

Theme:  
Holistic Faith

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# Editorial

The World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF) held its 11th General Assembly in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on May 4-10, 2000. The Bible studies and other presentations during the morning sessions were of a high order. So, with the permission of the International Director, we have pleasure in publishing in this issue one of those Bible studies, on the theme of creation, by Dr Iain Provan of Regent College, Vancouver, Canada. Others will appear in later issues.

Most of the WEF Commissions also held sessions both prior to and as part of the Assembly programme. In particular the Theological Commission which publishes this journal held a consultation on Ecclesiology which featured eight papers. In our next issue we hope to publish several of them.

Other articles in this issue cover a wide range of topics. Dr David Scholer of Fuller Theological Seminary continues the biblical theme in his study of Revelation, offering a clear and sensible approach to its interpretation based on contextual and theological concerns. Taking a philosophical perspective, Dr James Danaher of Nyack College, NY, investigates the vexed question of human freedom, pointing out the surprising results of the Christian position.

Turning to ecclesiological matters, Dr Veli-Matti Karkkainen tackles the question of apostolicity in the Pente-

costal tradition, with suggestions about how this controversial notion can be understood, making good use in the process of materials gained from years of dialogue between his tradition and the Roman Catholic Church.

Missiological concerns dominate the remaining essays. Dr J. B. Jeyaraj examines the biblical concept of jubilee in his Indian socio-political and economic context, Robert Lang'at of Kenya unravels the impact of the holiness movement on the missions history of Eastern Africa, and finally, Dr Bob Robinson of New Zealand presents the first part of his article on the uniqueness of Jesus, in which he subjects the accepted terminology of this subject to a detailed analysis in the hope of clarifying the matter. The remainder of his paper will be published in our next issue.

This issue completes 25 volumes of the journal, and the range of themes in it mirrors our concern throughout for a comprehensive and holistic theology. As Dr Provan notes in his Bible study, 'In all things we are called to act out the kingdom of God. And that is why holistic ministry is not one option among many for the Christian. Holistic ministry is simply bound up with what being a Christian is all about—being true to the nature of things.'

**David Parker, Editor.**

# Creation and Holistic Ministry: A Study of Genesis 1:1 to 2:3

by Iain Provan

**Keywords:** Redemption, *ex nihilo*, light, ecology, world, divine image, dominion, kingship, authority, vocation

'In the beginning was our father Abraham; and God created him *ex nihilo* from the dust of the ground and called him out of Babylonia to found the church.'

It is conceivable that the Bible *might* have begun in this way. Certainly many Christian readers have behaved as if it *did* begin in this way. And not a few Old Testament theologians of fairly recent times have

offered intellectual comfort for this idea, by arguing that the earliest, most distinctive creedal formulations found in Israel omitted all mention of any events prior to the Patriarchs. The same is true, they have alleged, of the most ancient narrative sources behind the Pentateuch.

The impression is thus created that everything in the biblical story prior to the Patriarchs must be of secondary importance for us as Christians, theologically and practically—that it is the great story of *redemption* upon which we should focus our attention, and not, to the same extent, the equally great story of creation. And this has certainly been the implicit or explicit view of many ordinary Christians I have known over the years, including many evangelical Christians. Abraham we know—a little; Moses we know a little better, even if we do not like him very much; but what does *creation* have to do with anything? Of what use are Genesis 1 and 2 to Christians, except as a stick that can usefully be employed

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to beat those who do not believe in this or that theory about the origins of things?

### Redeemed for what?

Which is the reason, of course, that so many Christian people have an exceptionally good grasp of why the theory of evolution is wicked, or why one theology of the atonement is better than another, but have a much higher degree of difficulty in answering this question: what are we *redeemed for*? It is clear enough, I suppose, what it is that we are redeemed *from*: nearly every Christian testimony will give substantial attention to that point, sometimes offering far more detail about the speaker's previous life than the audience ever truly wished to hear. We all know, or we think that we do, what it is that we are redeemed *from*; but what are we redeemed *for*?

- To tell others about Christ, certainly; but what if every other person were, hypothetically, already a *follower* of Christ? What if that aspect of our Christian calling were no longer necessary, because everyone had been saved: would there be anything left over for us to do, as Christians?
- Perhaps by then we would have passed beyond this present realm and would be with the Triune God for eternity; but what would we be doing *there* in his presence, as inhabitants of the new heavens and the new earth?
- Worshipping, certainly; but anything else? What are we redeemed *for*?

It is, in my experience, a question that many modern Christians find it difficult to answer. Indeed, they have not really *asked* it; for the Christian discipling that they have received has emphasized only redemption *from* something, and that is how they have come to conceive of the Christian life overall. They have a fairly good idea, therefore, about what they are *against*; but they are vague to the point of being incapacitated when asked what it is that they are *for*. They have an exceedingly narrow view, in fact, of what it means to be a Christian. They conceive of the Christian life mainly as a matter of *escaping* from things—

- from a decadent culture, perhaps;
- from unsatisfactory relationships;
- from creation itself, which is, they will sometimes gleefully tell you, destined for the fire.

There is often something of a desire to escape even from the self—from the humanness of things, from the earthiness of it all, from the embodied nature of things.

All of this, I suggest, is related to (although not exhaustively explained by) a fundamental theological problem; that such Christians—and there are many, many of them—possess no sufficiently robust idea of creation, with which to undergird and explain their idea of redemption. They have no idea of the larger canvas upon which the story of redemption is painted; the ideal or the end towards which redemption is pointed. Their Bible *indeed* begins, for all practical purposes, with Abraham—if they ever read the Old Testament

at all, rather than sticking entirely to the New. It is with Abraham that their Bible story begins, and not with creation.

Holistic Christians they therefore cannot be. Holistic ministry they therefore cannot practise, for they have not even conceived, yet, of its *possibility*. If any model of ministry has been plucked from Genesis 1-11, it is only the model of the ark-dwellers accompanying a modern-day Noah: sailors tossed around on the stormy seas of life; desperately struggling to prevent the chaotic world outside from leaking in; pausing in their travels only occasionally and briefly to see if they can find any unsuspecting pagans outside the ship, so that they can disable them, rush them on board, shut fast the doors, and sail off into the sunset to be again the church of God.

Whither they are sailing, of course, is a mystery to all concerned; for they have lost the map for the journey. It is enough that they are sailing together, safe from the storm.

### The God of Creation

The real Bible that we truly possess, of course, does not begin with Abraham. It does not even begin with Noah. It begins with Creation, and with a God who is involved with, open to, generative of, the whole of creation, and not just with a selected minority of his human creatures. It begins famously and ambiguously: *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and the earth was formless and empty*; or, more likely in the original Hebrew, **When** God began to create the

*heavens and the earth, the earth was formless and empty.*

Fierce discussions have been generated by this ambiguity, usually centring on the question of whether or not the creation of all things is *ex nihilo*, 'out of nothing'. And whether the creation of all things is indeed 'out of nothing'—whether nothing existed before the one God initiated its existence—is of course an interesting and important theological question, to which the answer for believers in the one God is presumably, although certainly speculatively, 'yes'. It is an important question. But it is doubtful whether *Genesis chapter 1* is at all interested in this question—the question of the creation of *all* things.

- Certainly it is interested in the creation of the things that have to do with us.
- It is interested in the ordering of things such that life on this planet is viable.
- It is interested in God's creative activity that *makes* a viable, and indeed a blessed, life possible here.

But there is no real evidence in the passage as a whole that the origin of *all things* is the focus of attention.

Indeed, you will notice a rather deafening silence in the passage as to the specific origin of at least *two* things that are mentioned. We hear that God spoke light into being (verse 3), and the sky (verse 4), and the land (verse 5), and everything else that follows; but we do not hear anything about the origin of either the darkness or the waters, first mentioned in verse 2. *They* are simply *there*, as

God's creative activity begins. They already exist, before God begins to form his words that will change everything. And their ultimate origin is not explicitly addressed in Genesis chapter 1, any more than the ultimate origin of evil in this world is addressed in Genesis chapter 3. Evil is simply there, already, in the form of the snake, before the human pair succumb to it. In Genesis 1, darkness and water are already there, too; and their presence, too, is shrouded in mystery that the text itself does not seek to dispel.

Once this reality is perceived, then the question of precise translation in Genesis 1:1 becomes less important than it has sometimes seemed; for whatever the better translation, it seems very likely on general grounds that the creation of our reality being pictured for us here does *not* involve a completely new beginning in absolute terms, moment zero in the Big Bang (as it were)—does *not* involve that, but rather, already, involves an act of divine redemption. That is, redemption is already bound up with creation in Genesis 1. Here is the earth, formless and empty, 'formless and void' (as older translations put it). It is a wasteland, uninhabitable by life, and certainly by human life. It is indeed marked, not by the order necessary for life, but by chaos. That is the significance, biblically, of the darkness and the water.

Darkness is a uniformly negative phenomenon in the Bible: a cloak for evil-doing, a symbol of ignorance and folly, and an image for death or the grave; and itself a spiritual power. It is the natural environment for evil

happenings.

Water is both necessary for life, and yet in large amounts dangerous and deadly to human beings. The use of the Hebrew word *tehom* here in verse 2, translated usually into English as 'the deep,' is particularly ominous; for it evokes the name of the dreadful sea-monster Tiamat, out of whose carcass, Babylonian myth claims, the world was carved. Other parts of the Bible also borrow from this same Babylonian mythology in developing a distinctly Hebrew view of creation. These other texts allude to a cosmic battle between the God of Israel and a sea-monster variously named as Leviathan or Rahab, or simply described as a serpent or a dragon. The 'waters' or 'floods' are indeed pictured in various OT texts, including several of the psalms, as restless, chaotic entities always liable to break into God's ordered world and to overwhelm the believer, so that life is put in danger and the psalmist feels himself sinking into the realm of death, the realm of She'ol beneath.

Water and darkness bespeak chaos. They are unruly and evil powers which, left to themselves, rise up in opposition to God, and are always looking for ways to disrupt the ordered and life-giving environment which God provides so that his creatures can flourish.

Here is the earth, then—formless and empty, a wasteland marked by chaos. Here is the earth, ready for God's creative activity to begin, as God's Spirit hovers over or sweeps across its expanse. Perhaps the picture is of the aftermath of battle, as



the victor surveys the subdued enemy, or perhaps it is simply one of containment and control. We cannot be sure, although the idea that God is sovereign over this chaotic reality, sovereign over the darkness and the waters, is already clear enough. Here is the beginning point of the world that we know; and out of the silence God speaks.

### Creation

'Let there be light.' The first creative act of many, each of them following a similar pattern. God speaks, and something comes into being, in obedience to the divine word—a fitting response of the created to the Creator. Something comes into being; and it is something 'good'. That is the point of the whole exercise: to create a good place, full of good things, reflecting the character of a God who is fundamentally good. Notice here, incidentally—just to underline what I was saying a moment ago—that the darkness is noticeably *not* called good in itself. It is only the light that is pronounced 'good', in the first instance. But notice also, on the other hand, that the darkness is not *destroyed* by God in creation, even *though* it is not good in itself. What happens is that the darkness is in fact redeemed. The enemy is turned into a friend, and made to serve a useful purpose as 'night' in relationship to the 'day'. Darkness becomes part of the good creation, through God's creative and redemptive action; and thus God reveals himself right at the beginning of the Bible story in terms that will become clearer only as the story

progresses. Here is a God whose interactions with creation are marked by generosity; a God of whom it will recurrently be said in the Old Testament that he is a compassionate and a gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness (e.g. Exodus 34:6). And so the darkness is *not* destroyed, but redeemed and made useful.

First the light is created, then; and secondly the sky, envisaged in verses 6-8 as separating the waters above it (the source of rain, snow and hail) from the waters beneath it—the waters that will shortly become the seas. Here are the 'heavens' introduced to us already in verse 1; and now in verses 9 and 10, we begin to hear of the earth. Dry land emerges, as the waters are ordered—in the same way that the darkness was ordered—so that they, too, serve a useful purpose. They are no longer the all-encompassing and life-denying 'deep' of verse 2, leaving no space on the planet where life may flourish. Now they are contained and constrained, so that the dry land can appear which will later support terrestrial life. Notice once again that the waters in verses 6-9 are not themselves referred to as 'good'. They are chaotic and dangerous entities redeemed, rather than good things created. It is only once the whole process of reordering has been completed half-way through day 3, and all the waters have found a useful function to perform, that we are finally told in verse 10 that 'God saw that it was good' (verse 10).

The *creation* of dry land then leads on naturally to the *development* of

the land so that it can support life, in verses 11-13; and verses 14-19 complete the backdrop against which life will emerge by filling in the details of the firmament. They describe the sun, the moon and the stars that will provide light and also the chronological framework within which human life, in particular, may be ordered and enjoyed: for they will serve as 'signs to mark seasons and days and years' (verse 14). Disorder is slowly and surely giving way to order—to a world in which it will be possible to live well, because it is 'good'.

The stage is thus fully set; and life emerges next, to act out its role on this stage—the diversity of creatures that live in the sea and the birds that fill the sky (verses 20-23); and the creatures who live on the land (verses 24-25). And it is all *indeed good*. God has created the whole thing with goodness as his guiding principle. He has drawn into this process even those things which in themselves did not start out as good. It is all *good*—for its own sake, and before human beings ever appear on the scene.

- It does not require our presence to be good.
- It is not only good because of our presence.
- It is good because God made it so, and has said it is so.

It is the very nature of the reality that we inhabit.

### Divine Image

Into this good creation, finally, come human beings (vv. 26-29). Why? To be the bearer of the divine image (v. 26)! What does that mean? In terms

of the immediate context of verse 26 within Genesis 1, it means that we have been given the task of 'ruling over' the other creatures, and indeed of 'subduing' the earth (verses 26, 28). It is these tasks that mark human beings out from the sea creatures and the birds, for example, who are also commanded to 'be fruitful and multiply' and to fill their environments, but are not commanded to 'rule over' or 'subdue' anything (compare verses 22 and 28). And so the image of God appears to be directly bound up with these particular commands. What is implied by these commands? Their language is strong.

The second verb (in English 'subdue') is a translation of the Hebrew verb *kabash*. It is the language of conquest, usually military conquest. It reappears in passages like Numbers 32:22, 29 and Joshua 18:1, where we read of the land being 'subdued' before God and his people; or 2 Samuel 8:11, where we read of David 'subduing' all the nations. Warfare therefore lurks in the background of this verb.

The first verb (in English 'have dominion, rule over') is a translation of the Hebrew verb *radah*. It is the language of government. It is used elsewhere in the Old Testament of kings governing their subjects (e.g. 1 Kings 4:24); of Israel ruling over those who had previously oppressed them (Isaiah 14:2); of the upright ruling over the wicked (Psalm 49:14). *Government* is envisaged in the use of this verb, especially royal government, with its associated tasks, such as establishing and maintaining jus-

tice.

Our Genesis language describing the divine commission to human beings is therefore strong language. It is language implying aggressive action taken by a would-be king to win his kingdom by force and then to govern it well. Like the hostile forces opposing the Israelites and their leaders as they entered the Promised Land, the earth is portrayed as confronting, at the moment of creation, these *human* invaders with their royal pretensions—those who come to multiply and to fill the earth, and must conquer it and then govern it if this multiplication and filling is to happen.

That is the reality of creation in Genesis 1. It is a hard-edged reality; and it is not a welcome reality to many, who hold out a more *romantic* vision of the world—a vision that knows only of harmony in the origins of things, and nothing of struggle; and a vision which feeds a romantic view of our *present* reality as well, in which struggle is frowned upon and harmony heavily advocated.

The romantic vision of the world, however, would require a different Genesis text. It would require a text that speaks in these terms: 'Do not fill the earth, but reduce your human impact upon it; be kind to it, rather than subduing it; and seek to live in harmony with other creatures rather than governing them.' Such a text does not in fact exist in Genesis 1, which does not share any modern, romantic notions about creation. Genesis 1 does not indulge in that mushy and naive, often profoundly anti-technological, sentimentality

about 'Nature' that we hear more and more around us. Genesis 1 views nature, not as a benevolent deity anxious to embrace us all as we abandon hope of controlling her, but as something that requires constantly to be governed if life is to flourish. And human beings have been given that task of governing, as kings in their newly-created kingdom.

That is what being created in the image of God in Genesis 1 is mainly about. But notice that it is indeed as the images of God that human beings have been called to this task. This is an important point to emphasize; for the language of Genesis 1:28 has sometimes been misunderstood as justifying the rapacious exploitation of the earth that is *also* a prominent feature of our modern experience—the other side of the coin to romantic idealism, and the reason that so many are attracted to it. 'God has legitimated our conquest of the earth', it is said; 'let us get on enthusiastically with our task and suck out every last resource from it for our benefit and pleasure.' So it is said. But it is as images of God that we are given this task of ruling and subduing. It is not as autonomous, self-created beings.

Here it is helpful to understand the probable cultural and historical background of the term 'image' in Genesis 1. It was common in the ancient Near East for great emperors to set up images or statues of themselves, 'likenesses' of themselves, in conquered territories that they were now claiming as their own. The image would function, in a manner of speaking, as the imperial represen-

tative in that territory, symbolizing imperial authority and control. The point is this: that the image had no authority of its own, any more than the vassal king of the territory, left in charge by the emperor, had such authority of his own. The only sort of authority in view, when an image appeared, was *delegated* authority.

And so it is in Genesis 1. It is as 'image of God,' and not as an *autonomous* being, that the human person is to subdue the earth and have dominion over other creatures. It is as delegate of the one true King who is King of everything. It is as creature, and not as god, that government is to be undertaken; for the kingdom is really God's, and does not belong to its human tenants. It is not theirs to do with as they will. They are indeed only the servants of God and the stewards of his creation, accountable always and in every respect to the Owner of the Garden, the Creator; for the earth is the Lord's, as the psalmist reminds us, and the fullness thereof (Psalm 24:1). It does not belong to us.

### **Image-bearing**

What is our human calling, therefore? It is to be a divine image-bearer in the midst of creation. What does that mean? It means to govern creation on God's behalf and as his representative; to mediate the rule of God in respect of the rest of creation; to be 'like God' in respect of the rest of creation. This involves, already in Genesis 1 and long before we get to the human turning away from God in Genesis 3, decisive action, even struggle. That is an intrinsic part of

the human calling, quite apart from the question of human fallenness, which so distorts and complicates our lives. The language of Genesis 1:28 makes this need for action, for struggle, clear; and indeed, in maintaining order and promoting life in creation in the ways envisaged here, human beings are themselves only consolidating and extending the creative acts of God in the first place—the God who himself, right at the beginning of the Bible, produces order and life out of the midst of darkness and chaos, and in opposition to their malevolent threats. The human vocation is analogous to the divine initiative, as one might expect if we are indeed made in God's image and in God's likeness. The human vocation involves the imitation of God.

Genesis 1 itself does not tell us much more, explicitly, about what the business of image-bearing involves, although it does suggest implicitly that it involves an appropriate balance between work and rest. God rests at the end of his week of creation (Genesis 2:1-3); and other parts of the OT rightly deduce that this divine example should certainly be followed by those who are made in God's likeness. To be like God involves both work and rest, in appropriate balance; and that is the great idea embedded in the Sabbath –

- the great symbol of the truth that we are not defined by what we do, and that life is more than work;
- the great expression of the idea that life is not found in grasping after things, but in letting go of

them and setting others free to do the same.

But beyond this one implication, Genesis 1 itself does not go.

We need to move out into other parts of the Bible, therefore, to fill out our picture of what image-bearing looks like. We need to move on to Genesis 2—the immediate context in which Genesis 1 must be read. Here the task of gardening, of earth-keeping, is further described, in a story that itself undermines any improper understanding of our ‘ruling’ the other creatures of the earth, since it emphasizes both the affinity that exists between human beings and animals (both created ‘out of the ground’), and the community that is possible between them. It is at least conceivable in this story, although it turns out not to be the case, that *adam* will find a soul-mate among the other creatures.

Beyond Genesis 2 we need to take account of passages in the OT Torah or Law that extend the Genesis perspective on the human role in creation, and make very practical applications of it—passages like Leviticus 25, which tell us that it is always God who owns the land, and that we are only stewards of it and do not own it; or, making the same point in a different way, passages that give us laws pertaining to the whole created order, and not just to its human part—Deuteronomy 5:12-15, for example, which insists that animals should share in the blessing of sabbath rest, or Deuteronomy 20:19-20, expressing concern for the good of trees in the midst of warfare.

Beyond these passages, we also

think of those parts of the Bible which articulate the ideals of Israelite kingship, in terms of justice and provision for all, emphasizing the protection of the most vulnerable in society; and beyond these we need to pay particular attention, of course, to the person of Jesus Christ, the divine image-bearer *par excellence* and the one whose human life we are called to imitate. Here is One who himself constantly urged his followers to live up to their calling of being ‘like God,’ not least in this brief instruction from Matthew’s Gospel: ‘Be perfect ... as your heavenly Father is perfect’—uttered in a context, of course, which speaks of God’s goodness in creation and of God’s generosity to everyone, whether they represent the forces of darkness or the forces of light.

Image-bearing is really what the whole Bible is about, at least when the focus of attention is on human beings; and we need the whole Bible to inform us about what it entails, for it is something much too complex to be spoken of in a single biblical text or a single biblical book. It is certainly a topic far too large to be addressed comprehensively here this morning in these brief moments as we begin our day together.

But Genesis 1 at least gives us our starting point: an important grounding for our reading of the rest of the Bible, and for our understanding of the nature of Christian ministry—although I myself, although I am an ordained minister, dislike the word ministry, and try not to use it. For ‘ministry’ has too much religion about it; too much clericalism. It is a word that has associations too nar-

row and too specific, and it is difficult for us to leave them behind us when we use it. In particular, it tends to make us think of particular tasks, of particular jobs, that we might be called to *do* in the church or in the world, rather than to think of the larger question that the Bible presses on us: the question of what it is that we are called to *be*. ‘Ministry’ is a word that tends to cramp the imagination, and to misdirect the Christian mind, as when students tell me that they intend ‘going into ministry’—which always makes me want to ask them what it is that they think they are doing at present, during every moment of every day.

