of these phenomena. What kind of Christian Faith do we then expect to live and confess in this new millennium? As far as I am concerned the Christian Faith in the new millennium should demonstrate the following two major things: Continuity in the Apostolic Faith and Concern for each other, especially the poor.

I CONTINUITY IN THE APOSTOLIC FAITH

For us the year 2000 may represent too long a period of time. We feel that the world has a very long history and that we have progressed very far. Midnight on the last day of December 1999 will be not only the start of a new year but also of a new millennium. So people are waiting for the day with much expectation and with a sense of great accomplishment and progress. If seen from the biblical perspective however, the period leading up to year 2000 cannot be considered very long. 'With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day' ([2 Pet. 3:8](#)). We may be just finishing our second day and entering our third day from the perspective of the Lord. This demonstrates the fact that we have to follow just the same faith as that of the apostles and their disciples without exaggerating our remoteness or distance of time from them.

The Apostolic Faith Exists Regardless of Place and Time

One of the marks of true followers of Jesus Christ is continuity in his teaching and that of the apostles. 'He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me' ([Mt. 10:40](#)). The apostle Paul praises the young Timothy for the knowledge of his teaching, way of life, purpose, faith and patience etc. and admonishes Timothy to continue in what he has learned ([2 Tim. 3:10-17](#)). The first believers who gave themselves to the Lord after hearing the message preached by St. Peter devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer ([Acts 2:41-42](#)). It is the same faith that we who are living at the threshold of the new millennium are following, committed to and intend to carry on.

It is very important for us to ascertain whether the faith we hold, which we preach in our churches and teach in our theological schools and Faculty has continuity with the apostolic faith or not. The true Christian church has one faith, one Lord and one baptism ([Eph. 4: 5.](#)) The content of that faith does not change with time or place.

The famous Church Father, Irenaeus, once wrote the following about the permanence of the Apostolic Faith in his work entitled *Against Heresies*: 'The Church though dispersed throughout the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith . . .' Then, after describing the content of the faith in words very similar to the Apostles' Creed he continues, 'As I have already observed, the Church, having received this preaching and this faith, although scattered throughout the whole world, yet, as if occupying but one house, carefully preserves it. She also believes these

points of doctrine just as if she had but one soul, and one and the same heart, and she proclaims them, and teaches them, and hands them down, with perfect harmony, as if she possessed only one mouth. For, although the languages of the world are dissimilar, yet the import of the tradition is one and the same. . . . Nor will any one of the rulers in the churches, however highly gifted he may be in point of eloquence, teach doctrines different from these (for no one is greater than the Master); nor, on the other hand, will he who is deficient in power of expression inflict injury on tradition. For the faith being ever one and the same, neither does one who is able at great length to discourse regarding it, make any addition to it, nor does one, who can say but little, diminish it. (Iren'us, *Against Heresies*, [1:10](#)).

If we really believe in the communion of saints, as we usually confess, we cannot but have the same faith as the early church. The content of the faith was handed on by the Lord to his first disciples and by the disciples to their followers. Christians of the first millennium handed on the same faith to those of the second millennium. We who are now living at the end of the second millennium have to carry over the same faith and hand it on to the generations of the third millennium. Christianity is not created anew in every generation or century. Rather it is newly experienced by each generation. The fish has been there in the sea for thousands of years. But each time we eat, we experience its taste and nourishment. It is similar with Christianity.

The Apostolic Faith May Be Contextualized But Cannot Be Modified or Changed

In recent years there has been a good understanding of the need to respect cultures and people groups. As a result genuine attempts have been made to share the message of Jesus Christ without imposing one's culture upon the recipients. On the other hand, some have gone to the point of modifying or changing the very content and message of the faith in order to speak to contemporary culture. It is very important to note here that there is no culture in the past, present or future to which Christianity will not be relevant. In fact, though the forms and expressions may change from place to place or from time to time, the situation, needs and predicaments of human beings are the same throughout the centuries and will remain the same until one gets an answer by faith in Jesus Christ. In my own judgment, there is no substantial difference, even between the so-called modern and scientific world, and the world of the first century, when it comes to the essential questions of human destiny. The difference I see between the two worlds is only that of 'mechanical advantage'.

Christianity deals with the question of relationships—a right relationship with God and man. There is an innermost yearning for this right relationship in everybody, whether a scientist in his laboratory or an illiterate farmer in a remote bush. I heard once of the death of two doctors in a renowned research laboratory. When the news of their death was revealed it was told that the one killed the other and then himself due to a quarrel they had. Thus we see that love, forgiveness, joy and peace are needed for every human being and every place in the world, regardless of one's background, such as country, education, occupation or culture. No sophistication of the modern world, the digital system, computerization or automation of any kind can help human beings in the area of relationships. The only one who can help is Jesus Christ, the Son of God who has opened the way to a right relationship with God and fellow human beings with his death on the cross that heralded love, forgiveness and reconciliation. I once also saw a rich man living in a big house with a lot of material wealth in it. However he was alone and lonely. I later on came to realize that he no longer lives with his wife because of the poor relationship they had. I said in my heart, 'It is much better for a person to live with his wife (a person) in love, forgiveness and patience than to live alone in a big stone house with all material

wealth in it.' A right personal relationship both with God and one's fellow man is a key to understanding what Christianity is all about. As I understand it, this right relationship does not conflict in any way with scientific progress or advancement. As air, food and water are needed for every human being, regardless of his background, so also true love, forgiveness and fellowship are needed for all. They are found by faith in him who is 'The Truth, The Way and the Life'. It is this faith that we need as we enter into the new millennium.

The Apostolic Faith Accepts the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the Authority of His Word

The apostle Paul writes about Jesus Christ, 'And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy' ([Col. 1:18](#)). Accepting the lordship and supremacy of Jesus Christ is demonstrated by obedience to him and his Word. He who does not accept his Word cannot accept him. There is no dichotomy between his Word and himself. I have heard a number of comments from church members that some churches preach politics from the pulpit, leaving aside the Word of God. If that is true, those churches have forgotten their calling and mission. A church that does not have a message from the Word of God to its audience is like a gun without a bullet. It is important to remember at this point what the reformer Luther said about the two marks of a true church, namely the right preaching and teaching of the Word of God and the right administration of the Sacraments. Whatever may be said to elucidate the message, Jesus Christ and his Word should have full authority in our churches. Our acceptance of the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of his Word should be demonstrated in both our churches and daily life. The modern church, if she wants to keep her identity with the Apostolic Church, needs to live in the same faith and preach and teach the same faith.

The Apostolic Faith is Mission Oriented

The church all over the world is the result of mission. To learn this we need simply to go back and read our history. The first missionary was our Lord Jesus Christ, who was sent from his Father. Ever since his first coming, mission has been going on. We may explain mission with different words and understand it in many ways. But for me, mission is the very breath of the church. It is her confession, telling who she is, what she believes and why she believes it. In short, it is telling what Christ has meant for her and what he promises to do for those who believe him. This kind of mission cannot be limited to a certain designated locality. It starts first with one's life, then family and friends, neighbours and one's town and country. It involves one's total existence and way of life. It is impossible to evangelize others without first being ourselves evangelized. He who does not know, and has never experienced the blessings of Jesus Christ in his own life and church cannot offer to others a genuine invitation to share in the blessing. It will be sheer hypocrisy to do that.

Inspired individuals and groups have done a great deal to give testimony to their faith in unreached areas all over the world. But in some of the countries which were seed beds of missionaries the very faith of the church is under attack. People have turned their eyes to material enticements and worldly pleasures, forgetting that whatever is material is temporary. Only the name 'Christian' is left as a historical relic and tradition without any demonstration of the essential substance of Christianity, which is living faith in Jesus Christ. In view of this the traditional and customary thinking of doing mission in certain designated areas, such as Africa, Asia and Latin America is painful to me. At this stage in history, I am quite convinced that mission and the proclamation of the saving power of

Jesus Christ are needed everywhere with almost equal urgency. With the apostle Paul we should be able to say 'I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome. I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. . . .' Everyone who believes in the message of the gospel will be saved. So mission should be done everywhere, among all nations ([Mt. 28:19-20](#)).

II CONCERN FOR EACH OTHER, ESPECIALLY THE POOR

One of the marks of true disciples of Jesus Christ is love. Love cannot be love if it is not translated into action. The apostle John writes, 'If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity in him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth' ([1 John 3:17-18](#)). Love requires interaction. It cannot take place in seclusion or isolation. The present seclusion and individualism seen in some cultures should be carefully weighed on the basis of this concept of love. We have heard and read a number of times of people dying in their apartments and their bodies being found after a number of weeks. It is very sad to learn that nobody ever visited them regularly. The church should be the foremost example of the love of Jesus Christ both within her members and in the community among whom she exists and whom she serves. Jesus Christ sought the lost; the downcast and the marginalized. So should his church on earth. It is expected from the body of Christ, the church, to reflect him who is love. He gave not only his possessions, honour, etc. but his very life in love.

Conclusion: We expect and hope for the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The present world around us is full of evil. When we see the countries in the world arena, materially affluent nations seem to be selfish, greedy and protective of their own advantages. On the other hand materially poorer nations seem to be torn with discord, war and envy. What then is the hope for our world in the years to come and particularly in the new millennium? If all the nations of the world were to be led by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, who was born from the virgin Mary, crucified, died and was buried under Pontius Pilate and rose on the third day from death, the world would be a peaceful place. There would be no discord, war, envy, selfishness, greed and protectionism. Thus, the only solution for our world is in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and his total reign. The church, his body, is expected to share in the reign of Jesus her Lord. In the meantime however she has to live in the world without being of the world and sharing its evil deeds. We, then, enter into the new millennium expecting the coming of our Lord who will give peace to his world and creation. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

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Jesus Christ—Lord of the Market Place

Bruce J Nicholls

Dr Bruce Nicholls gave the Frank Kline Memorial lecture on March 6, 1997, at the Union Biblical Seminary, Pune, India, where he was interim Principal for the year 1996–7. This annual lectureship series honours the founding Principal, Dr Frank Kline (1953–65). In his address the author explores the Lordship of Christ as Lord of creation, Lord of history and the church, and Lord of redemption in the context of training men and women to be practical theologians for service in the market places of India and the world.

Editor

It is indeed an honour and privilege to give the Frank and Betty Kline Memorial Lecture during my one year as Principal of UBS. My wife and I came to the Union Biblical Seminary as a young married couple in 1955 and worked under Dr. Kline's leadership until his retirement in 1965. Since then I have had the privilege of visiting them in their retirement home in USA. We have maintained regular links with their son, Harvey and their daughter, Helen. Our early years in India were shaped by their wise and gracious counsel and we were inspired by their consistent lifestyle, their genuine friendship with people in the town and their commitment to Christ's mission in the world. We thank God for every memory of them both.

I believe that the 21st century will be God's *kairos* time for evangelical leadership in the churches in India. Our founding Principal would have added, 'provided we are totally committed to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit'. He would also have affirmed the priority of the faithful exegesis of Scripture, the relevant interpretation of God's word for our fragmented and fallen society and Christ's call to mission in the world.

THE CHANGING MARKET PLACES OF INDIA

In our own context, we are called to proclaim by word, deed and life that Jesus Christ is Lord of the market place. The dynamic centre of any nation is the market place. This is the place where people meet to buy and sell and to exercise political rights and power. It is the meeting point of ethnic and social communities with the babble of languages each competing for supremacy. The market place is the focal point for education, medical care, maintenance of law and order, and provision of social services. It is the cultural centre for the arts, for entertainment and for sport. Above all, it is the nerve centre for the practice of religious faith or ideology and its propagation. The communication and propaganda media through T.V., video, films and radio are aimed at the people of the market place.

Market places are found in every city, town and village. With the growth of cities in number and size, they have become the decision-making centres of the nation. The city reflects the best of human creativity, scientific advance and human idealism but also the worst of human greed, violence and oppression leading to poverty and suffering. In one sense, the plurality of cultures of our nation change little; in another sense, they are changing rapidly with the impact of urbanization, modern technology, education and travel.

Every market place, whether large or small, has become a mosaic of cultures, ancient and modern. The conflict of the ages is nowhere more evident today than in India and in China—nations which are destined to dominate the 21st century. Early in the next century, 50% of the population of India will live in towns and cities. The percentage is now 30. The market places of our urban cities are impacting our national cultures, even down to the smallest village. Values and social structures of centuries of tradition will continue while urban society is caught in the conflict between its religious and caste

culture of the past and the secular and materialistic culture of the present and the future. Massive migrations from the villages to the cities are taking place everywhere in India. People uprooted from their culture are vulnerable and open to change. T.V., especially foreign T.V., video and films are creating new and hedonistic felt needs. We are in transition from a controlled or command economy to a free market and open economy. One of the results of this is the expanding middle class—symbolized by the possession of colour T.V. in the homes, a scooter or a car, English education for their children and expensive holidays.

Where culture changes rapidly, culture shock and stress result, exacerbated by the breakdown of marriages as more wives attain freedom and become financially independent. Escalating bribery and corruption in every facet of living bring increased marginalization and stress to the lives of ordinary people caught in the web of powerlessness and oppression. Those below the poverty line struggle to survive and to maintain some personal and family dignity as they become poorer and poorer. Those who own land or property or who exercise political and economic power are struggling to protect themselves from the very stresses that overwhelm the poor and powerless.

One third of the people of our four main cities live in dehumanizing slums and seem powerless to liberate themselves. They have little motivation or will to break out of their ghettos and alas! when some do, they begin to oppress their own people. National efforts to liberate the large Dalit community with empowered voting and reservation has brought some justice to these oppressed and marginalized poor, but at the cost of growing violence and retaliation by the upper castes and by the political power brokers.

If culture is 'the design for living', of any given community of people in the interaction of their traditional religious world views and values with the changing environment, then the most significant change in cultures is their increasing complexity. As more people with diverse backgrounds interact, their cultures become more diverse and complex. As people travel and migrate, as the mass communication media create new signs, symbols and myths, people find themselves living in a plurality of cultures. The business man or office worker lives in one culture in the office, and another at the club and a third in his/her home. The common missiological practice of defining people by 'people groups' is perhaps a too simplistic analysis of our complex changing social structures.

As practising Christians, do we have a coherent yet open understanding of the gospel within this diversity? By its very nature, fundamentalism cannot cope with rapid change. It resorts to violence and oppression to retain its cultural purity. This is true of all fundamentalist movements whether Hindu or Muslim where life is imprisoned in a culture bound life set. Similarly Christian fundamentalism is unable to meet the challenge of this growing complexity of culture. It is in danger of retreating into a narrow pietistic ghetto.

The challenge of Christ's lordship over culture and the market place is a challenge to be faithful to the givenness of revelation and the relevance and flexibility of the cultural change. All too often, church planting is reduced to rescuing individuals, not to the transforming of whole communities; evangelism is individualistic with little attention to the social fabric of family life. As our cities expand and the conflict of cultures becomes more intense, our churches appear to be unable to meet the challenge. While churches are growing among the unreached tribal communities, they are not keeping up with the growth of large cities. The challenge of the city market place is the challenge of the future.

MISSIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON JESUS CHRIST AS LORD OF THE MARKET PLACE

Here we focus on three perspectives of Jesus Christ as Lord of Creation, Lord of History and Lord of Liberation and Redemption.

A. Jesus Christ as Lord of Creation

In the opening prologue of John's Gospel, the author targets both Jewish and Gentile readers. To the Hebrew, the Word has creative power with its own independent existence so that the Word of God is a substitute name for God himself. To the Greek, the Word of God was the reason of God, the principle of order and rationality that controls and pervades the universe. It is the power that keeps the universe going. In the opening verse of the prologue, the Word is eternal; it is with God and is God. The Word is personalized for 'through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made'. The Creator as Word of God has become flesh and tabernacled among us (v. [14](#)). He reflects the glory of the Father and is full of grace and truth.

Paul takes up this theme and gives an in-depth theological reflection on the reality of God incarnated in Jesus Christ. In his Christological hymn ([Col. 1:15-20](#)), Paul declares that Jesus Christ is the exact image of the invisible God. In him, God who is invisible becomes visible, for in him, the fullness of Godhead dwells. He is the Lord of creation for he is God. This is the foundation pillar of Christ's lordship in the market place.

Christ is supreme over all creation for 'by him all things were created and for him'. He expands 'all things' to include the total cosmos, earth and heaven, all that is visible and invisible, so that nothing is outside his creative act. He is eternally prior to all things and in him all things hold together (v. [2017](#)) so he holds together everything in unity and perfect harmony. Without his sovereign control, the universe would disintegrate with an atomic bang.

How then does this exalted picture of Christ's lordship over creation, speak to our village and urban market places which so often seem to be in the power of spiritual forces antagonistic to Christ? The reality of the conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan is fully acknowledged in Scripture but Paul reminds us that Christ through the cross has disarmed the powers and authorities and made a public spectacle of them as Rome did of enemies in a victory parade ([Col. 2:15](#)). This conflict of the two kingdoms is here reflected in the contradictions of the market place. On the one hand, the market place testifies to God's activity, for here we see the greatness of humankind through grand architecture, aesthetically pleasing sculptures, beautiful designs in clothing, furniture and pottery, the wonders of T.V. and computers. All these reflect the greatness of humanity created in the image of God. At the same time, we see the consequences of human rebellion and sin, in poverty, uncollected garbage, disease and death, noise and pollution, violence and oppression. These evils exist by the permissive will of God, for Satan, though vanquished, is not yet destroyed. His end is the final lake of fire. To those who reject his reign, Jesus Christ becomes judge and in the end they are banished from the presence of Christ and his kingdom to a final judgment of remorse and unrelieved guilt. It is by faith that we see Christ's victory now, to be realized at his coming on Judgment Day when he hands over the 'kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power' ([1 Cor. 15:24](#)). It is this assurance of faith that enables us his disciples to persevere in the confidence that he shall reign and that in the day of his triumph, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord ([Philp. 2:10f](#)).

With this confidence in the sovereignty of Christ's reign, we are able to endorse Abraham Kuyper's famous statement made on the occasion of the founding of the Free University of Amsterdam, 'There is not one inch of any sphere of life over which Christ the Lord does not say "mine"'. In this sense, eschatology is realized now, but its confirmation

is not yet. Therefore, along with the heroes of faith, we claim Christ's lordship over every market place in India. This lordship may not become visible during our lifetime but we believe it will happen, provided the church is faithful to her calling.

The coming fulfilment of this vision is graphically portrayed in the description of the Holy City, the New Jerusalem coming out of heaven ([Rev. 21:2](#)). Our God is the Creator, Sustainer and Saviour of the city, the citadel of humankind's habitation.

B. Christ as Lord of History and the Church

Having affirmed the supremacy of Christ in Creation, Paul adds, 'He is head of the body, the church' ([Col. 1:18](#)). The Lord Jesus Christ is the head of the church because he is the lord of History. He, the transcendent God became imminent in his Creation. The Bible portrays God as a God who acts in human history, beginning with Abraham, the wandering pilgrim in the land of Canaan. God revealed himself as a covenant-making and covenant-keeping God with the repeated promise, 'I will be your God and you shall be my people.' This covenant he confirmed through numerous theophanies which we may interpret as appearance of the second person of the Trinity, the pre-incarnate Son of God. The ups and downs of the history of the Hebrews is a testimony of God's faithfulness to his purpose, for in the fullness of time, God became incarnate in the womb of the Virgin Mary. All the creeds of the early church give testimony to this central belief of incarnation. For Christian belief, God in history is fundamental. If Jesus was not born as described in Scripture, if he did not die on the cross (as Muslims suggest), if he did not rise from the dead as many Christian sceptics declare, then, says Paul, our belief is in vain.

This affirmation of God acting in history is already having a profound impact on the major community of India. Fifty years ago, Gandhiji was not concerned whether Krishna or Rama or Jesus never lived. The myths that surround them were themselves the reality. But not so now; Hindu fundamentalists take history seriously; otherwise why would they fight for the preservation of the exact spot at Ayodhya where Rama was born? This necessity of history is one sign of Christ's coming reign in the market places of India. God's covenant relationship with his people reaches a new level of reality in the promise of a new covenant given to the prophet Jeremiah, that God would write his laws on the hearts and minds of his people, that their sins would be forgiven and their shame and guilt blotted out and that all would know him without social distinction ([Jer. 31:31-34](#)). Jesus taught that this covenant was actualized in himself and sealed in his cross. History then has become his story and alone gives meaning to our story and experience. When Christ came, the kingdom became visible. For the Christian, history is no longer a cyclic story of endless rebirths like the seasons of the year; rather it points to a glorious fulfilment when Christ shall return.

The New Testament portrays the church as the sign that Christ the King has come. He announced the kingdom with the words 'the time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent, believe the good news' ([Mark 1:14f](#)). The church then is sign to the world that the kingdom has been made visible. She is the body of Christ, his bride. He is her head; just as the body is dependent on the head for its source of life so the church is dependent on Christ, the head. In response to Peter's affirmation of the deity and lordship of Christ, our Lord declared to Peter that upon him and his confession, he would build his church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it ([Matt. 16:13-20](#)).

If Christ is to be the Lord of the market place, he must first be Lord of the church, for in the words of the Lausanne Covenant, 'The Church is at the very center of God's cosmic purpose and is His appointed means of spreading the Gospel. But a Church which preaches the Cross must itself be marked by the Cross.' (Section 6).

Every time I visit Seoul, the capital of Korea, I am inspired by this sign of Christ's reign, for there the sign of a Cross is lifted up over 8000 churches. Every morning of the year the ringing shout of 'Hallelujah!' by thousands of Christians as they end their dawn prayer meetings, symbolizes Christ's lordship over his people. At the beginning of this century, there were only a few thousand Christians in Korea; today 50% of the people of Seoul acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord. But for the church to impact the whole society it needs to be constantly reformed and renewed under the lordship of Christ. Only where Christ is Lord is his kingdom visible.

The true church bears witness to the transforming power of the Cross and she participates in the resurrection life of her Lord. He is the first fruits that guarantee the coming resurrection of all believers. The resurrection is the bridge between Creation and the church. Christ calls us to break out of our ecclesiastical ghetto and be salt and light in society. Church growth of itself is no guarantee of Christ's lordship in the market place. For too long practising and believing Christians sanctioned slavery, then apartheid, and now caste distinctions within the church. For Christ to reign, the church must be in the world, but not of it.

The implication of this understanding of mission is critical to the life of any seminary, including the Union Biblical Seminary. Our impact on the city of Pune must begin with our involvement in the life of the churches of this city. Our forty weekend teams in the churches of Pune must have a clear focus in their calling as agents of renewal through example and teaching, and as witnesses penetrating the whole of society with the good news of Jesus Christ. In most cases, evangelism is the fruit of compassionate service and prophetic justice rather than its precursor.

From this it follows that those who teach in our seminaries must be men and women who share this vision, who have a background of in-depth pastoral and evangelistic experience and who are living models for students to follow. As I reflect on my own theological training, I see that I was more influenced and moulded by the character, lifestyle and church involvement of my teachers than by what I remember of their classroom lectures, however erudite they were. Let this be true of all of us called to the ministry of teaching and administration.