### Life

So let me ask, not about the nature of the ministry to which we are called, but rather about the nature of the *life* to which we are each called, indeed that we are *created* to live. What does Genesis 1 tell us about life, when read with attention to its broader biblical context?

- It is a life, the text tells us, to be lived in good and true relationship with God who gives it to us.
- It is a life to be lived in good and true relationship with our fellow-human beings, who are also made equally in God’s image, no matter what their gender, race or world-view may be.
- It is a life, we are further told, that is to be lived in good and true relationship with the remainder of the created order around us, for which we have a God-given responsibility.

It is a life, in sum, that is to image

God in the midst of God’s kingdom, which is the whole earth—to image God in multiple and various ways that reflect the beauty; the creativity; the love and compassion; the forgiveness and the justice of our Creator.

That is the picture of the human vocation that arises out of Genesis chapter 1; this is our service, our ‘ministry’, if you will. It is, of its very nature, fundamentally and irreducibly a holistic ministry. It is not clear how it could be anything else, when we are clearly created by God as whole people.

And it is in the context of this high human calling, which extends so far beyond the boundaries of what is normally thought of as religion, that the rest of the Bible story is to be understood. It is in the context of creation that we must comprehend the story of redemption.

What are we redeemed *from*? We are redeemed from sin: from the darkness that has entered into this world of right relationships and has produced such catastrophic disruption, as human beings have sought to be God rather than to be the *image* of God, and in turning away from God have brought disaster on themselves, their neighbours and their environment. We are redeemed from sin.

But what are we redeemed *for*? I return to the question with which I began a little while ago. What are we redeemed *for*?

- Not, biblically speaking, so that we can escape culture; or unsatisfactory relationships; or ourselves;

- *not* so that we can escape from creation itself;
- and *certainly* not so that we can create our own sub-culture *within* creation, our own holy comfort-zone in which all darkness is cast to the outside and we know only cuddly communion within.

That is not redemption; it is simply a different form of sinful self-indulgence. It is simply religion. Redemption is, rather, the restoration of the divine image in human beings, and the intrinsically-connected reconstitution of the right relationships that we were created to have with God, neighbour and creation. That is what we are redeemed *for*. It is a redemption in respect of God's creation purposes for us, which are closely connected with God's purposes for us also in the *new* creation in which we are caught up in Christ. It is a redemption always focused on the larger question of God's creation purposes for all things.

- And so Noah is redeemed from the watery chaos, just as the earth had previously been *formed* out of watery chaos, so that creation can continue.
- Abraham is called out of Babylonia in response to the chaos of Babel, with a view, ultimately, to the blessing of all nations.
- The Israelites are saved from the darkness and chaos of Egypt, so that they can become a kingdom of priests to the nations, mediating God's blessing them.

### **Christ the ultimate image-bearer**

And so the story goes on, until it cul-

minates in Jesus Christ. Here is the one who subdues the watery chaos of the Sea of Galilee with a simple command ('Be still'); the one who himself descends into the waters of death just as Jonah did, only to overcome the powers of darkness decisively and forever in his resurrection. Here is the one who thus makes possible the new heavens and the new earth of which the book of Revelation speaks, in which all things are redeemed—not merely human beings, but all creation which, in the words of the apostle Paul, has been groaning in anticipation of the kingdom of God coming finally and fully in God's good time, and is glad to see that day.

Here is the ultimate image-bearer, in whom our fractured images are for all time restored, and all is made well; so that in Revelation chapter 5 (verses 11-14) *every* creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, is found singing that famous song: 'to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever.' It is the New Testament version of an Old Testament vision, articulated most clearly in Psalms 148 and 150, in which 'everything that has breath praises the Lord'.

What a wonderful redemption is thus envisaged! It affects everything, and it touches every part of life. What are we redeemed to be? Bearers of the divine image in every aspect of our lives. What are we redeemed to *do*? To live out that reality with integrity and joy, whatever our hand finds to do in particular

instances, at particular times, and in particular places:

- whether it be worshipping and praying, or being a parent to our children, or a lover to our spouse;
- whether it be singing a psalm, or painting a portrait, or playing a sport; whether it be enjoying a wine, or farming a piece of land, or doing our duty by our employer;
- whether it be struggling for justice against the principalities and powers of this present age, or being persecuted for our faith or just actions, or rescuing a lost soul from the streets.

In all things we are called to act out the kingdom of God. And that is why holistic ministry is not one *option* among many for the Christian—something that we can take or leave

as we feel led. It is not even discussable, in all honesty, as if there were some room for debate about it. Holistic ministry is simply bound up with what being a Christian is all about; for being a Christian is all about the offering of our whole selves, and the whole of our reality, as living sacrifices to the one God who made all. It is about being true to the nature of things.

May God give us all grace to embrace this expansive Good News wholeheartedly, and to preach it, so that others may know true liberation, as they find their true humanity in Christ—as they ‘put on the new nature’, as the apostle Paul commends it, in Ephesians chapter 4 (verses 22-24), ‘created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness’. May it be so. Amen.



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# Breaking the Code: Interpretive Reflections on Revelation

David M. Scholer

**Keywords:** Church, Eschatology, Discipleship, Apocalyptic literature, Feminist critique

Revelation has always been a mysterious, intriguing and controversial book. William Tyndale, that great pioneer of the modern English translation of the Bible, said in the sixteenth century: 'The Apocalypse or Revelations of John are allegories whose literal sense is hard to find in many places'.<sup>1</sup> My favourite line, however, is that of G. K. Chesterton at the beginning of the twentieth century: 'And though St. John the

Evangelist saw many strange monsters in his vision, he saw no creature so wild as one of his own commentators'.<sup>2</sup> Books such as Arthur W. Wainwright's *Mysterious Apocalypse: Interpreting the Book of Revelation*<sup>3</sup> and Paul Boyer's *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophetic Belief in Modern American Culture*<sup>4</sup> are readable, insightful volumes documenting the controversy, intrigue and abuse of Revelation in the history and life of the church.

There are, of course, virtually countless contemporary examples of Revelation's power and intrigue, not the least of which is the eight-volume *Left Behind* series of books by Tim LeHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins,<sup>5</sup> which sold over sixteen million copies and

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<sup>1</sup> William Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man* (Antwerp, 1528; ed. David Daniell; London/New York: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 157.

<sup>2</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (1908; Fontana, 1961), p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Nashville: Abingdon, 1993.

<sup>4</sup> Cambridge/London: Harvard UP, 1992.

<sup>5</sup> *Left Behind, Tribulation Force, Soul Harvest, Nicolae, Apollyon, Assassins, The Indwelling, and The Mark* (Wheaton: Tyndale, since 1995).

which received further attention in February 2001 with the premier of the movie *Left Behind* in theatres across the United States.

In the early church, Revelation was already a controversial document. Papias, an early second century bishop attested by Irenaeus, Eusebius and Jerome, was, according to Eusebius, a millennialist. Although his views are not explicitly connected with a reading of Revelation, Eusebius reports this about Papias:

He says that after the resurrection of the dead there will be a period of a thousand years, when Christ's kingdom will be set up on this earth in material form. I suppose he got these notions by misinterpreting the apostolic accounts and failing to grasp what they had said in mystic and symbolic language. For he seems to have been a man of very small intelligence, to judge from his books.<sup>6</sup>

This passage clearly indicates the fundamental divide that has characterized the centuries-long debates within the church: should Revelation be read 'literally' or 'symbolically'? We still live with this option as the controlling question. This is not the place to give an account of all of the debates within the early church, but it should be noted that the so-called symbolic-interpretive scheme won the day. This was represented in Augustine's powerful interpretation of Revelation and in an action of the Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in AD 431, which condemned the belief in a literal millennium as superstition.

<sup>6</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39. Translation of G. A. Williamson, *Eusebius, The History of the Church* (London/New York: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 152.

What should be noted further from the early church is that all of this controversy led to some debate over whether Revelation should be included in the canon of the New Testament. Eusebius' rather well-known discussion of the New Testament writings divides them into four categories<sup>7</sup>: the recognized, the disputed, the spurious, and, the impious, foul books. What is striking is that he lists Revelation twice—it is in the recognized books and in the spurious, not the disputed, books! It is clear that Eusebius does not see Revelation as disputed (although it is) but rather as a book which divides authorities into two camps: those who confidently accept it and those who firmly reject it. Of course, we know that those in the first group carried the day.

It is tempting to attempt a sketch of the history of the interpretation of Revelation from the time of Augustine to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but there is not time for that now, nor is that my purpose. Rather, I wish to further point out two additional interpretive crises concerning Revelation that go beyond and/or are apart from the well-known fundamental divide of the so-called literal and symbolic approaches.

The writer D. H. Lawrence, who died in 1930, wrote in some detail on Revelation. Among other things he said:

The Apocalypse of John is, as it stands, the work of a second-rate mind. It appeals intensely to second-rate minds in every country and every century.

<sup>7</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.25.

Lawrence called Revelation the 'Judas' among the books of the New Testament.<sup>8</sup>

But, such a negative view is not only that of a man of letters who rejected Christianity. Charles Henry Dodd, one of the most famous New Testament scholars of the twentieth century, wrote in one of his early books, *The Gospel in the New Testament*, published in 1926, the following assessment of Revelation:

[H]ints of the authentic Christian Gospel are sadly overweighted by the force of passionate feeling behind the visions of judgment, vengeance, and destruction. The gospel of the Revelation, in a word, is a one-sided gospel... The author of Revelation has brooded too much, and his vision is out of focus.<sup>9</sup>

Dodd notes what must admittedly be seen as one of the interpretive issues of Revelation for persons today: the apparently judgmental, vindictive and violent character of so much of Revelation. How are the portrayals of God and Jesus Christ against the enemies in Revelation to be related to the stress in the gospel on the mercy and love of God demonstrated in Jesus Christ?

Further, in addition to the concern over Revelation as a book of vindictiveness and vengeance, there has developed in the late twentieth century a significant so-called feminist critique of Revelation. Revelation, it appears, provides two images of women. One is positive, represented

in the majestic woman of Revelation 12, the mother of the messianic ruler and of the believers, and the Bride of the Lamb in Revelation 19 and 21. The other is negative, represented in the false teacher Jezebel in Revelation 2 and in the whore who oppresses the church in Revelation 17.

Both, it is asserted by some feminist interpreters, depict women in classic, male-dominant modes: the adorned and subservient mother/wife and the evil woman who is sexually impure. Added to this is the description of the faithful followers of the Lamb in Revelation 14 as virgin men who have never defiled themselves with women.

The most forceful feminist critique of Revelation today is that of Tina Pippin, expressed in particular in two books, *Death and Desire: The Rhetoric of Gender in the Apocalypse of John*, and *Apocalyptic Bodies: The Biblical End of the World in Text and Image*.<sup>10</sup> Pippin writes:

Women readers of the Apocalypse are typed, hunted, adorned, and rejected. The domination of male over female remains intact... In the political realm women are defeated or banished to the wilderness; only the submissive, sexual Bride is allowed at the utopian feast of the Lamb... [The] men who enter her must be ritually pure, and the female figures with any sexual autonomy... are pushed out or to the edge... The Apocalypse is not a tale for women. The misogyny which underlies

<sup>8</sup> The information on D. H. Lawrence is drawn from Wainwright, pp. 199-200; the quotation is found on page 199.

<sup>9</sup> C. H. Dodd, *The Gospel in the New Testament* (London: The National Sunday School Union, n.d. [1926]), pp. 62-63.

<sup>10</sup> Tina Pippin, *Death and Desire: The Rhetoric of Gender in the Apocalypse of John* (Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), and *Apocalyptic Bodies: The Biblical End of the World in Text and Image* (London/New York: Routledge, 1999).

this narrative is extreme.<sup>11</sup>

So, Pippin concludes: 'What remains is the misogyny and exclusion by a powerful, wrathful deity. In the Apocalypse, the Kingdom of God is the kingdom of perversity'<sup>12</sup>.

Given the history of controversy over Revelation and the various challenges indicated here to understanding Revelation, it is my intention to attempt to provide some interpretive reflections on Revelation and thus, perhaps, contribute to 'breaking the code', to borrow the title of Bruce M. Metzger's very helpful little book from 1993.<sup>13</sup> In order to do this, I would like to address three broad areas for interpretive reflection:

- (1) the purpose and theology of Revelation;
- (2) four perspectives for a sound approach to the interpretation of Revelation; and
- (3) six suggestions for reading and hermeneutically applying Revelation as the Word of God in our own contemporary situations.

### The Purpose and Theology of Revelation

Of course, one should, perhaps, be cautious about treading where angels fear to tread! I am reminded of a Charles Schulz cartoon in which one person says to another: 'I used to consider myself an authority on the Book of Revelation, but one day I came across somebody who had

read it.'

Scholarship on Revelation abounds in our time. Just in the past four years, we have seen the appearance of several new and important commentaries on Revelation, including the mammoth works of David Aune and Gregory Beale, along with those of Robert Mounce, J. Ramsey Michaels, Frederick Murphy and Leonard Thompson, to name, I assure you, just a few.<sup>14</sup>

Revelation is fundamentally a prophetic, positive word of hope for the church and a deep call and encouragement to faithful discipleship. Revelation is neither a doomsday document nor an eschatological exotica. Revelation is a text about God Almighty and Jesus Christ, their victory over Satan and evil, and their vindication and deliverance of the 'faithful witnesses of Jesus' (the church). Revelation calls the church to worship and to follow the Lamb in

<sup>14</sup> David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5* (Word Biblical Commentary 52A; Dallas: Word, 1997); *Revelation 6-16* (Word Biblical Commentary 52B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998); *Revelation 17-22* (Word Biblical Commentary 52C; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998); Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (New International Greek Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids/Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans/Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999); Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 2nd ed. (New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids/Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans, 1997); Frederick J. Murphy, *Fallen Is Babylon: The Revelation to John* (The New Testament in Context; Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998); J. Ramsey Michaels, *Revelation* (IVP New Testament Commentary Series; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997); and Leonard L. Thompson, *Revelation* (Abingdon New Testament Commentaries; Nashville: Abingdon, 1998). See also the review article of most of these works by Paul B. Duff, 'Reading The Apocalypse at the Millennium', *Religious Studies Review* 26 (2000), pp. 217-21.

<sup>11</sup> Pippin, *Death and Desire*, pp. 104-05.

<sup>12</sup> Pippin, *Apocalyptic Bodies*, p. 125.

<sup>13</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993).

obedient, faithful discipleship.

Although Revelation is about ultimate destinies, including the glorious 'marriage supper of the Lamb', and is thus an eschatological text, it is more than anything else a call to faithful discipleship for the believers in the seven churches addressed. They are in danger of compromising their devotion to Jesus Christ by participation in the imperial cult of worshipping the Roman Emperor and by participation in the comforts of the world which lead to a false confidence in oneself and a rejection of dependence upon God and Jesus Christ.<sup>15</sup>

Revelation is actually common early-church theology addressed to a particular situation of potential compromise within the church. Its theology is presented in apocalyptic-symbolic terms, on which we will shortly comment, but its fundamental theological commitments can be summarized in four clear affirmations.<sup>16</sup>

(1) God and Jesus Christ are victors in the struggle of life and death, good and evil; the victory, in fact, has already been achieved in Christ and his death, resurrection and exaltation

and, therefore, there is genuine hope for the future. Think of the power of one of the opening words in Revelation at the end of the first century in the Roman Empire during the reign of Domitian, the first Caesar, according to Suetonius, to use regularly for himself the titles 'Lord' and 'God': '...Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of kings of earth' (1:5).<sup>17</sup>

(2) The people of God, the church, 'the faithful and true witnesses of Jesus', as they are called in Revelation, will be vindicated and will know the glory of eternal presence and fellowship with God and Jesus Christ. The closing words of the body of Revelation's visions are powerful—and connect with the text just noted above (1:5)—: '... and they [God's servants who worship the Lamb] shall reign for ever and ever' (22:5).

(3) The people of God do suffer, face opposition and difficulty and even death; there is a reality to the power and work of Satan and his human agents against God's people. Much of Revelation consists of various descriptions of the attack of Satan and Satan's agents, on the church.

(4) The people of God are called to be faithful and true. In this sense, Revelation is in the deepest and ultimate way a call to discipleship. In its first century setting it is calling believers to follow and worship only the Lamb; they are not to follow the false teachers who encourage believers to

<sup>15</sup> For an important study which nuances the situation the original recipients of Revelation faced, see Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984).

<sup>16</sup> For more detailed study of the theology of Revelation, see at least Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (New Testament Theology; Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Donald Guthrie, *The Relevance of the Apocalypse* (Didsbury Lectures, 1985; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans/Exeter: Paternoster, 1987); and Sophie Laws, *In the Light of the Lamb: Imagery, Parody, and Theology in the Apocalypse of John* (Good News Studies 31; Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1988).

<sup>17</sup> All biblical citations are from the New Revised Standard Version.

worship the Emperor in the imperial cult and/or otherwise compromise their allegiance to the worship of Jesus Christ and God.

Understanding Revelation as a call to discipleship in difficult and compromising times, more than as an eschatological 'map' may be a new approach to this text for some. It may be important simply to hear a collage of twenty-five texts from Revelation that make clear this emphatic call:

- (1) '...blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written....' (1:3);
- (2) 'I, John, your brother who share with you in Jesus the persecution and the kingdom and the patient endurance....' (1:9);
- (3) 'I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance.... I also know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for the sake of my name....' (2:2-3);
- (4) 'To everyone who conquers....' (2:7; repeated six other times: 2:11, 2:17, 2:28, 3:5, 3:12 and 3:21);
- (5) '...you did not deny your faith in me even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one....' (2:13);
- (6) 'I know your works—your love, faith, service, and patient endurance' (2:19);
- (7) 'Remember then what you received and heard; obey it, and repent' (3:3);
- (8) 'Because you have kept my word of patient endurance....' (3:10);
- (9) 'Be earnest, therefore, and repent' (3:19);
- (10) '...I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered for the word of God and for the testimony they had given.... They were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number would be complete both of their fellow servants and of their brothers and sisters, who were soon to be killed as they themselves had been killed' (6:9-11);
- (11) 'These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb' (7:14);
- (12) 'But they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they did not cling to life even in the face of death' (12:11);
- (13) '...those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus' (12:17);
- (14) 'Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints' (13:10);
- (15) '...these follow the Lamb wherever he goes' (14:4);
- (16) 'Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and hold fast to the faith of Jesus' (14:12);
- (17) '...those who had conquered....' (15:2);
- (18) '...Blessed is the one who stays awake and is clothed....' (16:15);
- (19) '...and those with him are called and chosen and faithful' (17:14);
- (20) '...for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints' (19:8);

- (21) ‘...who hold the testimony of Jesus...’ (19:10);  
 (22) ‘...beheaded for their testimony to Jesus...’ (20:4);  
 (23) ‘Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book’ (22:7);  
 (24) ‘...with those who keep the words of this book’ (22:9); and  
 (25) ‘...to repay according to everyone’s work.... Blessed are those who wash their robes...’ (22:12, 14).

### Four Perspectives on Interpretation

With the theology of Revelation clearly in mind, I believe that there are four primary and crucial perspectives for a sound approach to the interpretation of Revelation. The appropriateness of these perspectives is broadly shared and affirmed among major scholars today involved in the study and interpretation of Revelation.

(1) The beginning point for the interpretation of Revelation is the same as for any other text in the New Testament: its original setting, function and purpose. The Revelation of John is, in fact, addressed to a group of seven actual churches in the Roman province of Asia. It is concerned with the life and faith of these believers, who are under various forms of pressure to deny their commitment to Jesus Christ. Among other things, this means that Revelation addresses the concerns and situation of the original first century AD readers and assumes that they could understand what was written in the text within their own cultural, social

and historical context, even if, by divine design, the text also pointed to ultimate eschatological realities beyond the experience and understanding of the original recipients. This assumption is clear in the opening prologue in which John wrote: ‘Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near’ (1:3). Even what some regard as the most ‘famous’ text in Revelation, the mention of the number of the first beast, later known as the Antichrist, 666, is given with the assumption that the original recipients would understand it: ‘This calls for wisdom: let anyone with understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a person’ (13:18). The epilogue to Revelation (22:8-21) strongly implies that the original recipients will understand this text and are obligated to obey and preserve it. This perspective, which is not meant to deny that Revelation has a genuine eschatological, futuristic dimension and truth, does have far-reaching implications for the interpretation of all the details of Revelation: they are understandable and have meaning within the context of the first century AD recipients in the church and of their setting within the Roman Empire.

(2) Revelation, which is by its own testimony a circular letter to seven churches in the Roman province of Asia and a prophecy (1:3; 22:7, 10, 18, 19), is written in the apocalyptic genre known to us from numerous examples in Second Temple Jewish

literature. This apocalyptic literature attempts to face with absolute seriousness the deep and disturbing questions: Why do God's faithful people suffer at the hands of the wicked oppressors? Does God not care? Will there ever be vindication for the faithful?

Apocalyptic literature in its very character presents its answers in deeply symbolic language that the faithful would be able to understand (and, perhaps, that the unbelievers might not grasp). It speaks to their present suffering and sense of defeat by declaring that God will intervene, usually through an agent (the 'messianic' deliverer), and rescue and reward the faithful. This symbolic language of the Jewish apocalyptic tradition carries with it the rhetoric, for example, of vengeance and violence, of dramatic signs in the heavens, of number symbolism, of strange beasts, of revealing angels, of cataclysmic and cosmic upheavals and more.

A significant part of the power of apocalyptic literature is its very symbolism. In Revelation, for example, the person of Jesus Christ is rarely called by that name; usually he is identified as the Lamb. The symbol of the slain yet powerful Lamb is what makes Revelation compelling and cogent. The same points could be made in ordinary, prosaic terms, but then the power and intrigue are lost. In some ways, C. S. Lewis' famous *Narnia Chronicles* are a wonderful example of the compelling power of symbolic language. For Lewis to have written the 'truths' of these stories in 'literal' or prosaic

language would have destroyed their appeal and power.

Among the numerous Second Temple Jewish apocalyptic texts such as the Apocalypse of Abraham, 2 Baruch, 1 Enoch, Testament of Moses and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, the most important such work for understanding the apocalyptic genre of Revelation would be Fourth Ezra. This work is chapters 3-14 within what in the Old Testament Apocrypha is known as Second Esdras.<sup>18</sup>

Fourth Ezra is comprised of seven angelic visions (take note) given to Ezra to deal with the suffering of the Jewish people and their vindication and deliverance by God. The text is too long to review here in detail, but simply reading a few passages might in itself speak with power to the issues of the apocalyptic genre of Revelation and its interpretation.

First we will hear an important text from the third vision.

For my son the Messiah shall be revealed with those who are with him, and those who remain shall rejoice four hundred years. After those years my son the Messiah shall die, and all who draw human breath. Then the world shall be turned back to primeval silence for seven days, as it was at the first beginnings.... After seven days... [the] earth shall give up those who are asleep in it.... The Most High shall be revealed on the seat of judgment.... The pit of torment shall appear, and opposite it shall be the place of rest; and the furnace of hell shall be disclosed, and opposite it the paradise of delight (7:28-36).

In the fourth vision Ezra encoun-

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<sup>18</sup> Chapters 1-2 are known as Fifth Ezra and Chapters 15-16 are known as Sixth Ezra; both of these are early Christian works from the second century AD.



ters a woman, about whom the revealing angel declares: 'The woman whom you saw is Zion, which you now behold as a city being built' (10:44).

In the fifth vision there is a lion, about which it is said:

And as for the lion... this is the Messiah whom the Most High has kept until the end of days, who will arise from the offspring of David.... (12:31-32).

This theme is continued in the sixth vision in these words:

This is the interpretation of the vision: As for your seeing a man come up from the heart of the sea, this is he whom the Most High has been keeping for many ages, who will himself deliver his creation.... The days are coming when the Most High will deliver those who are on the earth. And bewilderment of mind shall come over those who inhabit the earth. They shall plan to make war against one another, city against city, place against place, people against people, and kingdom against kingdom. When these things take place and the signs occur that I showed you before, then my Son will be revealed... (13:25-32).

Revelation and Fourth Ezra share a common conceptual, symbolic world, which we know as apocalyptic literature. It uses these language forms, metaphors and symbols to speak of that which transcends human experience and which addresses human suffering and God's ultimate deliverance of God's people. Apocalyptic language would have been understood as addressing one's own situation with what we could call 'true reality', but in metaphorical and symbolic language which would have been understood to be just that. One might even say that it is only with metaphorical, symbolic, apocalyptic language that

one is able to address the realities of the cosmic struggle and God's eschatological deliverance of the faithful.

(3) Revelation is almost certainly to be understood as a dramatic presentation of the cosmic conflict between God and Satan, between the faithful followers of the Lamb and the evils of the first century Roman context that threatened faithfulness. Such a drama should not be understood as a linear presentation of one sequence of events, but rather as a series of repeated presentations of the conflict. In this sense, Revelation is characterized by recapitulation, in which there is repetition of the conflict and the resolution of final salvation. The interpretive principle of recapitulation goes back to Victorinus of Pettau, a bishop who was martyred about AD 300. Although he did not explicitly discuss such an interpretive principle *per se*, he implicitly used it as a primary framework of interpretation for Revelation; he wrote: 'Order is not to be looked for in the Apocalypse[; understanding] is to be looked for.'<sup>19</sup>

What is clear in a careful study of Revelation is that the final consummation of God's salvation of the faithful is presented many times. It is described in the context of the worship of the Lamb and the presentation of the scroll (5:1-14). It is powerfully presented in the interlude between the sixth and seventh seals (7:9-17). It is the content of the seventh trumpet (11:15-19). The 144,000 followers of the Lamb on Mount Zion are presented as repre-

<sup>19</sup> Victorinus, *In Apocalypsin* 8.2, as cited by Wainwright, p. 29; I am dependent upon Wainwright for an understanding of Victorinus.

sentative of this reality (14:1-5). It is briefly presented in the announcement of the marriage supper of the Lamb (19:6-10), and is, of course, described quite fully and finally at the end of the Revelation (21:1-22:5). There is, obviously, only one final salvation/consummation; it is not a repeated event. Revelation repeats the description of this glorious moment, not only because it is important, but because it is part of the apocalyptic style to engage in repetition or recapitulation; it is the dramatic character of such literature.

(4) The last major perspective for sound interpretation is, perhaps, the most difficult to explain and to comprehend. I would contend that the situation of John and his churches in the late first century Roman Empire is superimposed, as it were, upon the portrayal of the ultimate conflict between God and Satan, involving the fall of Satan and his Beasts and the victory of God, Jesus Christ and the faithful witnesses [= the believers]. Sometimes the line between the present situation of the author-recipients and the ultimate, cosmic future is rather thin; in this type of apocalyptic presentation the readers' experience and the reality of the ultimate end are one and the same—and yet clearly distinct. Imagine one of those books in which there are clear plastic sheets which overlay one another in a presentation of the human body or a geographical region. As each sheet is turned, one moves, with the human body, from the muscle structure to the skeletal frame, to vessels and arteries and to the various organs. Or, with a geographical region, one sees

first the political boundaries, than the rivers and vegetation and then the elevations. In a similar fashion, Revelation's first sheet is the author and recipient's actual cultural, social, political and historical first century AD setting and reality. As one turns to the second sheet, one sees the ultimate cosmic conflict between God and Jesus Christ and Satan and his agents. The two sheets are always together, however, so that Revelation is at the same time both a description of the author and recipients' world and also, by means of apocalyptic, metaphorical literature, a real and true, but not literalistic, description of the final conflict and God and Christ's victory and vindication of the faithful disciples. Thus, the realities of the recipients described in the opening letters are set in the context of Jesus Christ's actual, although yet not fully realized status, as 'the ruler of the kings of the earth' (1:5), and of the faithful witnesses' goal to be with the Lord God, their light, and to '... reign forever and ever' (22:5).

These four perspectives for a sound approach to the interpretation of Revelation taken together speak, hopefully with considerable help and clarity, to various interpretive issues noted earlier.

The fundamental issue of whether to read Revelation literally or symbolically is both basically resolved and seen to be an oversimplification or imprecision. Because Revelation is actually addressing the first century AD recipients in and with their issues, because Revelation is apocalyptic literature and because Revelation is recapitulatory in structure,

Revelation is not to be read or understood as a literalistic, chronological cryptogram of some alleged, final future moment of human history, unknown to the original author and recipients but known only to some self-appointed interpreter who has at some later time unlocked the meaning of Revelation. Church history has shown so clearly, and sadly, that in the hands of such privileged interpreters these precise predictions of a particular set of human events, often creating an unhealthy sense of fear and terror, have—at least to date—always been wrong. That is a sobering and instructive interpretive reality.

It is not simply that Revelation is symbolic but not literal; that would be imprecise and oversimplified. Revelation presents some things literally, but describes most matters in symbolic or metaphorical terms. But these metaphorical presentations are about actual issues and speak God's truth about events and commitments. In fact, most of the metaphors in Revelation are explained. Note the careful identification of all symbols and metaphors in the initial vision of Jesus Christ (1:9-20). The white robes of the faithful are their righteous deeds (19:8). Even the gloriously described New Jerusalem is not a literal city with pearly gates and golden streets; it is clearly identified as the Church: "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God' (21:9-10). In

effect, this is the apocalyptic, metaphorical description of what in Ephesians is described more simply, although even there with metaphor: '... to present the church to himself [Christ] in splendour, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish' (Ephesians 5:27). In Revelation the message is presented in metaphors, but the metaphors, although vehicles of power, themselves are not the message; the message is the truth or reality to which the metaphor refers.

Of course, not all of the symbols of Revelation are clearly identified. Apart from the explicit identifications, some symbols are nearly or virtually identified. An excellent example of this is the great whore of Revelation 17. She is Babylon (17:5), drunk with the blood of the saints (17:6), sits on seven mountains (17:9) and is specifically called 'the great city that rules over the kings of the earth' (17:18). This means it is Rome; there really is no reasonable alternative interpretation. Yet, some symbols remain a mystery. In the same section (Revelation 17) the ten horns who are ten kings (17:12) are impossible to identify, although contextually they must be some group of vassal kings within the power and reach of the Roman Empire. The few symbols in Revelation that cannot be identified or understood with any real clarity in their first century AD contexts never, in fact, erode or prohibit a sound and responsible interpretation of Revelation as a whole; there is always enough that is clear on which to base a sound inter-

pretation.

Within all of these perspectives it is possible to address briefly the contemporary concerns over the alleged undue violence and vilification in Revelation and its presumed male centredness which is negative in its presentation of women.

The language of vilification and violence was part and parcel of apocalyptic literature in the Second Temple Jewish period; it is part of the rhetoric and metaphor of such literary language and style. Further, this language is used in Revelation in the interests of God's vindication of faithful witnesses who have followed the Lamb at the cost of actual exclusion, suffering and even persecution. When later readers of Revelation, especially those in positions of power and privilege in the world, use these metaphors with any degree of literalism, it does become a kind of triumphalism that betrays the character of the gospel. Theologically, in the purposes of Revelation, these metaphors are meant to express the righteousness and justice of God and God's care for those who faithfully follow the Lamb and worship the Lamb and God. Evil has no place within the righteousness and justice of God and God's eternal rule.<sup>20</sup>

The so-called radical feminist cri-

tique of Revelation is built on data within Revelation that traditional and male-oriented interpreters have often ignored or glossed over. Some of the images of women and of sexuality in Revelation are reflective of the generally androcentric and even misogynistic character of much of the Greco-Roman culture with respect to women. Yet, Revelation is not theologically teaching a repressive or negative view of women or sexuality; again, the metaphorical language, combined here with some cultural assumptions, have shaped certain images in Revelation. Again, the metaphor should not be taken as the message.

It is possible to construct a positive feminist hermeneutic for Revelation. One excellent example of this is Barbara R. Rossing's 1999 book, *The Choice Between Two Cities: Whore, Bride, and Empire in the Apocalypse*.<sup>21</sup> Rossing thoroughly and strategically demonstrates that the use of two women, one good and one evil, to present one's choice in the world was a feature of a long tradition of moral literature both in the Jewish and Greco-Roman wisdom traditions, which in Judaism was often intertwined with the apocalyptic tradition. Through careful analysis Rossing establishes that Revelation uses these images, although feminine, not to promote gendered choices, but to give alternative communal visions that are, in fact, political: the injustice of this world over-

<sup>20</sup> For a much more thorough and excellent discussion of these issues, see, for one example, David Lertis Matson, "Outside Are the Dogs": Interpreting Revelation's Hate Language', *Leaven* 8:1 (2000), pp. 40-47; see also Wes Howard-Brook and Anthony Gwynter, "Vengeance Is Mine!" Says the Lord: Revelation's Language of Violence and the Practice of a Discipleship of Nonviolence', Chapter 5 in *Unveiling Empire: Reading Revelation Then and Now* (The Bible & Liberation Series; Maryknoll: Orbis, 1999).

<sup>21</sup> Barbara R. Rossing, *The Choice Between Two Cities: Whore, Bride, and Empire in the Apocalypse* (Harvard Theological Studies 48; Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999).

ruled by the justice of God's world.<sup>22</sup>

### Six Suggestions For Reading and Applying Revelation

I come now to my six suggestions for reading and hermeneutically applying Revelation as the Word of God in our own contemporary situations. These grow out of all that has been said already about the occasion, purpose, and theology of Revelation and interpretive perspectives for Revelation. These hermeneutical suggestions are meant also to speak to that persistent attempt in the history of the church, still present in our own times, to read Revelation primarily as a cryptic guide to the precise events of the end-time, always assumed to be within the lifetime of the interpreter or his or her circle of influence.

(1) Revelation should be understood within the historical and literary contexts of its author and original recipients. This is the foundation and basis for all other understandings. This is a simple affirmation, but its importance and value cannot be overemphasized.

(2) The theological commitments of Revelation should never be lost or minimized or marginalized; they are always valid and true for the people of God: God vindicates the people of God in and through conflict; thus, the people of God should remain faithful and receive God's salvation. The call to discipleship within Revelation is crucial. Although not developed here, I regret to say, the emphasis on the worship of God and

the Lamb in Revelation, who receive in fact parallel and equal worship, should be emphasized in the context of discipleship. Revelation is replete with hymns that are powerful and deep—4:8, 11; 5:9-14; 7:10-12; 11:15-18; 12:10-12; 15:3-4; and 19:1-8 are among the texts that deserve special and careful attention in this regard.<sup>23</sup>

(3) Any conflict anywhere and at anytime which tests and challenges the church and believers can and should be read against the historical and theological grid of Revelation. Revelation can give meaning to such experiences faced throughout history by the faithful witnesses to Jesus Christ. One of the problems of much of western, North Atlantic, English-speaking male-oriented interpretation of Revelation in the last one to two hundred years is that it has occurred in contexts in which the interpreter has been situated in a reasonably privileged place, relatively free from suffering, conflict and a sense that one's faith is deeply threatened by the surrounding culture. Given such contexts, it might be more difficult for the interpreter to enter genuinely into the apocalyptic and metaphorical framework of Revelation and thus use it as an appropriate grid for understanding one's situation. I have on occasion even suggested that it is only the comfortable interpreter who has the time and leisure to read Revelation as a cryptogrammic map of the future

<sup>22</sup> See especially Rossing, pp. 161-65.

<sup>23</sup> Among many good articles on this subject, see the fine one by Marianne Meye Thompson, 'Worship in the Book of Revelation', *Ex Auditu* 8 (1992), pp. 45-54.

rather than as a metaphorically powerful drama of the conflict of being a faithful disciple awaiting the glorious vindication and salvation of God and the Lamb!

(4) But, the historical and theological grid of Revelation is neither a guide, chart or cryptogram to the unfolding of human history nor a presentation of the literal and/or chronological details of the 'end time(s)' of human history. That was never its purpose in terms of its original setting, its occasion, its form or its message to the seven churches of Asia. To use Revelation in this way has, as indicated, proved in the history of the church to be mistaken; it is an irresponsible approach and constitutes an abuse of the Apocalypse.

(5) Revelation is a constant message of hope and call to discipleship for the church, which is—from the apocalyptic perspective of John—always in a situation of crisis, persecution and pressure to compromise the gospel. Revelation should be read, studied, preached and taught with this perspective clearly in view.

(6) To the extent and degree that Revelation speaks of the actual climax of human history and the inauguration of the final judgment, salvation and the eternal union of the Bride and the Lamb, which it does, it is speaking beyond John's knowledge and that of his original hearers and readers. Apart from the certainty of this climactic victory of God, it is also speaking beyond our understanding as well.

Thus, it would be arrogant and hermeneutically dishonest to think that we know or could know this sec-

ond level of meaning before the fact. As was and is the case with the incarnation, death, resurrection and messianic fulfilment of Jesus, these events were a/the hermeneutical key to the Old Testament *only after the fact* and not before the fulfilment of the promises in events later understood. To speculate, if in the eternal presence of God we discover that some parts or details of Revelation were literal indications of some end-time events, so be it; that possibility is no warrant now for anyone's irresponsible or arrogant attempt to misuse Revelation with speculative interpretations that violate sound interpretive and hermeneutical principles.

### Closing

So, my final word is this: embrace Revelation as a call to discipleship and worship in the midst of life and culture which always threaten to erode true witness to the Lamb. Never let the abuses and misuse of Revelation cause neglect or avoidance of it. Confess strongly that 'the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever,' (11:15), embracing the certain hope that '... his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever' (22:3-5).

# Human Freedom and Christian Morality

James P. Danaher

**Keywords:** Christian ethics, morality, freedom, postmodernism

Many today simply deny the existence of human freedom. In light of what we know about the way human beings conform to sociological pressures, behavioural conditioning, and physiological and genetic factors, the position that human freedom is an illusion has become popular. Of course, if we are not free beings, neither are we moral beings. Morality demands a certain freedom. How are we to praise some for their moral excellence and condemn others when we are not, to a large extent, responsible for our behaviour, good or bad? In light of the contemporary wisdom produced by the physical and social sciences perhaps morality is an illusion.

Strangely, while geneticists and social scientists tell us of our lack of

freedom, a host of postmodern philosophers tell us quite the opposite. The existential and linguistic philosophies of the 20th century, along with historicism and pragmatism, have all contributed to the creation of a postmodern age in which our conceptual reality is very much a matter of our own making. According to postmodern philosophers, human beings have an enormous freedom to conceptualize the world in a vast variety of ways. In the past, words were generally thought to signify ready-made concepts which were given and somehow reflected reality. Today, we understand that our concepts are largely the product of a freedom we have to conceptualize the world in a variety of ways. Conceptual reality is very much a matter of our own making. Thus, even if the physical world is beyond our ability to affect, we are free to choose from a variety of competing narratives concerning what the brute facts of the physical world mean and how they are to be conceptualized. We can accept the narrative that our cultural and scientific communities impose upon us, or we can choose some alternative way to conceptual-

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ize the world.

### Behavioural Freedom

Consequently, although we may be more aware than ever before that the physical circumstances of our existence are beyond our control, we are, at the same time, more aware than ever before that we are free to determine for ourselves what those circumstances mean. It would appear that we are both free and not free. But what is the nature of the freedom that is required in order for us to be moral beings? Is it a freedom over our behaviour and the physical reality of our existence, or is it the freedom we have over our conceptual reality?

It would at first appear that the kind of freedom necessary for us to be moral agents is a freedom over our behaviour and not merely a freedom over the conceptual world of our understanding. Indeed, the dominant cultural view is that both virtue and sin are accomplished, not by merely thinking about doing good or evil, but by actually doing good or evil. Aristotle tells us that in order to be good, we must actually do something and not merely think or intend to do good: '[M]en become builders by building and lyre players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts.'<sup>1</sup> For Aristotle, virtue is a habit<sup>2</sup> and as a habit it is obviously

behavioural.

Equally, we generally construe evil as behavioural as well. Our dominant cultural view is that we are free to think what we want and are held morally responsible only for what we do and not what we think. The law sanctions only immoral acts and not immoral thoughts. We believe that thoughts hurt no one. Furthermore, they are impossible to detect. Therefore the offences we contemplate become offences only when we act on them and not when we think them.<sup>3</sup> The man who thinks of doing evil but restrains himself from actually doing it is considered not to be evil. Indeed, in many instances, his refusal to do the evil he had contemplated is seen as a virtue.<sup>4</sup>

It certainly appears that both moral good and evil are behavioural. It would, therefore, equally seem that the freedom we need to be moral beings must be behavioural as well. Since so much of our behaviour is not free but determined by genetic predisposition, conditioning, or social pressures, it would seem that we lack the freedom we need to be moral agents. Some people may do good things, while other people do bad things, but the cause of their behaviour is not the person's own will but their upbringing, financial situation, biological predispositions, chemical imbalances, and a host of other factors over which they have little or no control.

Many react to this and attempt to

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethic*, Ed. Richard McKeon, *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: Random House, 1941), 1103a35-1103b2.

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean*, 1103a14-1103a34.

<sup>3</sup> The crime of conspiracy may be the one exception.

<sup>4</sup> Strangely, if this is a virtue, it is one that must be preceded by an evil thought.



resurrect the moral nature of human beings by refuting the contemporary wisdom with arguments that challenge the evidence produced by today's science. There is, however, another way to resurrect our moral nature in a postmodern world. It is the way Jesus suggested two thousand years ago.

### Jesus on Freedom

Jesus tells us that morality is not behavioural. According to Jesus, the sin is in our imagination and the offence occurs when we conceive evil in our hearts and minds and not merely when we act upon those evil thoughts.

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.<sup>5</sup>

Jesus also says something very similar about anger and equates it with murder.<sup>6</sup> Equally, John confirms that teaching and says, 'whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer'.<sup>7</sup> If this can be taken to mean that morality exists first and foremost within our hearts and minds, then perhaps we are moral beings, since within that internal, conceptual world we are free.

Of course, the sin that Jesus says is in our hearts and minds is only half of the story. In order for us to be moral we must have a freedom to do good as well as evil, and thus the

moral good must also be internal and thus under our control. It would seem that this is the more difficult case. Our culture does not deem someone good merely for having good thoughts. A courageous person is one who behaves courageously and a just person is one who behaves justly. To maintain that moral goodness is not behavioural but conceptual would certainly be to oppose the dominant cultural view. But that, of course, is exactly what Christianity does. The Christian view is that not only is sin internal and a matter of our hearts and minds, but so also is our righteousness. According to Christianity, we become righteous not by what we do but by sharing in what Christ did. The way we come to share in that righteousness is through a belief and not an action.

### Christianity and Beliefs

Christianity, first and foremost, is a religion of beliefs not actions. Most religions stress what we have to do to please God. Christianity stresses what we must *believe* about the nature of God, in order to please him, and in order to realize the ultimate happiness we desire.<sup>8</sup> It is not so much what a bride does for her husband as what she thinks about him that either pleases or displeases him. All the good behaviour in the world cannot make up for the ill beliefs a wife has about her husband. Equally, her beliefs about her hus-

<sup>5</sup> Mt. 5:27-28 KJV

<sup>6</sup> Mt. 5:21-22 KJV

<sup>7</sup> 1 Jn. 3:15 KJV

<sup>8</sup> What ultimately pleases God is that his creation realizes the fullness that he intends for it. Thus, God's pleasure and our happiness are one and the same. John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), p. 32.

band are largely what make her either happy or unhappy. Likewise, our ultimate happiness comes not from what we do but from what we believe, and in particular what we believe about God.