This church-centred priority must be reflected in the spiritual formation of our students. Daily worship in the chapel, mastering the skills and discipline of expository preaching and teaching, grappling with the contextual issues of a market place theology, evidencing a passionate love for people and having a burning desire to make Christ known must shape the life of our seminary community. Our goal is more than to impart academic knowledge, important as this is; it is to shape the life and message of those entrusted to our care for four years of training. Our focus must be on what the student becomes more than on the examinations he or she needs to pass.

In the past, we have been blessed with the privileges of freedom of worship and the propagation of our faith as guaranteed by the Constitution of India. Tomorrow this situation may change. We have to prepare ourselves for days of restriction and even persecution. But we do not fear, for we know from history that when the church is persecuted it is purified and nothing can stop its growth. The recent history of the church in China and in Nepal bears witness to the growth of the church and her impact on society.

C. Jesus Christ, Liberator and Lord of Redemption

Christ's work on the cross was both an act of reconciliation and the beginning of a process. Christ calls us to love our Lord with all our being and our neighbour as ourselves. We cannot obey one without obeying the other. Therefore evangelism is inseparable from compassion and servanthood and from striving for peace and justice in society. John

affirms the universality of our Lord's saving love when he writes, 'for he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world' ([1 John 2:2](#)). Redemption begins with the individual and the family but must extend to the community and to the nation. Liberation begins with the poor and the powerless but its goal is freedom for everyone, light penetrating the darkness and salt permeating the whole in order that society may be renewed and evil restrained. The goal of the gospel of the kingdom is to bring all powers and authorities under Christ's rule. While conversion to Christ is central to our missiological goal God's plan of redemption is all-embracing. It is not limited to the redemption of individuals; it includes all of God's handiwork, for God not only forgives our sins but also heals our diseases ([Ps. 103:3](#)). A major part of Jesus' three brief years of ministry was devoted to meeting the needs of society—healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, releasing women entrapped in bondage and feeding the hungry. The restoring of creation was never far from his preaching. His parables are drawn primarily from nature and from human experience. Christ's work of redemption culminated in victory over death itself. The resurrection of the body points to the redemption of the whole person—body, mind and spirit—and the goal of the good news is the promise of a new earth and a new heaven wherein dwells righteousness ([2 Pet. 3:13](#)). The whole of creation is now 'subject to frustration', and 'under bondage of decay' and groans as a woman in the pains of childbirth ([Rom. 8:19-22](#)). The promise of the liberation of creation from the dominion of evil is seen in the vision of peace in the city, in community and in nature ([Isa. 11:1-9; 65:17-25](#)). It will be consummated at the end of time with the coming of the new Jerusalem and the healing of the nations by the leaves of the tree of life ([Rev. 22:2](#)). Concern for the environment is not an extra beyond mission but an integral part of it. It is the cosmic dimension of salvation. I dream of the day when UBS will be offering an M.Th. in Ecology with a specific focus on the redemption of the market place.

We want the campus of UBS to be a signpost to our stewardship of creation and our involvement in its renewal. We are landscaping the whole of our campus that it may be a garden of thankfulness to our Creator and offered to the glory of God. This means more than the planting of trees; it means accepting the self-discipline of garbage control, the careful use of water and electricity, cleanliness and tidiness in our hostels and homes, respect for seminary property and voluntary service to maintain UBS as a garden unto the Lord, knowing that one day we will all have to give an account of our stewardship. Service in the Campus is but a school of discipline for service in the community. Every day a hundred women come to our Community Development Center for training in income-generating skills. They come from three nearby slums. Their goodwill is a bridge for teams of students to minister to them in their community by teaching literacy, hygiene, garbage collection and community well-being. Another challenge opening up before us is the approaching crisis of HIV positive and AIDS victims. Pune is known to have one of the highest number of people under the judgment of this painful death. The next ten years will witness an explosion of opportunity to help with compassion those who are dying of such dreaded diseases. In addition public agencies in Pune that are concerned to preserve and restore the environment are inviting us to work with them. Can we see this as part of God's calling to mission and evangelism? When our students see fruit from their ministry among the poor and oppressed as well as among the rich and the student class, this will be a sign that Christ is extending the frontiers of his lordship over the market places of Pune.

CONCLUSION

This comprehensive and integrated understanding of our missiological task bears implications for the future directions of our Seminary.

Our primary calling is to train pastors, teachers, evangelists and cross-cultural missionaries for the ministries of the church and mission agencies across this vast nation of India and beyond. As we begin our post-graduate department of training at the level of M.Th. and eventually Ph.D., we will be preparing teachers for the growing number of seminaries and colleges across India who are in urgent need of qualified staff. There are probably two hundred such institutions which need our help. The Pentecostal families of churches alone sponsor more than seventy Bible Schools at various levels.

As our theology of the market place deepens and our commitment to Christ's lordship over the whole of society is strengthened so our seminary must expand its ministries to work with the lay leaders of our churches and the Christian decision-makers in secular employment. We have already begun an annual short course in Marathi for village elders who have been sponsored by their respective churches. UBS has a long experience in extension education in English, Marathi and Hindi with excellent teaching materials prepared over the years. However, these are in need of constant revision and new courses are needed. We cannot meet the challenge of lay training alone and we look forward to pooling teaching materials with other like-minded seminaries. We are exploring the possibility of expanding our extension education programme to include evening classes of one month course modules in the major cities of Maharashtra and even beyond to New Delhi. It is indeed tragic that two of the great cities of India, Mumbai and New Delhi have little or no effective training at the graduate level for those whose ministry is primarily in the market places of our society. As a seminary, we must face in two directions, the church and the world and live with the tension of serving both.

As UBS explores the possibility of partnership with other colleges and with the churches we serve, may we be empowered by the Holy Spirit to be agents of change in a confused world, ever testifying to the changelessness of Jesus Christ, the Lord of the market place.

We thank God for the late Frank and Betty Kline, for their vision of fifty years ago and for the privilege of following in their footsteps, training men and women to be ambassadors of the Lord Jesus Christ in the churches and in the market places of our world.

Dr Bruce Nicholls, now resident in Auckland, New Zealand, is engaged in writing and editing and in lecturing widely in Asia.

The Renewal of the Church

James Wong

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In this paper presented at the recent Asia Leadership Conference on Evangelism, Canon Wong traces the major renewal movements in the church from Pentecost to the

charismatic renewal movements of today, and then he analyses their positive and negative characteristics.
Editor

In church history, the first major spiritual revival began in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost as recorded in [Acts 2](#). About twelve years later, another revival took place in Antioch in which Gentiles came to faith in Jesus Christ in large numbers (see [Acts 11:19–26](#)). The Book of Acts recorded several accounts of revivals—in Jerusalem and Judea ([Acts 6:1–8](#)), in Samaria ([Acts 8:5–17](#)), and particularly during Paul’s missionary journeys in 45–48 AD ([Acts 13 & 14](#)), in 51–54 AD ([Acts 15:36–18:22](#)) and in 54–58 AD ([Acts 18:23–21:29](#)). It is also possible that after the apostle John returned from Patmos to Ephesus around 96 AD, there was a revival in Asia Minor until his death in 98 AD during the first year of the reign of Emperor Trajan.

The greatest spiritual awakening of the Church was the Reformation (from 1517 to 1590). During the Reformation, considerable emphasis was placed on the inspiration and authority of the Bible, on justification by faith alone and the priesthood of all believers and other great doctrines of the biblical faith. Many of the corrupt practices and superstitions of the medieval Roman Church were rejected. Luther’s trust in the Lord and confidence in his protection over him gave him courage to stand against the Roman Church as he continued to advocate the principles of the Reformation which opened the way to the greatest revival of the church.

There was widespread renewal throughout Europe during the time of the Reformation. While Martin Luther and Philip Melancton were the main leaders in Germany, John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli led the movement in Switzerland; William Tyndale, Hugh Latimer, Nicolas Ridley and Archbishop Thomas Cranmer in England and John Knox in Scotland. There were also the Anabaptists who were more radical in their protests against Roman beliefs and practices. They were greatly misunderstood by their Protestant brethren and were persecuted.

After the time of the Reformation, there were many significant revivals from 1590 onwards. This was the Puritan era and revivals broke out in Scotland and Ireland as well as in Massachusetts on the other side of the Atlantic. Solomon Stoddard, (the grandfather of the revivalist, Jonathan Edwards) reported that in 1679, 1683, 1696, 1712 and 1718 revivals occurred in Northampton, Massachusetts.

J Edwin Orr, the great historian of revivals has reported extensively the revivals in the first and second Evangelical Awakenings and the Twentieth Century Revivals. These began in America in 1734 under the ministry of Jonathan Edwards, from Northampton, Mass. and were brought into prominence by the itinerant ministries of George Whitefield (1714–1770) and John Wesley (1703–1791). Both of these men had made a lasting impact in England and America. From his conversion on 24th May 1738 at a meeting in Aldersgate Street in London until his death in 1791, John Wesley started a revival movement whose influence is still felt round the world today. An excellent study on ecclesiology is contributed by Howard Snyder in his book *The Radical Wesley— Patterns for Church Renewal*.

The Second Great Awakening took place in the United States and in England between 1787 and 1825. It centred around the preaching ministry of Charles Simeon at Holy Trinity Church in Cambridge from 1783 to his death in 1836. It served as a corrective to the spiritual decline which had set in through the philosophy of Deism. It affected a number of colleges and universities (including Yale) from 1787 to 1802. Through these student movements the revival spread. From the east coast of America it spread to the mid-west and brought about church growth, improvement of morals and national life, a

check in the spread of Deism, social reform movements, introduction of camp meetings and the holiness movement and the emergence of home and foreign missionary societies.

During the first few decades of the 19th century, revival was continuing simultaneously in Scotland and America. The island of Skye in the Hebrides was the scene of spiritual power in 1812 and 1814. From 1812 to 1839 many local revivals occurred throughout Scotland. Meanwhile, on the east coast of the United States there was a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit from 1820 to 1832. By the 1840s, Europe was also touched, particularly in Holland and Germany. It was largely a northern hemisphere experience when from 1857 to 1860, New York city became the focus of attention, and national newspapers began covering 'The Progress of the Revival' on a daily basis. Ever since then, it has been rare for the secular press to be on the side of God!

As the revival circled the globe, its progress in the US was hindered by the Civil War. During the late 19th century, there were revivals in South Wales in 1871. In the US there was the growth of the Holiness Camp meetings from 1850 onwards. In 1873, D. L. Moody visited Britain for the third time to conduct evangelistic meetings for 2 years. Beginning at York, he and Ira D. Sankey caused revival in Scotland and during their 4 month campaign in London, more than 2 million people attended their meetings. Returning to the United States he kept up an incredible preaching ministry and it was estimated that up to 100 million heard him preach (without the aid of radio and television). He died in December 1899.

In the 20th century, there have been at least three major spiritual awakenings which affected the whole world. The first of these took place during the first decade of this century from 1901 to 1910. Beginning in 1901 at a Bible school in Topeka, Kansas, which was led by Charles Parham, modern-day Pentecostalism was born. It touched other parts of the world as also did the Welsh revival of 1904–1905, the Asuza Street revival in Los Angeles in 1906, the Korean revival from 1907, the Shantung revival in China (1908) and the great Edinburgh Conference on World Missions in 1910 which was initiated by John R Mott.

The second important event was the raising of great healing evangelists like Aimee Semple McPherson, Charles S. Price, William Branham, Kathryn Kuhlman, Oral Roberts, T. L. Osborn and Gordon Lindsay from 1920 to the 1960s. The greatest of today's evangelists, in a class of his own, is the evangelical Billy Graham. Even though this period of revival was largely inspired by the Pentecostals, it influenced churches all over the world leading to renewal of faith and growth.

The third major awakening began in the 1960s and continues into the present times when the Charismatic renewal has made significant inroads into the historic mainline denominations. As a result, it has also created a massive church-growth and church-planting movement and the re-vitalization of many of the classical Pentecostal churches, especially the Assemblies of God.

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE DISTINCTIVE IN TIMES OF REVIVAL

During times of revival, people are responsive to the gospel and they display a hunger and intense enthusiasm for Christianity. They become so preoccupied with the things of God that they have little interest in anything else. Once a revival has taken place the word will spread very quickly and widely (as we have seen in the recent Toronto event); and people will travel from miles away, to see where the action is. To partake in an experience which is so often lacking in ordinary church life people will pay the price to have an encounter with God. As they experience the presence of the Lord in an environment of revival they will stay for a long time not wanting the moment to pass away.

Praising God and singing become joyful and exuberant. Often the worship session lasts for hours. The preaching and teaching of God's Word often has the ability to penetrate the hearts of the audience. This is necessary to sustain and direct a Christ-centred and God-glorifying revival. Great emphasis should be placed on hearing the Word of God, expounding the whole counsel of God. Bible-study groups must be formed for those who respond to the revival.

In such a situation the church will experience growth and new believers will be added to the congregation. Backsliders will be restored, and on-going Christians will experience a new sense of empowering by the Holy Spirit to enable them to witness for Christ. Christians who have been touched by the Lord will experience change, a deep commitment and some of them will even enter full-time Christian service.

In a revival, people receive an immediate revelation of God's glory and holiness as well as of their own sinfulness and inadequacy before him. People are convicted of their own sinfulness which should lead to repentance as they become conscious of the awesome holiness of God. As they recognize that there is forgiveness because of the grace of God, they find redemption and receive an assurance of forgiveness and peace with God. Individuals are freed from bondage to sinful habits, bad attitudes and wrong-doing.

In revivals people are spiritually refreshed. The feeling of freedom in the Spirit gives rise to praise and thanksgiving to God. There is enthusiastic singing, and in some cases there have been accounts of heavenly choirs accompanying such praise. Often spiritual gifts flow out freely as people experience the power of God upon their life. Because of the hunger for God, prayers are intense among those who seek the Lord for revival, and a great sense of expectancy is displayed by the participants.

Important awakenings emerge simultaneously in many different locations. Initially there is very little human organization, for God moves sovereignly at his own initiative. Nevertheless, as word of the revival gets around, large numbers of people do converge on the place of revival. Physical healings, deliverances from evil powers and miracles often take place. These phenomena help to stimulate faith and make people aware of the imminence of Christ's second coming as he pours out his Spirit upon the church to prepare his bride for his return.

A spirit of giving and sacrifice is often prevalent during a revival. People spend whole nights in prayer and fasting. There is tremendous zeal for evangelizing. Saving the lost and missions become an urgent priority. Participants love to come together to share their experiences and resources as they seek to encourage and minister to one another. Superficial profession of faith, nominalism and luke-warmness and irrelevant traditions are discarded and quite often new structures and churches are birthed through revivals. Because of the profound impression that a revival has upon many of those who participate in it, its effects can be long lasting. New forms of ministry are spawned and they will continue on for a long time even after the awakening.

However there are also negative aspects in a revival where through the excesses and lack of wisdom the genuine work of God can be counterfeited and brought into disrepute. Controversies and criticisms—some true and some false—will arise. Many leaders will experience intense opposition and persecution. Every revival has been criticized extensively, bringing reproach on different aspects of it. For this reason a revival usually rises to a high point and then declines. People return to a low spiritual level, others will turn away and some who were convinced that there had been a visitation of God become indifferent or ashamed to acknowledge their former conviction of faith. So Christians who have experienced revival need to be continuously renewed and churches need constant renewal at different stages of their life and witness.

Up to now I have not made a distinction, if there is any, between these terms: renewal, revival, spiritual awakening. From a historical perspective it is difficult to categorize the movement of God in the life of the church as renewal or revival or religious awakening. I believe they are all the sovereign work of God and the purpose is to glorify him and extend the kingdom of God on earth. These different terms can be used synonymously.

However Robert L. Roxburgh has given a helpful statement to enable us to understand more of this subject which I quote.

Renewal, like the word love, is difficult to define and open to multiple interpretations. The Bible uses the term for both the initial Christian experience and for the subsequent reinvigorating of one's walk with God. The word has been used culturally and historically, along with synonymous terms such as 'Reformation', 'Renaissance', 'Revival', 'Restoration' and 'Awakening', to explain fresh movements of God's Spirit upon his people. Some have seen these other terms as reflecting different aspects of Renewal. We can generally state that Renewal expresses the revitalizing work of God's Spirit in our generation upon individuals and churches. We must also specifically state that such a renewal affects the inward spiritual life with power and signs as on the Day of Pentecost, and affects also the outward corporate nature of worship, church structures, outreach and lifestyle as described in the rest of the Book of Acts.

Renewal is a dynamic rather than a static experience. That is to say that while the initial 'entering in' (some call this the baptism or the fullness of the Spirit) may be a crisis experience, such a renewal, according to [Ephesians 5:18](#), needs to be constantly renewed itself. Renewal is, therefore, a gateway not a goal. Entering through the gate, individuals and churches grow in their awareness of all the dimensions of God's power at work in his kingdom.

As we have seen in the history of the church, there is need for a continuous process of renewal to keep the church alive, dynamic and mission effective. We have seen in the history of revival that God has given seasons of refreshment and revitalization of the church, all through the past 2000 years of church history. We can expect God will pour forth his mighty power on the church as we move towards the end of this century and into the third millenium. The motivation for Christians all over the world to be revived and renewed, is to enable us to fulfil the goal of evangelization of the whole world, and to plant a viable church in every unreached people group. The church is renewed for mission.

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The Involvement of the Laity in the Ministry of the Church

Jey J Kanagaraj

In a paper presented at a Pastor's Fellowship in Pune, India, Dr Kanagaraj outlined the calling and ministry of lay leaders in the church. Being a theologian is not restricted to members of the ordained clergy nor to teachers in theological schools! Some of the most

creative and prophetic theologians today are lay men and women, in part because these are the people who are involved in the total ministries of the church in the world.
Editor

The apostle Paul said that the purpose of Christ's gifts given to the church is 'to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ' ([Eph. 4:11-12](#)). This means, as D. A. Thangasamy puts it, that full-time ministers have a special function, namely to help the whole church to become equipped and make it fit for the task of taking the message of the gospel of love and reconciliation to the world through service.¹ But today we do not see the whole church being involved in Christian programmes. It is often assumed that church work is the work of the pastors and of other paid full-time ministers. This causes the majority of the church members to remain mere inactive spectators; is the Christian task merely the task of a handful of people in the church? If we say 'No', how then can we help the lay people to become involved in church programmes? What are the areas in which laity participation is needed today? Whom do we call 'laity' or 'lay people'? These are some of the concerns of this paper.

WHAT IS LAITY?

The word 'lay' comes from the Greek word *laikos*, but this word never occurs in the Bible. However, the word *laos*, of which *laikos* is the adjective, frequently appears in the Bible. *Laos* means 'people' and it is often used in the Bible in contrast to the gentiles. Therefore it refers to the people of God, distinct from the gentiles. They are the people chosen by God to fulfil his purpose in the world in contrast to the peoples who were not consecrated. According to [1 Peter 2:9-10](#), the priestly functions of the OT are carried over to the people of God as a whole. The word 'cleric' and 'clerk' come from the Greek *klêros*, which primarily means 'lot' and then 'portion' or 'heritage'. In [1 Peter 5:3](#) the word in the plural means the community allotted to each presbyter. This shows that the term clergy refers to an office, a function, and not a state of life. The clergy are allotted a special portion of work from among the whole people of God. The clerical condition is mainly defined by the service of the altar and the religious service of the people. The clergy enter into this service by ordination. The first use of the word 'layman' as opposed to 'priest' is found in the letter of Clement of Rome to Corinthians. Later on the distinction became clear. However, in the NT there appears no such distinction.

The church is called to be the 'salt' and 'light' of the world. If this call is to be fulfilled, it is necessary that the lay people should be motivated and trained to involve themselves in Christian ministry, because it is only by the laity that the church can reach the whole society through its daily occupations and secular living. They are the bridge between the church and the world to which we have an obligation to minister. The church is a corporate community in which all, not just the clergy, have a ministry. This of course includes women, youths, and children. The corporate nature of the church's life and ministry is clearly brought out by Paul in his image of the church as the body of Christ. God has appointed in the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, miracle workers, healers, helpers, administrators, and speakers of various kinds of tongues ([1 Cor. 12:27-28](#); [Eph. 4:11-13](#)). There are diverse functions, but we all share one life, the life of Jesus Christ through his Spirit. Therefore all members, irrespective of sex and age, are important and necessary for the body of Christ to function. Both clergy and laity should plan and work together to communicate effectively the love of God to contemporary

¹ D. A. Thangasamy, *Towards Involvement: The Theory and Practice of Laity Education* (CLS-ISPCCK-LPH, 1972), p. xi.

society.

Biblical Foundation for Lay Involvement in Ministry

The laity have been God's instruments from the early time in Israel's history. Both Moses and Joshua were heavily dependent on the elders of Israel in their tasks. The authority of Moses to judge people was delegated to the able men chosen by him out of all Israel ([Ex. 18:24-26](#)) and similarly some of the spirit, which was upon Moses, was put by God upon seventy men to be the officers of the people so that they might share the burden with Moses ([Num. 11:16-25](#)). The seventy elders of Israel went up with Moses, Aaron and the priests to Mt. Sinai where they saw God ([Ex. 24:9-11](#)). The elders of Israel went up against Ai along with Joshua ([Josh. 8:10](#)). Without the support of the lay people the leaders could not have discharged their responsibilities successfully. God often spoke through lay prophets in the Old Testament. For example, Amos was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees, but God chose him to be his instrument to declare his message not as a priest, but as a simple man in the market place ([Amos 7:14](#)). Elijah and Elisha were peasants and God called them to be his ambassadors before kings and ordinary people ([1 Kgs. 17ff.](#); cf. [Jam. 5:17-18](#)). Even in a male dominated world God used women like Ruth and Esther as his messengers. In the New Testament we have evidence of women like Lydia, a seller of purple goods, and Priscilla, a tent-maker, who were chosen by God to be partners in proclaiming the gospel ([Acts 16:14, 40; 18: 2, 3; Rom. 16:4-5](#)). Paul's journeys and mission were much dependent on lay persons who took care of the churches he established (e.g. [Acts. 14:23; 20:17ff.](#)). Thus the New Testament church was heavily dependent on lay members and leaders.

But today in most of the churches the situation is different. Congregations are heavily dependent upon clerical leadership. They are satisfied with attending Sunday services, paying regular subscriptions and giving offerings. For some reason or the other their talents and abilities hidden unused. They remain inactive partly because of their fear and unwillingness, but mostly because of lack of care on the part of the clergy.

Lay-Clergy Teamwork in Ministry

A. J. Lindgren and N. Shawchuck suggest five factors as important for the increased involvement of lay people in the church's ministry.²

1. The foundation for the empowerment of God's people in carrying out the church's ministry is spiritual renewal. The church, particularly the clergy, must provide many opportunities for the laity through worship, social action, Bible study, group sharing, discussion, etc. in which everyone will be able to realize God's presence and be renewed.
2. The clergy should seek consciously to identify the personal needs, goals, and abilities of members and relate them to the church's goals and activities. People will involve themselves in the church's life only if they find the church programmes interesting and fulfilling some of their own personal needs and goals. A pastor should never build a church programme that reflects only his/her interest and theological position.
3. The laity can work together with the clergy in making basic decisions of policy and programming and also in implementing them. This can be done effectively even

² A. J. Lindgren and N. Shawchuck, *Let My People Go: Empowering Laity for Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), pp. 24-26.

without obtaining membership of the Pastorate Committee and other administrative structures.

4. The pastor's leadership style, the quality of his interpersonal relationships, and his professional competence are critical factors in enhancing or blocking the empowerment of lay involvement in the church's ministry.
5. The clergy, along with the whole congregation, should plan for identifying, recruiting, and training lay persons as church leaders so that they may be able to use their interests and abilities at the maximum level.

Thus the church at large and pastors in particular should provide enough service opportunities to release the power of the lay people and enable them to minister effectively to a broader spectrum of human needs around them.

SOME AREAS OF INVOLVEMENT FOR THE LAITY

Yves Congar classifies the functions of the laity in five different categories.³ Using his classification as a framework, I give my suggestions as to the possible areas of lay involvement in churches.

1. *The Church's Priestly Function*: In this type of ministry the lay potential can be used in worship services. They may be encouraged to conduct prayers and intercessions, to read the Scriptures, and to assist the clergy in the celebration of the sacraments (baptism and the Lord's Supper). I am sure that most of the churches are already doing this, but still many more lay leaders may be trained and used in the priestly function of the church.
2. *The Church's Kingly Function*: The kingly aspect of the ministry may denote the leadership and administrative role which the laity could play in the Body of Christ. They should be delegated the authority for taking care of the congregation by doing house-visiting, by visiting the sick, prisoners, homes for the aged, bereaved families, the shut-ins, and all kinds of needy people. They must be given enough opportunities to give leadership to various committees, to look after the properties and the buildings of the church, and to keep the congregation register and financial accounts. The laity, along with the clergy, can take gifts to people on special occasions and also receive gifts for the growth of the church. The institutions and organizations managed by the church can effectively be administered primarily by the laity who are experts in particular disciplines in secular education.
3. *The Church's Prophetic Function*: The lay members are prophets who can receive the Word of God and deliver it to others. Preaching and teaching are the important aspects of the church's ministry and lay leaders can more meaningfully carry out this ministry, if they are given adequate training. By so doing, they themselves will be strengthened in their Christian faith. Prophetic ministry also includes social action and working for social justice and equality. The laity can become involved in this type of ministry by encouraging the good, and condemning the evil in society, by writing on current issues

³ Y. Congar, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity* (Westminster, Maryland, The Newman Press, reprint, 1967), pp. 121ff. Also, the New Delhi Statement, published at the time of the consultation on 'The Evangelization of the Poor' that was held in New Delhi on 17-23 October 1993, classifies the church's ministry in five categories: the soteriological function, the prophetic function, the ecumenical function, the priestly function, and the kingly function—see *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol. 18 (2, 1994), p. 178; and B. J. Nicholls and B. R. Wood (eds.), *Sharing the Good News with the Poor*, (Bangalore: Baker Book House, 1996), pp. 15-16.

and by staging forums for discussions.

4. *The Church's Communal Life*: The church's vitality and witness largely depend upon its communal life in terms of fellowship and sharing. The solidarity of its members should be promoted and protected. The role of the laity in this important area of the church's life is crucial. They can organize small groups for each area, occasional get-togethers, fellowship meals, picnics, games, excursions, dramas, choir and orchestra programmes, carol services, village evangelism, community development programmes, conventions, and conferences, and so on (the list is not exhaustive).
5. *The Church's Apostolic Function*: This kind of work involves reaching the unreached with the gospel of Jesus Christ, planting churches, and strengthening them by teaching the Christian faith in a new way. The laity of the church have more access to society than the clergy and therefore evangelism and mission can effectively be carried out by them. It may be carried out either within or outside one's own culture and language. The apostolic function also includes the ministry of encouragement and collection of gifts for the needy. Such works can better be performed by the lay people.

APPENDIX

The following two major concerns were raised in our discussion:

Problems Involved in Lay Leadership

While lay involvement is essential for the growth and health of the church, one cannot ignore the problems associated with it. In some churches there is a danger of lay people dominating the clergy and not cooperating with the Pastorate Committee. Instead of concentrating on their respective works, sometimes they begin to build up animosity against church administration and organizational structures. However, problems need not stop lay involvement in our churches. The question is: why does such a situation occur in churches today? During the discussion, one member pointed out that it is because of lack of lay training. Indeed an average layperson remains ill-equipped even today to carry out Christ's work in the world.

What Shall We Do for Training the Laity?

Attention was drawn to the need to conduct lay-training programmes in suitable places. A one-year course, preferably in the evenings, may be worked out and teachers from theological colleges may be utilized in this training programme. Courses may be offered to the Pastorate Committee members, Sunday School teachers, youth leaders, and women's workers. They must be well trained before they are given authority. Probably this is an area which needs careful thinking and planning.

Further Questions for Discussion:

1. How can we motivate and encourage lay persons in our churches to become involved in ministry?
2. What are the other areas in which they might be involved?
3. In what way can today's laity be better trained?
4. How can we help one another, particularly when problems such as power consciousness, non-cooperating attitudes, etc. arise in the minds of lay members in our churches?

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Christian Responses to the New Age Spirituality

John W Drane

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In this article Dr Drane shows that New Age spirituality and practice is the religious projection of post-modernity. Its origins are many and diverse and its goal is none other than to induce altered and new dimensional levels of human consciousness. Most New Agers identify the church with the failure of western culture and spirituality, and thus if christianity is part of the problem it cannot be part of the solution. The author notes that New Age claims to enhanced mental powers and stress-relieving therapies are attracting the attention of the business world. He urges Christians to respond positively to the challenges of this paradigm shift in spirituality and culture

One of the most obvious signs of the burgeoning spirituality of our day is the growing popularity of the New Age. Most general bookstores have New Age (or Body, Mind, and Spirit) sections, while the New Age identity advertises consumer products ranging from beauty care and fashions to music and complementary health therapies. Moreover, the influence of the New Age is not restricted to popular culture, and the ranks of New Age writers include scientists,¹ as well as social scientists and business professors—while the emergence of transpersonal psychology is also generally recognized as part of this new spiritual search.²

But what exactly is the New Age? Some argue the idea has been dreamed up by paranoid Christian fundamentalists, who, with the collapse of Communism, no longer had anything to hate, and therefore needed to create a new enemy for themselves.³ Even New Agers struggle to define it. Social psychologist John L. Simmons writes: ‘I knew something was stirring in the world but I didn’t know what’, and then adds, ‘the signs of the new movement are everywhere . . . millions of people are, in one way or another, becoming unofficially involved in it’, and it ‘may currently be the most vital information in the world,

¹ Fritjof Capra, *The Turning Point* (London: Flamingo, 1983); Rupert Sheldrake, *The Rebirth of Nature: the Greening of Science and of God* (London: Century, 1990); James Lovelock, author of the classic *Gaia: A New Look at life on Earth* (Oxford: OUP, 1979); Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy* (Los Angeles: I. P. Tarcher, 1980); William Bloom, *The New Age: an anthology of essential writings* (London: Rider, 1991).

² R. S. Valle, ‘The Emergence of Transpersonal Psychology’ in R. S. Valle & S. Halling, eds., *Existential-Phenomenological Perspectives in Psychology* (New York: Plenum Press, 1989), pp. 257–268.

³ For examples of this approach, cf Constance Cumbe, *The Hidden Dangers of the Rainbow* (Louisiana: Huntington House, 1983); Alan Morrison. *The Serpent and the Cross* (Birmingham: K & M Books, 1994).

with incredible implications for every man, woman, and child alive today.⁴ Others who thought they knew what it was, and who once happily bore the New Age label, now wish to discard it, because of its misuse by racketeers more interested in money than spirituality.⁵

Merely listing the empirical signs of the New Age is of little help, for it embraces an extraordinary diversity of artifacts and techniques whose purpose is vaguely 'spiritual'. Electronic gadgets claiming to make you a new person via personal colour analysis, aromatherapy, yoga, homeopathy, wilderness retreats, 'bodywork' and massage. Therapists offer to put clients in touch with their inner selves, while yet others advertize introductions to personal 'spirit guides', and claim the ability to channel messages from whales, dolphins, extra-terrestrials, and even (in one advertisement I came across) Barbie dolls ('the polyethylene essence who is 700 million teaching entities').⁶

It is a major challenge even to describe something so multi-faceted, let alone to analyze it in any systematic way. This is not a problem for New Agers, who for other reasons are generally contemptuous of analytical knowledge. The only way to explain how all these things belong together is to invoke something like Wittgenstein's notion of 'family resemblances'.⁷ A New Age music catalogue, for instance, might contain recordings channelled in from some spiritual world, which, as they are played, will put listeners into altered states of consciousness. But it might just as easily contain Gregorian chants and the music of Graham Kendrick. What is true of the parts is not necessarily going to be true of the whole (and *vice versa*). In reality, the only thing these particular examples have in common is that someone put them in the same catalogue and labelled them all 'New Age'!⁸

ORIGINS

It can be hard to take all this seriously. Yet Lawrence Osborn claims that 'New Age ideas and activities are now virtually coextensive with western culture'.⁹ So what is going on?

According to New Agers our culture is undergoing a paradigm shift. The worldview originating with the European Enlightenment—and beyond that, the Reformation and classical Greece and Rome—is in a state of terminal collapse. New Agers are not the only ones to believe that, and a comprehensive account of it takes us well beyond the narrow concerns of theological inquiry, to embrace science as well as politics and financial disciplines. But within this wide frame of reference several things are providing a significant impetus to the development of the specifically religious and spiritual dimensions of the New Age.

First is *astrology*. Astrologically speaking, the age of Pisces (the fish) has lasted for 2000 years, roughly corresponding with the Christian era. Sometime between now and the middle of the next century the age of Aquarius (the water bearer) will dawn. These ages can be correlated with Joachim of Fiore's dispensations of Law, Grace, and Freedom

⁴ L. Simmons, *The Emerging New Age* (Santa Fe: Bear & Co., 1990), quotations from pp. 7, 12, 14.

⁵ E.g., Carol Riddell, *The Findhorn Community* (Findhorn: Findhorn Press, 1991), p. 64.

⁶ For examples, cf. New Age magazines such as *New Age Journal* or *Kindred Spirit*. 'Barbie channeling' was advertized in San Francisco's *Common Ground* 72 (1992), p. 80.

⁷ L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1968), sections 65–78.

⁸ A more extensive description of the New Age is in my *What is the New Age Saying to the Church?* (London: HarperCollins, 1991).

⁹ Lawrence Osborn, *Angels of Light?* (London: Daybreak, 1992), p. xii.

corresponding to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, so as to make the identification Aries = the Father/Judaism; Pisces = the Son/Christianity; and Aquarius = the Spirit/New Age. This Age of Aquarius will bring about many changes, including advances in human potential: 'The paradigm of the Aquarian conspiracy sees humankind embedded in nature. It promotes the autonomous individual in a decentralized society. It sees us as stewards of our resources, inner and outer. It says that we are not victims, not pawns, not limited by conditions and conditioning.'¹⁰ Some claim there will even be measurable physical changes in the way the earth relates to the rest of the solar system.¹¹ Like Christian eschatology, New Age teaching asserts that though the Age of Aquarius is not yet here in its fullness, its arrival is certain, and those who are spiritually aware will tune in to its values here and now. Most New Age therapies are supposed to provide ways of achieving this, usually by inducing altered or new-dimensional levels of consciousness.

Not totally unrelated to astrology is the fact that the year 2000 will shortly be here. The year 1000 produced intense millennialist speculation, and a similar phenomenon looks set to appear in the closing years of this century. People who would not be attracted by the esoteric side are still attracted by the New Age vision, because it seems to correspond to their own hope that a new millennium will provide the opportunity for a new start.

In addition, there is a deep dissatisfaction with the present western culture and worldview. A typical New Age understanding starts with the conviction that the Enlightenment, along with the science and technology generated by it, has failed. There may have been great advances in, for example, transportation systems and medical science. But at a more profound level, it has not worked. Mechanistic models for understanding human life have created more problems than they solved. Combined with a reductionist approach to knowledge, a rationalist-materialist worldview has produced discontinuities in every area of life, from the depersonalization experienced by patients in modern scientific medicine, to the pollution of the environment. Things are getting worse, not better. Enlightenment philosophy and science promised to equip people to control the environment, rather than the environment controlling them. But today's environmental crisis has unleashed forces that are beyond the capacity of human reason, and for the first time since the middle ages humankind's destiny is controlled by unknown, and probably unknowable, natural forces.

The New Age then is both a response to and an expression of the forces of modernity. Its response to the crisis in modernity is, in effect, a form of post-modernism, projected as religion. This should alert us to the difficulty of finding easy answers to many of the questions it raises. In his perceptive, if intemperate, study of post-modernism, Ernst Gellner speaks for many when he remarks that 'Post-modernism is a contemporary movement. It is strong and fashionable. Over and above this, it is not altogether clear what the devil it is. In fact, clarity is not conspicuous amongst its marked attributes.'¹²

¹⁰ Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, p. 30. Statements like this of course raise serious ethical questions. See further my paper 'Coming to Terms with the New Age Movement', in the *Report of the Board of Social Responsibility* presented to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, May 1993, pp. 54–57.

¹¹ 'The New Age has begun, but will not be fully recognized as such until the shift of the [earth's magnetic] axis has eradicated some of the evils of the present age ...' (Ruth Montgomery, *Strangers Among Us* (Fawcett Crest, 1979), pp. 30–31.)

¹² E. Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 22. For more on this, cf. my article, 'Salvation and Cultural Change', in D. English, *Windows on Salvation* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1994), pp. 166–180.

Spirituality

The New Age diagnosis of the problem is, however, quite clear. The present predicament is blamed on a loss of direction by previous generations. Inspired by a rationalist-materialist-reductionist worldview, our forebears devalued spiritual and personal values in favour of a mechanistic outlook. If a loss of spiritual perception is the cause of the problem, then obviously any effective resolution of the present crisis must start with the recovery of spirituality.

Furthermore, if there is a way out of the mess, traditional western sources of spiritual guidance will be of little help in finding it. As part of the old cultural establishment, the church is regarded as incapable of exercising any constructive role in charting a course for the future. Most New Agers have no difficulty in identifying the Enlightenment worldview with the church, and when one part of the philosophical edifice of western culture begins to crumble, that inevitably calls into question its other central components.

We might debate whether Christianity shaped the Enlightenment, or whether it was the other way round, and the church allowed itself to be taken over by essentially secular values.¹³ Either way, the practical outcome is the same: if Christianity is part of the problem it cannot also be part of the solution. Consequently, the only place to find spiritual guidance for the future will be in other cultures and worldviews, or within ourselves.

This leads some New Agers towards non-western religions, especially Buddhism. Others gravitate towards ethnic cultures previously displaced by European invasions of the Americas, Australasia, or Africa. This particular route to a new worldview has the added advantage of helping to expiate some of the West's corporate guilt about its past treatment of other cultures.

Yet other New Agers seek spiritual solutions in what is effectively a reversal of history, by looking to the pre-Christian pagan worldview of the West itself. As a result, Celtic mythology, along with all manner of occult and animistic worldviews, are also gaining new popularity and acceptance.

There are others, however, who are still sufficiently influenced by Enlightenment rationalist-materialism to be suspicious of anything that could be called 'religion'. They tend to search for new understandings by exploring the depths of their own psyche, encouraged by the apparent similarities between the techniques of transpersonal psychology and the experiences of mystics through the ages.

Some argue that the New Age has come about as eastern religions have travelled west.¹⁴ But this is too narrow an understanding. Eastern and monistic influences account for only a tiny part of the New Age, and there is a much stronger input from other sources. There is, for instance, a highly dualistic New Age, with a worldview similar to ancient Gnosticism and whose basic conviction is that people do not belong on this earth, but in some spiritual extra-terrestrial sphere. This bit of the New Age specializes in channelling messages from spirit guides and extra-terrestrials, and speculating about the lost continents Lemuria and Atlantis, or legends of Arthurian Britain. Its historical lineage can be traced through people like Swedenborg, Mesmer, Blavatsky, Bailey, and Cayce. Alongside this, however, a different section of the New Age espouses a creation-based spirituality which is either pantheistic or panentheistic, and its heritage is more easily

¹³ Cf. Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks* (Geneva: WCC, 1986) and *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (London: SPCK, 1989).

¹⁴ Cf. I. Gordon Melton, *Encyclopedic Handbook of Cults in America* (New York: Garland, 1992 = Garland Reference Library of Social Science, vol. 797), p. 164.

traced through Romantic poets like Shelley, Blake, and Wordsworth, with further connections to the eco-feminist revival of Wicca, and even to more mainstream feminist theology.¹⁵ Such diverse elements clearly do not have one single root, and searching for one is a pointless exercise. But they do have a common motivation, which leads me to conclude that the real driving force behind the New Age in all its forms is dissatisfaction with the cultural *status quo* of the West. In so far as western culture has also been Christian culture, dissatisfaction with Christianity is inevitably a part of that.

New Age unease with Christianity centres on the notion of dualism, and it is not hard to see why. As examples, we might mention how the acceptance of an absolute distinction between people and nature gave permission for destruction and pollution of the environment with no concern for the consequences. Or the way the church perpetuated the idea that confrontation is the way to resolve differences between peoples. Or the abuse and exploitation of women by men. Or the assumption that analytical, logical reason is of greater value than intuition and creativity. The dominance of such dualisms in western thinking forms the basis of Capra's argument that 'This emphasis, supported by the patriarchal system and further encouraged by the dominance of sensate culture during the past three centuries, has led to a profound cultural imbalance which lies at the very root of our current crisis . . .'¹⁶ It is no surprise that many in the New Age find something like a monistic worldview—albeit redefined in a variety of ways, using materials from many different sources—far more relevant to the salvation of our culture than a Christianity which for most of its history has been dominated by dualism in its most extreme form, as originally expounded within Platonism and embraced with enthusiasm by most generations of Christian believers ever since.¹⁷

New Age at Work

This search for a holistic spiritual paradigm has surfaced in unexpected places, not least in the world of big business. Attendance at so-called 'New Age' training courses has become a regular part of many people's working life. Much attention has been focused on these courses by the popular media, largely as a result of claims that some of the techniques infringe on human rights. Several successful lawsuits have been brought on such grounds, both here and in the USA, and there is plenty of evidence of what to most people would be bizarre practices within these courses. One might initially think of the use of pyramids and electronic 'mind machines' to expand the human brain, or the study of books like *The Ultimate Super Will Power*, which claims that 'if you simply put this book in your bag or brief case, the eighth dimensional power generated by the book will bring you happiness and good fortune'.¹⁸ But these seem almost normal compared with other

¹⁵ For this typological analysis of the New Age I am indebted to one of my graduate researchers, Paul Greer, *The Spiritual Dynamics of the New Age Movement* (Stirling University PhD, 1994).

¹⁶ Capra, *The Turning Point*, pp. 21–22.

¹⁷ For an account of Christian history and theology from this perspective, cf. Matthew Fox, *Whee! We, Wee All the Way Home* (Santa Fe: Bear & Co., 1981); *Original Blessing* (Santa Fe: Bear & Co., 1983). Fox's questions are often more useful than his answers, but that should not allow us to dismiss their significance. For critiques, cf. Rosemary Radford Ruether, 'Matthew Fox and Creation Spirituality', *Catholic World*, (July/August 1990), pp. 168–172; Andrew Deeter Dreiteer, 'A New Creation', *The Way*, 29/1, (1989), pp. 4–12; Ted Peters, *The Cosmic Self* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), pp. 120–131; Jane E. Strohl, 'The Matthew Fox Phenomenon', *Word & World* 8, (Winter 1988), pp. 42–47; Andrew Walker, ed., *Different Gospels* (London: SPCK, 1993), pp. 155–172.

¹⁸ Katao Ishii, *The Ultimate Super Will Power* (Gardena CA: ESP Science Research Institute, 1986).

courses during which managers might dress up as witches and wizards to create their perfect work environment by casting demons out of their corporate empire, or seek to change the actual nature of reality through techniques like Neuro-Linguistic Programming.

It is easy to dismiss such things as trendy nonsense. But there is a serious side to all this. It was perhaps inevitable that dissatisfaction with the Enlightenment worldview should be strongly felt in the industrial context, for this is where mechanistic assumptions were most often taken to their logical conclusion. Russell Ackoff is typical of a number of management consultants who blame all the evils of the Industrial Revolution on the Christian belief in God as a transcendent creator. As 'a consequence of man's efforts to imitate God by creating machines to do his work, industrial organizations . . . were taken to be related to their creators, their owners, much as the universe was to God . . . employees were treated as replaceable machines or machine parts even though they were known to be human beings . . .'¹⁹ This understanding leads Ackoff to reiterate a familiar New Age theme, that if Christianity is part of the problem it cannot be part of the solution, and therefore we must look elsewhere for the way out of our present predicament. For Ackoff, this is to be found in the monistic worldview of Eastern cultures (in management-speak 'the God of the Systems Age'), or 'God-as-the-whole [who], cannot be individualized or personified, and cannot be thought of as the creator'.²⁰

Others find themselves more attracted to neo-paganism as a way of resolving things. These people might describe themselves as 'like the shamans and magicians of the past . . . spiritual warriors', searching for 'a magical elixir to revive the dying dragon child', and thereby establish themselves as 'the initiators and creators of their world'.²¹ One such consultant, Lew Tice, is reported as telling his clients: 'You have the power to become the Wizard of Oz. My affirmations are continually that I am a very powerful wizard . . . I bestow upon you the brains and habits to make yourself a better human being.'²²

It is no surprise that such courses are popular, when they claim not only to make managers better people, but also to enhance the profits of their companies, and even impart the power actually to change the way the world is. The combination of the power of positive thinking with stress-relieving therapies, witchcraft, serious cultural analysis, and (to be honest) a lot of fun, means there is something for everyone in here. Of course, not every 'New Age' management course contains all these elements, and what is true of the parts is not necessarily true of the whole. But the mere fact that this kind of thing is widely perceived as the way forward into the next century underlines the far-reaching nature of the paradigm shift which is taking place all around us.

Christianity and the New Age

Clearly, Christians need to pay urgent attention to all this. For in addition to the theological questions raised by the New Age, those most attracted to it are, in sociological terms, the people who in the past formed the natural constituency of the churches.²³ Many

¹⁹ Russell Ackoff, *Creating the Corporate Future* (New York: Wiley, 1981). On this, see the whole of part 1, esp. pp. 3–24; quotations are from pp. 25–26.

²⁰ *Op. cit.*, pp. 19–20.