Some actions can, of course, help to change our beliefs, but it is always the internal beliefs that we hold toward someone that are the true measure of whether we love them or not. The amount of Scripture that speaks of the attitude or internal belief we are to have toward God is enormous. Certainly, the Scripture also instructs us concerning our behaviour in order that we might not destroy ourselves or one another, but our relationship toward God is always about having right beliefs about who God is. Even obedience, which may be largely behavioural, is not an end in itself but a means to get us to do certain things in order that we might see God's faithfulness and thus come to believe the right things about him.

In order to please God and to realize ultimate happiness ourselves, we '... must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him'.<sup>9</sup> Christianity is a *faith* ethic. The righteousness we attain in Christianity is a righteousness of faith. Our all too human tendency, however, is to twist the truth of the Scripture in order to put the emphasis on our behaviour rather than our belief in God's faithfulness. We emphasize the fact that we need to 'diligently seek him', which we attempt to demonstrate with our

long prayers, our spectacular worship, and other behaviour we erroneously believe will please him. Since he is concerned with our ultimate happiness, however, what is most important to him is the fact that we believe that he is a faithful rewarder. That is what brings us into the fullness of the life of faith God has for us. God provides all the circumstances to produce that faith within us, but our part is to conceptualize that God is behind the circumstances of our lives and that he is a rewarder who desires and intends to bless us. This is the righteousness of Christianity. The righteousness of our culture may be behavioural, as was the righteousness of the Pharisees, but the righteousness of the Christian is internal and conceptual.

### Conceptual Freedom

This fact that Christian morality is internal and conceptual has several interesting consequences. First, it means that sin is much more abundant than our culture would have us believe. If sin is internal and exists within our imagination, the world of our imagination is certainly a more sinful place than this physical world. As decadent as the physical world may be, it does not compare to the decadence I find in my own heart where I am willing to commit murder simply because someone drives slowly in the fast lane. In the physical world, our outward behaviour is deterred, and the thought of painful consequences for our actions restrain us, but there are no such constraints in the internal world of our imagination. Within our imagi-

<sup>9</sup> Heb. 11:6 KJV

nation we are free, and that freedom takes us deeper and deeper into what Jesus tells us is sin.

A second consequence is that although sin is much more abundant within the internal world of our imagination, righteousness is more abundant there as well. Since Christian righteousness requires only that we believe certain things about the character and nature of God, there is at least the potential for much more righteousness within the internal world than in the external (physical) world. The attainment of habitual righteous behaviour in the physical world is something very few of us ever completely realize. So while sin flourishes in that internal, conceptual world, so too does righteousness.

Another interesting consequence is that our potential for the abundant righteousness of faith that is offered through Christ and realized through our internal beliefs is in a certain correlation to the abundance of sin that exists within that internal world. As we come to understand that our behaviour only represents the tip of the iceberg and the extent of the sin which condemns us extends beyond our behaviour and exists internally within our imagination, we are much more inclined to seek also a righteousness which is beyond our behaviour. In realizing the enormity of our sin, we are much more likely to seek an enormity of righteousness to combat such a volume of sin. Of course, that is just what Christianity offers—an enormous righteousness that is had, not through external behaviour, but merely through an internal belief.

### **Freedom and Forgiveness**

Thus, while the rest of humanity may no longer see themselves as moral creatures in light of contemporary scientific wisdom, Christians are moral beings even in light of the contemporary wisdom. Indeed, the contemporary wisdom which tells us that we are not free enough to control our behaviour or even our thoughts, also tells us that we are free to conceptualize those behaviours and thoughts in a variety of ways, and that is all the freedom necessary for a Christian ethic.

We may not be free enough from our upbringing or genetic predisposition in order to get our behaviour straight. We might not even be able to control the thoughts and feelings which flood our imagination, but we do have the liberty to agree with Jesus and conceptualize those things as he does and call them sin. We may not be free to attain a righteousness of our own, but we are free enough to attain a righteousness that is not our own. The ideal of Christian morality is not that we would be able to avoid all sin, but that we would confess our sins and repent in order that we would be forgiven and receive the righteousness Jesus has for us. For the Christian, what it means to be righteous is to be forgiven and not to be sinless.

# Pentecostalism and the Claim for Apostolicity: An Essay in Ecumenical Ecclesiology

Veli-Matti Karkkainen

**Keywords:** Unity, Holiness, Dialogue, Mission, Charisma, Pneumatology, Eschatology

## Introduction: The Dispute Over the Ecclesiality of the Church

One of the ironies of church history is that the first church of the modern Pentecostal movement called itself Apostolic Faith Mission (Azusa Street, Los Angeles, CA). The irony

of this title lies, of course, in that if there has been any claim in Pentecostalism—or other Free Churches—that the traditional churches have hotly contested, it surely is the claim for apostolicity. By definition, especially in Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox theologies, Free Church ecclesiologies represent the quintessence of what is not apostolic.

As far as the conditions of ecclesiality are concerned, the episcopal<sup>1</sup> and Free Church traditions (Pentecostalism included), differ in three main respects:

(1) According to Catholic and Orthodox tradition, Free Church ecclesiology lacks a bishop to ensure the presence of Christ, while according to the Free Church tradition, such a bishop is not permitted.

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'episcopal' in its general theological sense means those churches that regard bishops as a necessary condition of the ecclesiality of the church.

(2) In the episcopal model, Christ's presence is mediated sacramentally. By contrast, Free Churches speak of Christ's unmediated, 'direct' presence in the entire local communion.

(3) According to the episcopal tradition, the church is constituted through the performance of objective activities, and Christ's constitutive presence is not bound to the subjective disposition, even if the latter is not unimportant. The Free Churches, however, have come to emphasize subjective conditions, namely faith and obedience, to the point that where these are missing, even if the objective side is there, a serious doubt of ecclesiality arises.<sup>2</sup>

Because apostolicity is related to other traditional 'notes' of the church—holiness, oneness, and catholicity<sup>3</sup>—the very foundation of Free Church ecclesiology is at stake. The apostolicity of Free Churches is

uncatholic because it lacks connection to the whole church in its history, which, episcopal churches contend, is assured by the *successio apostolica*.<sup>4</sup>

Pentecostal and other Free Churches have insisted on the holiness, oneness, apostolicity, and catholicity of their own churches, although they have rarely argued along the classical canons. Free Churches understand the holiness of their churches primarily in the holiness of their members,<sup>5</sup> the oneness of the church as 'spiritual unity' of all born-again Christians,<sup>6</sup> the apostolicity as faithfulness to the apostolic doctrine and life,<sup>7</sup> and the catholicity consequently as self-evident fact.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, Free Churches have looked at the traditional churches and accused them of the lack of ecclesiality. Their holiness is impaired by the presence of mixed membership, their claim for the apostolicity on the basis of apostolic succession is biblically unfounded, etc.

Furthermore, Free Churches have asked of traditional churches, what

<sup>2</sup> Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 133-35.

<sup>3</sup> So Yves Congar, 'Die Wesenseigenschaften der Kirche,' *Mysterium Salutis. Grundriss Heilsgeschichtlicher Dogmatik IV/ 1*, hrsg. Von Johannes Feiner & Magnus Löhrer (Einsiedeln: Benziger Verlag, 1972), pp. 362ff.; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 405; Thomas C. Oden, 'Life in the Spirit,' *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3 (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992), p. 349: 'Apostolicity is intrinsically interwoven with the other marks of the church: Only that church that is one can be catholic. Only that church that is united in the one mission of the one Lord can be apostolic. Lacking that holiness which is fitting to the obedience of faith, one finds neither apostolicity nor catholicity. Only that church that is formed by the apostolic memory can be united in one body with the Lord.' See also, Vladimir Lossky, 'Concerning the Third Mark of the Church: Catholicity,' *In the Image and Likeness of God*, ed. J. H. Erickson & T. E. Bird (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), p. 171.

<sup>4</sup> See Volf, *After Our Likeness*, pp. 259-60.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Volf's (*After Our Likeness*) critical discussion of Free Church ecclesiology, as represented by the first Baptist, John Smyth, in critical dialogue with Catholic (Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger) and Eastern Orthodox (John D. Zizioulas) ecclesiologies.

<sup>6</sup> For a Pentecostal understanding of unity, see, e.g. my 'Spiritus ubi vult spirat. Pneumatology in Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue 1972-1989', *Schriften der Luther-Agricola-Gesellschaft* 42 (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Society, 1998), pp. 314-323.

<sup>7</sup> For a Pentecostal understanding, see, e.g. my 'Spiritus ubi vult spirat', especially p. 355.

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g. John Smyth, *The Works of John Smyth*, ed. W. T. Whitley (Cambridge: CUP, 1915), p. 745 and R. Flew and R. E. Davies, eds., *The Catholicity of Protestantism* (London: Lutterworth, 1950).

the price would be for 'earning credentials' in the eyes of the older churches. Would that not mean losing one's identity altogether?<sup>9</sup> If Free Churches, for example, were to become apostolic, they should incorporate bishops in their ministry patterns. But would that lead to a contradiction in terms?<sup>10</sup>

The purpose of the present essay is to take a critical look at the possibility of and theological conditions of apostolicity in Pentecostal ecclesologies. First, I will survey the current situation in ecumenical theology concerning apostolicity (a rather complicated topic, loaded with both practical and theoretical disputes). Second, I will ask what kind of 'apostolic roots' and inclinations might be found in Pentecostal ecclesiology compared to a traditional Roman Catholic view. Pentecostals have had theological dialogue at international level with Roman Catholics since 1972, and one of the topics discussed is apostolicity and corollary issues. We therefore have some ecumenical material available. Third, I will present seven theses pertaining to an ecumenical understanding of the notion of apostolicity, a notion that I believe all Christian churches can accept, and I will ask what possible implications may follow from

these statements. I will conclude the essay by focusing on the most disputed question of all, namely, apostolic succession, and look at alternative solutions to the problems.

### **Apostolicity in the Current Ecumenical Context<sup>11</sup>**

Apostolicity is a complex concept. Even in the New Testament, there is not one single notion of what it is to be an apostle, but rather different suggestions.<sup>12</sup> James D. G. Dunn has argued that already in the New Testament there was a 'parting of the ways' between different orientations, such as those that championed enthusiastic charismatic spirituality over against those building on the office.<sup>13</sup> With regard to apostolicity, Paul seems to regard the establishment of new churches as the essence of apostleship (1 Cor. 9:1-2), and in consequence can speak of each church having its (own) apostles (1 Cor. 12:27-28). In Acts, however, apostleship was determined exclu-

<sup>11</sup> An up-to-date survey of apostolicity as it is explicated in several international ecumenical documents can be found in Margaret O'Gara, 'Apostolicity in Ecumenical Dialogue', *MID-STREAM: Ecumenical Movement Today* 37:2 (April 1998), pp. 175-212.

<sup>12</sup> See further, R. Schnackenburg, 'Apostolizität: Stand der Forschung', *Katholizität und Apostolizität*. KuD. Beihefte 2 (Göttingen, 1971), pp. 51-73 and Miguel M. Garjo-Guembe, *Communion of the Saints*. Foundation, Nature, and Structure of the Church (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994), pp. 29ff.

<sup>13</sup> See further, J.D.G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament. An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM/Philadelphia: Trinity Press, 1991), especially Chap. IX and idem, *The Parting of the Ways Between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London: SCM/Philadelphia: Trinity Press, 1991), pp. 260-280.

<sup>9</sup> For Free Church identity, see my 'On Free Churches, Identity in Ecumenical Context: Pentecostalism as a Case Study', *MID-STREAM: The Ecumenical Movement Today*, (forthcoming).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Volf's (*After Our Likeness*, p. 260) note with regard to catholicity: 'A catholic Free Church is a contradiction in terms; it understands itself as free precisely with regard to those relationships that would tie it to the whole and thus make it catholic in the first place.'

sively on the basis of a commission by the risen Christ during the limited period of his resurrection appearances (Acts 1:21ff.; cf. 1 Cor. 15:8).<sup>14</sup>

In modern discussions of the idea of apostolic succession, the insight has established itself that the primary issue is succession in the teaching and faith of the apostles and only secondarily a matter of succession in office.<sup>15</sup> According to the Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Commission, the church is apostolic in so far as it stands on apostolic faith; the criterion is the apostolic witness, that is, the apostolic teaching of the gospel.<sup>16</sup> From the Pentecostal perspective, it is interesting to note that according to that document, the commission of the church that goes back to the apostles, 'is carried out through a variety of charisms'.<sup>17</sup> Also, the same docu-

ment defines the much disputed question of apostolic succession in conciliar terms: 'The basic intention of the doctrine of apostolic succession is to indicate that, throughout all historical changes in its proclamation and structures, the church is at all times referred to its apostolic origin.'<sup>18</sup>

The ecumenical consensus-document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, provides us with the most detailed conciliar outline of apostolicity. According to it, apostolic tradition (the term that the document favours) is:

...continuity in the permanent characteristic of the Church of the apostles:<sup>19</sup> witness to the apostolic faith, proclamation and fresh interpretation of the Gospel, celebration of baptism and the eucharist, the transmission of ministerial responsibilities, communion in prayer, love and joy and suffering, service to the sick and the needy, unity among the local churches and sharing the gifts which the Lord has given to each.<sup>20</sup>

This definition is helpful, since its focus is on spirituality and ministry rather than on quasi-judicial notions of succession of office(s). It includes the whole people of God and even entails a diaconic dimension.

In the New Testament, there is one essential aspect to apostolicity, one too often neglected both in history

<sup>14</sup> Dunn, *Parting of the Ways*, p. 273.

<sup>15</sup> Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Commission, Malta Report [The Gospel and Church], 1972, (in, *Growth in Agreement: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level*, eds. H. Meyer & L. Vischer [New York/Ramsey, N.J.; Paulist and Geneva: WCC, 1984], pp. 168-89), # 60-61; Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, p. 403; Lima, III, # 34-36. See also, Congar, *Mysterium Salutis*, IV/1, pp. 557ff., E. Schlink, *Ökumenische Dogmatik*, pp. 614-22; Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), Vol. 2, p. 39. Pannenberg (p. 403) notes that succession in office that comes through ordination by ministers is a sign expressing the unity of the whole church in the apostolic faith because ordained ministers represent the whole church of Christ and in this capacity hand down the commission that the apostles received from Jesus Christ himself. Free Churches, because of a different theology of ordination, do not link ordination and apostolicity this way.

<sup>16</sup> Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Commission, # 52.

<sup>17</sup> Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Commission, # 53.

<sup>18</sup> Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Commission, # 57 (emphases mine).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. the definition given by Catholic Christopher O'Donnell ('Ecclesia.' *A Theological Encyclopedia of the Church* [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996], p. 19): 'A broad description of apostolicity is of being in harmony and in communion with the apostolic Church from the beginning.'

<sup>20</sup> *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. Faith and Order Commission, 1982 (in *Growth in Agreement*, pp. 465-503), # 34.

and in modern times, namely, the pneumatological and charismatic quality of apostolicity. The concept of apostolicity in the New Testament is indeed more pneumatologically and charismatically loaded than most of the historical, or even more modern, views let us know. The birth of the Christian church goes back to the pouring out of the Spirit. The first apostles ministered in the power of the Spirit, and the focus of the early church's worship was the transmittance of the Spirit and a Spirit-experience. Catholic theologian, F. A. Sullivan, is one amongst the representatives of the traditional churches who has argued enthusiastically for a pneumatological concept of apostolicity.<sup>21</sup> Orthodox Vladimir Lossky concurs, saying that the apostolicity 'dwells in the power of the... Spirit infused into the apostles by the breath of Christ and transmitted to their successors' (Acts 20:28).<sup>22</sup> Lutheran Eduard Schlink uses Paul's doctrine of charisms as the starting point of what he has to say about the relationship between charisms and apostolic ministry. He deals with the apostolic ministry before discussing charisms.<sup>23</sup> He stresses that in 1 Corinthians 12:28 this ministry is itself a charism, and he does not think it any accident that this charism is mentioned first. The apostles were church-founding charismatics.<sup>24</sup> One way they exer-

cised charismatic ministry was in healing of the sick, as explained, for example, in Mark 6:12-13.<sup>25</sup> It has been the legacy of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements to remind the church universal of this crucial part of New Testament apostolicity.<sup>26</sup>

There is also a pronounced missionary orientation in the New Testament and in more recent approaches to apostolicity. The church is 'apostolic because it remains in continuity in essentials with the original witnessing of the first-century apostles.'<sup>27</sup> What is originally apostolic is sending to bear witness to the universal and definitive truth of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.<sup>28</sup> 'The apostolicity of the church is ultimately grounded in God's mission to the world.'<sup>29</sup> Primarily, then, the church's apostolicity means that the sending out of the apostles to all humanity is continued by the church. The task of mission did not end with the age of the apostles.<sup>30</sup> Part of continuing the apos-

<sup>25</sup> See further Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, p. 270 with references.

<sup>26</sup> See further, Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, Chap. IX.

<sup>27</sup> Michael A. Fahey, 'Church', in *Systematic Theology. Roman Catholic Perspectives*, Vol. II, eds. F. S. Fiorenza & J. P. Galvin (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), p. 43.

<sup>28</sup> As representative of recent ecumenical documents, see, e.g. Anglican-Lutheran International Continuation Committee, *The Niagara Report*, 1987 (London: Anglican Consultative Council & Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1988), # 21. I am grateful to O'Gara, 'Apostolicity', (p. 195) for this reference.

<sup>29</sup> Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology. The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life* (New York: OUP, 1980), p. 135.

<sup>30</sup> This missionary orientation in apostolicity was emphasized, e.g. in the *Epistle of Clement* dating from about 96 C.E.

<sup>21</sup> F.A. Sullivan, *The Church We Believe In: One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic* (Dublin: Gill & McMillan/Mawhaw: Paulist, 1988), pp. 185-197.

<sup>22</sup> Lossky, 'Concerning the Third Mark', p. 172.

<sup>23</sup> Schlink, *Ökumenische Dogmatik*, pp. 591ff.

<sup>24</sup> Schlink, *Ökumenische Dogmatik*, p. 598.



tolic mission is fidelity to the apostolic beginnings, especially to the apostolic gospel.<sup>31</sup> Consequently, the stress on the teaching rather than the office itself has come to be emphasized in recent discussions.

Apostolicity, however, is a two-fold concept. On the one hand, there has to be fidelity to the tradition otherwise we lose any criterion between true and false. On the other hand, the 'church is authentically apostolic only when as a missionary church it remains ready to alter traditional ways of thinking and living, being renewed constantly on the basis of its origins'.<sup>32</sup> Thus, apostolicity is a dynamic reality.<sup>33</sup>

In the final analysis, apostolicity, as well as other marks of the church, are objects of faith as much as they are anything else. According to Pannenberg, we must stress the church's

apostolicity so strongly 'for the very reason that we detect so clearly that the church has broken away from its apostolic beginnings and is pushing on into uncertain future'.<sup>34</sup> Primarily, the assertion of the church as apostolic is meant to be understood eschatologically.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, apostolicity is part of a prayer of longing and hope that the church may in fact become what it is called to be by reason of its lofty vocation.<sup>36</sup>

Understanding the church's apostolicity in terms of the apostolic mission points beyond every historical present to the eschatological consummation of the world.<sup>37</sup> The apostolic mission of the church aims at the renewal of all humanity in the kingdom of God, a renewal that has begun already with the advent and cross of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>38</sup>

Whatever the understanding of apostolicity is in given time, it should be clearly understood that originally apostolicity, more than any other characteristics of the church (unity, catholicity, and holiness), was not

<sup>31</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, 'Die Bedeutung der Eschatologie für das Verständnis der Apostolizität unter Katholizität der Kirche', in *Ethik und Ekklesiologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), pp. 222ff. and idem, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, pp. 406-7. In the beginnings of the church, the authority of the apostles kept the churches in their faith. After the death of the apostles, the church had to rely on apostolic teaching for the truth of the message. See further, J. Roloff, 'Apostel I', TRE, III (1978), pp. 430-45. For the historical development, see Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, pp. 378ff.

<sup>32</sup> Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, p. 407. On the missionary dimension of apostolicity, see further Garijo-Guembe, *Communion of the Saints*, pp. 31-36.

<sup>33</sup> This was clearly captured in the dialogue between the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, *Toward a Common Understanding of the Church*, 1990 [Information Service III: 74 (1990)], #116, according to which apostolicity 'is a living reality which simultaneously keeps the Church in communion with its living source and allows it to renew its youth continually so as to reach the Kingdom'. I am indebted to O'Gara, 'Apostolicity', (p. 202) for this reference.

<sup>34</sup> Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, p. 409. So also Gerhard Ebeling, *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, Vol. 3 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1979), pp. 369-75.

<sup>35</sup> From an Eastern Orthodox perspective, see John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion. Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), Chap. 5 which makes a difference between 'historical' and 'eschatological' approaches to apostolicity and attempts for a synthesis.

<sup>36</sup> Fahey, 'Church', pp. 42-43; so also O'Donnell, *Ecclesia*, p. 19.

<sup>37</sup> The integral relationship between mission and eschatology in the understanding of apostolicity is clearly depicted in Wolfhart Pannenberg, 'Apostolizität und Katholizität der Kirche in der Perspektive des Eschatologie,' *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 94 (1965), pp. 97-112.