²¹ For an account of such courses see Rachel Storm, 'Disciples of the New Age', *International Management*, (March 1991), pp. 42–45.

²² For more extensive discussion of all this, cf. my *What is the New Age Saying to the Church?*, pp. 168–201.

²³ Cf. Lawrence Osborn, 'The Gospel in the New Age', *Gospel and Culture* 18, (Autumn 1993), pp. 1–5.

New Agers are indifferent to Christianity, but others are to varying degrees opposed to it and see no possibility of progress unless the traditional Christian worldview is comprehensively abandoned. The rising popularity of the New Age and the decline of the church are but different sides of the same coin, and at least four specific challenges to the church can be identified in all this.

(1) Do western Christians have the courage to live with their heritage and history? Sometimes the record needs to be put straight: Christians have not single-handedly been responsible for everything that has gone wrong in the world, as some New Agers are inclined to claim. But Christians have certainly done plenty for which they bear corporate guilt, and any attempt to rewrite history will be seen for what it is: special pleading and self-justification. Repentance will be a more appropriate response.

(2) The New Age disquiet with dualism is generally well-founded, especially as it relates to Christian understandings of sin and blessing, and the nature of God. Many people (including many Christians) experience the church as an institution which puts them down and refuses to accept them as they are. Have Christians emphasized the wrong kind of dualisms, for example by using concepts of sin to justify themselves and condemn others? And what is an authentically Christian view of both divine and human creativity *vis-à-vis* fallenness?²⁴

(3) Further the mystical/supernatural/numinous/spiritual dimension of Christian faith now demands honest reappraisal. Many—though not all—New Agers have a strong belief in some kind of spiritual reality lying beyond this world, and the whole question of direct personal perception of the divine is, in varying ways, of growing importance to an increasing proportion of the population. These people see most Christians as thoroughgoing rationalist-materialists, and for that very reason regard the church as irrelevant to the contemporary debates on spirituality. On the other hand fundamentalists often see engagement with the New Age as ‘spiritual warfare’, and so the issue becomes a battle between one form of dualism and another, and the ‘Christian’ perspective is barely distinguishable from its New Age counterpart. One of the most urgent challenges is for Christians to sort out what they believe about all this.

(4) Most New Agers find Jesus attractive, but believe the church does not address—let alone meet—their spiritual needs. For Jacob Needleman, Christianity is only a matter of words, exhortations and philosophy rather than a matter of practical guidance for experiencing directly the truth of the teachings’.²⁵ Ian Wray believes Christianity cares only about ‘dwelling intellectually upon the dogma, with a consequent lack of therapeutic, by which I mean the lack of any real body of ideas and practices to help people change. The near total absence of practical aids to human psychological and spiritual growth within Christianity left a vacuum which [New Age therapies] had to fill, based upon principles which [they] had to discover for themselves.’²⁶

Needleman goes on to say that his spiritual search is for ‘the Christianity that works, that actually produces real change in human nature, real transformation’. Presumably Christians are looking for the same thing, which is one of several reasons why it makes more sense to regard the New Age as an opportunity rather than a threat. Those prepared

²⁴ For more on this cf. my *Evangelism for a New Age: Creating Churches for the Next Century* (London: HarperCollins, 1994).

²⁵ Jacob Needleman, *Lost Christianity* (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1980), p. 35.

²⁶ Ian Wray ‘Buddhism and Psychotherapy’, G. Claxton, *Beyond Therapy* (London: Wisdom Publications, 1986), pp. 160–161.

to engage with some of these questions might easily discover there is less distance than they think between Christianity and the New Age.

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Communicating the Concept of God in Korean Culture

Bong Rin Ro

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The terminology used for 'God' in any culture always has profound significance for theological understanding and for the practice of evangelism and church growth. Dr Bong Ro shows the importance of this understanding in communicating the concept of God to the people of Korea in the plurality of their religious cultures.
Editor

INTRODUCTION

How can one communicate the God of the Bible to Koreans with totally different concepts of God due to their traditional cultures and religions? How does a Christian interpret the religious experience of prayerful contemplation of a Buddhist in comparison with his own prayer to God? In the rural communities many farmers believe in Shamanism and the power of spirits that control their lives. Are there some common grounds between Christians and non-Christians where they can have religious dialogue?

It is very important for us to gain a proper understanding of the Korean concept of God and how to effectively communicate the gospel to Asians, especially Koreans. In order to achieve this objective the author deals with two principal areas: first, how do we analyse the complex Korean concepts of the deity; and secondly, how do we apply scriptural principles for the purpose of communicating the God of the Bible to Koreans in the context of the 21st century?

KOREAN CONCEPTS OF GOD

Dr. Yong-Bok Rha in his Th.D. thesis at Boston University in 1977, *An Analysis of the Terms used for God in Korea in the Context of Indigenization*, provides useful information on the concepts of God in Korea and lists thirteen different terms for God which this present author divides into three categories. The first category of gods is definitely influenced by Chinese concepts. The second category of gods is related to Korean indigenous shamanism, and the third category has to do with the mythological story of the foremost ancestor of the Korean race, Tangoon.

I Names of God Related to Chinese Concept of Heavenly Rulers

1. *Chun (Heaven), Sang Che (Heavenly Ruler), and Shen (God)*

A number of names of God in Korea are related to the ruler(s) of the heavens, because the Koreans believed in the heavenly rulers just as the Chinese did. The Chinese used three terms to name their God: *Shang Ti* (Heavenly Ruler, called *Sang Che* in Korean), *T'ien* (Heaven, *Chun* in Korean), and *Shen* (God, *Shin* in Korean). During the Golden Age of China in the twenty-third century B.C., according to the Book of History, Emperor Shun offered sacrifice to Shang Ti to celebrate his accession to the throne, and offered at Tai Shan other sacrifices to the hills and streams, and a burnt offering to T'ien. Shang Ti is a personal God, the supreme ruler of all the rulers of the earth, while T'ien represents an impersonal heaven or providence. Shen is used as a technical term for God, often conveying the meaning of spirits or good spirits in contrast to evil spirits called *Kwei*.

Koreans still use the words Chun (T'ien), Sang Che (Shang Ti), and Shin (Shun), which came from the Chinese characters, when they refer to God. Chun was mainly used by Korean Confucianists, while Sang Che was used by the first Protestant missionaries in their Bible translation until the Korean Christians and the first missionaries decided to drop it and use rather the Korean colloquial language for God. We have to understand that many Korean words derived from Chinese characters, but most other vocabulary came directly from the Korean language without any connection with the Chinese language.

Therefore, Koreans commonly used the words, *Ha Nul Nim* (하늘님), or *Han Ool Nim* (하느님), or *Ha Nu Nim* (한울님) for God. Chun Do Kyo (Heavenly Way Religion) which is an indigenous religion founded by Jae-Woo Choe in 1860, who tried to combine western Christianity with eastern learning, used Sang Che for a time but does not use it any longer.

2. *Chun Chu* (Lord of Heaven), *Chun Shin* (Gods of heaven), and *Ok Hwang Che* (The Supreme Emperor or the King of Kings). When Mateo Ricci, a Jesuit missionary to China (1581–1610), began to work on the book, *T'ien-Hsueh-Shih-I* (The True Doctrine of T'iens Teachings), in 1591, he chose the word, T'ien Chu (Chun Chu), for God. After that, the Roman Catholic Church both in China and Korea used this word until 1971 when the Korean Bible Society decided to produce a joint New Testament translation for Roman Catholics and Protestants, using the word for God, Ha Nu Nim, instead.

Chun Shin means 'gods in heavens' signifying personified heaven and representing some nature gods as well as spirits in Shamanism in Korea. Since the Confucianists believe in heavenly powers, Chuh Shin represents natural powers that control wind, rain, storm, mountain, river etc. For Shamanists, Chun Shin means gods of spirits that control all aspects of human life, particularly related to rural and agricultural settings.

Ok Hwang Che, which means the Supreme Emperor among the rulers, is the name of the deity for the Taoists in Korea. There is a hierarchical structure among the heavenly celestial beings, and this concept of gods conveys a thought of the Supreme One among many powerful rulers of the universe. Since Taoism deals with harmony with nature, it has many superstitious practices to communicate with gods and spirits in this world.

3. *Bu Chu Nim (Buddha)* in Buddhism. When Gautama (ca. 560–480 B.C.) lived in northeast India, his main concern was with human suffering (*dukha*) and how to extinguish suffering by attaining to the status of nirvana rather than the existence of god(s); therefore, some Buddhist scholars consider Buddhism as atheistic or agnostic. Theravada Buddhism does not consider Gautama Buddha as deity, but in Mahayana Buddhism which is prevalent in China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam Gautama has been deified as the Absolute and the eternal Buddha essence.

Koreans worship Buddha as deity and revere Bodhisattvas (whose statues stand in the temples). These Bodhisattvas supposedly could reach the status of nirvana but

abdicated the privilege in order to help others. There are hundreds of Buddha and Bodhisattva statues in Buddhist temples to whom the Buddhists pay their tributes. Korean Buddhism is very polytheistic as are other Mahayana Buddhists in Asia.

4. *Ha Nul Nim*, *Han Ool Nim*, and *Ha Nu Nim* Associated with Heavenly Lord. The most common words used to describe deity in Korea were associated with the Heavenly Lord or the One who rules heavens (Ha Nul in Korean). *Ha Nul Nim* (하늘님) means Heavenly Lord. Ha Nul is the Korean translation of the Chinese character, Chun, which means heaven, and Nim means Lord; therefore, the Korean concept of God has been very closely associated with the One who rules heaven. Confucianists and Shamanists have used this word for God.

Han Ool Nim (한울님) is the term used for God by the Chun Do Kyo (Heavenly Way Religion). There is a difference of opinion among Korean scholars on the origin of this term, Han Ool Nim. One view is that Han (한) means great and Ool is an abbreviated word of 'Oori' (우리) meaning *great we*, therefore, Han Ool Nim means Our Great God. Another view is that this term of God comes from the word, Ha Nul, (하늘) which means heaven; therefore, Han Ool Nim has the same meaning as Ha Nul Nim, Heavenly Lord. *Ha Nu Nim* (하느님) is the most commonly used traditional term for God. The etymology of the word Ha Nu (하느) is the same as of Ha Nul (하늘); the meaning of these terms has the same meaning of Heavenly Lord. The Roman Catholic Church has adopted the word Ha Nu Nim for God.

II the Names of God Related to Shamanism

The majority of Koreans before the coming of western missionaries at the end of the nineteenth century had little education or were illiterate under the feudalistic society. The farmers and rural people were very much affected by shamanistic animism and worshipped many gods and spirits. Besides the *Chun Shin* (Heavenly Spirits) mentioned above, which are associated with nature gods in Shamanism and Confucianism, there are two other main terms used for God by the rural people.

1. *Shin Ryung* (신령 , Gods and Spirits). Korean Shamanists believe in pantheism and polydemonism—that the spirits or gods are living in natural objects such as trees, rocks, hills, waters, houses as well as in living and dead persons. The fear of evil spirits plays an important role in a person's life, so that he or she has to offer sacrifices to the spirits in order to appease them; otherwise, the power of the evil spirits will bring misfortune, sickness and death to him and to his family. Therefore, the exorcists such as *Mudangs* or *Paksus* are brought into the family to appease the spirits. Shin Ryung is still popular among the people not only in rural areas but also in cities.

2. *Ha Na Nim* (하나님 , One Great God). One very significant fact which we have to recognize in Korean Shamanism is the recognition of one Supreme God above other gods and spirits. They used to utilize the word Ha Na Nim (하나님) in which Ha Na means one and Nim means Lord or God.

The Korean spelling of Na (나) was used in the olden days, but the Korean grammar has changed the Na from the old spelling (나) to the new one (나). The hierarchical structure of gods and spirits in Korean Shamanism has placed One Supreme God or Spirit as the head which leads to the concept of monotheism. C.A. Clark, a renowned American

missionary in Korea, states that Ha Na Nim is unique. There is scarcely a question that he goes far back into the dim ages of Korean history long before any of the foreign religions came into the country. In the earliest history of Shamanism, we note how Ye Kook people worshipped Ha Na Nim. It was Ha Na Nim whom Tangoon worshipped on his high altar on Kang Hwa.

In contextualizing the biblical concept of the Trinitarian God, Korean Protestant Christians adopted this term Ha Na Nim for God. This is quite different from the Chinese concepts of polytheism in Buddhism and of the impersonal Lord of Heaven, T'ien, of Confucianism. Furthermore, Koreans have one unified culture and language among 70 million people both in North and South Korea. This is one of the important reasons why Koreans have readily accepted the monotheistic God of the Bible; consequently, the churches have grown very rapidly among the Korean people.

III Tangoon Mythological Concept of God (“trinitarian God”):

Han Ul Nim (**한울님** , One Great Spirit) and *Sam Shin* (**삼신** , Trinitarian God). Each nation usually has its own mythological story of the beginning of their race. The Korean people also have their mythology known as Tangoon Mythology. An indigenous religion of Tangoon Kyo (**단군교**) was established from this mythology and its name was changed to Tai Chong Kyo (**태종교**) in October 1904 by Mr. Bong-I Paik, who claimed to receive special revelation at Mt. Paiktoo. The Tai Chong Kyo has a membership of over a half million people.

According to the Tangoon mythological story, *Hwan In* (Father the Creator) lived with *Hwan Woong* (Teacher, Leader) and *Hwan Kum* (King, Governor) in heaven. The Hwan Woong wanted to establish an earthly kingdom and received permission from his father Hwan In. He descended upon Mt. Tae Paik near Pyungyang with 3,000 spirits and proclaimed himself the ‘King of the Universe’ under an ancient ‘paktal’ tree. He governed the universe through three vice-regents, the ‘Wind General’, the ‘Rain Governor’, and the ‘Cloud Teacher’. Since he wanted to become a human being, he heard a dialogue between a tiger and a bear about becoming human beings. These two animals heard a voice coming out of the Void saying that if each would eat twenty pieces of garlic and a piece of artemisia and retire in a cave for twenty-one days, they would become man. The active tiger could not remain in the cave for 21 days, but the patient bear stayed there for 21 days and become a woman and her first wish was to have a son. Hwan Woong, the Spirit King, saw her sitting beside the stream, circled around her and breathed upon her. She finally conceived and bore a son whose name was Tangoon or Hwan Kum, the foremost ancestor of the Korean race in 2,333 B.C.

Dr. Rha points out three important points in Tai Chong Kyo:

1. It conveys the monotheistic concept in Han Ul Nim, One Great Spirit, and Hwan In, Hwan Woong and Hwan Kum are three functions of Han Ul Nim.

2. Han Ul Nim became incarnated in Tangoon or Hwan Kum and lived in this world (Korea) and ruled the people.

3. A Trinitarian theology based on Tangoon Mythology was developed in Korea in 1963 by Dr. Sung-Bum Yun, professor of theology at the Korean Methodist Seminary in Seoul.

In conclusion, Koreans like many other Asians have worshipped many gods and spirits. Nevertheless, the monotheistic concept of God can be discovered even in the traditional religions of Korea. The similarity of words such as Ha Nu Nim (**하느님** ,

Heavenly Lord) and Ha Na Nim (하나님, One Great Spirit) of Shamanism, and the Christian usage of Ha Na Nim (하나님) for the God of the Bible has certainly helped Korean Christians to witness to non-Christians about the gospel.

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Christian Responses to the Challenge of Native Spiritualities in Central America

Guillermo Cook

Evangelical theology calls for dialogue between the Scriptures as the revealed Word of God, Jesus Christ as unique and universal and the responses of communities of people, each with their own experience of God and of spiritual reality. In this article Dr Cook clearly empathizes with the Maya people of Central America in their past and present search to know God as expressed through rich images and symbols some of which reflect the glory of biblical imagery. The author explores the ways Catholic and Protestant indigenous Christians search for bridges to communicate the fullness of Jesus Christ while acknowledging that his uniqueness is a stumbling block to Maya spirituality. The insights of a team of Maya Presbyterian village pastors from Yucaton, Mexico in formulating their own confession of faith is particularly illuminating. For the Maya people to be unashamedly Christian and unashamedly Maya is a challenge to Christians in every culture.

Even before 1992 and the quincentenary of Columbus' 'discovery' of the 'Americas',¹ the ancient religiosity of the indigenous inhabitants had begun to reappear. It had been hidden for centuries in mountain caves, isolated jungles and under a thin veneer of popular Catholicism. This reawakening coincides with the resurgence of the indigenous populations. A century and a half after the European invasion, the indigenous population in the 'New World' was reduced to barely 10% of its original population of an estimated 100 million people. Today the indigenous population stands at about 50 million and is growing.²

All over the Americas there has been a revival of interest in indigenous culture and spirituality. Informal meetings of indigenous priests and leaders have been held in

¹ The whole incident of the conquest of the 'New World' by European powers is full of ironies and misnomers. Columbus thought he had arrived in the East Indies, the Spice Islands and called the inhabitants 'indians'. Their ancestors were the real discoverers of this new land, when they crossed the Bering land-bridge from Siberia thousand of years before. When Columbus' exploits were forgotten, the new lands came to be named after another Italian explorer, Americo Vespucci, with a greater ability to spin a yarn.

² *500 YEARS Quito*, Latin American Council of Churches, No 3, Nov. 1991, p. 9.

Mesoamerica,³ the Andean region and elsewhere to discuss the content of the various ethnic spiritualities, their commonalities and differences. Indigenous Catholic liberationists and Protestant pastors have dialogued with priests of the resurgent indigenous religions over points of contact between their respective spiritualities. They began with creation myths and exodus events. Understanding was achieved on a number of general theological issues, until the question of Christ's claim to divinity and universality—central to the Christian faith—fractured the unity of indigenous religious leaders. At first glance, there are more points of contact between the Old Testament and indigenous spirituality than with the New Testament. The unique claims of Jesus Christ and of the faith which he founded are not easily assimilated into traditional indigenous spirituality. This has caused numerous defections from among Catholic priests in Guatemala and the Andean region, and more recently, from the ranks of Methodism in Bolivia.

I have chosen to focus upon the Maya people who have been around Mesoamerica for several millenia, because it is the people that I know and love best. Much of what I shall have to say could also be written about the resurgence of indigenous spiritualities in other parts—particularly the Andes region—of what indigenous peoples have begun to call Abia Yala⁴.

Both Catholic and Protestant (including evangelical) indigenous thinkers are struggling to establish bridges between the Christian faith and the spirituality of their ancestors. While the outward trappings of this spirituality, it must be recognized, are not the same as those of the ancient Maya and Aztec priests, many aspects of the underlying worldview remain the same. The fact that even today Maya Christians—both Catholic and Protestant—may be found attending their regular church services as well as secretly practising ancient rites that missionaries taught them are idolatrous is a testimony to a lack of understanding and appreciation of the nature of indigenous spirituality.

I THE PRE-HISTORY OF THE MESOAMERICAN PEOPLES

Mesoamerican indigenous spirituality needs to be taken as seriously as are the so-called great world religions—for reasons of age and sophistication and because of its emerging challenge to Christianity and also because of its alternative proposals to the unsavoury fruits of modernity.

Between ten and fifteen thousand years ago, when the Indo European peoples were just beginning to fan out from the steppes of Central Asia into India, Anatolia, the Aegean and Europe, a unique culture began to develop on the Pacific watershed of Central America. At about the time when Abram and Sarai were migrating south and westward from the Fertile Crescent, the culture which came to be called *Maya* began to move into the Guatemalan highlands and jungle lowlands of Central America, over a period of many centuries. Around the time of the birth of the Buddha in Nepal, and of the return of the Jewish exiles from Persia, a sophisticated civilization of towering temple pyramids was at the height of its development in the northern jungles of Guatemala. The sheer scope of the time and space that this civilization has encompassed is staggering. To put it into a more familiar perspective, the Classic Era of Mesoamerican civilization began at about the time of the close of the New Testament period. It ended, in the ninth century, not long after

³ Mesoamerica (middle America) is the term that Latin Americanist scholars use to refer to the land mass that encompasses Mexico and Central America.

⁴ Abia Yala—'beautiful' or 'fruitful land' — is what the Kuna peoples of Panama call their world. Indigenous leaders throughout Latin America use it to refer to the 'American' continent.

Charlemagne was crowned Holy Roman Emperor. By the time the Spaniards arrived in the sixteenth century, their amazing civilization was buried in jungle growth. Only a few relatively weak and backward warring tribes remained to make life miserable for the invaders for another century or so. Yet, despite their subjugation, the Mayas and their culture are still with us. Their refusal to disappear was dramatized by the ongoing Tzeltal Maya uprising in Chiapas, Mexico. A major factor in their survival has been their secret maintenance of their holistic spirituality.

II TEUTLATOLLI:⁵ SPEAKING ABOUT GOD—INDIGENOUS THEOLOGY AND THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

What I have been calling indigenous ‘religiosity’ or ‘spirituality’, indigenous thinkers prefer to term ‘theology’. An indigenous theologian and Catholic priest, defines his peoples’ theology as ‘the complex of religious knowledge that indigenous peoples possess and by means of which we explain, beginning thousands of years ago until now, our faith experience’. Indigenous theology ‘is not the fruit of intellectual minds of people who write books’, points out Fr. Eleazar López Hernández, an indigenous priest in Mexico. Rather, ‘it is the reflexive expression, in indigenous style (that is, in symbolic and mythical language) of the vital experience that we indigenous have of God’. This means that we should not expect indigenous theologies, and even less their incipient Christologies, to meet western standards of logic and precision.

Indigenous theology has always been expressed not so much through words as through cultic symbols—dances and reenactments, prayers and rituals, dreams and oral tradition, in which the core myths are expressed, discussed, interpreted and elaborated upon. The word for it in indigenous languages signifies ‘God speaking’, and ‘speaking about God’.⁶ The emergent theologies of the indigenous peoples of Abia Yala represent the most recent stage in an age-old, and yet new, grassroots spirituality that can both enrich and challenge traditional Christianity. Such is the case with the various responses of Maya religious leaders to the Christ which was forced upon them by white Europeans and who yet continues to attract them.

European theology,⁷ in all of its manifestations, is increasingly being rejected today by Maya activists and thinkers. It stands accused of cultural insensitivity, at best, and of racial and physical genocide, at worst. Radical Maya thinkers resent being called ‘pagan’; this condescending pejorative makes them fair game for thoughtless proselytizers of every Christian persuasion. ‘Five hundred years have passed and the Christianizers are escalating their efforts to convert us’, Pop Cal explodes. Christian techniques have become more sophisticated: what Catholicism calls the ‘new evangelization’ is disguised in jargon about an ‘indian Christ’, and ‘an autochthonous church’. The Catholic hierarchy, he argues, is trying to convince the indigenous peoples that the violent gospel of the past has today

⁵ *Teutlatolli* is a Nahuatl (Aztec) term that can be translated both as ‘the God that speaks’ and ‘speaking about God’. It is the most abstract term in indigenous theology, and the most explicit vis a vis Christian theology. The term, and its equivalents in other Mesoamerican languages, came into common usage during the classic period (300 to 800 AD)

⁶ See chapter 10 by Fr. Eleazar López Hernández, in Guillermo Cook, *Crosscurrents in Indigenous Spirituality: Interface of Maya, Catholic and Protestant Worldviews* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997).

⁷ I use the term ‘European’ in place of imprecise geographical terms such as ‘Western’ and ‘North’. Central America is, along with the United States and Canada, geographically in the Western and Northern hemispheres. The source of the theology and worldview that indigenous peoples refuse to submit to is ultimately European.

converted to the 'Good News of love' which has become incarnate in Maya culture. But indigenous people cannot forget the brutal excesses of the first evangelization. Even liberation theologians have come in for their share of criticism. In the pursuit of their ideological agendas, indigenous leaders say, liberationists failed to come to terms with the unique spirituality and rich culture of the indigenous peoples. 'The poor and crucified Christ' that progressive Catholics profess to have discovered in indigenous communities is as alienating and demeaning as traditional evangelism. 'It keeps us weak against our oppressors, and turns us all into abjectly servile persons', Pop Cal cries. He accuses ideological warriors of every persuasion of continuing to use indigenous peoples as cannon fodder.

The most scathing criticism, however, of this Mayan intellectual is directed at Protestants who base their missionary activities on the Great Commission. Pop Cal accuses them of depriving 'human beings of the right to search for God on their own'. The Christian claim that the only revelation of God is through his Son Jesus Christ slams the door on Maya-Christian dialogue, radical indigenous thinkers insist.⁸ According to Fr. López Hernández, this radical rejection of Christianity is influential, even though it characterizes only a handful of indigenous intellectuals.

It is precisely the richness of their spiritual and cultural heritage that, indigenous leaders argue, gives them the right to question the imposition of Christianity upon them. But they are not merely questioning, they are building upon their heritage with the materials that have come down to them—and new elements that they have adapted from the invaders—and developing their own responses to Christianity. Maya Christologies are developing in the middle ranges between the extremes of Christian fundamentalism and of indigenous radicalism.

III INCIPIENT INDIGENOUS CHRISTOLOGIES

Christology, even in Scripture, did not develop in a vacuum. The various interpretations of the person of Jesus Christ which have followed grew out of particular understandings about God's intervention in human history—inulturated responses to specific challenges to the Christian faith. This is the case with the Christologies which have arisen in Latin America.

In order to find the freedom to develop uniquely Maya Christologies, indigenous leaders have found it necessary to distance themselves somewhat from the Christian traditions which they have been taught. Nonetheless, their debt to these traditions is quite evident. The hermeneutical tool of Maya Catholic theologians is liberation theology. The theological paradigm of the most articulate Maya Protestant theologians is Reformational theology. It is important to understand that there has been more discussion between Catholic indigenous theologians throughout the Americas and between them and traditional religionists, than among indigenous Protestants who have denominational barriers to surmount, theological hangups to overcome, and induced cultural hangups to circumvent. Until recently, Protestants interested in dialoguing with their own indigenous tradition mainly followed Catholic initiatives. For this reason, one must speak of an indigenous Catholic theology in dialogue with numerous ethnic spiritualities, followed by isolated attempts by indigenous Protestants in the various regions to develop their own theology in dialogue with their cultural traditions.

⁸ Antonio Pop Cal, 'The old face of the new evangelization', in Cook, *Crosscurrents*, Chapter 13. His precise use of evangelical terminology makes one suspect that, at some stage in his formation, he received Protestant teaching.

The Catholic Approach to an Ethnic Christology

Christology did not arrive in the New World in a historical vacuum. It had been warped by Medieval Roman Catholicism and totally distorted by the crusades. The Christ that the Catholic Spanish and Portuguese brought to Latin America was a complex mixture of contradictory and docetic visions—a crusading warrior and a crucified Saviour; a figurehead monarch at the side of his more powerful consort,⁹ as well as the cherubic white baby that she cradles in her arms. These perceptions still inform many Catholics in Latin America.

Because Roman Catholic Christology is so dependent upon ecclesiology and so burdened by its history in Latin America, Maya Catholics who break with their church find it very difficult to develop a meaningful Christology, except by negation. This is, in effect, the recognition of Wuqub Iq, an ex-Catholic priest in Guatemala.

Believers need help in defining their attitudes toward their present situation, and in discerning where the Creator and Former of Life (both personal and collective) is at work—the one who Christians call ‘the Lord of history’. We find ourselves, however, seeking understanding by way of negation rather than affirmation, because the latter can all too easily be manipulated.¹⁰

So Maya Catholics must begin by re-thinking their theology, getting to know the God of their ancestors. The Supreme God of the Mayas was worshipped in their many languages in terms that are often reminiscent of Old Testament language, with one striking difference: though he is referred to in masculine terms, some of the divine names and qualities are feminine. Though the supreme Maya deity is absolute, incorporeal, and in essence nameless, He reveals himself as both male and female, Mother and Father. The female dimension is particularly revealed within nature. This deity, whose highest physical representation is the sun, is acknowledged as the Creator—Builder, Shaper—and the Mover and Integrator of Creation. God, the Defender of his people, is worshipped as Wonderful Lord. But his most arresting name, and the one by which God is often addressed today by culturally aware Mayas is Christological in its implications: ‘Heart of Heaven and Heart of Earth’. These names, for many Catholic Maya, are proof enough that God was revealed to their ancestors through visions and scriptures, prophets, and for some, anthropomorphic manifestations. Might not Mesoamerica, they ask, have had its prophets and divine representatives?¹¹

⁹ It has been suggested that this image was influenced by the ruling style of Isabella of Castile and her consort Ferdinand of Aragon. Cp. Georges Cassalis, in José Miguez-Bonino, ed., *Who is Jesus Christ in Latin America Today?* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1984), pp. 74, 75.

¹⁰ Wuqub’ Iq’, ‘Understanding Mayan spirituality: A proposed methodology for dialogue with Christians’, Chapter 16 of Cook, *Crosscurrents*.

¹¹ Several strands of the Quetzacoatl confusing myth need to be unravelled, since the legends are overlapping. He is a zoomorphic manifestation of the one true God that harks back to the dawn of Mesoamerican civilization. Several Mesoamerican priest-kings bore his name. The best known, a ruler of the central Mexican Toltec kingdom (ca. AD 950), is said to have banished war, instructed his people in the arts of peace, and taught them to worship the One God. Expelled from his land by rival tribes who introduced a warrior god that required human sacrifices, Quetzacoatl abandoned his throne and travelled eastward across the water, promising some day to return (cf. Miguel León Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, [London: SPCK, 1980], pp. 151–167ff). Centuries later, another Toltec Quetzacoatl imposed the feathered serpent cult with sacred warfare and human sacrifice upon the Mayas of Yucatán. This bloody cult was denounced by Maya prophets.

With this appreciation of their own spirituality, indigenous Catholic priests are turning to a Mayan way of understanding the Christian God—‘the Only God’, in Wuqub Iq’s expression, through the spiritual experience of their own peoples. ‘We are searching for guidelines that take our daily reality into account, throw light upon the future, and can orient our pastoral planning.’ In order to know God and to understand Jesus Christ, says Wuqub Iq, it is essential to recognize that the Christianity which the ‘conquistadores’ brought ‘was essentially unlike the fundamental human values which were set forth by the God of Jesus Christ’. What the Spaniards saw as a victory for the rule of Christ—the defeat of infidels and pagans—was not Christianity but ‘a religious ideology for soldiers, adventurers, and zealots’.

Having placed a question mark above ecclesiastical Christology and its claims to absolute truth and authority, Catholic Mayas today value popular religiosity as a symbolic bridge between Christian and Maya spirituality. Catholic missionaries, after fruitless attempts to stamp out indigenous spirituality, eventually came to terms with the popular Christianity of the Mesoamerican peoples. Behind the images of the Lord God and of his ‘deputy’ Jesus Christ, the statues of virgins and saints and the huge crosses in village squares, loom the myriad manifestations of Maya divinity. The dual male and female nature of the gods of Mayan popular religiosity, is echoed in the relationship between Jesus and Mary. The Catholic religious calendar has its counterpart in the sacred calendar of the Mayas. Catholic Mayas find room for dialogue between Roman Catholic sacramental Christology and indigenous sacramental myths; but, in so doing, they must be careful not to threaten the authority of the church. What the outcome of this search for a culturally relevant Christology will be for a Maya Catholic Christology, remains to be seen.

A Protestant Approach to Maya Christology

The Christ that Protestant missionaries announced to the ‘indians’, was dressed in the garb of the English and American traders and missionaries who brought him to Latin America. Reflecting the virtues and vices of the Anglo-Saxon culture, the missionary message was a study in contradictions. It was monotheistic and dualistic, individualistic and pluralistic, austere and hard-working (the Protestant ethic), and at the same time caring and forgiving. Protestant Christology, even today, is both spiritual (mystical) and materialistic (pragmatic). The same Protestant Christ who was proclaimed to the indigenous peoples of North America and to the short-lived Reformed colonies in sixteenth century Brazil, sanctified the hellish trade of blacks from West Africa. The Protestant missionaries who began to arrive in Central and South America in the latter half of the nineteenth century were unable to perceive that the popular Catholicism that they condemned was, despite its most degrading aspects, a resistance mechanism that enabled the indigenous peoples to survive European exploitation.

Indigenous Protestants are relative late-comers to indigenous theology, perhaps because their history has followed a different course. The Christ that was brought to Latin America by Protestants was militantly anti-Catholic and is perceived by large numbers of indigenous people as a liberating alternative to the more oppressive elements of popular Catholicism.¹² The novelty factor may have also played a role. In some respects, the Christ that Protestant missionaries proclaimed to the indigenous people was more otherworldly than the Christ of Catholicism; socio-culturally, North American Christology focuses more upon the beliefs of individuals than the Spanish Catholic Christ who appears as part of a

¹² See Liliana R. Goldin and Brent Metz, ‘An Expression of Cultural Change: Invisible Converts to Protestantism Among Highland Guatemala Mayas’, in *Ethnology*, No. 30, vol. 4, (1991), pp. 325–338. It is reproduced in Cook, *Crosscurrents*, chapter 3.

Holy Family. However, neither understanding of Christ speaks to the uniquely communitarian ethos of indigenous spirituality.

Maya Protestant intellectuals, after going through a period of negation, seem to be moving toward a more affirmative theology and a more explicit Christology. Although the odd Protestant indigenous intellectual has exceeded most Catholic Mayas in proposing a radical return to their ancestral theologies, according to Fr. López Hernández, the handful of ethnic theologians in Mesoamerica stand somewhere between the extremes of Christian fundamentalism and outright rejection of Christianity.¹³

Mindful of the traditional Protestant nervousness about indigenous or vernacular theologies, Moisés Colop, who is a Ki'che' Maya and a minister in the National Presbyterian Church of Guatemala, cautions:

Indigenous theology is not a distortion of Christian theology, but rather a proximate theological expression in a foreign language (Spanish), using methods that are not our own. Even as there is variety in Christian theology, there is also variety in the exercise and practice of indigenous theology.¹⁴

Mayan Protestant thinkers, though at first influenced by liberation thinking, are increasingly drawn back to their Protestant roots, the Reformation principles of 'solo Christo', 'sola gratia' and 'sola Scriptura'. Despite the suspicion that most Protestants who have been trained in a European academic system, have of 'pagan' practices, the 'Protestant principle' of dissent gives indigenous Protestants more room than their Catholic colleagues enjoy to explore new theological and ecclesial options. In any case, if they are expelled from their churches, they can always join the endless train of new Protestant movements in Latin America.

Most Protestant indigenous theology is still quite tentative and exploratory. Yet there are encouraging signs that serious reflection has begun. A paper prepared by a team of Maya Presbyterian village pastors approaches Christology from the context of their native Yucatan, Mexico. And they have gone to the considerable trouble of framing it in the categories of Reformed theology,¹⁵ thus providing a bridge between the symbolic language of the Mayas and linear European logic. The document is a modest, and helpful, Protestant contribution to an ongoing Christological debate with Catholic and traditional indigenous leaders. It makes five basic points which I have summarized.

1. God reveals himself¹⁶ to all peoples and cultures. God is the source of life for all peoples ([Jn. 1:1-4, 9](#)); it is the basic tenet of indigenous theology. He has granted to every person, and to every race and people, the right to be creative and unique ([Ac. 17:24-27](#)). God has revealed himself to all peoples and continues to communicate to them through their consciences ([Ro. 2:14-16; 1:20](#)). God liberates the oppressed: other nations and peoples besides Israel have experienced God's liberation and his judgment for disobedience ([Am. 9:7, 9](#)). He takes pleasure in the worship of all peoples who follow him in truth ([Mal. 1:11](#)). God has charged all peoples to administer his creation ([Ps. 8:6](#)). The universality of the divine actions herein summarized makes it possible to search for ways of expressing Christian theology in indigenous categories.

2. As Israel was rejected for not following in God's way, the Maya peoples were denounced for abandoning their monotheistic faith. Their prophets announced judgment and hope based upon the return of the true prophet-king Quetzacoatl. The Maya peoples were not always idolatrous. They worshipped one God. Although he was associated with the sun, there is no evidence of an image or painting being made of the supreme Maya

¹³ López Hernández, chapter 10 in Cook, *Crosscurrents*.

¹⁴ Colop, chapter 11 in Cook, *Crosscurrents*.

¹⁵ Pr. Facundo Ku Canché, 'Towards an Indigenous Theology: A Reformed Protestant Perspective', chapter 10 in Cook, *Crosscurrents*. There are six chapters in this collection by indigenous Protestants.

deity Hunab Ku'¹⁷ The idolatrous elements, Mayas insist, were imposed by Toltec and Itzá invaders from central Mexico. Traditions recorded during the Spanish invasion period a few centuries later speak of this fact.

For a time, they knew about one God who surveyed heaven and earth and everything, from his heavenly seat. They had dedicated a temple to him, with priests who received presents and alms from the people to be offered unto God. This was their way of worship until a great lord came from afar who, with his people, were idolaters and whom the whole land began to follow in their idolatry . . . having idols for everything (Relación de Motul).

The ancient wise men of Yucatán 'relate that some eight hundred years ago there was no idolatry in this land'. But after the Mexicas¹⁸ 'conquered us, a captain who called himself Quetzacoatl (feathered serpent) . . . introduced . . . the idolatrous worship of gods made of wood and mud', to whom they even offered human blood (Relación de don Martín de Palomar).

Although many Mayas became idolaters, there were also those who preserved their monotheistic faith. There were poets and rulers, and above all prophets, who like the Old Testament Elijah, called their people back to the worship of the One True God. Their pronouncements, known collectively as the *chilam balam*, after the best known of five leading prophets,¹⁹ are collections of predictions which were compiled shortly before the coming of the Europeans, and later transcribed into Latin script. Erroneously described as 'prophecies of a new religion', Mayas insist that they are, in fact, prophecies of the resurgence of the monotheistic faith which had been distorted by northern tribes. They announced the imminent destruction of the oppressive religious system of the Itzá invaders.²⁰

Bow before the true God, omnipotent above all things . . . Creator of heaven and earth . . . My words shall be painful to you O Maya Itzá, water witch of the Mayas; you who refuse to hear about another God, who believe that your deities are worthy. But you shall come to acknowledge the truth of my preaching! (Prophecy of Natzín Yabún Chan).

When Hunab Ku', the only deity, is manifest he shall bring peace to his peoples, including to the Itzás who are called to adore him. It shall be the dawn of a new monotheistic faith, the beginning of a new humanity (the Prophecy of Chilam Balam). Mayas today understand these to be valid prophecies upon which to base a renewed indigenous theology in which, for Christians, there is ample room for incarnational revelation.

¹⁷ *Hunab kú* is a composite name, somewhat akin to Yaweh, which denotes oneness (*hu*), being (*nab*) and divinity (*ku*).

¹⁸ *Mexicas*, bands of tribes from the Central Plains of North America that gradually overwhelmed the Maya related Mesoamerican civilization in central Mexico. A minor tribe gained the ascendancy and went on to found the Aztec empire.

¹⁹ Chilam Balam, in his own words, was 'a priest who travels to every province on earth explaining the word of the Lord Kú, the only true deity' (Chilam Balam de Chumayel).

²⁰ The Itzás were a semi-barbarian race of traders along the Gulf Coast, providing cultural links between the Mayas and the Toltec empire in central Mexico. The Maya city of Chichén Itzá (whose Toltec style ruins are still the marvel of thousands of tourists) was built, presumably by the Itzás, around the middle of the ninth century AD. According to Maya documents written after the Spanish conquest, the city was also conquered by Toltecs (or Toltecized Mayas) from the north who brought in alien religious practices. The relationship between both invading groups is unclear.

3. Catholic and Protestant Christianity failed to respond to the promise of these prophecies. The Europeans came at the time announced by the prophets, bringing a new religion of one supreme God, his Son Jesus Christ, and his mother, the Virgin Mary. For the Maya, these were implacable deities, in whose name every Maya representation of God had to be destroyed. If the dedicated, and often fanatical, friars who learned the indigenous languages had been able to understand the monotheistic undercurrent in Maya theology, would they have acted differently? Probably not. The Catholic monarchs and their armies had, after all, expelled monotheistic Jews and Muslims from their newly unified kingdom, in the same year of Columbus' 'discovery' of the 'Indies'. In order to survive, indigenous religiosity fused with popular Catholicism. The priests of Hunab Kú, the one God, went underground while the official religion was being smashed. They continued to resist and to await the fulfilment of the prophecies. This spirituality is strong in the resurgent Maya religion.

When Protestant missionaries began to arrive at the end of the nineteenth century, they proclaimed a one true God and his Son Jesus Christ, but in western cultural terms that made it difficult for indigenous converts to build bridges to their own traditions. Today, Maya Protestants are beginning to rethink their relationship to Jesus Christ; they are searching for ways to inculturate the Christian message so that it can become wholly good news to their people.

4. Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God, is the only mediator between God and man. If Christ is being rejected by indigenous theologians it is because his mediation was announced to them with a hidden agenda: they were invited to accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, then told to reject their cultural identity. But this was not the intent of the original Christian message. Jesus became a Jew but did not require his followers to become Jews, challenging them to discover and proclaim Christ within each new culture. God is not limited in his revelation. Might he not have revealed himself as the 'non-incarnate Word' to people of other races and cultures ([Gn. 16:7-16](#); [21:8-21](#)) as he did on a number of occasions to the patriarchs. In an interesting exegesis indigenous theologians ask whether 'the goings out' (*iatso*, sudden manifestations) of him who was to be born in Bethlehem Ephratah that 'are from old, from ancient times' ([Micah 5:2](#))—might refer to unrecorded manifestations of the Christ to peoples of other races. Some kind of divine manifestation is imbedded in their collective memory. Fr. Diego de Landa, recorded in his memoirs²¹ that the Yucatan Maya celebrated an event which they called 'em ku'—'the descent of god'.²²

5. Mayas have a right to discover the one God in their own culture and to follow Jesus Christ in their own way. Every people has unique frames of reference from which to discover the one God. If the Church Fathers could use the categories of Greek philosophy to explain Christianity to the Hellenistic world, Maya thinkers wonder why they are not allowed to formulate Christian theology in indigenous frames of reference. But they are not satisfied with formulating culturally coherent Christological statements. True Christology is always substantiated by its fruits. The fruits of western Christianity have become bitterly apparent to indigenous peoples in the Americas. What are the fruits of indigenous spirituality?

²¹ Diego de Landa, *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán*. Edición de Miguel Rivera, (Madrid: Historia 16, 1985). Fr. Landa was at the same time an admirer of the Maya people and culture and a fanatical destroyer of their religion.

²² The temple of Chichén Itzá was positioned in such a way that the supreme god Kukulcán (Quetzacoatl) could descend from heaven once a year, the rising sun rippling down the 360 steps, to be with his people—and with countless tourists who continue to observe the phenomenon yearly at the March 21 solstice.

In Protestant indigenous theology, comments pastor Colop, there is a ‘commitment to the Supreme Being, who is one and the same as the Trinitarian God of Christianity²³, who is manifested in every culture of the world’. This Supreme Deity ‘requires harmony, fraternity, and respect, both between human beings and for the whole of creation’. Indigenous theology has, in fact, ‘deepened our faith and spirituality’.²⁴ Maya spirituality has a profound sense of the sacred which is akin to the Old Testament ethos. Concepts such as sin and blessing in relation to God and his creation are very much part of Maya belief and practice. A Maya theologian finds similarities between a Maya confession and an affirmation from Luther’s Minor Catechism.

... that God is the Tata Ixel (Divine Father); that everything that surrounds us, animals and plants are our sisters and brothers, because He cares for us all alike. God the Almighty One protects all of us, feeds us, watches over our ways and grants us the gift to live joyfully.²⁵

IV ISSUES IN DIALOGUE

The above statements might seem to provide a Christian agenda for dialogue. But from a radical indigenous perspective, this is not enough, because it seems to take their own theology less than seriously and introduces a problematic figure, Jesus Christ.²⁶ For their part, Christians are prone to throw at least two roadblocks in the path of dialogue—‘idolatry’ and ‘syncretism’. These need to be seriously addressed before meaningful dialogue can take place.

The Bible, Idolatry, and Divine Mediations

The radical monotheism of the Old Testament would seem to place an insurmountable obstacle in the way of dialogue with indigenous religions. Let us explore this further. On the one hand, God is a mystery and finite minds are incapable of fathoming infinity, eternity, perfection and all the other attributes that are ascribed to God. Nevertheless, human beings, created in the image of God, have, since Eden, always striven to understand God, to cut the deity down to size, to imagine the Creator in images of the creation. On the one hand, Scripture condemns our human obsession with packaging God, on the other, we find a recognition that human minds and spirits can grasp only very small ‘pieces’ of divine reality, and need to put names to these perceptions. There is a need for mediations or symbols of divine reality, such as the rainbow, pillars of fire and cloud, symbols that derive from minerals (rock, water), plants (rose, seed, wine, tree), animals (blood, desert serpent, lamb, lion, dove, eagle), and humans (Adam, prophets, priests, kings, Melchizedek, Cyrus), kingdoms.

²³ Although I have not found this developed in writing, I have heard Maya Christians comment that Trinitarian theology is more a development of the western penchant for developing a logical system out of the various manifestations and names of the One True God. Mayas believe that the Creator God is expressed uniquely as a Duality (Father/Mother), and that he is represented in the Sun and Moon, and in many other natural forms which are akin to those that the Christian Scriptures use to speak about God and Jesus Christ ([Jb. 38:1](#); [40:6](#); [Ps. 18:2](#); [84:11](#); [Jn. 1:29](#); [Rev. 5: 5, 6](#); [22:16](#)).

²⁴ Colop, pp. 64, 65.

²⁵ Pr. Antonio Otzoy, ‘Traditional Values and Christian Ethics: A Maya Protestant Spirituality’, chapter 17, in Cook, *Crosscurrents*.

²⁶ See chapters 16 and 13 in Cook, *Crosscurrents*.