<sup>38</sup> Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, p. 407.

intended to be used polemically or apologetically to demonstrate the superiority of one church over another or to imply that one possessed more unity, sanctity, catholicity, or apostolicity.<sup>39</sup>

### The Issue of Apostolicity in Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue

Since 1972, the two currently largest, Christian families (Roman Catholics and Pentecostals) have been engaged in mutual talks at the international level.<sup>40</sup> This dialogue,

<sup>39</sup> Fahey, 'Church', p. 42. This is aptly noted in *The Porvoo Common Statement* (Conversations between the British and Irish Anglican Churches and the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran Churches, 1992 [London: Council for Christian Unity of the General Synod of the Church of England, 1993]) when it affirms that the church as a whole is apostolic (# 37) and 'the primary manifestation of apostolic succession is to be found in the apostolic tradition of the Church as a whole' (# 39). In this sense, Karl Rahner's (*Foundations of Christian Faith* [New York: Crossroad, 1982], pp. 357-8) argumentation from apostolicity, that the Roman Catholic Church stands in greater continuity with the primitive church than any other Christian community, is ecumenically fruitless; see also Herman Josef Pottmeyer, 'Die Frage nach der wahren Kirche', in *Handbuch der Fundamentaltheologie* 3 (Freiburg: Herder, 1986), pp. 212-41.

<sup>40</sup> For background and themes, see Kärkkäinen, *Spiritus ubi vult spirat*, Chap. 2 and *Ad ultimum terrae. Evangelization, Protelytism, and Common Witness in the Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue 1990-1997*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1998, Chap. 2. For a summary, see Kärkkäinen, 'An Exercise on the Frontiers of Ecumenism: Almost Thirty Years of the Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue', *Exchange: Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research* 29:2 (2000): pp. 156-171. For recent appraisals, see Kilian McDonnell, 'Improbable Conversations: The International Classical Pentecostal/Roman Catholic Dialogue', *Pneuma* 17:2 (1995), pp. 163-174; McDonnell, 'Five Defining Issues: The International Classical Pentecostal/Roman Catholic Dialogue', *Pneuma* 17:2 (1995), pp. 175-188; and Walter J. Hollenweger, 'Roman Catholics and Pentecostals in Dialogue', *Ecumenical Review* (1999), pp. 147-159.

which represents an exercise on the frontiers of ecumenism, took up the issue of apostolicity during the first quinquennium (1972-1978). This is the first time in the history of the modern ecumenical movement that a Free Church has engaged in serious dialogue concerning apostolicity with an established church to whom the issue of apostolicity is a crucial ecclesiological affirmation.

It is significant that the 'focus of the dialogue bears upon how ministry in the church continues the ministry of the Apostles'.<sup>41</sup> Whatever differences there may be between Catholic and Pentecostal ecclesiologies, there is this foundational commitment to the notion of 'one holy catholic apostolic Church' made up of all believers (cf. Eph. 4:4-6).<sup>42</sup>

Before we look at some details of the mutual discussions, it is important to note that the issue of apostolicity is not necessarily strange to Pentecostalism. It might come as a surprise to uninformed observers of Pentecostalism that the notion of apostolicity is located in the very roots of the movement.<sup>43</sup>

The following words form the preamble to the Pentecostal self-understanding of its theology and mission in 1906, when the world-wide movement was born:

<sup>41</sup> *Final Report* (1977-1982), # 77.

<sup>42</sup> *Final Report* (1985-1989), # 34.

<sup>43</sup> The most detailed discussion of Pentecostal apostolicity is to be found in the paper by the Pentecostal co-chair of the Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue, Cecil M. Robek: 'A Pentecostal Perspective on Apostolicity'. A paper presented to Faith and Order, National Council of Churches, Consultation on American Born Churches, March 1992 (Unpublished; to be part of the future publication on the topic of 'Apostolicity in America').

THE APOSTOLIC FAITH MOVEMENT stands for the restoration of faith once delivered unto the saints—the old time religion, camp meetings, revivals, missions, street and prison work and Christian Unity everywhere.<sup>44</sup>

There are several items in this preamble which call for a closer look. First of all, the name of the movement itself, 'The Apostolic Faith Movement', clearly refers to the desire to 'go back to Pentecost'<sup>45</sup> of apostolic times as recorded in Acts 2. It also points toward a priority given to primitive religion.<sup>46</sup> This initial naming gave birth to numerous other titles of churches, movements, publications which bear the same name.<sup>47</sup> It is also noteworthy that even today, several Pentecostal

movements around the world, e.g. in Africa and former Eastern Europe, are known only by the name 'Apostolic'.<sup>48</sup>

The insistence on the apostolic nature of the church implied restorationist vision '...to displace dead forms and creeds and wild fanaticisms [of existing Churches] with living practical Christianity.'<sup>49</sup> The phrase, 'stands for the restoration of the faith once delivered unto the saints' (from Jude 3), clearly suggests that the Apostolic faith was in mind here and that a certain body of knowledge was intended to be understood as constituting that apostolic faith. That could be summarized as statements concerning (1) Justification, (2) Sanctification, (3) Baptism in the Holy Ghost, and (4) Healing.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore (and this is of immense importance ecumenically), the statement of the Apostolic Faith Movement encapsulates the essence of the confession 'one holy catholic apostolic Church',<sup>51</sup> though Pentecostals do not so often use the creedal language of older churches.<sup>52</sup> Robeck summarizes the main

<sup>44</sup> *Apostolic Faith* 2:1 (September, 1906). For a helpful treatment of the topic of apostolicity and related issues, see Gerald T. Sheppard, 'The Nicene Creed, Filioque, and Pentecostal Movements in the United States', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 31:3-4 (1986), pp. 401-416.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Frank D. Macchia, 'The Church as an End-Time Missionary Fellowship of the Spirit: A Pentecostal Perspective on the Significance of Pneumatology for Ecclesiology.' A Paper presented to Pentecostal/National Council of Churches Dialogue, March 12, 1997, Oakland California [Unpublished], pp. 20-21), who notes that movements such as Pentecostalism sought 'to discover direct access to the church of the apostles through the mediation of the Holy Spirit'. The implication is, of course, that a 'mediation' through some other agencies than the Holy Spirit (e.g. sacraments) was not regarded as 'apostolic'. Lesslie Newbigin (*The Household of God* [London: SCM, 1953], Chap. IV) concurs by arguing that the Pentecostal understanding of church is neither dominated by Word nor sacrament but by the direct experience of the Holy Spirit as it was believed to have been shared originally among the apostles and early followers of Jesus. See also Peter Hocken, 'Church, Theology of the,' *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley M. Burgess & Gary B. McGee (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), p. 217.

<sup>46</sup> Robeck, 'A Pentecostal Perspective on Apostolicity', 1-2.

<sup>47</sup> E.g. *The Apostolic Herald*, *The Apostolic Messenger*, *The Apostolic Witness*, etc.

<sup>48</sup> See several articles under the term 'apostolic' in the *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*.

<sup>49</sup> *Apostolic Faith* 2:1 (Sept., 1906).

<sup>50</sup> *Apostolic Faith* 2:1 (Sept., 1906) under the title 'The Apostolic Faith Movement'. These statements were accompanied by a brief apologetic note designed to alleviate any charge of sectarianism which might be raised against the movement.

<sup>51</sup> *Final Report* (1985-1989), # 34.

<sup>52</sup> Robeck, 'A Pentecostal Perspective on Apostolicity', (pp. 2-3) notes that although Pentecostals in general are anti-creedal, it was not to negate the truths which the creed was intended to exalt and protect, but rather, it was to deny that the creed was sufficient to the task. Scripture was more important than creed, and, in some cases, experience consistent with Scripture.

elements of this commitment to the apostolic confession based on the above quoted preamble:

The explicit commitment of these early Pentecostals to 'Christian Unity,' and their honest recognition of their role as a restoration movement within the Church points toward their affirmation of the *oneness* of the Church. Identification with their Wesleyan-Holiness roots articulated through references to the 'old time religion' and 'camp meetings' with their deep commitment to personal sanctification, underscore their belief in the *holiness* of the Church and its impact on the personal lives of each individual Christian. Their recognition that the Church in which the Apostolic Faith Movement participated was 'everywhere' is an explicit affirmation of the *catholicity* of the Church. And their self-designation as the 'Apostolic Faith Movement' is sufficient to demonstrate some kind of commitment to the *apostolic nature* of the church and a deep concern to contribute to a restored or enhanced *apostolic character* of the Church.<sup>53</sup>

The formulation of early Pentecostal understanding of apostolicity is important also in that it reaches beyond the issue of faith, e.g. doctrine, creed, theology, to the issues of power and practice. This is the core of 'living, practical Christianity'.<sup>54</sup> In the final analysis, then, what was the ultimate criterion was not formulations of faith but living out of the apostolic gospel.

This brief consideration of apostolicity from a Pentecostal perspective reveals that the essence of it is to go back to the faith and experience of apostolic times to live consistently with the New Testament church.

There is also a strong missionary orientation there. Although this formulation of Pentecostalism is rather different from that of Roman Catholics, one can see a common denominator: the ultimate criterion is that of 'continuity/consistency' with the beginnings of the church, i.e. with apostolic times. Without artificially downplaying the difference in the method of ascertainment, one can perhaps state that there is mutual intention in both traditions, serving the same purpose.

Both Roman Catholics and Pentecostals believe that the church lives in continuity with the New Testament apostles and their proclamation, and with the apostolic church. A primary manifestation of this is to be found in fidelity to the apostolic teaching.<sup>55</sup> There is, though, a subtle difference in how these two traditions view the history of the church. While Pentecostals, influenced by restorationist perspectives, have claimed continuity with the church in the New Testament by arguing for discontinuity with much of the historical Church, Catholics have tended to underline the succession along the lines of church history, starting with the New Testament.<sup>56</sup> 'By adopting these two positions, one of continuity, the other of discontinuity, each tradition has attempted to demonstrate its faithfulness to the apostolic faith 'once for all delivered

<sup>53</sup> Robeck, 'A Pentecostal Perspective on Apostolicity', p. 2. (emphasis mine)

<sup>54</sup> Robeck, 'A Pentecostal Perspective on Apostolicity', p. 14.

<sup>55</sup> *Final Report (1977-1982)*, # 88.

<sup>56</sup> *Final Report (1985-1989)*, # 107, 108.

to the saints' (Jude 3).<sup>57</sup> Neither Catholics nor Pentecostals claim that continuity in history by itself would be a guarantee of spiritual maturity or of doctrinal soundness.<sup>58</sup>

The major difference has to do with the way fidelity to apostolicity is guaranteed. For Roman Catholics, the succession of bishops in an orderly transmission of ministry through history is both guarantee and manifestation of this fidelity.<sup>59</sup> For Pentecostals, the current dynamic of the Spirit is regarded as a more valid endorsement of apostolic faith and ministry than an unbroken line of episcopal succession. Pentecostals would look to apostolic life and to the power of preaching which leads to conversions to Jesus Christ as an authentication of apostolic ministry.<sup>60</sup>

Pentecostal H. D. Edwards illustrates how the question of episcopal succession, insisted on by Roman Catholics, is difficult to decide for Pentecostals. 'Pentecostals would unhesitatingly affirm that they are

*both apostolic and in succession.* The joint designation, if understood to affirm episcopacy as being the only method of guaranteeing authenticity and a wholly genuine expression of Christian continuity, would be strongly opposed by the Pentecostals.<sup>61</sup> This is understandable, since for Pentecostals to admit the necessity of apostolic succession as the criterion would mean to call in question the whole validity of their spiritual experience and encounter with God, in as much as it has occurred outside the framework and the security allegedly guaranteed by apostolic succession.

Pentecostals would like to see Roman Catholics place more emphasis on the requirements of apostolic life than on episcopal succession. Roman Catholics, without in any way ignoring the requirements of apostolic life, maintain that the sovereignty of God's act in the transmission of the word and the ministry of sacrament is not nullified by the personal infidelity of the minister.<sup>62</sup> Despite this difference of emphasis, there is strong

<sup>57</sup> *Final Report* (1985-1989), # 108. The text continues: 'The significance of this for the welfare of the whole Church urges upon us the need of further common theological reflection on the history of the Church.'

<sup>58</sup> *Final Report* (1985-1989), # 107.

<sup>59</sup> *Final Report* (1977-1982), # 89; see also # 79 and Liam G. Walsh, 'Ministry in the Church', in Jerry L. Sandidge, *Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue (1977-1982): A Study in Developing Ecumenism. Studien zur interkulturellen Geschichte des Christentums* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1987), Vol 2, pp. 381-86.

<sup>60</sup> *Final Report* (1977-1982), # 90; H. David Edwards ('A Pentecostal Perspective of the Church', in Sandidge, *Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue*, pp. 404-409, 419-421) provides a Pentecostal perspective to the role of the Apostles and apostolicity of the Church. He illustrates the Pentecostal insistence on the role of the Spirit with these

words: 'For Pentecostals, Moses and Joshua, Saul and David, Elijah and Elisha illustrate, if not determine, the principle of succession, i.e., that it is a "spirit" matter, sometimes accompanied by structure—laying on of hands—but not always. In fact, they would probably say that to insist always on the laying on of hands is to "limit the Spirit" and by way of analogy and illustration would refer to the experience of the apostles in Acts, that whereas in Samaria and Ephesus the apostles laid hands on Christians that they might receive the Spirit, in the house of Cornelius the Spirit fell on them while Peter was speaking, without his laying hands on them.' (p. 408-409; emphasis mine)

<sup>61</sup> Edwards, 'A Pentecostal Perspective of the Church', p. 419.

<sup>62</sup> *Final Report* (1977-1982), # 90.

mutual concern for the necessity of holiness of life as a qualifier for and mark of apostolicity. It is admitted, though, that the power and sovereignty of God is not limited to the confines of a weak and sinful minister, but the church has to make use of any necessary means to provide seriously for the holiness of the ministers.<sup>63</sup>

### **Toward a Conciliar Understanding of Apostolicity**

Charles A. Conniry, a Free Church (Baptist) theologian, has recently presented a synthesis of four major views of apostolicity:<sup>64</sup>

- (1) 'Ecclesial apostolicity' emphasizes apostolicity as a means of establishing the institutional authority of the church
- (2) 'Biblical apostolicity' looks to the apostolic character of the church in order to identify a norm by which the legitimacy of subsequent accretions is determined.
- (3) 'Pneumatic apostolicity' appeals to a charisma of the Spirit that is as much a part of today's church as it was in the first century.
- (4) A related and yet distinct emphasis, 'kerygmatic apostolicity', sees the church's apostolic character actualized by the faithful carrying-out of its mission. Conniry contends that rather than viewing any one of these legitimate interpretations as final or exclusive of others, they should

be seen rather as complementa-  
rily.

Building on this analysis and the previous discussion, I want to ask two interrelated questions: What are the essential aspects of apostolicity that all Christian churches would be more or less ready to affirm? What are those that could build bridges between traditional, mostly episcopal churches, the Free Churches and other non-traditional Christian groups? These are the two ecumenically pregnant and critical questions that determine the future discussions on the topic.

There are at least seven aspects of apostolicity that I believe every Christian community is ready to accept. These aspects might serve as a 'minimum' for further work on this much disputed question.

All churches accept that, first, apostolicity involves a continuity<sup>65</sup> in the life and faith of the apostles and the apostolic church of the New Testament. By implication, then, one may conclude that all churches also accept, second, that charismatic life and worship is an essential part of apostolicity. No serious New Testament exegete disputes the charismatic nature of the New Testament church(es). Third, one can say that mission (proclamation of the gospel) is yet another indistinguishable aspect of apostolicity. The risen Lord commanded his disciples (apostles) to continue the missionary work he had

<sup>63</sup> *Final Report* (1977-1982), # 91.

<sup>64</sup> Charles J. Conniry, 'Identifying Apostolic Christianity: A Synthesis of Viewpoints', *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 37:3 (1994), pp. 247-261 (with extensive bibliography relating to various theological traditions and denominations).

<sup>65</sup> I prefer here the term 'continuity' rather than 'succession', since the latter term is so heavily loaded with a specific kind of succession, e.g. episcopal succession in terms of having continual chain of bishops.

begun. Fourth, all churches firmly believe that the Scriptures of the New Testament are themselves apostolic and are the norm of the apostolicity. Fifth, apostolicity is a dynamic concept. It is not only or primarily a question of juridics but rather a question of life and vitality and thus of obedience, service, and everyday discipleship.<sup>66</sup> Sixth, apostolicity concerns the whole people of God, not only clergy or authority. This is, for example, what Hans Küng has argued. He supports an understanding of apostolic succession that involves the whole people of God and is inspired directly by the Spirit anew in each generation as the church renews itself in the witness of the apostles.<sup>67</sup> Seventh, apostolicity is a heavily pneumatological concept. Only the Holy Spirit is 'the one who makes the Church apostolic'.<sup>68</sup>

The Roman Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue on ecclesiology shows that there are indeed complementary ways of affirming other churches' apostolicity, thus ecclesiality, if no one definition is taken as final or exclusive of others. If the seven aspects outlined above are accepted universally among Christian churches, ecumenically fruitful and hopeful implications follow. Communication between various

churches, rather than being fruitless strife about the goodness of one's own apostolicity, has the potential of becoming a truly ecumenical exchange of gifts. For example, traditional churches learn to pay attention to dynamic elements of apostolicity whereas younger churches learn to appreciate tradition. Those churches strong on fellowship and teaching might learn to appreciate the necessary missionary nature of the church. Those churches strong on the biblical foundations might dare to take another look at charisms and the role of the Spirit, and so on.

Catholic ecumenist, Avery Dulles, sets a fruitful precedent. Dulles is ready to admit that criteria other than episcopal succession might serve as a criterion for true apostolicity. Here he strikes the note Protestants in general and Free Churches in particular have been eager to emphasize:

Unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity are dynamic realities that depend on the foundational work of Christ and on his continued presence and activity through the Holy Spirit. Evangelical communities that excel in love for Jesus Christ and in obedience to the Holy Spirit may be more unitive, holy, catholic, and apostolic than highly sacramental and hierarchically organized churches in which faith and charity have become cold.<sup>69</sup>

This is an example of applying to ecumenical relations fresh perspectives that have arisen out of ecumenical reflections on the notion of apostolicity.

Another recent example from Dulles testifies to the fruitfulness of

<sup>66</sup> See further, Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, Vol. 2, p. 45.

<sup>67</sup> Hans Küng, *The Church* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1967), pp. 355-56. So also Lutheran Arnold Bittlinger, *Im Kraftfeld des Geistes* (Marburg an der Lahn: Ökumenischer Verlag Dr. R. F. Edel, 1966), pp. 129ff.

<sup>68</sup> Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, Vol. 2, pp. 39-44 (44); J. D. Zizioulas, 'La continuité avec les origines apotoliques kans la conscience théologique des Eglises orthodoxes', *Istina* 19 (1974), pp. 65-94.

<sup>69</sup> A. Dulles, 'The Church as "One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic"', *ERT* 23:1 (1999), p. 27.

the approach recommended above. When apostolicity is understood as a comprehensive, many-sided concept, rather than focusing on a particular aspect disputed by many other churches, one is committed to look for criteria acceptable to all. One such criterion is the aspect number four in our list above, namely that of the word of God. According to Dulles, 'to insist on the sole lordship of Christ as known to us from the Scriptures is already to accept a large measure of apostolicity'.<sup>70</sup> All Christian churches affirm the absolute normativity of Scripture and thus of its Lord. This generally upheld criterion can serve as *the* norm for apostolicity. Even then there are differences of opinion, but these can be discussed from the perspective of limited convergence. The importance of Dulles' ideas is enhanced when we take into consideration the contexts in which they were presented: in a Protestant periodical and in dialogue on ecclesiology between Roman Catholics and Evangelicals.

### **Is there any Hope Concerning the Question of Apostolic Succession?**

As is well known, the most hotly debated question is of course that of episcopal succession and, consequently, ministry/ordination. The possible outcome of ecumenical convergence in the understanding of apostolicity is to a large degree dependent on how this question is handled.

Most traditional churches are not ready to follow the precepts of Free Churches or of Karl Barth, who reject any view of apostolicity based on historical or juridical grounds and strongly object to apostolic succession being based on ordination as this would be to predispose the Holy Spirit to act according to human demands.<sup>71</sup> However, older churches should listen to the arguments of others. In fact, those who reject apostolic succession (as understood in the episcopal sense) also have a case, as Baptist theologian J. L. Garrett argues.<sup>72</sup> First, the role of ministers in the New Testament does not constitute necessarily a three-fold hierarchical order and can be explained apart from the theory of apostolic succession. Second, the church at Rome was seemingly led by a body of presbyters in the time of Clement of Rome. Third, the activity of Peter and John in Samaria (Acts 8:14-25) and Paul's teaching authority in the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 4:7, 21; 11:16, 34) can be recognized and explained in terms of apostleship apart from any theory of episcopal succession. Fourth, the canonical New Testament can be reckoned as the 'strict successor' to the apostles rather than the bishops. Fifth, the ministries of the non-episcopal churches since the era of the Protes-

<sup>71</sup> For Barth's view, see *Church Dogmatics* 4:1 (Edinburgh: Clark, 1956), pp. 712-725. When I lump together Barth and Free Churches, I do not intend to assume any connection between them. I just note that they happen to have much similarity in their argumentation.

<sup>72</sup> J. L. Garrett, Jr., *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 568-9.

<sup>70</sup> Dulles, 'The Church', p. 27.



tant Reformation would seem to argue against the necessity of apostolic succession.

Even if these kinds of argument might not be able to convince theologians of traditional churches of the supremacy of non-episcopal argumentation, they are substantial enough to promote honest ecumenical dialogue. The fact is that the concept of apostolicity is so diverse and complicated that clinging exclusively to one aspect seems not to do justice either to the New Testament data nor to later theological developments. On what justification, other than historical, do the older churches have the exclusive claim for one particular kind of definition when the view can by no means find indisputable—some would even say, substantial—biblical support?

The ecclesiality of any church is of necessity tied up with its apostolicity. There can be no church without apostolic continuity.<sup>73</sup> Rejecting another church's claim for apostolicity is no less a serious act than bluntly rejecting the ecclesiality of that church.