To name something or someone in the Semitic culture was to establish proprietary rights over them ([Gen. 2:19](#)). Yet the God who reveals himself through evocative names (Yahweh, El Shaddai, Yaveh Sabaoth) allows himself to be named (Adonai), even by a pagan name (Elohim). None of these names escaped being used in idolatrous ways. Thus, mediations can easily become idols. The fine line that divides a sign or a symbol from an image or idol is often almost invisible. Yet we cannot do without symbols. They are essential to communication. But an important characteristic of symbols is their flexibility and adaptability. The moment they become static they lose their capacity to communicate, to free people up, to make them alive. In a word, they become idols—symbols of death which need to be destroyed.²⁷

At the heart of the divine image in human beings is the gift of imagination. To be able to imagine the past, use our imagination creatively in the present, and imagine a better future for ourselves, our families and our peoples is what human communication and community is all about. But when images grow static, when movements become monuments, when ideas (*eidos*) close in upon themselves and are imposed as ideologies (*eidologia*) or are made sacred and are idolized (*eidolatria*), they take the place of God and are called an abomination. Obviously, political systems that we abhor and peoples whose cultures and religions that we find strange are not alone in making images to ‘strange gods’.

What is the difference, asks Eric From, between the human sacrifices that the Aztecs offered to their gods and today’s human sacrifices that are offered in war to the idols of nationalism and the sovereign state, even in ‘Christian’ nations? Or, we might add, to the idols of the ideology of neo-liberalism and gods of consumerism and materialism which are often touted by devout Christians.²⁸ Every religion, including the Christian religion, uses symbols, myths and even magic (manipulation) to explain, maintain and project its beliefs.

John A. Mackay, a much respected Presbyterian missionary to Perú, an authority on hispanic culture and literature and one time President of Princeton Theological Seminary, has stated that at the four essential dimensions of the Christian faith—divine revelation, the encounter of human beings with God, the community of God’s people and human obedience to God—the Christian church is always tempted to fall into idolatry. We worship ideas (doctrines), emotions (feeling), ecclesiastical structures and particular ethical interpretations.

When theology, the role of which is to interpret reality, becomes an end in itself, Christian doctrine, however orthodox, becomes an idol . . . loyalty to ideas . . . and not to God whom these ideas represent . . . An idol can also appear out of a real encounter with God . . . In this case an emotion or a feeling becomes an idol . . . The organized community, as well, the institution can become an end in itself . . . Even when the church takes the place

²⁷ We have an interesting example of this in Scripture. When the Israelites were being bitten by vipers in punishment for their sin of rebellion against God, Moses interceded for his people and God ordered him to make a bronze serpent, to tell the people to gaze upon the image and they would be healed ([Num. 21:4–9](#)). This is, indeed, a strange passage, given the clear prohibition in Exodus ([20:4](#)) against making graven images and worshipping them. Several centuries, later, that life-giving image had become an unclean idol—‘Nehushtan’—a double entendre which sounds both like bronze snake and unclean thing in Hebrew ([2 Ki. 18:4](#)). But this is not the end of the story. Jesus uses the ‘unclean image’ to teach Nicodemus, an idol hating Jew, about his own redeeming death ([Jn. 3:14](#)). This symbolism is, by the way, especially significant for the Maya peoples for whose ancestors a serpent is a symbol of divinity, partly because of its capacity to take various forms and shapes.

²⁸ Erich Fromm, *And You Shall be as Gods*. From the Spanish translation, *Y seréis como dioses* (Buenos Aires Paidós, 1980), pp. 43, 44, 48, 49.

of God it substitutes God in the loyalty of human beings . . . Finally, at the very moment when a specific precept, a scruple, or perhaps a high ideal is absolutized . . . it then becomes an idol.²⁹

If Christianity has had trouble understanding God without making idols of divinity, do we have a right to demand otherwise from a pre-Christian religion that never knew the Jewish Decalogue and Shema, nor read the New Testament because it existed centuries before Judeo-Christian revelation? Furthermore, the versions of Christianity which they have received from the West have been plagued with idols— images, cultural baggage, racism, dogmas and alien social organization.

Syncretism and the Incarnation

The charge of syncretism is often used against attempts at inculturating the gospel in an ‘alien’ environment—i.e. in contexts where cultural patterns and religious symbols are radically different from the Judeo-Greco framework within which Scripture and the Christian faith first appeared. The fear of ‘watering down’ or denaturing the gospel has been present in the church from the first moment that apostles and evangelists moved out of Jerusalem into the alien environment of Hellenism and Roman state religion. While the Greek cognate of syncretism is very ancient, its pejorative usage among Christians came much later.

The first recorded use of ‘syncretism’ in the present negative theological sense was in the seventeenth century during a controversy between a group of German Lutheran intellectuals over a proposed dialogue between all the Christian churches, including the Roman church. Those that used this derogatory connotation argued that syncretism derived from *sugkeranume* —mixed or hybrid. At the time in Europe’s long colonial history when the white race was supreme, everything hybrid (mixed breeds and mixed ideas) were inferior and to be despised. This usage was hardened in the fires of religious controversy, and has persisted until today in both conservative and early ecumenical circles. More recently, *sugkrêtos* or *sugkratos* (‘mixed together’) has been suggested as the semantic root of ‘syncretism’.

But is it? This was not the first time the term was used theologically or otherwise. The first recorded instance of the word, centuries before, was by the Greek writer Plutarch, who used it in a quite different sense. The Cretans, he relates, spent a lot of their time in fighting among themselves. But when they were attacked by outside enemies, they put aside their differences to combat a common enemy. ‘And that,’ says Plutarch, ‘was it which they commonly called syncretism (*sugkretismos*).’ This first recorded usage of the term is a compound of *sug* (together), *cret* (Crete), and *ismos* (‘ism’ or system). Juan Sepúlveda, a Chilean Pentecostal missiologist, concludes that ‘together-Crete-system’ means something like ‘to unite or to federate, as did the Cretans’.³⁰ Syncretism is here the equivalent of our modern word ‘solidarity’.

Erasmus picked up the theme in the sixteenth century, while he was introducing the writings of Plutarch and other classics to his contemporaries. He interprets ‘together-

²⁹ Juan A. Mackay, *Realidad e idolatría en el cristianismo contemporáneo* (Buenos Aires: La Aurora, 1970), pp. 9, 10, 19, 20.

³⁰ Juan Sepúlveda, *Gospel in Culture in Latin American Protestantism: Toward a New Theological Appreciation of Syncretism*. Th.D. dissertation, University of Birmingham, UK, 1996 (second draft). He cites Plutarch, ‘On brotherly Love’, No 9, in Wm. W. Goodwin (ed.) *Plutarch’s Morals*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1888), p. 62, Cf. Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw (eds.). *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism. The Politics of Religious Synthesis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 2ff. 2; and Henry G. Burger, ‘Syncretism, An Acculturative Acceleration’, in *Human Organization*: vol. 25 (1966), p. 104.

Crete-system' metaphorically to signify 'common interest' even when 'sincere love' is lacking. The Dutch philosopher, a Catholic, soon began to apply the proverb to concrete situations: urging the reformer Melancon to set aside their differences and, 'Cretan with Cretan stand against the foe'. In another letter he described the way in which St. Paul adapted the Christian message to the Corinthian church as 'syncretism' (*sugkretizein*). Going even further, he argued that the apostle was only following the method of his Master who 'adjusted himself to those whom he wanted to pull over to himself'.³¹ This usage is very close to the technical term 'contextualization' (used by Protestant evangelicals) and 'inculturation' (used in Roman Catholic and ecumenical circles). Sepúlveda suggests that this metaphorical use of 'syncretism', as used theologically by Erasmus, sounds very much like 'incarnating oneself into the characteristics of those whom one wants to address'. Erasmus was applying the term to the necessary cultural mediation of the gospel.³² We are forced then to ask whether it is possible to communicate the gospel meaningfully without 'syncretism', in this sense. Erasmus' usage of syncretism has implications for our understanding of the incarnation, as well as enscripturation.

The preceding paragraphs are meant as a caution against too hasty a use of the term and a challenge to recover some of its positive connotations as we strive to inculturate the gospel among people of other faiths. Whatever the case, the negative exegesis of syncretism will long remain with us, so we need more humility to recognize the negative syncretisms in each of our versions of Christianity.

V UNDERSTANDING THE MAYA

But what does all this mean for the subject of this article? Who are these people who are attempting to express their faith in Jesus Christ in new and creative ways? What has transpired in recent history to foster this awakening of Maya self-awareness and renewal of their spirituality?

In order to begin to understand their worldview, we need 1) to consider the nature of the culture and spirituality of the Maya, the indigenous people on which this study is focused, and 2) the way that Mayas, perhaps more than most other indigenous peoples, have both resisted and adapted to cultural imposition in creative ways. Their resistance to modernity has produced a renewed pan-Maya identity that had not existed for almost a millennium.

The World of the Maya

The ancient religions of Mesoamerica were cyclical. The unique contribution of the Maya may have been to mesh this with a linear concept of time. Their need to understand and to master time energized their spirituality and caused them to make amazing astronomical and mathematical discoveries. Time was also at the heart of their continuing worldview which is based upon the tension between the totality and complementarity of all things. 'Nothing is excluded from Maya spirituality.' In Maya religion, 'unity is to be found within plurality or diversity and vice-versa'.³³ This is the locus of divinity—

³¹ Sepúlveda, 7, 8 quoting from *Collected Works of Erasmus*, Margaret Mann Phillips and R. A. B. Mynors (ed.) (Toronto University Press, 1982), and other sources.

³² *Ibid*, 6, 9.

³³ Vitalino Similox Salazar, *La expresión y Metodología del Pensamiento Maya Contemporáneo en Guatemala*, (Guatemala: Editorial Cholsamaj, 1992). Licentiate thesis, Universidad Mariano Gálvez, p. 43. A part of this thesis by a Maya Presbyterian pastor can be found in Cook, *Crosscurrents*, chapter 1.

ultimately, one, all powerful, often nameless, Creator God, who is revealed in many complementary ways, both masculine and feminine. Earth and heaven, light and darkness, death and life, are all manifestations of divinity, evidences of the One God, whom peasant Maya see all around them in nature. Although the face of the One True God was hidden by the pomp and circumstance of the oppressive and polytheistic official cult, documents survive which contain prayers to that One God, the 'Former' and 'Inventor' of all things.³⁴

Resistance Strategies

The culture, social organization and spirituality of the Maya is a function of their holistic view of the universe and of their need to understand their myths and traditions. Over countless millennia, the people who came to be called 'Maya' ('the people of time') had migrated throughout Mesoamerica, overrunning tribes and being conquered by kingdoms. They developed thriving civilizations and powerful city states which collapsed, only to rise again or move on. As catastrophic as this event was, the Mayas at first took the coming of the Spaniards in their stride. They were prepared to outlast the Spaniards as they had outlived other conquerors. 'From the sixteenth century to the twentieth, they have ignored the European when possible, accommodated him only when unavoidable, taken from him what they could use, and fought him tenaciously whenever he has threatened to break the stalemate between his civilization and theirs.'³⁵

New Forms of Survival

When indigenous spirituality came face to face with the Christian religion it was forced to find new forms of survival. Their 'altars and places of worship were moved to the highest mountains, while at the same time the signs and symbols were buried in the thick walls of the cathedrals and even placed within Catholic altars and symbols.'³⁶ Images and symbols of indigenous spirituality were adapted without losing some of their original meaning. One such symbol was the cross, which the Maya, from time immemorial, have considered sacred. They have associated it with the tree of life whose branches point to the four corners of the universe and whose towering trunk and thick roots keep together heaven and earth and the underworld. After the coming of Christianity, the Mayas had no difficulty in venerating the tall Catholic crosses as symbols of the Supreme God—the 'Señor Dios' and his deputy the 'Lord Jesucristo'.³⁷ Today, some Maya Christians suggest that the Maya cross might have been part of a pre-Christian announcement within their own culture of God's salvific plan.³⁸

After two centuries of violently resisting the white invader, Mayas throughout the region have opted for more subtle resistance, maintaining their languages, dress and customs, despite the pressures of modernity, guerrilla warfare, and army brutality. At the same time, isolation, brought about by topography, migration, intertribal wars and colonial policy, have limited their capability for greater resistance and the opportunities for mutual enrichment. In the closing years of this millennium, however, events are

³⁴ Cp. Miguel León-Portilla, ed., *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, (London: SPCK, 1980), pp. 109, 132, 230.

³⁵ Ronald Wright, *Stolen Continents: The Indian Story*, (London: John Murray, 1992), pp. 150, 161, 175–187.

³⁶ Colop, p. 62. Cp. Inga Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquests: Maya and Spaniard in Yucatán, 1517–1570*, (Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 163.

³⁷ Clendinnen, p. 182.

³⁸ Otzoy, p. 10.

bringing about a significant change in Maya self-awareness, relationships, and expressions.

The indigenous peoples have had to come to terms with modernity, with all of its promise and ruthlessness. In highland Guatemala, in the 1970s and '80s, forces locked in mortal combat disputed the soul of the Mayas. Young indigenous Catholic activists—armed with 'scientific' farming and health techniques and motivated by a post Vatican II religious ethic and social practice—began to displace the authority of the village elders and priests. The brutal tactics which the military used to destroy 'communism' in the burgeoning base ecclesial communities uprooted thousands of tribal peoples from their ancestral lands and decimated the village elders. When a devastating earthquake flattened many villages, thousands of homeless people swelled the shanty-towns of the capital city, further separating the people from their ancestral religion. With the military's approval, fundamentalist Protestant groups from the United States quickly moved into the vacuum with medicine, aid and denunciation of Maya religiosity as pagan and satanic. Despite their disparate aims, catechists, soldiers and missionaries all manipulated traditional Maya symbols for their own ends. This three-pronged assault seriously undermined the foundations of a land-based culture and a local mountain spirit-oriented religiosity. Yet this same situation, and the new ideas that were forcefully disseminated, created the conditions for a new form of resistance, religious revitalization—pan-Mayanism.³⁹

From the ashes of seeming total destruction, the Maya people of Guatemala have arisen with surprising moral authority, to propose a new social contract for the nation based in part upon their own values. The Tzeltal Maya in eastern Chiapas state, armed only with wooden rifles—the Zapatista movement—have not ceased to pressure the national government for a restructuring of the corrupt Mexican political system.

The Rise of a Pan-Maya Identity

All of a sudden, it seemed, traditional Maya spirituality was emerging full blown right under the surprised noses of church leaders, scholars and rulers. In and around 1992—after five centuries of underground existence — a decision was made by Maya priests to make their spirituality known to the world.⁴⁰ What can we make of it? Is this phenomenon the same as the syncretistic Catholic popular religiosity? Is it identical with the ancient worship of the Aztec and Mayas? Or is it a religion which was being reborn, phoenix like, from the fires and ashes of oppression, war, and modernity? Whatever the answer to these questions, what cannot be doubted is the seriousness with which Mayas and other indigenous groups throughout the Americas are working together and locally toward the development of a relevant and coherent theology that is comprehensible to Christians. In the process, they are having to come to terms with five centuries of Christianity, and in particular with Jesus Christ, the person whom Christians call the Son of God and claim to follow and obey. The current responses to the Christian message among the Maya and

³⁹ Cp. Richard Wilson, 'Anchored communities: Identity and history of the Maya-Q'eqchi', in *Man: The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*. Vol. 28, No. 1 (March, 1993), and chapter 7 in Cook, *Crosscurrents*. See also, by the same author, 'Machine Guns and Mountain Spirits: The Cultural Effects of State Repression among the Q'eqchi' of Guatemala' in *Critique of Anthropology*, (London, SAGE Publications, vol. 11, no. 1). See also *Maya Resurgence in Guatemala: Q'eqchi' Experiences*, (London & Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995).

⁴⁰ There are indigenous publishing houses in Mexico City (CENAMI) and Quito (Abia Yala), both Catholic related. The Protestant COOPA, a sister traditional indigenous entity IETSAY, and the Liga Maya Internacional (also traditional religion) publish in Costa Rica.

other indigenous peoples must be understood in the context of their very long history, unique cultural and religious achievements, and frequent need to adapt.

CONCLUSION

The Maya peoples are convinced that their ancient wisdom has something positive to offer to a world that has run out of solutions to its problems. Maya spirituality holds high exceptional values concerning life, land, human responsibility, and divine interventions in history. Women maintain the continuity of the traditions from generation to generation and hold positions of honour such as traditional healers and priestesses. Indigenous peoples are overwhelmingly respectful of other religions. They would like us to respect their spirituality and to explore its values. However, many Europeans and ‘mestizos’ (mixed bloods) can barely contain their suspicion of anything ‘native’. Unfortunately, we (religious leaders perhaps more than others) have a strong urge to control any new development. Christians are too prone to pin the labels of ‘syncretism’ and ‘idolatry’ on spiritual manifestations that we can’t understand, because they use totally different symbol systems from what we are accustomed to in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

‘Would that the intermediaries between Jesus and the Mayas would let him speak to us, walk with us, shine upon our pathway, without us being labelled pagans’, exclaims Antonio Otzoy, a Kaqchikel-Maya Presbyterian pastor. ‘The blind man’, he adds, ‘cried out to Jesus to have compassion upon him, but the multitude repressed him. Undeterred, he called out more loudly, Jesus healed him and he went on his way singing.’

Our experience is like that of the blind man: we have heard the voice that tells us that our faith is making us whole and we continue to glorify his name ([Lk. 18:35–43](#)). We want people to let us know that Jesus who enthralled people, lifted up the humble, took unto himself the marginalized, and condemned the proud and the sinners can do the same today. We want to meet that Christ who fascinates us when we listen to him and doesn’t put us off.⁴¹

The Maya peoples of Central America, and their indigenous sisters and brothers in other regions of Latin America, are expressing their Christian faith anew, as has always been the case where the gospel of Jesus Christ has been allowed to truly take root within a culture.

Is Christ being resurrected among the Maya? asks Ki’che’-Maya pastor Moisés Colop. His answer is a categorical No, ‘because Jesus has never left us’. Actually, what has happened, he argues, is that Christ ‘has been marginalized, vilified, and forgotten’. And because they have also been mistreated, the Mayas, Colop concludes, feel a kinship with him and are ready to recognize Jesus Christ as the one who has revealed himself to them as the ‘Heart of Heaven and Heart of Earth’—one of the hauntingly beautiful Maya names for the One True God.⁴²

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⁴¹ Otzoy, in Cook, *Crosscurrents*.

⁴² Colop, chapter 11 in Cook, *Crosscurrents*.

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Dr Guillermo Cook was born in Argentina of missionary parents, is a minister of the Methodist Church of Brazil and now lives in Costa Rica. This article gathers some of the materials which were collected for his book, *Indigenous Spirituality: Interface of Maya, Catholic and Protestant World-Views* (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1997).

Book Reviews

HOLY FATHER: A DOXOLOGICAL APPROACH TO SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Sunand Sumithra

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(Reviewed by Ivan Satyavrata)

More than two decades ago in his *Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, Robin Boyd suggested that the main factor which tended to discourage the emergence of a 'formulated' Christian theology in India was the widespread dislike for anything *dogmatic*. He observed that there was, on the other hand, a tendency to regard direct *anubhava* (experience) of God as of primary importance in theological reflection in India (Madras: C.L.S., 1979, p. 3). *Holy Father* is a bold attempt to take this very Indian passion for an experience of God and apply it to a very neglected (some would regard as 'outdated') aspect of the Christian theological enterprise in India—the formulation of a Systematic Theology.

The author devotes the Preface to explaining his choice of title and to clarifying his distinctive approach. His purpose is clearly *devotional*—'The overall aim . . . dear reader, is to encourage you to trust, worship and obey God' (p. 11) and *doxological*—'. . . the study of theology should first and foremost lead the reader to glorify God' (p. 15). Convinced that the words '*Holy Father*' (in [ln. 17:11](#)) constitute the shortest and best definition of God in the Bible, for the author the book is essentially a journey of discovery—'an attempt to discover what Jesus meant in so addressing God' (p. 12). The rationale for the simple three-part structure of the book is also explained in the Preface. *Part I: PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD* deals basically with introductory questions, some of which relate specifically to the book—structure, scope, approach—and others to theology as a discipline—definition, method, language and posture.

The approach to doing theology in *Holy Father* represents a distinct departure from the common approach which has come to us as a legacy of the scholastic period. Hence it does not attempt to place God under the microscope of objective scientific scrutiny: 'God

can never be studied . . . as for example we study some stuff in the test tube (or) some guinea pig under experiment . . .’ (p. 28). Consequently, one of the greatest strengths of this work [and, as we shall see, there are many] is perhaps its unabashed and blatant subjectivity. The author makes no apologies whatsoever for theologizing as a lover of God and a disciple of Christ. In fact he regards faith as ‘the most essential prerequisite’ for ‘doing, studying or practising theology’ (p. 30).

His aim as set forth in the introduction is not simply to raise questions of mere academic interest, or to impart rational information about God. Theology, for him, must not only enable us to respond to God meaningfully and responsibly, it must ‘equip us, beyond the skills of worshipping and witnessing, to live out a victorious Christian life in our concrete situations’ (p. 28), for its purpose is ‘to cultivate godliness through establishing the truth and validity of our beliefs in ways meaningful to the recipients of each generation’ (p. 29).

In his definition of ‘theology’ the author sees the term as having been derived from *theos* and *logia*, [rather than *theos* and *logos*], thus driving home a point vital to his approach: ‘. . . while in the derived meaning theology was basically a rational effort, in its original meaning the term emphasized not so much facts to be grasped about God as the response of praise and worship from such knowledge’.

Accordingly, a unique feature of the author’s style is the remarkable ease with which he flows from theological discourse and academic discussion to praise and adoration of God. This, of course, is theology at its highest, echoing as it does the theological posture of no less a person than the apostle Paul, whose theological expositions often seem to climax most naturally—almost inevitably—in spontaneous outbursts of praise and worship ([Rom. 11:33–36](#); [Eph. 3:14–21](#); [Philp. 1:3–11](#); [Col. 1:3–12](#)). This approach is also consonant with the best of Indian theological reflection and in direct continuity with the spirit of K.C. Sen, Sundar Singh and others who applied a rare degree of sensitivity in blending profound theological insight with fervent devotion to the master.

Part II: I RECEIVED FROM THE LORD WHAT I ALSO PASSED ON TO YOU, consists of two chapters which deal with the basis for Christian theological reflection. *Chapter 2.01* focuses on the crucial question of *Authority*. He discusses each of the standard epistemological options in turn—Reason, Conscience, Experience, Tradition, making a convincing case for the evangelical doctrine of divine revelation as the only reliable basis for truth. The primacy of revelation, according to the author, requires that God, revelation and man be held together in any responsible procedure of doing theology. A fairly detailed treatment of the concept of ‘Special Revelation’ prepares the ground for a discussion of the place and use of the Bible in theological reflection in the following chapter.

All the major issues relating to the use of the Bible—Inspiration, Canon, Interpretation and Contextualisation—are dealt with succinctly and comprehensively in *Chapter 2.02*.

Crucial questions are raised such as: ‘Is it realistic to claim that the ancient Bible . . . is without any error? How does it differ from other documents of the tradition, or from scriptures of other religions, such as the Vedas or the Qur’an?’ (p. 77). There are occasional instances of what appear to be lack of precision in the language used which could be due to printing errors. One is left wondering what the author intends to convey in sentences such as the following: ‘We can even affirm that contextualisation is the only means of discovering fuller gospel in each for generation its posterity’ or ‘Once the universal elements are extracted from contextual theologies, and the biblical elements are clear, it become the theology’—both occur on the same page (p. 92).

Despite these occasional blemishes which do occur elsewhere in the book as well, the author articulates his distinct evangelical stance with unmistakable academic credibility and integrity. His evangelical position has a distinctly Asian flavour, however, and

represents a radical departure from the cold categories of western theological reflection to which third-world evangelicals are often held captive.

In *Part III: SHOW ME THY GLORY, I PRAY*, we come to the heart of the book and the bulk of its content. Twelve of the book's fifteen chapters fall within this section, which is again subdivided into two subsections: WHO GOD IS and WHAT HE DOES. The three chapters in the first of these subsections focus on the three aspects of the Christian Godhead—*Father, Jesus Christ* and *Holy Spirit* respectively. It is at this point that a major weakness of the author's approach as reflected in the title becomes more apparent. In Chapter 3.01, after carefully explaining some of the limitations involved in any attempt to define God, the author makes the '*Father*'-hood of God the focus and thrust of a tentative definition: 'JESUS REVEALED GOD AS A SPIRIT—LOVABLE, HEAVENLY FATHER OF ALL THINGS' (p.106).

Apart from the fact that the Greeks in Europe and Hindus in India seem to have clearly perceived God as Spirit long before the coming of Christ, in this reviewer's opinion, the attempt to subsume the Christian understanding of God under the category of '*Holy Father*' is somewhat reductionistic. This definition of God is especially inadequate since it is derived from the revelation of God in Christ rather than natural revelation or the Old Testament revelation of God. The Incarnation revealed God not only as Father, but pointed clearly towards the triune nature of God as the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit, with all of the rich implications arising from such a view of God. The discussion of the divine attributes consequently becomes a little confusing at some points. Some moral attributes—Love, Mercy and Grace—and some key titles— Creator, Lord, Teacher, Sustainer, Saviour and Fulfiller—are all discussed in relation to God's '*Father*'-hood, holiness is treated as an aspect of the heavenly nature, and love is dealt with as a separate category altogether. '*Father*' is evidently an all-important category in the author's understanding of God, which at times results in an unfortunate tendency towards '*Patronism*'.

Fortunately, however, this appears to be the only major flaw in a discourse on God which is rich in biblical content, profound in its interaction with Christian theological tradition, and full of devotional and practical application. One cannot talk about God in India without reference to its innumerable religious traditions, both ancient and modern. The author's God-talk is thus rightly steeped in the language of Indian theological discourse. In fact, we often see not just a theologian at work but a philosopher as well, which at times may be a disadvantage when the link in a chain of thought appears to be missing and the logic not evident. The author's concluding defence of the personhood of God on philosophical grounds (p. 1461) is somewhat disappointing and inexplicable in the light of his earlier biblical defence of the concept (pp. 111–113). The philosophical approach is totally inconsistent with a fundamental premise of his exposition: 'we cannot know nor define God . . . he [Jesus] only can reveal. We must only try to understand and respond to what Jesus revealed . . . the best revelation is from him' (p. 146).

The chapter on Christology [*Chapter 3.02*] reflects a distinctively Asian approach to Christ. The author's discussion of Jesus' identity is set within the context of the Hindu response to Christ. While the New Testament titles of Jesus and other biblical material are dealt with in fair detail, the historical controversies receive somewhat summary treatment, and the Christological creeds and confessions are effectively ignored. Although the author has a section entitled '*His Humanity and Deity*', explicit treatments of the Deity of Christ or the relationship between the divine and human natures of Christ are conspicuous by their absence.

In dealing with the Cross, Resurrection, Ascension and Return of Christ, the author devotes most of his attention to the significance of the Cross of Christ. After a discussion

of the three main interpretations of the Cross—as Propitiation, Redemption and Victory—the author offers his own: ‘On the cross Jesus pleased God on our behalf, in our place’ (p.187). Adam’s act of disobedience was reversed as on the cross ‘Jesus pleased God in everything and in our place and so gained for us access to God and his kingdom’ (p. 188). What does one do with such a ‘moral representative’ view of the Cross of Christ? The suffering and death of Christ seem incidental to rather than an integral part of the atoning work of Christ. According to this view, the Cross could have been replaced by any other act of obedience without in any way affecting the efficacy of the atonement.

We come across certain further instances of confusion due to lack of precision in language. For example, Apollonarianism is described inaccurately as ‘the first great Christological heresy’; present day Nestorians would clearly object to their view of Christ being described as ‘two distinct *persons*, divine and human’ (p. 156). After rightly insisting that Christology is ‘the heart of all Christian faith and theology’ the author goes on to assert, ‘We believe in the Bible because of Jesus, we do not believe in Jesus Christ because of the Bible’ (p. 158), as if there were any way for us to come to faith in Christ apart from the testimony of the Bible. The greatest strength of the author’s Christology apart from the obvious ‘Asianness’ referred to earlier is that he offers us not an abstract theological treatise, but an eulogy of a disciple in love with his master. One touches a freshness, spontaneity and depth lacking in most other text-books of theology.

The treatment of the Holy Spirit (*Chapter 3.03*) is somewhat brief but thorough. More attention could perhaps have been paid to the Holy Spirit’s distinct personhood and deity and to his place within the Trinity. The fourth-century Macedonian heresy which resulted in the Holy Spirit’s identity being more clearly defined is not mentioned. The Baptism of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit are issues which have come into prominence in recent years largely due to the outbreak of the Charismatic movement, and the author gives them due attention. His treatment of these somewhat controversial questions is fair and balanced, and although non-Charismatic, is not anti-Charismatic either, and should satisfy those at both ends of the church’s spectrum on this issue. Alert Pentecostals might find the description of their interpretation of the baptism of the Spirit as an ‘empowering but *repeatable* experience’ (p. 208) somewhat cryptic and even distressing.

The chapters which follow take us from who God is to what he does. We have first a theology of history and a simple if cursory treatment of Predestination and Election in a chapter entitled *Plans* (3.04), and a theology of Creation in the chapter entitled *Creates* (3.05). The Creation discussion is replete with reference to Hindu tradition, but we have to be content with a sentence or two on the subject of Satan and demons. In the Asian context and in the light of the current occult explosion world-wide, this is regrettably inadequate.

We reach a high-point in the book when we come to the author’s conception of man in *Chapter 3.06* entitled *His Children*. Here is where the author’s unique assets as a research scholar with access to English and German sources, and familiarity with Sanskrit terminology come to the fore. The breadth of interaction with different viewpoints draws from an amazing wealth of information, although at times the order and rationale of the arrangement is not always clear. Thus while the treatment of the *Imago Dei* is brilliant in theological content and analysis, you wish the arrangement of the material were either clearly chronological or logical.

The doctrine of *Sin* to which the author turns his attention in the following chapter (3.07) is set within the context of the strong antipathy to the concept in Hindu philosophical tradition. The treatment is straightforward, but by no means superficial, as is evident from the ample number of footnotes. Somewhat mysteriously, the next chapter (3.08) digresses somewhat, leading us to a consideration of the Providence of God

(*Sustains and Governs*). He not only traces the meaning of the concept through church history and the Bible, but develops a brief theodicy in response to the problem of evil, and explores the relation of divine providence to prayer and miracles as well. The logic for this chapter coming after the chapter on sin is, however, not at all clear, especially when one discovers that the chapter that follows carries forward the discussion on sin begun in the previous chapter (3.07).

Since the author makes no distinction between the consequences of sin and punishment for sin, he deals with both under the title *Punishes* (3.09). Defending the prerogative of God who is 'holy love' (p. 293) to punish the guilty sinner or chastise his erring child, the author defines the purpose of punishment as essentially the vindication of God's just character. The punishment for sin can be summarized in one word—'death', but this death is defined not just in spiritual, physical and eternal terms, but in its all-pervasive influence extending to society and the environment as well. 'Original Sin' likewise describes the consequence of Adam's sin impacting the entire human race, and the essential issues are clearly addressed by the author with the help of a simple chart included as an appendix.

The equation of original sin with social evil—'Our thesis here is that what Augustine called Original Sin can be properly defined as "social evil" . . .' (p. 306)—warrants special attention. Earlier in the chapter the author explains the basis of the transmission of sin—both guilt and pollution (depravity)—in organic terms, in keeping with the Augustinian view: 'God looks upon humanity . . . as one organic whole . . . and Adam as its head and representative . . . Just as Levi, being in the loins of Abraham gave the tithe of reverence to Melchizedek, so also each human being disobeyed when Adam ate the forbidden fruit' (pp. 304f). Nowhere do we see the exegetical grounds of this view refuted.

Moreover, we observe some confusion within the author's understanding of social evil itself. On one hand the author maintains that no one person is responsible for social sins. In fact, all the persons participating in such structural evils 'might be saintly in themselves' since the structure is 'a corporate personality which operates entirely independent of individual persons involved' (p. 305). On the other hand he insists that 'in every structure there is a decision making centre, a person who is the moving spirit behind the decision . . . Thus it is possible to make one key person accountable even for corporate decisions' (p.306). The lack of clarity here obviously brings the author's equation of original sin with social evil into serious question.

In *Chapter 3.10* we come to a subject that is the soul of the Christian faith—what the author refers to as the 'subjective' aspect of salvation. He begins with a defence of his choice of title—*Reconciles*—as the most comprehensive motif for describing the salvific meaning of the Cross. He substantiates his point with a brief but masterful survey of the significance of the Cross in western and Indian thought. What follows is a comprehensive and detailed discussion of seventeen different biblical terms and concepts highlighting various benefits of the atonement. While the etymology, biblical usage and practical application of all the essential terms—Salvation, Reconciliation, Conversion, Union with Christ, Regeneration, Adoption, Justification, Sanctification, Forgiveness, Eternal life—are covered very well in this treatment, there is some needless overlapping. For example, the term 'Righteousness' should properly have been treated under 'Justification', and 'Purification' and 'Perfection' under 'Sanctification'. The gap of a hundred pages between his treatment of the 'objective' [*Chapter 3.02*] and 'subjective' [*Chapter 3.10*] aspects of salvation is something of a handicap from the viewpoint of class-room usage.

Chapter 3.11: Inaugurates his Kingdom, represents perhaps the most radical departure from mainstream orthodox theology. The author seems in effect to discard the church in favour of the kingdom of God. He gives us a hint concerning the direction of his thought in

the opening paragraph itself—‘we have to admit that the kingdom of [God] is essential to our theology, while the church is at best a poor substitute for it’ (p. 343). He follows up with an excellent analysis of the ‘kingdom of God’ theme, exploring it through church history and in the Bible, and outlining his view of the kingdom in summary. Evangelicals have been justifiably accused of neglecting the kingdom, and in that light the author’s emphasis on the kingdom is both welcome and refreshing.

As the author enters into a discussion of ‘The Kingdom of God and the Church’ some amount of confusion begins to enter the discussion. In all fairness to the author it must be admitted that the relationship between the church and the kingdom is a theological mine-field that few if any have succeeded in crossing, which—in this reviewer’s opinion—this author also fails to do. The confusion begins as the author introduces a section entitled ‘*Various forms of the Church in history*’ with the statement that ‘throughout the past two thousand years, Jesus’ *kingdom* has evolved into ever so many forms . . .’ We are left wondering whether the author sees any distinction at all between the church and the kingdom. When he concludes this section by saying: ‘all these are various forms of the kingdom which Jesus had proclaimed . . . With this survey we are now ready to approach *ekklesia*, the church’ (p. 362) the confusion intensifies.

The ambiguity remains unresolved as we proceed further in the chapter, for although he devotes some attention to examining the understanding of the church in history and the biblical meaning of the church, his exegesis of the crucial [Matt. 16:18](#) passage confounds the problem further: ‘it is obviously impossible to interpret that his [Jesus]’ intention was to build the church immediately—for he had not yet died and resurrected, which was necessary for the *kingdom* to come into existence’ (p. 366).

The main thesis of the author is stated in a section entitled ‘*Kingdom of God rather than the Church*’ in which the author’s understanding of the relationship between the two concepts is made explicit for perhaps the first time—‘Church is an institutionalized kingdom’ (p. 367). Is the author then against the church *per se*, or merely against the church as an institution, the organised church? His tone seems quite unequivocal—‘The Church *must* be abandoned ...’ (p. 367) and he goes on to offer an impressive list of reasons why.

Perhaps the most enigmatic if radical claim made by the author is that Jesus did not come to establish the church but the kingdom. The influence of Chenchiah is apparent here: God did not intend or plant the church—he only permitted it. It is impossible to see how the author can maintain this view in the light of overwhelming New Testament evidence to the contrary—as we have, for example in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians ([1:22](#); [3:10](#); [5:23–32](#)). Among the other reasons offered, we have the strange assertion that the Church has no ultimate value in eschatology—the climax of the ages is the wedding of the Lamb: what is his bride if not the church? To suggest as the author does, that the church be abandoned because its present form is foreign to the New Testament, is surely a case of the proverbial throwing out of the baby with the bath-water. If modern believers in the West are leaving the church by hundreds, they are also walking out on conventional principles of Christian morality—neither can be discarded solely on the basis of their decreasing popularity. The author observes very accurately that the church is a ‘stumbling block’ to non-Christians, but is not also the Cross? (cf. [1 Cor. 1:23](#)). The concluding point in the author’s case against the church—in which he reiterates his earlier approval of the rapidly mushrooming house church movement (p.370 cf pp. 361f)—confirms the suspicion that his attack is directed against the institutionalized church establishment and not against the church as such.

Whatever be the actual intentions of the author, the kingdom and church both have their legitimate place in the divine economy, and one need not usurp or be placed in

opposition to the other. The fact of the matter is that the church is an integral and indispensable part of the gospel ([Acts 20:28](#)), with its roots not only in the Old Testament 'People of God' ([1 Pet. 2:9](#)), but in the heart of God himself from eternity ([Eph. 3:9-11](#)). Sick and anaemic though it may appear to be at times, or desperately in need of renewal, restructuring or reformation, or perhaps even in a state of apostasy, 'the church of the living God' remains 'the pillar and foundation of the truth' ([1 Tim. 3:15](#)). The chapter concludes with a discussion of the two Protestant sacraments and the ministry. A sad and inexplicable omission is the absence of any reference to the mission of the church either here or anywhere else in the book.

The concluding chapter—*Fulfil*s (3.12)—is a fairly straightforward treatment of eschatology. Beginning with an analysis of history and fulfilment especially as it relates to the tension between God's sovereign control over the affairs of his universe and human freedom, the author goes on to explore the vital eschatological concept of 'the Day of the Lord'. He then takes us through all of the basic eschatological truths—Death, the Intermediate state, the Second coming of Christ, Resurrection, Millennium, Tribulation, Last Judgment and Heaven and Hell—setting forth the various (often conflicting) positions on many of these issues against the background of the biblical material, and skilfully avoiding controversy at every point. His basic posture on some of these controversial and divisive issues is best summarized in his own words: 'Since the eschatological events are in the future and do not affect our trust and obedience on earth in the present, it is best to leave the uncertain truths of the Bible in a pending file . . .' (p. 402).

Holy Father is a work which, while not without its flaws, is brilliant in its originality, breadth, depth and aesthetic beauty. If its weaknesses may seem to have received undue attention in this review it is only because its many strengths will be obvious to any reader. Any lover of the Bible will find the author's profuse quotations from the Scripture heartwarming—the *Index of Biblical References* which runs into twenty-eight pages is an objective indication of the author's respect for and dependence on the Bible. The interaction with various non-Christian philosophies, familiarity with twenty centuries of Christian theological tradition, and acquaintance with contemporary theological trends display a breadth of knowledge almost breath-taking in its impact upon the average reader.

Most readers will find the summaries included at the conclusion of most of the chapters extremely useful for quick and ready reference. The hundreds of foot-notes are a vast wealth of information, and as compelling reading as the text itself. Non-Asians and theological novices will find the *Glossary* extremely helpful. An excellent *Bibliography*—which incidentally includes many recent publications—an *Index of Persons* and another *Index of Subjects* add the necessary flourishes to an outstanding theological treatise.

Both students and teachers of Systematic Theology will be glad at long last to have access to a theology text-book that touches both mind and heart. The General Editors of the Theological Book Trust have done the theological student community in India a great service by placing in our hands yet another quality text-book that is solidly biblical, scholarly, contextual, extremely readable and modestly priced. Although written primarily for the Asian context, it has much to say which will be of immense value to the worldwide Christian community. In the opinion of this reviewer, it will without question remain the standard work on systematic theology from an Asian evangelical perspective for years to come.

WHAT IS AN EVANGELICAL?

by D. M. Lloyd-Jones
Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 1992; 91pp., £1.50;
ISBN 0 85151 6262

Reviewed by A. T. B. McGowan, *Highland Theological Institute, Elgin, USA* in *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*

This book contains three addresses given by Dr Lloyd-Jones to an International Fellowship of Evangelical Students conference in 1971. It was originally published in 1989 as part of a longer collection entitled *Knowing the Times*. In characteristic style, Dr Lloyd-Jones offers a clear and succinct analysis of the problems created by theological trends with Evangelicalism. Despite the fact that these addresses were given over twenty years ago, the analysis is prophetically appropriate to our own day. He says that the word 'Evangelical' needs to be defined and clarified so that its meaning remains the same. He notes the significant changes which have taken place in some churches and Christian bodies such that they no longer hold to the truths which they once did. He does make it clear, however, that he is not interested in division or separation for their own sake, but rather in highlighting the essential truths of the Christian faith. He notes that those who are extreme separatists are almost as bad as those who are interested in ecumenism to the detriment of evangelical truth.

Lloyd-Jones lays out four guiding principles in his attempt to answer the question of the title: 1. The preservation of the gospel; 2. Learning from history; 3. Maintaining negatives; 4. No subtractions or additions. He spends many pages dealing with the general characteristics of an Evangelical. Many of these are expected: subservience to Scripture; emphasis on the new birth; concern for evangelism, and so on. But he also goes into more controversial areas; contending, for example, that an Evangelical must be distrustful of reason, philosophy and scholarship, especially as these have been used in modern theology. This is a most helpful section and needs to be heard loudly and clearly in theological colleges today, where Enlightenment principles and values (rather than biblical ones) are often in control. In the closing lecture, he highlights a number of truths which he regards as fundamental, and others which he regards as secondary. The former includes the doctrines of Scripture, justification by faith and the atonement (penal and substitutionary). In the latter category he includes the differences between Christians on such doctrines as election, the last things and baptism.

This must surely be one of the most useful books ever to come from Lloyd-Jones. The word 'Evangelical' has become so elastic today as to defy definition at all. How good it is to be called back to the basics. This is not to say that the present reviewer accepts all that the author puts forward. For example, the statement that an Evangelical is someone who does not believe in a state church does not easily persuade someone who values Knox and the Covenanters! Nevertheless, this is a challenging book and one which should be read by everyone who would lay claim to the name 'Evangelical'. One suspects that fewer (if they were honest) would lay claim to the title afterwards.

THE UNIQUE CHRIST IN OUR PLURALIST WORLD

Edited by Bruce J. Nicholls
Carlisle, Paternoster/Grand Rapids, Baker, 1994

(Reviewed by Michael Duncan in *Stimulus* Vol 3 No. 3
August 1995)

Fit bodies fat minds. That is how Os Guinness describes many evangelicals today. In a book (Baker House, 1994) that goes by that title Guinness traces the retreat of the evangelical mind and the 'dumbing down of evangelicalism through popular culture'. Anti-intellectualism, he suggests, has become the scandal of evangelicalism. And sadly, this very anti-intellectualism in New Zealand will keep many from plucking this book *The Unique Christ in Our Pluralist World* from the shelves, paying for it so as to plunge into its depths. A pity. For this book is good stuff!

In similar vein to Guinness, David Wells (*No Place for Truth*: Eerdmans, 1993), rebukes evangelicals for their disregard of theology, doctrine and the confession of truth. He laments that many evangelical churches have in their pulpits therapists or managers but not 'brokers of truth'. Wells thus urges an urgent return to 'sound doctrine'. *The Unique Christ in a Pluralist World* is a timely response to that call. This book is unashamedly about the traditional doctrine of the uniqueness of Christ—a doctrine that is fast becoming 'the victim of religious mutiny.'

But what makes the book unique is that it explores Christ's uniqueness not just in relation to other religions (as is often the case) but also in reference to the challenges of modernity, political ideologies, the church, peace and justice, hope and judgement. These are the storm fronts and motifs of mission and so it goes without saying that this book belongs on the shelves of any urban community worker, mission pastor, community development activist, or missionary (local or overseas).

The book consists of twenty papers given by evangelical theologians at an international gathering in Manila in 1992. Chris Wright (England), Kwame Bediako (Ghana), Rene Padilla (Argentina), Miroslav Volf (Croatia), Valdir Steuernagel (Brazil), Frances Adeney (Indonesia), Jonathan Chao (Hong Kong), Bong-Ho Son (South Korea) and Ken Gnanakan (India) are just some of the contributing authors. In other words, what makes this book so worthwhile is that the subject matter is debated from a number of contexts. A communal hermeneutic is at work in the book whereby the uniqueness of Christ is discussed 'cross culturally'. Because of this communal exposure readers of this book will find themselves, and what they have come to understand as the uniqueness of Christ, being critiqued from the position at which others, from vastly different contexts, have arrived on this doctrine.

What is even more pleasing in this book is that it doesn't omit differences of opinion. A glaring example is over the question of violence. Where one author allows for violence in extreme situations (Bong-Ho Son) another seems to rule it out altogether (David Lim). The point being, that in this book are a number of evangelical thinkers who are not afraid to declare and debate their differences. It is my conviction that this level of debate is sadly missing in the evangelical camp in New Zealand and we would do well to pick up this book to discern how these authors actually debate the issues.

If there is a weakness in the book it would be that in places it is heavy going. Some of the words are excessively 'technical' and 'theological'. I mean, most would run a mile from a subtitle that reads: *The Ambivalence of Knowledge in Hermatological Perspective*. Scary!! Unfortunately, this will turn many 'street practitioners' off the book and these are the very people who would benefit from grappling with its contents. A word to these 'street people'. This book will not be easy at times but then Jesus never said discipleship would be easy!

But full marks to Bruce Nicholls, the editor, for compiling these papers and making them available to all of us. As I return to my streets of plurality and complexity I now do so with a book that will guide me through the difficult maze and make for better mission.