Still another motivation for all churches to re-evaluate their understanding of apostolicity is presented by Catholic, Avery Dulles, in these words:

Can we speak of the church as apostolic in view of the radical mutations that it has undergone over the centuries? Many of the structures, doctrines, and practices of contemporary Christians would surprise

and baffle the apostles.<sup>74</sup>

The approach of the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* document is helpful in that it distinguishes between the apostolicity of the whole church and the apostolic succession in the ministry, thus treating the latter as subordinate to the former, rather than equating them.<sup>75</sup> In fact, Dulles himself concludes from this (although the official Catholic response to the BEM-document expressed reservations<sup>76</sup>) that on the basis of the Lima text it might be possible to admit 'a large measure of apostolicity without apostolic succession in the ministry'.<sup>77</sup> While I applaud this ecumenical attitude, I am not sure if we can 'quantify' the notion of apostolicity the way Dulles does. The consequent problem would be just 'how much' one needs apostolicity in order for a church to be a church (i.e. to be apostolic 'enough').

However the apostolicity is defined theologically; it is of necessity bound to the community of God; the church; the whole church of God on earth. As Roman Catholic C. O'Donnell fittingly summarizes: 'So at its deepest level, apostolicity denotes this possibility of encountering now the Mystery through the Holy Spirit in a community which mediates the divine plan throughout history.'<sup>78</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Dulles, 'The Church', p. 14.

<sup>75</sup> See further, Dulles, 'The Church', p. 26.

<sup>76</sup> Vatican Appraisal of the WCC Document, 'Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry', *Origins* 17 (November 19, 1987), pp. 401-16.

<sup>77</sup> Dulles, 'The Church', p. 27.

<sup>78</sup> O'Donnell, 'Ecclesia', p. 20.

<sup>73</sup> Ola Tjörhom, 'Apostolisk kontinuitet og apostolisk suksesjon i Porvoo-rapporten—en utfordring for de nordiske Lutherske kirkene', *Nordiskt Eku-menisk Orientering* 4 (December, 1995), p. 10.

# Jubilee and Society: Reflections

Dr. Jesudason Baskar Jeyaraj

**Keywords:** Land, rest, debt, rich, poor, sabbatical year, India

The world has seen the dawn of the 3rd millennium. Churches and leaders in different countries have called for the redistribution of land and cancellation of the debts of Third World countries. Poor peasants in India and in the subcontinent are involved in the struggle for justice. In this paper, I will reflect on the release of the land and labourers and the cancellation of debts as well as highlighting some of the salient features of the Jubilee institution. This study is not a thorough study of the Jubilee tradition in ancient Israel, but it is more of a

reflection. Some scholars have already written on the topic of biblical Jubilee.<sup>1</sup>

The salient features of the biblical Jubilee tradition are more relevant to the Indian context at present than ever before. First, 60 percent of the population still live in villages and our society is predominantly agrarian. Second, land alienation is taking place rapidly along with modernization. There is construction of industries, highways, extension of airports, leasing of water reservoirs to multinational companies, construction of new dams, shopping complexes, etc. Third, money-lenders have multiplied at every level. Policemen lend money on interest to poor rickshaw workers, auto drivers and vegetable vendors on the street. Even Christian teachers and office assistants in mission schools operate money-lending businesses on a small scale among fellow teachers and neighbours. I was told that a treasur-

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<sup>1</sup> For example, R. North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*; Jeffrey Fager, *Land Tenure and the Biblical Jubilee*; Chris J.H. Wright, *God's People in God's Land: Family, Land and Property in the OT*; Walter Brueggemann, *The Land*; and others.

er of a local church lent the Sunday offering to local people at a high interest rate and multiplied the income for the sake of his church. Many money-lenders in India use local- and state-level political forces to protect their authorized and unauthorized money-lending businesses.

This paper focuses attention on the theme 'Jubilee' in Leviticus 25. The word 'Jubilee' is derived from the Hebrew word *yobel* which literally means 'ram's horn'. The priests of ancient Israel were asked to blow the ram's horn on the completion of the forty-ninth year in order to inaugurate the fiftieth year:

You shall count off seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the period of seven weeks of years gives forty-nine years. Then you shall have the trumpet sounded loud; on the tenth day of the seventh month—on the day of atonement—you shall have the trumpet sounded throughout all your land. And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you; you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family. (Lev. 25:8-10)

### Restoration

Ancient Israelite society was an agrarian society. When the people settled down in Canaan, the land was distributed, according to the size of the family, to cultivate and produce food for their families (Num. 26). The land cultivated by the family was regarded as *nahala* 'inheritance'. That families were prohibited from selling this inheritance to anyone and becoming landless is evident from the case of Naboth's vineyard (1 Kgs. 21:3: 'The Lord forbid that I should

give you my ancestral inheritance.')

Such an inheritance gave each family employment, food and the right to be members of the village. Questions have been raised on the nature of the ownership of the land: whether the land was commonly owned by the tribe or the clan, or by families. There are many indications in the Old Testament of the ownership of land by families, such as Naboth's vineyard, the tradition of passing on the land of the deceased person without male child to his brother, the claim of the five daughters of Zelophehad for their father's land (Num. 27:1-11), Boaz redeeming the land of Naomi (Ruth 4:1-7), and the purchase of the land in Anathoth by Jeremiah (Jer. 32:6-15).

### Socio-economic Dimension

#### Land

Families, as we know, cannot survive without land. Alienation from the land means poverty and bonded slavery. Poor families in ancient Israel were allowed to mortgage part of their land to their relations or neighbours, cultivate the rest and redeem the mortgaged land when they could find the money. But debt is a vicious trap. Due to an increasing burden of debt, such families had no other option except to mortgage the rest of the property and become servants to the mortgagee. People who could lend money started accumulating the land of the poor and became wealthy. Money-lenders exploited poor peasants and oppressed them so that the poor would work for them continuously.

The rich in their society added land

to land, house to house and remained as the ruling class. Being the ruling class, the kings, officials at the royal court, landlords and business families never wanted to change the policies and laws or implement them to bring economic and social justice in their society. Prophets raised their voices against such injustice and inequality and demanded the ruling class repent and render justice to the poor and marginalized (Amos 2:6-8; 5:24; 6:4-7; Micah 2:1-2; Isaiah 5:8-10). The sociological justification for the redemption of land and labourers comes from the historical situation which developed during the monarchy.

To counter the alienation of the land from the poor and the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few rich, God insisted on the liberation of land from the rich and its restoration to the original families. The need to empower the poor with land, the right to cultivate it and enjoy the fruits of their labour was met by the introduction of the Jubilee Law. Since it is set in the context of Sinai, it became a legal code for them to practise.

The institution of Jubilee limited the mortgage to a maximum period of 49 years. The rich were then asked to return the land without demanding repayment of the loan or interest. Thus the Jubilee year institution put an end to the perpetual alienation of land from poor families and the accumulation of properties by the rich. It became an instrument in restoring the land and resetting the economy, if not to perfect egalitarianism, at least to reducing the widening gap between the rich and poor. It also

challenged upper class people at least once every 50 years. Socio-economic evils that began in one era in ancient Israel could be rectified at the end of the era and the new era could begin with justice and welfare.

### *Labour*

When families lose their right to cultivate the land that is mortgaged to another person, the mortgagee can employ the mortgager to cultivate it for wages. This happened in ancient Israel and is still happening in India today. In such a situation, the family are labourers for their new master. The mortgagee, however, can choose to appoint another family as his labourers. The family that lost the land then has to leave and go to another landlord for work and be his servants. In both situations, the family is alienated from their land, become servants and eventually end up in bonded slavery. Restoring the land alone to the family in the 50th year is not enough. The family must also be set free from servitude so they can go back to their land and exercise the right to cultivate it. Cancelling the mortgage and restoring the land demands also the liberation of labourers.

The rich, who enjoy the servitude of the poor, do not allow them to escape their clutches and go free. If the families are not set free and enabled to reclaim their right to return to their land, cultivate it once again and enjoy the produce, then releasing the land is meaningless. The Jubilee institution, therefore, linked the liberation of the land with the liberation of labour. Families and land must be reunited to overcome

alienation.

### *Capital*

The Jubilee institution provides relief from repayment of the loan. The mortgagee cannot charge any interest on the loan or even demand that the capital be returned to him in the 50th year. Since the mortgagee uses the land, the produce from the land is valued as equal to the capital and interest. Of course, it depends upon the amount borrowed, the number of years of the mortgage and the yielding capacity of the land. When the mortgager wants to redeem the land, he needs to pay only the balance for the number of years the mortgagee cannot use the land.

If the family cannot redeem it due to their poverty, then in the 50th year the land should be restored to the family without demanding the return of the borrowed capital. Families are relieved of their debts since the money-lender has used the land till the Jubilee year and enjoyed the fruits of the land. In spite of the writing off of their debts and restoration of their land, the families also need money to start cultivating the land once again and to maintain their family until the next harvest. Mere liberation of land and labour is not enough. If financial aid is not extended, the poor family will once again need to borrow money by mortgaging their land and so become slaves again.

So another law took care of this problem (Deut. 15:12-15). This law insisted that rich landlords should provide enough food, grain, cattle, wine, oil, and money to the poor family to start their new life. Such a sharing of resources with the poor

sustains them until they reap the harvest of their land. Not only the remission of debts, restoration of land and liberation of labour are important but also the sharing of resources to establish their new life.

### **Theological Dimension**

The theological justification for providing the redemption of land and labourer is stated in Lev. 25:23-24:

The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants. And in all the country you possess, you shall provide for the redemption of the land.

While Ex. 19:5-6; Deut. 10:14 and Ps. 24:1 speak of Yahweh's ownership of the whole earth in general, Lev. 25:23-24 speaks of the ownership of the agricultural land. That the Israelites are the tenants of the land is worth noting. First, Yahweh's explicit claim to the agricultural land is seen in the reason for prohibiting the sale of land in Lev. 25:23. Concerning the meaning of the phrase 'for the land is mine' in v. 23b, two views have been expressed. One is that the word 'land' (*erets*) refers in general to the ground or territory that the people of Israel will possess and dwell in. Here it signifies Yahweh's ownership of the promised territory.<sup>2</sup>

Another view is that it refers to the

<sup>2</sup> A. R. S. Kennedy, *Leviticus and Numbers: Introduction*. Rev. Ed. (CB: Edinburgh, T.C. & E.C. Jack, n.d.), p. 166; J. R. Porter, *Leviticus* (CBC: Cambridge UP, 1976), p. 201; M. Ottosson, 'erets', *TDOT*: 1 (1974), p. 401; N. Micklem, *The Book of Leviticus*. Vol. 2. Ed. G. A. Buttrick (IB; Nashville: Abingdon, 1953), p. 123; G. J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (NICOT; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1979), p. 320.

farmland or agricultural fields of the families.<sup>3</sup> According to this view, v. 23b signifies Yahweh's ownership of the agricultural land within the promised territory. Since scholarly opinions differ regarding the meaning of the word *erets* in v. 23b, and the same word appears four times in vv. 23-24, it is necessary to make clear how this word is used in the text.

The word *erets* which appears in v. 24a 'and in all the country you possess' refers to the territory which they are going to possess and settle down in and live as Yahweh's sojourners and strangers. The use of the preposition 'in' (*ba*), which usually refers to a location, and the instruction to grant redemption for the agricultural land in the territory which has been possessed by them, indicate that the word *erets* in v. 24a means the territory of the promised land.

*Erets* in v. 23b, however, 'for the land is mine', refers to the agricultural land and not the promised territory. For the phrase 'for the land is mine' (v.23b) is closely linked to v. 23a by the causal particle (*ki*) and stands as the direct reason for the prohibition of permanent sale of agricultural land. This logical connection leads us to regard *erets* in v. 23b as agricultural land rather than the promised territory. Furthermore, we know this from the main thrust of Lev. 25:1-24. Details such as giving

rest to the fields in the seventh year (vv. 1-7, 20-22), selling and buying fields according to the number of years for crops (vv. 13-16), abundant yields of the field (vv. 18-19), redeeming the land by the kin and returning the fields in the Jubilee year (vv. 10, 24, 28) are all concerned with agriculture. So, the word *erets* which is used in connection with selling, buying, redeeming and returning the land in v.23a and v.24b, must refer to the fields of the family.

Second, an implicit claim of Yahweh to the agricultural land is expressed through the law of rest to the land in the seventh year (Lev. 25:1-7, 20-22.) Although expressions such as 'your fields' and 'your vineyards' (vv. 1-7, 20-22) and 'each of you shall return to his property' (vv. 10, 13) seem to indicate that the land, fields and vineyards belong to the Israelites, they do not. They should instead be understood in relation to the main thrust of Lev. 25:1-24: these agricultural lands belong to Yahweh and they are left in the Israelite's possession like land left in the custody of tenants. The condition that the Israelites should give rest to the agricultural land in the seventh year laid down by Yahweh is to remind and make them realize that Yahweh is the owner and they cannot use the land according to their own will as if they are the owners.

Such 'a resting period' (*sabbat*) or 'a year of solemn rest' (*sabat sabaton*) for the land is described as 'sabbatical period for Yahweh' (*sabat layahweh*) in vv. 2 and 4. The purpose of leaving the land fallow in the

<sup>3</sup> R. North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee* (Anal. Bibl. 4; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1954), p. 158; N. H. Snaith, *Leviticus and Numbers* (CB; London: Nelson, 1967), p. 164; R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC, Leicester: IVP, 1980), p. 226.

seventh year is neither for the use of the poor nor for the use of the people of Israel in general. No one is allowed to sow, plough, harvest or use that land in any way in the seventh year (vv. 2-5.) The land must be left completely to its rest during that period. The humanitarian dimension expressed in Ex. 23:10-11 is mostly interpreted in the sense of allowing the poor to go and collect the food available in the fallow land in the seventh year. The poor always found some fallow land in their region, or nearby, year after year and so survived. Here the emphasis is on the charitable aspect of the sabbatical year.

There is some truth in this interpretation if we understand that the land left as fallow in the Sabbath year is not the same land taken as a mortgage from another family. If the land left as fallow is the land of another family, then we can also interpret it as allowing the family which lost it to return to their land in the sabbatical year, not just to collect food, but to claim it again and keep it in their possession. The land returns to the original owner in the sabbatical year. This does not conflict with the idea of the sabbatical year of rest for the land. For, from the perspective of the mortgagee, it is a fallow year for the land and so he cannot cultivate that piece of land. From the perspective of the mortgager who lost it for six years, it is a year to enter into the land to collect food and thus reverse the ownership. This right is provided by the divine rule of the sabbatical year.

This aspect is further emphasized

by the theological dimension of Lev. 25:1-7 where the resting period of the land is called a resting year for the sake of Yahweh. To observe the rest for the land in the seventh year throughout the promised territory is to acknowledge that Yahweh is the owner of the land and that Yahweh has given it as his gift for their use. I also think the implication of expressions such as 'a resting period for Yahweh', 'sabbatical year of solemn rest', and 'a year of solemn rest' to the land in Lev. 25, is that the land is redistributed in the sabbatical year. A detailed study is needed to see the link between the sabbatical year and the redistribution of land.

The two conditions Yahweh placed on the Israelites, namely, not to sell the land because it belongs to him, and to give rest to the land in the seventh year, indicate that the Israelites are only tenant-workers. The idea that the Israelites are not the owners of the land is further made clear by describing their landless status as that of sojourners and strangers. Such sojourners dwell in somebody's land with the permission of the landlord or the local community and could be employed by the landlord or the community to cultivate the land.<sup>4</sup> However, Israelites as tenants were allowed to sell the right of use to another family only in times of poverty (v. 25) and they were not

<sup>4</sup> For details on 'sojourners' and 'strangers': R de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, pp. 74-76; D. Kellermann, 'gur; ger; geruth; meghurim', *TDOT*: 2 (1977), pp. 439-449; C. J. H. Wright, 'Family, Land and property in Ancient Israel: Some Aspects of Old Testament Ethics' (PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge, 1976), pp. 61f.

allowed to sell the ownership of land.

This is made clear to us, first, from the expressions 'according to the number of crops after the Jubilee you shall buy', 'according to the number of years for crops he shall sell' (v. 15) and 'the number of crops that he is selling' (v. 16). The word 'crops' (*tebuah*) here means a series of cultivation on the land and indicates that only the use of the land is sold and not the ownership of the land. That families can only mortgage the land is expressed, secondly, by a prohibition, 'Do not sell the land for annihilation' (*lisimitut*, v. 23) which means the sale of land must not cancel the right of recovering the land.<sup>5</sup> No one in Israel has the right to sell the land to another person as if that land is in his ownership. They can only mortgage it for a period with the view to redeeming it.

Two kinds of redemption of the land are outlined in Lev. 25:25-28, namely, redemption by the nearest kin of the family that mortgaged the land (v.25), and, redemption by the seller himself (vv. 25-28). The theology of Yahweh's ownership of land does not deny the responsibility of the tenant or his kinsman. The person who sold the land to another party is expected to redeem that part of the land on mortgage, improving his financial situation either by cultivating the rest of the land or by some other means. If he is unable to improve his financial situation, the nearest kinsman can pay

the money to the one who bought the land, presumably at some time in the middle of the sale period, reclaim the right of use and restore the land to the seller.<sup>6</sup>

The tenancy system demands family solidarity. If these possibilities fail, then the land should be returned in the Jubilee year to the family which mortgaged it. No payment is necessary at the time of returning the land in the Jubilee year because the price is worked out according to the number of years of cultivation, taking into consideration the marginal gain of the buyer and the money received by the seller for the number of years he could not cultivate his land. If the whole capital, or part of it, has to be returned after the completion of the sale period, then the buyer gets a great bargain. He enjoys the produce for the full period of mortgage as well as getting back some money. That is why Lev. 25:13-28 does not say that the capital should be returned after the completion of the sale period in order to get back the right of use, only the 'balance of payment' when the land is redeemed by the seller in the middle of the sale period.

### Historical Dimension

Historical criticism raises questions regarding the origin of the idea of the Jubilee year and the actual practice of it in ancient Israel. Since this text is from the Priestly writer, it could be said that the Priestly group invented

<sup>5</sup> Rui de Menzes, 'The Pentateuchal Theology of Land' *Bible Bhashyam* 12 (1986), p. 23; Wright, 'Family, Land and Property,' p. 56.

<sup>6</sup> M. Noth, *Leviticus: a Commentary* (OTL; Trans. J. E. Anderson, London: SCM, 1981), p. 189; North, *Sociology*, pp. 165f.



the idea of Jubilee during their exilic experience in Babylon and introduced it through their Holiness Code. As such, it is an exilic law. Jeffrey Fager points out that J. R. Porter and Anton Jirku believe that the ancient Israelite had the idea of land redemption in the Jubilee year because their patriarchs practised tribal ethics, which insisted on the redemption of land.<sup>7</sup> He also quotes the view of S. Bess, who suggests that the combination of poverty and accumulation of land in the monarchical period could have created the Jubilee law.<sup>8</sup> Finally, the idea of land belonging to god in the Ancient Near East is another reason for a very early date for the Jubilee tradition.

These three reasons (tribal ethics, economic situation and theological ideas from the Ancient Near East) suggest the existence of a tradition of periodic redistribution of land in the pre-exilic period. Apart from these, we cannot ignore the possibility of a move to counter the Canaanite tradition of permanent ownership of land by the rulers and landlords. For example, Moses' tradition of distributing the land equally to families, insisting on the idea of *nahala*, and the tradition of redistribution of land in the pre-exilic period could counter the Canaanite system which was influencing them during the period of settlement and of the monarchy.

However, Fager believes that there could have been some sort of tradi-

tion of periodic redistribution of land in the pre-exilic period but that such a tradition could have become the law of the Jubilee under the influence of the Priestly group in the exilic period for two main reasons. First, their intention was to help the returning exiles to obtain their land. Those who left the land and went into exile needed their land in which to live and produce food when they returned. These exiles who underwent difficulties should not feel doubly punished—alienated from the land in exile, and landless after returning. The concern of the priests was to give economic power to the returning exiles by introducing the law of the returning of the land after 49 years. This could also heal ill-feelings between the returning Israelites and those already living in the land and help to create one single, united community of Yahweh.<sup>9</sup>

The second intention of the Priestly group was to assert their authority on the community by modifying the old Mosaic tradition of distribution of land so that each family has the right to their share of land through the Jubilee law, and placing this law in the context of the legal code of Sinai. This results in the redistribution of land and overcoming of the economic disorder caused over the years by the accumulation of land by purchase and money loans or the departure of families either to survive the famine or into exile.<sup>10</sup>

Fager is of the opinion that redistribution in every Jubilee could have

<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey A. Fager, 'Land Tenure and the Biblical Jubilee: Uncovering Hebrew Ethics through the Sociology of Knowledge', *JSOT Supplement* 155 (Sheffield: SAP, 1993), pp. 27-29.

<sup>8</sup> Fager, 'Land Tenure,' pp. 29-32.

<sup>9</sup> Fager, 'Land Tenure,' pp. 60-63.

<sup>10</sup> Fager, 'Land Tenure,' pp. 54-56.

been disastrous to the economy. He thinks that the Priestly group intended some sort of distribution of land to those families which lost land, not a thorough redistribution throughout the land in the Jubilee year.<sup>11</sup> The Priestly group made a compromise between the ideal of total redistribution and failure to redistribute the land by introducing the idea of land redistribution through the law of the Jubilee year. But how can the Priestly group speak of one thing and mean another? In my opinion, practical difficulties in the redistribution of the land in the Jubilee year and some economic problems could not be avoided. Oppressive forces would have definitely tried to hinder the implementation of the Jubilee law. Denial of redistribution is more disastrous to the community life. The gap widens between the rich and poor, and this could lead to class struggle.

The linking of the Sabbath to the land in the text of Jubilee (Lev. 25) and the suggestion of the calculation of the Jubilee year by multiplying Sabbaths, leads me to think that there was a periodic redistribution of land once in seven years as Yahweh cancels the tenancy right on the sabbatical year and renews it again. It seems the observance of the sabbatical year of release of land and the forgiveness of debts in the earlier period by families according to their own sabbatical calendar could have failed by the 8th century. The Priestly group, who knew of this failure and the message of the 8th century

prophets, modified the idea of a sabbatical year periodic redistribution to once in 50 years as a compromise for the sake of the returning exiles. However, their remarkable achievement was to enable the release of land and labourer in the Jubilee year without the repayment of the capital and interest. We can notice that the Jubilee law of the Priestly code is a combination and modification of the earlier three important laws of the sabbatical year: rest to the land, release of slaves and servants and lending financial help without interest as stated in the Covenant code.

In my opinion, redistribution of land in the sabbatical year could have been revived as a practical possibility because:

- i) It gives a short period of six years for possessing the mortgaged land.
- ii) The Sabbath tradition is deeply rooted in Israel both in terms of rest and releasing the slaves.
- iii) The mortgager would also like to see the release of the land without any payment on the seventh year and reassert his economic position.
- iv) Because of its flexibility the Sabbath year release could be worked out locally with the help of the two parties and the elders or priests in the village more easily than adhering to a uniform, national Jubilee year for the country.

So it seems to me that the preferable option is to have the tradition of a local release of land and labourers once in seven years. But a national law is also needed to force the

<sup>11</sup> Fager, 'Land Tenure,' pp. 110-111.

defaulters to release the land to the original owner, release the bonded labourers and forgive the debts at least once in 50 years.

Having examined the situation, we can see that there are several salient features of the Jubilee institution that challenge us, whether we are involved in agriculture or in some other profession.

i) By declaring that the land belongs to God, the Jubilee institution makes the agricultural land sacred. It does not mean that people cannot enter or use it, but they cannot own it as their permanent property. Converting agricultural land, which produces food for people, into industrial or amusement parks or highways and airports in a country like India needs to be rethought.

ii) The Jubilee institution that insists on redistribution of land to the landless stops the growth of large estates (latifundism) by a few rich people, thus giving more political and economic power to the poor.

iii) Jubilee attaches people to the land and underlines the close relationship between the two. People need the land and the land needs the people to live, produce food and take care of it.

iv) Jubilee emphasizes the economic viability of families to live, cultivate and grow food. Each family can stand on its own feet without depending on others for food. This sustainability is brought out in the Jubilee law.

v) Since redemption of land by kith and kin—the ‘goel’ concept—is emphasized in the Jubilee regulation, family solidarity is demanded.

vi) Jubilee envisages the possibility of a new egalitarian society here and now. It is not a utopia, but rather a realistic goal that can be achieved if the community co-operates.

vii) Jubilee also implies that in any period of 50 years, the socio-economic system can go wrong and disparities can arise but Jubilee provides an on-going mechanism for periodic redistribution and the recycling of the social order.

### Revitalization

By introducing the Jubilee institution, the Priestly group revitalized the tradition of the release of land, labourer and forgiveness of debts in Israel. As the ‘intelligentsia’ of the Israelite community, with cultic authority and in the absence of the monarchy in the post-exilic period, the Priestly group could have even made the effort to implement it and reorder the new community in the post-exilic period. Jubilee could have been made a meaningful celebration to the communities. Jubilee brings reconciliation and rejoicing. The poor who lost the land and went into servitude for a number of years should rejoice at receiving their land once again. The 50th year wipes away their tears after a long period of poverty and suffering. They are set free to exercise their right to enjoy their land in freedom and dignity.

Rejoicing is not just for emotional satisfaction. It has a spiritual effect. It contributes to the healing of the estranged relationships between the rich and the poor. By rejoicing in what God has initiated to set things right, the poor in society can get rid

of their bitter feelings towards those who oppress them. Real joy in society is possible only when the poor forgive their oppressors. The rich need the forgiveness of the poor and powerless. The wealthy need to repent, rectify their injustice, and restore the losses to their victims. Jubilee year is a special year for repentance and forgiveness and reconciling the broken relationships in society.

The rich people also can rejoice because they are repenting and restoring the land to the families who lost it, setting them free to cultivate the land and helping them with various resources to restart their life in the new era. Real joy is not in the accumulation of wealth and enjoying the labour of others, but in sharing and enabling the poor to regain power and dignity and seeing them rejoicing. The rich should be thankful to God for the Jubilee law that counters their selfish nature and compels them to contribute to the process of achieving equality and welfare for all. Like the Priestly group in Israel, churches today are expected to revitalize the meaningful Jubilee tradition to redeem land and the labourer and provide forgiveness of debts.

India experienced a similar distribution of land by the rich to the landless through an institution called 'Boodan Movement' ('Boomi' means land; 'dan' means gift) initiated in April 1951 by Acharya Vinoba Bhave, an ardent follower of Mahatma Gandhi and his ideals.<sup>12</sup> Soon

after independence, the process of consolidation of the states into the formation of union of India continued. During this period (1947-1951), peasants in different states were involved in the struggles, claiming their rights to own land. Some of these peasant movements in West Bengal (Naxalite) and Andhra Pradesh (Telangana) were violent and many landlords were killed. Vinoba went to these riot-stricken areas and pleaded with the landlords to distribute land to landless farmers. Voluntarily giving land as a gift went on from 1951 to 1961 in many parts of India.

The Gandhian School, led by Vinobha, introduced another institution called 'Gramdan' ('Gram' means 'villages'; 'dan' means 'gift') in January 1957 after seeing the success of Boodan Movement. It provided the opportunity for the rich to donate lands to the villages to hold them as a common property. Families in villages can only make use of these lands donated to their village to produce food and cannot claim ownership. This paved the way for cooperative farming in many villages. Even though the Boodan Movement and Gramdan Movement did not achieve a thorough redistribution of land and recycling of the economy, they proved that land distribution is possible without violence. They were timely actions to help the landless soon after our liberation from the British, who could have done a major land reform in our country during their 150 years of rule. I am not equating the Gandhian movements of Boodan and Gramdan to the bib-

<sup>12</sup> C. B. Mamoria and B. B. Tripathi, *Agricultural Problem of India*, (New Delhi: Kitab Mahal, 1989), pp. 713-719.

lical Jubilee institution of the Priestly group. But there is a similarity: whenever a nation is liberated from bondage (Egyptian), or exile (Babylonian), or colonial rule (British), land is the foremost issue to be dealt with.

### **Contemporary Challenges**

Biblical messages remind us of the need to make our lives more meaningful to our society. Land alienation happens quickly, and many people in India are becoming poor, leaving their villages in search of jobs in towns and cities. One of the main reasons for leaving the land and becoming bonded labourers is the problem of debt. In times of monsoon failure, extra medical or education expenses, or marriages of children, house repairs, purchase of seed and fertilizers, farmers borrow money from money-lenders by mortgaging their land. Unable to pay the capital and interest, they transfer the ownership of their land forever to the money-lenders and surrender themselves as their servants. Now they plough their land for the sake of their new master.

The reviving of the biblical idea of Jubilee in the last decade has challenged many of our churches and missionary organizations. The theology of land is becoming prominent in India. Three missionaries belonging to one of the missionary organizations in India have initiated a scheme to help the tribals in their area. Farmers bring the best of their wheat harvest to be stored in the church as seed to be used in the next cultivation, rather than selling all their harvest at a low price and then later bor-

rowing money from the money-lenders to buy the seed for sowing. They use the church as the seed-bank and later as a marketing place to sell their harvest at a good price. Some of the tribals who co-operated with this scheme were able to redeem their land. The mediating role of this church in storing the seed and promoting the sale and clearing their debts was not liked by the money-lenders. They accused the missionaries of converting the tribals to Christianity and finally set fire to the church. This kind of micro-level social action in redeeming the land and labourers is repeated in different parts of India.

However, loans and debts are problems not only for the farmers but also for the people who are working in organized and unorganized sectors in the cities and towns. They borrow money from the illegal money-lenders and also fall into the debt trap. Many Christians think that the Jubilee challenges are not relevant to the people living in towns and cities, since most of them do not own land or are not involved in agriculture. But some industrial workers go home without their salary and borrow again to sustain their family. Some of them hesitate to go out of the company confines, and stay inside the campus until late at night to avoid the money-lenders waiting at the gate. Some of them take leave on pay-day to avoid money-lenders. If they regularly avoid the money-lenders and fail to pay the interest on their loans, they are beaten and their wives and children are ill-treated by the money-lenders.

A survey was made by our students to find out the seriousness of loans and debts of the poor living in a particular area near our seminary and the problems faced by them from the money-lenders. These money-lenders collect Rupee 1 per day as interest for a loan of Rs.100. It looks as if it is a very low interest rate, but it is calculated per day. A poor labourer who borrowed Rs.500 pays Rs.5 as daily interest which makes Rs.1825 in interest by the end of the year. The loan of Rs.500 still remains an unsettled burden. Money-lenders encourage their borrowers not to worry about the capital now but to continue to pay the interest regularly. The small capital lent is used as a hook to fetch a big income through interest. If the person is unable to return the capital borrowed, they will remain on the hook, paying the interest continuously for years. These people who are hooked to the vicious cycle of debts undergo mental agony, become sick, and resort to alcohol and drugs and even commit suicide.

Churches and missions are fighting not only against these principalities and powers but also against our government. The ruling BJP government in New Delhi (religious fundamentalist party of Hinduism) and their militant outfits like RSS and Bajrang Dal (suspected of killing the Australian missionary, Graham Staines, and his two sons in Orissa) see the Christian mission activities of evangelism and liberation as a threat to their status quo and their policy of keeping the poor as poor and the rich as rich, low caste as low and high caste as high. So, the liberative actions are accused of being conversions. This government celebrated the 50th year of Independence as a mere political function, ignoring economic and social reform. There is a great need for solidarity and co-operation of leaders in politics, religion and economics to make the ideals of Jubilee more meaningful to the people in a local area or at the national level. This is urgently needed in the light of the mounting debts of the Third World countries.

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# The Doctrine of Holiness and Missions: A Pietistic Foundation of African Evangelical Christianity

Robert Kipkemoi Lang'at

**Keywords:** African religion; faith missions; Wesleyanism; Quakerism; holiness, revivals

## I Introduction

When President Daniel Arap Moi of Kenya came to power in 1978, he elevated evangelical Christianity to a level not before paralleled in Kenyan history. He abolished traditional beer 'clubs' in all market places of Kenya and championed a crusade against female circumcision. It is easy to attribute these actions to his altruistic political philosophy of *Nyayoism*.<sup>1</sup> However, as hinted by his biogra-

pher, Andrew Morton, these political decisions can perhaps be better explained by Moi's evangelical upbringing in the church of the Africa Inland Mission, the Africa Inland Church.

This was a life which involved 'rigorous self-discipline', was 'puritanical', and was a 'devout Christian

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<sup>1</sup> 'Nyayo' is a swahili word for 'footsteps.' As a political slogan, the second president of Kenya popularized 'Nyayo' as an indication of following in the nationalistic footsteps of the first president. It was, however, a synthesis of religious overtones and political ideology as a philosophical basis of nationhood. Thus *Nyayoism* entails threefold virtues of peace, love and unity. In praxis, President Moi calls this being mindful of other people's welfare as typified by the many social projects initiated during his tenure. These tenets are clearly espoused in his book *Kenya African Nationalism: Nyayo Philosophy and Principles* (Nairobi: Macmillan, 1986). A close study of this political philosophy shows striking similarities to the biblical golden rule and what John Wesley often explained as the essence of holiness: loving the Lord with all the heart, mind, and strength and loving the neighbour as one's self.

faith'.<sup>2</sup> Many within the Africa Inland Church (AIC) today call this 'Ukristo Wa AIC' (unique AIC Christianity). For an astute historian of the holiness movement and pietism, these are definite marks of a revivalist, holiness, missionary legacy. It is a legacy that, though largely uninformed by its original western theoretical foundation, continues to manifest itself in the ethos of African evangelicalism. Sample any evangelical church in Africa and the same pietistic trends are observable. To understand both African spirituality and church renewal, then, it is imperative to pay close attention to the revival roots of Christianity in the African continent.

While it is true that the revival movement played a key role in world missions, holiness as the theological content of these revivals has scarcely been studied. Given that most, if not all, of the North Atlantic hemisphere evangelical mission agencies that sent missionaries to Africa before the 1930s were fully embedded in the revival sub-culture, it is also true that the doctrine of holiness played a crucial role in shaping the nature of African Christianity. The task of explicating this phenomenon has not yet been fully explored. No historical account of Christianity in Africa to date fully examines the role holiness played in the spiritual, theoretical, and theological formation of the missionaries who went there. Furthermore, how the perception of this doctrine affected their view of

missions and their specific objectives as they ministered in Africa also awaits full analysis.

There is also the challenge of studying the process of cross-cultural establishment of a holiness constituency in Africa. What holiness meant to Africans living within cultural and linguistic contexts different from those of the western missionaries needs some investigation. More importantly, how the national church leadership has continued the vision of propagating the heritage once delivered is yet to be accounted for. The purpose of this article is to give a brief historical overview of the doctrine of holiness as it relates to African missions with a view to stimulating further research and discussions along the same lines.

## II. Pre-missionary African Concepts of Holiness

Whether Africans had a concept of holiness prior to the advent of western missionary Christianity is a contested issue. Thus part of the process of understanding how Africans appropriated the doctrine involves a thorough study of the African traditional view of sanctification. It requires a study of African understanding of soteriology as mediated through cleansing rituals. Postulating the absence of the idea of holiness in Islamic and Bantu literature before the advent of European missionaries, P. J. L. Frankl and Yahya Ali Omar have noted that 'the available evidence suggests that in the mid-nineteenth century at the second coming of European-Christians to the East African coast, there was no

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<sup>2</sup> Andrew Morton, *Moi: The Making of an African Statesman* (London: Michael O'Mara, 1998), p. 36.



lexical equivalent for [the term] "holy" or its near synonym in the spoken language of the Swahili people'.<sup>3</sup> Though the absence of a lexical equivalent neither invalidates the necessity of holiness nor suggests the Africans could not process holiness through their thought patterns, it does suggest that there is a sense in which the total implication of holiness theology is novel to African spirituality.

John S. Mbiti, in his study of African philosophy and religions, argues that there is no direct reference to the holiness of God in Africa and that though the 'concept of holiness' is present in ritual, moral matters and linguistically in (many) African languages, 'the word "holiness" or "holy" in its theological usage do not seem to exist'.<sup>4</sup> Of course much depends on what Mbiti meant by the difference between 'concept' and 'theological usage'. If Mbiti's assertions are correct, they raise questions about how much the African languages and rituals 'prepared them' for the reception of biblical holiness. They also lead one to wonder how the missionaries succeeded, using these 'inadequate' media, if at all they did, as they were often more critical of the 'profanity' that prevailed in the African religious practices. More research is required to ascertain whether the African concept of holiness had an ontological transformative nature, where one

would be thought to be like a god, or if the concept was merely ceremonial, providing positional cleansing.

### III Methodism-Holiness and Missions

The best place to begin a discussion on holiness and missions is with Methodism. For brevity's sake, this article will give an overview of theological developments within Methodism that link holiness and missions. It is quite easy to see someone like John Wesley, who spent almost all his life in the British Isles after his failed missionary trip to the colony of Georgia, as a non-starter in missions. Indeed, just as it is difficult to find a sizable text that studies the contributions of John Wesley to family life, it is difficult to find one that interprets his theology missiologically. Much credit is usually given to his colleague, Thomas Coke, as the 'Father of Methodist World Missions'. However, Wesley learnt a lesson from his American experience—Europe without 'real Christianity' would not be able to convert the world. After his Aldersgate experience of 1738, Wesley spent the rest of his life trying to build the Methodists as a leaven of 'pure Christianity' that would spread to the rest of the world. In the process of doing so he established a missionary ideology that would spark the birth of generations of missionary societies out of the evangelical revivals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. John Wesley understood holiness as a mark of 'real Christianity'.

In his 1783 sermon, *The General Spread of the Gospel*, John Wesley

<sup>3</sup> P. J. L. Frank and Yahya Ali Omar, 'The Idea of the 'Holy' in Swahili', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, (1999), XXIX, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> John S. Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa* (London: SPCK, 1970), pp. 41-42.

saw the rise of Methodism in England as a providential leaven to spread scriptural holiness throughout the world. He foresaw a time when the 'leaven of pure and undefiled religion...of inward and outward holiness would spread to the remotest parts not only of Europe but of Asia, Africa and America.'<sup>5</sup> The greatest boost to this holiness world vision was given by the post-American civil war holiness revivals. By the beginning of the twentieth century holiness was no longer a mere incentive or justification of world evangelization but an organizational strategy, the very basis and object of missions. The National Holiness Association for the Promotion of Holiness, organized earlier in 1867, thought the time had come 'for the holiness people, to use their holiness money, through holiness channels, to support holiness missionaries, who will do holiness work in the foreign fields'.<sup>6</sup> This perception had profound consequences with regard to the role of the doctrine of holiness in world evangelization.<sup>7</sup> Certain events, however, were pre-udes to this larger organizational endeavour for the course of holiness overseas. Most of these efforts were individual and though respected, were often deemed by the holiness people as 'unorganized'.

<sup>5</sup> John Wesley, 'The General Spread of the Gospel,' *Sermons* Vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), pp. 277-288.

<sup>6</sup> C. W. Ruth, 'Some Reasons for the New Missionary Society', *Christian Witness and Advocate of Bible Holiness* (September 1, 1910), p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> The interrelationship between holiness and world missions is a subject that has not been fully explored. This paper is limited to the African context.

Amanda Berry Smith and William Taylor are two individuals mentioned in the history of the National Holiness Missionary Society (NHMS)<sup>8</sup> who could not be confined to one country because of their 'holiness world vision'.<sup>9</sup> Though the two came at the time of ecclesiological and missiological tensions in mainline Methodism, they did not belong to the tradition of 'the come-outer' but the group that sought to use camp meetings, literature, foreign missions and other means to promote the doctrine of entire sanctification. When William Taylor organized revivals in South Africa in 1866, before Keswick Conventions started (1875), he introduced Andrew Murray, of the Dutch Reformed Church, to the doctrine of sanctification.<sup>10</sup> Murray turned out to be a prolific writer on holiness and closely allied himself to Keswick Conventions in South Africa in the latter part of his life.<sup>11</sup> Murray's holiness legacy is difficult to ascertain. Though perhaps an unusual candidate for holiness

<sup>8</sup> This was the official missionary society inaugurated in 1910 by the Methodists aligned to the National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness. It is the current *World Gospel Mission*. When it first started the missionaries were sent to China. Kenya is at present the largest field of this Wesleyan mission agency.

<sup>9</sup> W. W. Cary, *Story of the National Holiness Missionary Society: The Whole Gospel for the Whole World* (Chicago, IL: National Holiness Missionary Society, 1940), p. 293.

<sup>10</sup> William Taylor, *The Flaming Torch in the Darkest of Africa* (New York: Eaton, 1898), p. 365.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Murray, in a clear divergence from his Reformed theological heritage, wrote over two hundred books, most of them on the subject of holiness and the Holy Spirit. See the reproductions by Bethany House Publishers which include: Andrew Murray, *The Believer's Full Blessing of Pentecost* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1984) and *Revival* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1990).

promotion, his theological contributions do not seem to have made significant impact on interracial equity and against growing apartheid tendencies in the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC).

On the other hand, Amanda B. Smith helped William Taylor in Africa 'turn the Methodist mission there into a holiness crusade'.<sup>12</sup> Taylor produced a mix of Methodist doctrines, self-supporting missions strategy and holiness theology.<sup>13</sup> Holiness had not been the central theme of the Liberian revival and its impact had waned by the time Smith arrived in 1882.<sup>14</sup> In Clay-Ashland, Liberia, she wrote that 'for a long time there has been a good deal of interest manifested among a number of Christians on the subject of personal holiness'.<sup>15</sup> In a language reminiscent of that used in America, she stated that she had begun a 'meeting once a month, for the promotion of holiness'.<sup>16</sup> Out of these arose an association called

'Clay-Ashland Holiness Association'.<sup>17</sup> A holiness camp meeting was held at Cape Palmas, Liberia in 1886. This brought together Christians from Presbyterian, Baptist, Congregational and Methodist churches.<sup>18</sup> This testifies to the fact that the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification influenced Reformed theology with in contexts beyond North America. In this case, a revivalist ecumenicity emerged in West Africa as a result of Taylor/Smith holiness revivals. By the advent of the twentieth century, William Taylor and Amanda B. Smith had retired from active missionary service. The duo represented a generation of maverick holiness missionaries that operated with a loose attachment to their denominations.<sup>19</sup>

#### IV Faith Missions and Holiness

In the rise of what are generally referred to as 'faith missions' and distinctively holiness missions, the doctrine of holiness became an important force in missions. Peniel Mission<sup>20</sup> stood as a transitional influence for a number of missionaries

<sup>12</sup> Timothy L. Smith, *Called Unto Holiness: The Story of the Nazarenes* (Kansas City: Nazarene, 1962), p. 41.

<sup>13</sup> See *Report of Bishop Taylor's Self-Supporting Missions*, July 1, 1884-March 24, 1888, pp. 24, 26; Bishop Taylor's committee listed holiness and self-supporting policy as part of the covenants to be subscribed to by the missionary candidates. In addition to the Methodist Episcopal Church's questions on going into perfection, Taylor included being entirely consecrated to God and cleansed from all sin as qualifications for the missionaries. In addition they were to indicate freedom from use of liquor, tobacco and other narcotics.

<sup>14</sup> Adrienne M. Israel, *Amanda Berry Smith: From Washerwoman to Evangelist* (Lanham: Scarecrow, 1998), p. 76.