GOD'S EMPOWERING PRESENCE. THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE LETTERS OF PAUL

by Gordon D. Fee

Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson/Carlisle:
Paternoster, 1994, 992 pp., £29.99/\$39.95

(Reviewed by William W. Klein,
Denver Seminary, Denver, Colorado in *Themelios* Vol 22:3)

Phrases such as *tour de force* and *magnum opus* come immediately to mind. Words like 'comprehensive' and 'encyclopaedic' also appropriately describe this monumental assessment of the place that the Holy Spirit has in Pauline theology. Fee, NT Professor at Regent College in Vancouver, begins with a section that introduces the topic and Paul's uses of *pneuma* (spirit/Spirit) and accompanying terms in his letters. He proceeds (using 760 pages!) with his analysis, epistle by epistle—following his presumed chronology of Paul's letter-writing career (Galatians follows the Corinthian letters)—of all the texts that treat Paul's theology of the Spirit. By the way, Fee considers all the traditional Pauline corpus, including Ephesians and the Pastoral Epistles, to be genuinely Pauline and worthy of inclusion in a discussion of Paul's theology. Part II consists of Fee's synthesis of the results of his exegesis of the texts. It divides into sections on the Spirit's role in Paul's eschatology, his doctrine of God, his soteriology, and his ecclesiology. The book concludes with a chapter entitled, 'Where to From Here? The Relevance of Pauline Pneumatology'.

The book's preface and introductory pages introduce the reader to a scholar deeply committed to correcting the current deficiency in the modern church's understanding of the proper role and ministry of the Holy Spirit, 'but to do so as the result of exegetical labour'. That is, Fee intends to show by his analysis of Paul's letters just how crucial, dynamic and experiential a role the Spirit had in Christianity's foundational theologian's life and thought. Fee is convinced that 'for Paul the Spirit, as an experienced and living reality, was the absolutely crucial matter for Christian life, from beginning to end' (p. 1). The book's title pointedly reflects, then, Fee's bedrock convictions about Paul's theology of the Spirit. The Spirit is a *person* who embodies the *presence* of God himself, a person who indwells and *empowers* God's people in this present age. The book represents more than an exegetical exercise for the author. It is a sermon, a plea for renewal, an appeal for the contemporary church to return to its biblical roots in recognizing and appropriating the ministry of the Spirit in its life and work.

In a very enlightening lexical chapter, Fee studies articular and anarthrous uses of *pneuma*, distinctions between the divine Spirit and a human spirit, 'spirit' expressing a quality or attitude, adjectival uses translated as 'spiritual', and the term *charisma*, rendered 'spiritual gift'. Several extremely important and significant conclusions emerge. Perhaps the most startling is the statement: 'In fact, there is not a single instance in Paul where this word [spiritual] refers to the human "spirit" and has to do with "spiritual life", as this word is most often understood in modern English' (p. 32). For Paul, 'spiritual' speaks of the domain of God's personal, Holy Spirit, not spiritual in the sense of ethereal or non-physical.

A review cannot assess in any responsible way the bulk of Fee's 760 pages of exegesis of specific texts. Some formal observations might help potential readers understand the magnitude of what Fee has accomplished. Each chapter begins with a review of the major and significant commentaries on the letter, followed by other significant studies. He quotes each text for discussion, provides footnotes on text-critical matters, and proceeds with his analysis—virtually a commentary—of the verse or verses at issue. Each chapter ends with a conclusion that summarizes the specific teaching on the Spirit in that letter or

group of letters. Fee is at his best in exegeting biblical texts. Though his sympathies clearly reside with promoting the role and place of the Spirit, he does not recoil from correcting misapplications, even when they challenge what he believes are ‘deeper life’ and ‘second blessing’ misuses of texts (as an example, see his treatment of [1 Cor. 2:6–3:2](#)). As to tongues, Fee sees Paul promoting their private use ‘as much as one pleases’, but in the congregation only when it edifies the body (p. 151). An excursus defends in greater detail his view, originally presented in his commentary on 1 Corinthians (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) and subsequently challenged by various reviews (e.g. D. A. Carson, ‘“Silent in the churches”: On the role of women in [1 Corinthians 14:33b–36](#)’, in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. J. Piper and W. A. Grudem (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), pp. 140–53), that [1 Corinthians 14:34–35](#) were not original to the letter, nor did they come from Paul at all.

Fee’s final synthetic chapters proceed from his concern to unleash the Spirit in the contemporary church, fighting the human proclivity to domesticate and channel the Spirit lest the Spirit challenge and subvert the structures of our settled ‘orthodoxy’ and comfortable traditions. Growing out of his understanding of the ‘centre’ in Paul’s theological system, Fee organizes his conclusions about the place of the Spirit around Paul’s four major thrusts:

1. On the Spirit as eschatological fulfilment, Fee understands Paul’s view as: ‘The future had truly broken into the present, as verified by the gift of the Spirit; and since the Spirit meant the presence of God’s power, that dimension of the future had already arrived in some measure’ (p. 825).
2. As to the Spirit as God’s personal presence, ‘for Paul, the Spirit is not some merely impersonal “force” or “influence” or “power”. The Spirit is none other than the fulfilment of the promise that God himself would once again be present with his people’ (p. 845).
3. On the Spirit and salvation, ‘“Salvation in Christ” not only begins by the Spirit, it is the ongoing work of the Spirit in every area and avenue of Christian life . . . [We must see] the central role the Spirit plays at every juncture’ (p. 869).
4. The Spirit plays the central role in the life of the people of God, the gathered Christian community as it lives the tension of the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’. ‘The only way we can so live is by the power of the Spirit’ (p. 895).

The final chapter summarizes the book’s discoveries into eight conclusions. These statements describe how the church’s leading foundational theologian and apostle understood the Spirit’s place. Fee follows this with a sobering, brief comparison with what we find in the church today, and then a plea for a ‘way forward’. The plea is ‘for the recapturing of the Pauline perspective of Christian life as essentially the life of the Spirit, dynamically experienced and eschatologically oriented—but *fully integrated into the life of the church*’ (p. 901, his emphasis). And in contrast to those who wish to tear down or abandon present structures, Fee urges that believers work to breathe the life of the Spirit into our present institutions, theologies and liturgies. An appendix to the book considers Paul’s antecedents: the Spirit in the OT and developments during the inter-testamental period.

Though reviewers or readers might quibble here or there on individual points of exegesis, to do so here would be impertinent in view of what Fee has accomplished for us. The case is overwhelming. According to Paul, the Spirit has infused his presence and power into every individual Christian and the corporate body which is the church. This is authentic and normal Christianity. But for many contemporary ‘Christians’ and ‘churches’ the Spirit is either completely absent or viewed as an optional accessory to be summoned

when needed, or, worse, a worrisome aberration. We stand chastened; we are brought up short, but not merely because an eloquent writer/preacher has made an impassioned appeal. Fee has demonstrated his case with the utmost exegetical rigour. This is no mere *ad hominem* entreaty. Fee has shown us in masterful strokes the true heart and vision of the apostle Paul—what is really true of those ‘in Christ’.

TO PREACH OR NOT TO PREACH?

The Church’s Urgent Question

by David C. Norrington

Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996

130pp. indexes

ISBN 0-85364-697-X

(Reviewed by David Parker)

There is no doubting the answer that the author gives to the question posed by the title of this book—regular preaching in Christian worship services, as commonly found in all branches of the church (but emphasized particularly strongly by evangelicals), is not only without biblical support and ineffective in communicating Christian truth, but is harmful for the purpose for which it is most treasured—the spiritual growth of the hearers. According to the author, it ‘intensifies the impoverishment of Christian life’ (p 115), and hence ‘the church’s urgent question’ is to replace the regular sermon with a system that will be more useful in nurturing Christians and their church communities.

Norrington, who teaches Religious Studies at Blackpool College, thinks this is a ‘modest’ step, but because the sermon ‘is embedded in a complex organizational structure which is far removed from biblical patterns,’ it is likely to be ‘contentious,’ and hence advises caution in the process. Nevertheless, he believes careful study of the biblical and historical data set within its own culture and a corresponding analysis of contemporary western culture would confirm his conclusions.

In developing his own case, which is clearly laid out and supported by a great deal of documentation from a wide range of disciplines, he examines first the role of preaching in the Bible and early church. He finds that there is little evidence to support the current practice which was introduced only in later times, a process influenced mainly by the popularity of rhetoric in the contemporary pagan society. This tendency towards the introduction of the regular sermon (complete by the fourth century) was reinforced by changes in the role of the church leaders and the effect of auditorium style church buildings which replaced the house churches of the earlier period. Thus the ‘altered status of sermon can be explained as resulting from the influence upon the church of the non-Christian culture surrounding it’ (p. 115).

He rounds off this section by showing that the sermon did not play any significant part in the process of advancing the spiritual growth of Christians in the NT era. Drawing heavily on the insights of Robert Banks and his investigations of early church life, he argues that this function was performed instead by other methods, such as personal discipling, small groups, mutual ministries and attention to spiritual gifts.

Turning to the contemporary church, Norrington goes on to point out how modern preaching is poorly adapted to effective teaching and communication of biblical truth, particularly in western cultures. For example, it cannot be related to the different individual needs of the various listeners, it is a passive, one-way system of communication which does not develop the listener’s powers of thought or analytical skills and it fails to develop a sense of community. What is more, he argues that it actually de-skills people who are already active in using their own spiritual gifts, and it presents a model of

domination by the clergy, leading to an unhealthy dependency syndrome and resultant spiritual poverty in the hearers.

Norrington's energetic case that modern preaching arose 'in the context of the neglect of Scripture and the unintelligent embracing of pagan ideas' (p. 98) continues relentlessly in a final chapter dealing with objections to his proposals for the abandonment of the regular sermon. Here, as elsewhere, he does not hesitate to attack favourite notions, such as the importance of sermon for evangelism or the exemplary virtues of the preaching of the Puritans, if he believes the evidence requires it.

He has the admirable ability of succinctly presenting accepted ideas and historical material in a fresh light which reinterprets them completely. Many of these new interpretations merit serious consideration; to take but one example—the transition from home churches to church buildings where the preacher could more readily dominate to the exclusion of mutual ministry was not a welcome release from restrictive conditions that would benefit the church's development, as is often supposed. Instead, he sees it as a departure from conditions which were ideal for developing the church's life brought about by the pressure of alien, anti-biblical forces. His position on the role of preaching in evangelism is another example.

Norrington's argument is directed exclusively against what he calls the 'regular sermon'. He defines the sermon as 'a speech, essentially concerned with biblical, ethical and related material, designed to increase understanding and promote godly living amongst the listening congregation, delivered by one in good standing with the local Christian community and addressed primarily to the faithful in the context of their own gatherings'. By 'regular sermon' he means the 'frequent and regular occurrence' of this kind of sermon at most major gatherings of the church (p. 1).

He does not want to rule out preaching altogether, because he sees there is biblical justification and practical usefulness for sermons in some situations, especially where specific problems need attention (p.69). However, his definition and many of his arguments indicate that he is thinking almost exclusively of the sermon as an instrument for teaching biblical truth in an educational sense. This is often the case, especially in evangelical churches where the worship service may be reduced to the preliminaries and a sermon in the form of a biblical exposition, or lengthy segments of musical praise and a sermon. Norrington's case is highly appropriate in these situations, but he speaks as if this is the only function of preaching, and as if most churches are so bereft of supporting structures for training and nurture that they put the whole weight on the sermon itself.

The argument presented by this book could be dismissed as a piece of naïve, biblicistic restorationism which is unsympathetic to all developments subsequent to the New Testament and insensitive to the traditions of the church. But it is a well argued case that raises important issues about the nurture of Christians and the purposes for which they meet; as such it ought to be taken seriously.

THE RECOVERY OF MISSION

by Vinoth Ramachandra

Carlisle, U.K: Paternoster. 1996. 293 pp.

Price Not Indicated.

(Reviewed by Dr. David Harley, Dean, Discipleship Training Centre, Singapore, in Dharma Deepika Vol 2 No 2.)

Vinoth Ramachandra has served as the regional secretary for South Asia of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES) since 1987. He holds a doctoral degree in nuclear engineering from the University of London, but has pursued a pastoral

and evangelistic ministry among university students in his home country of Sri Lanka rather than follow a career in the academic world or in nuclear energy.

In his first book, Ramachandra deals with the twin issues which confront the Christian church both in Asia and in other parts of the world: modernity and pluralism. He points out that religious pluralism has been endorsed by many Christian academics and church leaders not only as a social fact but as 'a new theological understanding of the relationship between the Christian faith and other faiths' (p. ix).

This new understanding has an inevitable impact on the nature of the church's mission, for if all religious traditions are accepted as having salvific value, then 'the traditional Christian concept of mission must be given up in the interests of mutual religious enrichment through dialogue and peaceful cooperation' (p. x).

Ramachandra has written this book as an evangelical contribution to this vital debate. He writes primarily for pastors, seminary students and missionary candidates. But he also has in mind thinking 'lay' people who are aware of the critical impact such a paradigm shift in the church's mission could have on the life and future of the church.

In the first part of the book, he explores the writings of three Asian theologians who have exercised considerable influence both in Asia and the West: Stanley Samartha, Raimundo Panikkar and Aloysius Peiris. He has chosen these three both because of their reputation and also because they represent the kinds of view that are becoming increasingly popular, especially within the ecumenical movement.

In Part II, he compares the approaches of each writer and notes their points of agreement and disagreement. He observes the trends of western liberal and critical scholarship that have influenced their thinking. He also devotes a chapter to Lesslie Newbigin's critique of western culture.

In the final section of his book, Ramachandra considers the person of Jesus who, as he points out, receives little attention at the hands of most pluralistic theologians. As he examines the evidence of the gospels, he finds himself confronted with the 'inescapable scandal of the uniqueness of Christ and his claims'.

His concluding chapter turns from theological and philosophical debate to missionary practice. He criticizes both conservative and liberal approaches to mission and suggests ways in which the gospel may be faithfully and effectively presented in a modern and pluralistic world.

This is a substantial and scholarly book by a Sri Lankan evangelical on one of the most important issues facing the church today: the encounter between the Christian faith and other faith communities. It will be as helpful to the church in the West as to the church in Asia. Buy one today, read it, and then give it to your pastor!

IN SEARCH OF SELF: BEYOND THE NEW AGE

By Vishal Mangalwadi

London: Hodder & Stoughton. 1992. xii, 287

pp. £7.99 in U.K.; paper. ISBN 0-340-552271.

(Reviewed by Ramesh Khattri, Ph.D., Director, Nepal Bible Ashram, Kathmandu. in Dharma Deepika Vol 2 No. 2.)

The very name is a misnomer because 'New Age' has taken over old, eastern ideas. The New Age, begun in California and now spread world-wide, is here to stay and perhaps fade (as the title of the same work published in USA, *When the New Age Grows Old*, suggests). While it stays, New Age has become a challenge to a Christian view point, ethics, life-style, and philosophy. New Age borrows 'monism' from the Hindu *advaita* philosophy, accepts the doctrines of *maya* and *karma*, both incompatible with the Christian understanding of

the reality of the present world and the forgiveness of sins once and for all in Jesus Christ. The basic assumption behind New Age is that man himself is god, not a sinner. So Utopia is within human grasp. Although New Age is making Hinduism popular and relevant, the Christian faith has not been correctly interpreted by it. Mangalwadi aims to show how biblical Christianity quenches the thirst New Agers seek in vain to satisfy. In nine well-researched chapters, Mangalwadi deals with the background to the New Age movement, astrology, UFOs, tantric sex, ecology, vegetarianism, reincarnation, and miracles.

Astrology. New Age eagerly looks forward to the future Age of Aquarius which will usher in 'harmony, peace . . .' Mangalwadi turns to Genesis. Stars, the sun and the moon are created things to serve man, not to govern him.

Spiritism. New Agers have their own spirits that guide them. True! However, human beings should be properly guided only by the Holy Spirit, who cannot be manipulated as the New Agers might wish.

UFOs. New Agers rely on extra-terrestrials, whose existence is not yet confirmed, to sort out problems! New Agers should explore the Bible's teaching about the visitation of angels and the second coming of Christ.

Tantric Sex. This appeals to New Agers as a means of 'self enlightenment', but condemns the partners to frustration.

Ecology. New Agers elevate ecology to the level of god by deifying Mother-Earth. Mangalwadi notes that goddess worship in India has not given Indian women the dignity they deserve. There is no guarantee that regarding the earth as a goddess will inspire people to better ecology.

Vegetarianism. Mangalwadi notes that although India has practised this more than other nations, India has yet to benefit from it.

Reincarnation. Mangalwadi argues that the reincarnation so advocated by New Agers could simply be a case of demon possession.

Miracles. Miracles do not occur because the New Ager successfully thinks that sickness is mere illusion. Miracles happen because God intervenes.

The epilogue concludes that the New Ager will err as long as he or she tries to understand life without reference to God. An appendix studies how recent physics seems to support the monism of philosophical Hinduism.

Mangalwadi writes as a Christian. So his appeal to the Bible as the infallible standard is obvious. Advocates of other religious traditions may find Mangalwadi's approach simplistic or dogmatic. This reviewer, also a Christian, found himself agreeing with the author one hundred percent.

BRIDGING THE GAP: EVANGELISM, DEVELOPMENT AND SHALOM

by Bruce Bradshaw

Monrovia, MARC, 1993 pp. 183

(Reviewed by R. Craig Woodring, Colorado Springs, USA)

The book *Bridging the Gap: Evangelism, Development and Shalom*, by Bruce Bradshaw, examines how western world views clash with the primal world view of the developing world. The author presents a very good understanding of the issues and broadly applies his thesis to a variety of development arenas. While this reviewer believes this to be a valuable first level analysis of the problem, and an excellent thesis for approaching the problem, there is still much work that could be done both in the thesis and in the synthesis as well as discussion on the application side. Overall, the book is an excellent starting point on the subject of making development work for those it is supposed to help. I highly

recommend it for those development professionals, social works specialists, and church workers seeking to see positive change occur through development.

The author first presents the weaknesses of development as it is widely practised today, by western and western educated individuals in non-profit organizations who perceive the problem facing a community to be either physical or social in nature and needing technical solutions. The receiving community or individual often refuses, rejects, or minimally accesses the solution technology because their ownership and understanding of it is minimal. Sometimes the receiver becomes dependent on the donor to continue to provide the inputs and management for the development technologies, long after management transfer should have occurred. Rarely does the solution become widely accepted and take root in the new host cultural setting. Bradshaw defines the real underlying problem to be that the primal world views of the developing arena are inadequately addressed by the western scientific world view. The spiritual perspective of the developing world's poor and illiterate masses, the target group, does not mesh with the scientific perspective of the development professional and agency. The development practitioner often assumes that there is a limited spiritual world which is divorced from the natural world where the problems exist and where solutions are needed. Bradshaw shows that this duality concept is incorrect and in no way addresses the holistic nature of primal cultures.

Bradshaw's solution is based on the ancient Hebrew concept of *Shalom*. He investigates the roots and definition of this concept, which involves both spiritual and material components. Sadly, his discussion here could use more development models. His explanation of *Shalom* seems incomplete, leaving this reader to try to piece together a solid definition with the breadth the author is calling for.

After the introduction of *Shalom*, and a good discussion on contextualization, the author then applies the concept to several development arenas. Some of these discussions are better than others though all have merit. The discussion of *Shalom* in management, education, and medicine is very thought provoking. To Bradshaw's credit he does deal with the subjects of the environment and economics, though both need much more synthesis and effort. The environmental issues seem to degenerate into an economic problem and the economics discussion could use much more thought. For example, this reviewer was surprised that there was no discussion of the Greek concept of stewardship, *Oikonomos*. There is much more work that could be brought out in this area. The discussions on addressing the powers was very thought provoking but more clarity would have been helpful. Lastly the author attempts to bring in two additional points on holism and transformation. These topics would have been better placed earlier in the work as they provide good fundamental understanding for concept application.

The concluding thoughts deserve a final chapter of their own. After 170 odd pages of working on developing understanding of *Shalom* and applications, a concluding and final synthesis would be appropriate.

In conclusion, this book is important and brings up many interesting thoughts. It should provide ample material for further development and discussion by a variety of authors. Hopefully, it will also challenge us readers to seek the concept of *Shalom* in our efforts at development.

EVANGELICALS IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND 1734–1984

by Kenneth Hylson Smith

T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1988 424pp., £16.95;

ISBN 0 567 29161 8

(Reviewed by Peter Cook, St Andrew's Church, Cheadle Hulme, UK in *Scottish Journal of Evangelical Theology*)

This is a scholarly, extremely well-documented yet easily readable account of the progress of Anglican Evangelicalism in the post-Wesley era almost to the present day. It can justifiably be regarded both as a textbook to introduce the student new to this particular aspect of church history and, on account of an abundance of footnotes together with its bibliography and indices, as a helpful guide for those who wish to research more deeply into the period. Or it may be treated simply as an informative and fascinatingly interesting book for those who want to know what goes on in the evangelical world, especially in the Church of England.

So many facets of Evangelicalism are examined that it is quite impossible to give any adequate account of the book in a short review. Hylson Smith pursues a track very well-worn by readers of G. R. Balleine's classic published in 1908, *A History of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England*, which hitherto has been a 'must' for evangelical ordinands, but the assessments which this more modern account offers have all the benefits of an abundance of recent research. It provides us, moreover, with a further seventy years of evangelical history. The epilogue predicting 'the other side of 1984' clearly needs revision in the light of what has actually happened in this last decade.

Hylson Smith retells the story of the continuous struggle over nearly three centuries of Evangelicalism—reborn through Wesley's revival and initially to be found in a few scattered parishes, albeit experiencing quite remarkable ministries—to expand into the wider Anglican church. Despite almost as many setbacks as advances, it has become one of the most powerful forces affecting the course of the present-day Church of England. We see divine providence at work, when Evangelicalism manages to break out of the parishes and gain access to the episcopal bench, very much because of Palmerston's ignorance of ecclesiastical affairs, which forced him to rely on the advice of Lord Shaftesbury!

We witness the birth of the great evangelical societies influencing the church at home and abroad for over a century and a half, among them the Church Pastoral Aid Society and the Church Missionary Society. We learn that Shaftesbury the social reformer was a high Tory afraid of power falling into the hands of the working classes. We discover that J. C. Ryle, the darling of so many modern conservative Evangelicals, was both unsympathetic towards the Keswick Movement and regarded as a neo-Evangelical in his day. We witness the struggle between Evangelicalism and ritualism in the last century and liberalism in this. The contributions of John Stott and J. I. Packer are evaluated, especially for the parts they played in the post-War controversies, over *Honest to God*, *The Myth of God Incarnate*, and fundamentalism. Prayer book revision, the charismatic movement and the revolution in church music are given due consideration.

Hylson Smith commands our attention as he bears us through the years, mixing anecdotes with statistics, mini-biographies with theological adjudication. He surely is a worthy successor to Balleine, not only in assessing familiarly trodden ground, but in filling the gap left by the absence of any similar work covering the progress of Anglican Evangelicalism during the greater part of the twentieth century.