<sup>15</sup> Amanda B. Smith, *An Autobiography*, p. 380.

<sup>16</sup> Smith, *An Autobiography*, p. 381.

<sup>17</sup> Smith, *An Autobiography*, p. 381.

<sup>18</sup> Smith, *An Autobiography*, pp. 472-473.

<sup>19</sup> Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989), p. 214.

<sup>20</sup> Peniel Mission was founded in Los Angeles in 1886 by Manie Payne Ferguson and Theodore Pollock Ferguson as an answer for the need for mid-week fellowship ministry and rescue missions for the burgeoning population of Los Angeles. The Fergusons established the *Peniel Hall* as a meeting place, *Peniel Herald* as the mission's publication, and *Peniel Missionary Institute* to train its staff. It soon developed into a series of rescue missions in the Western coast of the United States. Peniel Mission expanded its 'Home Missions' work to incorporate

who went to Africa under the faith principle. The role of Peniel Mission in world missions has not been fully appreciated. Its formation was a culmination of holiness revivals gaining momentum in the American western frontiers. Manie Payne Ferguson and Theodore Pollock Ferguson were behind the inception of Peniel Mission in 1886. Pollock Ferguson, a Presbyterian, was introduced to the experience of sanctification in Wesleyan terms during a holiness meeting under Lucius B. Fuller at Oberlin College.<sup>21</sup> Ferguson eventually 'got sanctified' at Santa Barbara, California in 1880 under Harden Wallace

and Henry Ashcraft.<sup>22</sup> He attended and participated in several Methodist camp meetings across the United States.<sup>23</sup> There is no doubt that one of those who inspired Ferguson was Bishop William Taylor whom he heard and 'bought all his books' at the Round Lake Camp Meeting, New Jersey in 1882.<sup>24</sup>

Peniel Mission and the World Gospel Mission merged in 1957.<sup>25</sup> Before the above event became a reality, Peniel Missions played a vital role in the 'pre-history' of the World Gospel Mission (WGM) and other 'faith missions'. A missionary couple, Burnette and Gerald Fish, mentioned in their book three 'full-circles' in relation to the development of WGM in Kenya.<sup>26</sup> These 'full circles' point to the way the Africa Inland Church (1895) and the Kenya Yearly Meeting of Friends (1902) were related to the Africa Gospel Church (1932). What needs to be emphasized is the fact that the three denom-

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world missions and sent missionaries to Mexico, India and Egypt. Apart from its own direct missionary involvement, Peniel Mission became a transition place from mainline ecclesiastical structures to more independent overseas missionaries, holiness denominations, and mission agencies mentioned in the text (See Carl Bangs, *Phineas F. Bresee: His Life in Methodism, the Holiness Movement and the Church of the Nazarene*, [Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1995]; Laura Trachsel, *Kindled Fires in Africa* [Marion, IN: World Gospel Mission, 1960]; and Burnette C. Fish and Gerald W. Fish, *The Place of Songs: A History of the World Gospel Mission and the Africa Gospel Mission in Kenya* [Kericho, Kenya: World Gospel Mission, 1989]). Peniel Mission merged its ministries with the World Gospel Mission in 1957.

<sup>21</sup> Manie Payne Ferguson, *T. P. Ferguson: the Love Slave of Jesus Christ and His People and Founder of Peniel Missions* (Los Angeles: np, nd), p. 21. The title of the book is suggestive of the two Wesleyan motifs: love for God and humanity. This also motivated the Salvation Army missiological approach and was used by other Wesleyan bodies to justify the connection between holiness and missions; (see Editorial of *The Christian Witness and Advocate of Bible Holiness*, January 12, 1911, p. 8) -'Jesus forever settled the question of holiness and foreign missions [when he affirmed the lawyer's respond that] thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy strength and with all thy mind, and thy neighbour as thyself.'

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<sup>22</sup> Ferguson, *The Love Slave*, p. 23.

<sup>23</sup> Ashcraft has been identified as representing the more radical 'come-outism' movement within the Methodist Episcopal Church and that part of the move to establish Peniel Mission was meant to be a middle ground between staying in the denominations and forming new ones, a move that provided the holiness people a 'third way' that would lead to formation of independent missions and consequently gave 'the Holiness Movement institutional form without conflicting with the Churches'. See Carl Bangs, *Phineas F. Bresee: His Life in Methodism, the Holiness Movement and the Church of the Nazarene* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1995), p. 185.

<sup>24</sup> Ferguson, *The Love Slave*, pp. 101-102.

<sup>25</sup> Laura Trachsel, *Kindled Fires in Africa* (Marion, IN: World Gospel Mission, 1960), pp. 109-11.

<sup>26</sup> Burnette C. Fish and Gerald W. Fish, *The Place of Songs: A History of the World Gospel Mission and the Africa Gospel Mission in Kenya* (Kericho, Kenya: World Gospel Mission, 1989), p. 527.

inations trace their theological history to the influence of holiness revivals on their missionaries, particularly through Peniel Mission.

### V Holiness Missions

It is important to note that most if not all faith missions were born out of holiness revivals. Albert. B. Simpson, a Presbyterian and founder of Christian & Missionary Alliance Church and associated with Peniel Mission during the 1890s, was instrumental in the training, ordination, and commissioning of Peter Cameroon Scott for African missions in the 1890s. Available sources do not indicate how early Scott and Simpson met. However, Scott, a Presbyterian from Scotland, trained at New York Missionary Training College (now Nyack College), first went to Africa under the aegis of International Missionary Alliance in 1890. Due to health reasons, he soon resigned. In 1895, however, Scott returned to Africa with a team that included Willis R. Hotchkiss, a Quaker Wesleyan/holiness evangelist, to start the work of Africa Inland Mission.<sup>27</sup>

Andrew M. Andersen, who became a key leader in the Africa Inland Mission (AIM) in Kenya, was sanctified in 1903 at Peniel Mission. Andersen attended Cleveland Bible College and met Hotchkiss. Andersen decided to join Hotchkiss in Kenya in 1907 under Africa Inland Mission. When the World Gospel

Mission (WGM), whose forerunner was Peniel Mission, was searching for a field in Kenya in the late 1920s, Andersen in 'gratitude for his conversion through Peniel Missions, a holiness work', assisted in the early years of the mission in Kenya.<sup>28</sup>

The work of Friends Africa Industrial Mission (FAIM) in Kenya is part of the larger influence of the doctrine of holiness in missions. Willis R. Hotchkiss, who had earlier resigned from AIM, took Arthur Chilson and Edgar Hole to start this mission in 1901. It is fascinating to note that en route to Africa the trio paid a courtesy call on Bishop William Taylor while in London. Taylor, who had become 'a patron saint' for the holiness missionaries, prayed for them and used his knowledge of Africa to direct them to work near Lake Victoria.<sup>29</sup> Thus the Quaker 'Inward Look' continued to be replaced by 'World Vision' as a result of the Methodist connection. Thomas D. Hamm summarizes the extent of American Methodism's impact on Quakerism:

Late in the summer of 1875 a Methodist Minister decided to indulge his professional curiosity by attending the annual gathering of Yearly Meeting of Friends in Richmond. Unlike his military brother fourteen years earlier, the Methodist minister felt completely at home. The devotional meeting opened with the singing of a familiar hymn. Then the presiding preacher called for testimonies... then an altar call was issued, and soon seekers after conversion and sanctification crowded

<sup>27</sup> Kenneth Richardson, *Garden of Miracles: The Story of the Africa Inland Mission* (London: Africa Inland Mission, 1976), pp. 20-36.

<sup>28</sup> Fish, *The Place of Songs*, p. 527.

<sup>29</sup> Edna H. Chilson, *Ambassador of the King* (Wichita, KS: Esther Chilson Choate and Rachel E. Chilson, 1943), p. 14.

around several mourners' benches.<sup>30</sup>

This period has been depicted not only as a time of Wesleyanization of Quakerism but also of the American religious landscape and the larger world. Douglas and Dorothy Steere at the Friends World Committee in 1954 noted that it was not until 1868 that Friends Foreign Missions Association was formed:

The Society of Friends was far from being a leader in the cause of missions. Had it not been for the strong influence of the Wesleyan Evangelical Movement upon Society both in England and America, arousing it to witness to Christ who spoke to its condition and setting a powerful example to it in the wave of missionary enthusiasm that swept the church in the nineteenth century, there is little to indicate that English Quakers would have ventured on these undertakings.<sup>31</sup>

Rasmussen has noted that 'international revivalism was dominated by Holiness Methodism' that stressed sanctification as a second definite experience after conversion.<sup>32</sup> She also correctly recognizes that 'the evangelical influence which led to the great revival among Friends also aroused in them an interest in foreign mission work'.<sup>33</sup>

## VI Faith Missions and Denominations

There are two kinds of distinctively

Wesleyan/Holiness Missions that began to take root in Africa during the 'institutional' phase of the revivals: denominational and inter-denominational. James R. Bishop, the Executive Director of the World Gospel Mission in the 1960s, wrote that 'though keen missionary interest existed and scattered support was given to various missionaries and missionary projects through the National [Holiness Association] prior to June 1910... the leaders of the National [Holiness Association] were not satisfied with the haphazard expression of the organization's missionary zeal'.<sup>34</sup> A number of their missionaries who were involved with mainline Methodism and other missions were not finding what the holiness people called 'an unhindered field for the aggressive pushing of holiness'.<sup>35</sup> Those missionaries operating independently had no system of accountability. Many had gone out that had not been examined on doctrinal matters such as speaking in tongues and 'third blessing' holiness. There was also concern about preaching a general advancement of grace rather than the type of holiness that the supporters at home wanted communicated to the uttermost parts of the earth.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Thomas D. Hamm, *The Transformation of American Quakerism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1988), p. 74.

<sup>31</sup> Douglas and Dorothy Steere, *Friends Work in Africa* (London: Friends World Committee, 1954), pp. 6-7.

<sup>32</sup> Ann Marie Bak Rasmussen, *The Quaker Movement in Africa* (London: British Academic Press, 1995), p. 16.

<sup>33</sup> Rasmussen, *The Quaker Movement in Africa*, p. 19.

<sup>34</sup> James R. Bishop, (Unpublished Manuscript) 'The Birth of the National Holiness Missionary Society', Delbert Rose Collection, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Ky.

<sup>35</sup> Iva Durham Vennard, 'Is the National Association for the Promotion of Holiness Justifiable in Organizing a Department of Foreign Missions?' *The Christian Witness and Advocate of Bible Holiness*, 31:23, (June 15, 1911).

<sup>36</sup> The NHMS was in part a reaction to Keswick holiness espoused by most of the 'Faith Missions'; see C. B. Ward, *Christian Witness and Advocate of Bible Holiness* (September 26, 1907), p. 9.

Even the concept of faith missions was not taught well enough to encourage holiness in foreign lands. A clear example is in the situation surrounding the immediate circumstances leading to the founding of the National Holiness Missionary Society, where Woodford Taylor and Cecil Troxel, the original missionaries, broke from the Chihli Mission because of what was perceived as unclear Wesleyan interpretation of scripture and lack of unity in policy. They wanted 'unity in doctrine and experience of holiness' which was not available in faith missions.<sup>37</sup>

Clara Ford was the first missionary sent to Africa under the auspices of the National Holiness Missionary Society. She marks a connection between the inauguration of the NHMS and the beginning of holiness work among the Kipsigis people of Kenya. Ford arrived in Africa in 1929. This missionary woman represents the wide acceptance by a number of holiness mission agencies of women in ministry. The East Africa Holiness Association was organized with Ford as secretary and for months she edited and published a holiness magazine, the only interdenominational religious magazine published in East Africa in the 1930s.<sup>38</sup> The magazine was called *Matangazo Ya Injili*, Swahili for 'Gospel Herald'. By 1935 it had a circulation of 1,300 throughout East

Africa.<sup>39</sup> It appears the efforts to develop an interdenominational outreach with an objective of spreading scriptural holiness prominently occupied the minds of the early WGM, Quaker and AIM missionaries. Virgil Kirkpatrick said of one of their meetings, 'please pray that this beginning will develop into a great annual holiness convention'.<sup>40</sup>

### VII 'Holiness' for National Pastors and Converts

To some of the holiness mission agencies, the matter of understanding the teaching and possession of the experience of entire cleansing as a second definite work of grace was imperative. On the field it was to be depended upon and nobody was to be sent without the experience.<sup>41</sup> What was demanded of the missionaries also became their mandate for reaching Africa. Some of the missionaries thus said: 'We go then looking to Him, determined by His grace to pierce Africa's darkness with the pure light of "Holiness unto the Lord": trusting that its glow may constantly radiate from our own lives until those to whom we minister will catch and carry over, even until the utmost part.'<sup>42</sup> There is a sense in which Africa's 'darkness' was in itself a justification for the 'deeper' cleans-

<sup>37</sup> Mrs Cecil Troxel and John J. Trachsel, *Cecil Troxel: The Man and the Work* (Chicago: National Holiness Missionary Society, 1948), p. 88.

<sup>38</sup> Cary, *Story of the National Holiness Missionary Society*, p. 342.

<sup>39</sup> Cary, *Story of the National Holiness Missionary Society*, p. 342.

<sup>40</sup> Virgil Kirkpatrick, 'Meetings', *Call to Prayer* (August 1935), p. 13.

<sup>41</sup> Burnis H. Bushong, *Reaching the Unreached Now: a brief history of the World Gospel Mission* (Marion Ind.: WGM, 1995), p. 13.

<sup>42</sup> Virgil Kirkpatrick, 'Why We Go to Africa', *Call to Prayer* (July 1932), p. 9.

ing power. African adherents were expected to break away from traditional ceremonies, a superstitious past, witchcraft, and polygamy as well as embrace a lifestyle of abstinence from alcohol, tobacco, dancing (including traditional dancing), and sexual promiscuity.

The missionaries sought to ensure national pastors attained and shared the experience of holiness. One of the missionaries wrote that 'our hope for speedy ministry does not lie in our personal ministry among the masses but in a sanctified native ministry'.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, efforts were made to pass on the theological heritage to a group of native evangelists. Missionary Faye Kirkpatrick anticipated that 'the greatest missionary accomplishment in these latter days shall be through the sanctified native church'.<sup>44</sup> Orville Leonard reported that 'much of the real missionary work away from the main station is carried on by native ministers'.<sup>45</sup> Early Africa Gospel Church pastors were not only required to be sanctified but it was part of their monthly report to register those who sought sanctification experiences.<sup>46</sup> A speedy and most convenient way to spread the good news was perceived as facilitated when the natives attained the holiness experience. They would effectively articulate and make a strong argument for Christianity among their people. It was

also seen as the best way of ensuring permanence of evangelistic results. Robert K. Smith hoped the church would become 'a permanent structure, definitely converted, wholly sanctified, constantly spirit-led and filled with joy awaiting His coming'.<sup>47</sup>

### VIII The Effect of 'Holiness'

A review of available literature on holiness in Africa reveals that the missionaries had to grapple with the appropriateness of the doctrine of sanctification in African Christianity. Early Methodist missionaries and preachers gave 'much attention to Christian Perfection [and] personal journals and letters witness to their having been very conscious of this teaching as part of Methodist heritage. The ministers were regularly asked, during synods and conferences, if they continued to preach the doctrine'.<sup>48</sup> However, Kwesi Dickson also notes that in Africa 'the edge of this teaching has been blunted by the fact that the church has tried to separate its members from life as they knew it from the particularity of their circumstances' and therefore, in his judgment this doctrine has not constituted a potential for change in Africa.<sup>49</sup> Dickson's theological analysis borders on a rejection of holiness as irrelevant for Africa. This position is difficult to sustain in the light of the history of revivalism and its potential for social change. It is not easy to

<sup>43</sup> Fish, *The Place of Songs*, p. 268.

<sup>44</sup> Faye Kirkpatrick, 'God is Still on the Throne', *Call to Prayer* (December 1935), p. 8.

<sup>45</sup> Orville E. Leonard, *Pioneering* (privately printed, nd), p. 8.

<sup>46</sup> Leonard, *Pioneering*, p. 20.

<sup>47</sup> Robert K. Smith, 'Building Christian Character in Africa', *Call to Prayer* (June 1935), p. 9.

<sup>48</sup> Theodore Runyon (ed.), *Sanctification & Liberation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), p. 198.

<sup>49</sup> Runyon, *Sanctification & Liberation*, p. 198.



understand why a doctrine based on perfectionist love for God and humanity, supported by a strong connectional system and whose prime exponent, John Wesley, had vehemently fought the enslavement of the African race would not have a potential for change in Africa.<sup>50</sup>

It has been argued that despite most of the leaders of the church in Kenya being influenced for forty years by the East African Revival,<sup>51</sup> much of Kenyan Christianity is full of bitter divisions, nominalism, tribalism and differences of personalities and customs. John Martin stated that in Rwanda eight out of ten people claim to be Christian and yet the country was penetrated by ethnic purification. He blamed the massacres on the shortcomings of the East African Revival and missionary legacies for having lacked social engagement, limited stress on human rights, failed to give systematic instructions, and for having retreated to 'apolitical' pietism, substituted testimonies for biblical instruction and emphasized private morality over structural evil or corporate sin.<sup>52</sup> This study hits holiness revivalism at the core of its strength. It calls for a re-investigation

of the doctrine of holiness in the light of the African situation because, as indicated earlier, these findings are also based on a superficial understanding of holiness.

Perhaps the most curious of all the statements on holiness in Africa is that made by a researcher on faith missions, Klaus Fiedler. He sees holiness as a revival phenomenon that suited the 'people [in the missionary's homeland] who had long been converted and yearned for deeper Christian life'. For him such a situation did not exist in the mission field where the missionary had first to establish the church. This process of establishing the church, according to Fiedler, was 'done not by means of preaching holiness, but by preaching conversion'. Therefore, Fiedler concludes, missionaries 'did not try to build holiness structures they were used to, such as conferences, camp meetings, and fellowship groups ... did not translate holiness literature into African languages, nor did they write their own holiness literature in those languages'. To him the slow process of conversion left little energy and time for preaching holiness.<sup>53</sup> Though he does not want to conclude that holiness did not take root in Africa, he sees little success achieved even by missions like the World Gospel Mission which defined its primary mission as based on the doctrine of entire sanctification.<sup>54</sup>

Fiedler's work is perhaps the most

<sup>50</sup> See Wesley's letter to William Wilberforce urging him to fight slavery: Letters, *The Works of John Wesley*, XIII, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), p. 153.

<sup>51</sup> The East African Revival was strongly influenced by the American holiness revivalism and most of the early revivalists were from the Free Methodist Church, the Friends Africa Industrial Mission, the National Holiness Missionary Society and the Africa Inland Mission. Unfortunately, history has presented this movement as mainly Anglican-Keswick revivalism (see J. E. Church, *Quest for the Highest: An Autobiographical Account of the East African Revival* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, p. 1981).

<sup>52</sup> John Martin, 'Revivalism and Ethnic Conflict', *Transformation: an international dialogue on mission and ethics* (April/June 1995), pp. 1-2.

<sup>53</sup> Klaus Fiedler, *The story of Faith Missions: From Hudson Taylor to Present Day Africa* (Oxford: Regnum, 1994) p. 247.

<sup>54</sup> Fiedler, *The Story of Faith Missions*, p. 248 (The World Gospel Mission was previously the National Holiness Missionary Society)

definitive study of holiness in Africa. His faith missions lens and limited holiness corpus, from which the research is drawn, led him to miss crucial theological developments on the doctrine of sanctification as understood within missionary circles. His interpretation separates holiness from the soteriology of the African missionaries. Though his purpose was to describe the theology of faith missions in the African context, he overlooked the study of major cultural issues with the assumption that this had been done by others. The above study shows that missionaries did seek to communicate the doctrine of holiness. Marie Bak Rasmussen concurred that the gospel that the FAIM missionaries brought to Kenya was a revival gospel which meant that the Africans could find forgiveness for their sins, and also had the opportunity to experience sanctification as in America.<sup>55</sup> The structures similar to those in America including conferences, camp meetings, and fellowships were also available to the African people for the purpose of leading them to sanctification.<sup>56</sup> This challenges Fiedler's assumptions. In summary, there are a number of historical, theological, cultural, sociological and missiological hurdles that are crucial for interpreting the development of the doctrine of holiness in Africa.

### IX. Conclusion

The doctrine of holiness played a major role in the inception of evangelical Christianity in Africa. This role included spiritual and theological foundations of missions that would be considered outside the Wesleyan family. In the nineteenth century it also became the rallying point for most of the evangelical missions. This teaching and experience was embodied in the lives and practices of the missionaries. It defined their objectives in reaching Africa with the gospel. The missionaries perceived that the message of holiness was understood and received in Africa as the essence of the deepest relationship with Christ. They relied on this for the permanency of their results. They also saw holy living as an alternative to what they thought of as 'heathen' traditional practices of the African people. Though documentation is lacking, it is clear that pietistic Christianity, when applied carefully, was spiritually edifying for the African Christians but when misapplied it became counter-productive. This research is based almost entirely on secondary materials published in the west. More work needs to be done, using all possible research apparatus to ascertain the historical, theological, and contextual underpinnings of the experience of holiness in Africa.

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<sup>55</sup> Rasmussen, *The Quaker Movement in Africa*, pp. 43-44.

<sup>56</sup> Rasmussen, *The Quaker Movement in Africa*, pp. 59-60.

# What Exactly is Meant by the ‘Uniqueness of Christ’? An Examination of the Phrase and Other Suggested Alternatives in the Context of Religious Pluralism (Part I) Bob Robinson

**Keywords:** Christology, continuity, discontinuity, religious pluralism, uniqueness

## **Introduction: Is there an issue here?**

*(a) Is uniqueness the best available word to use when describing Christ?*

The heart of Christian faith is the good news about Jesus Christ. The gospel is plainly christocentric in character, and evangelical assertions

about Christ—especially in the context of religious pluralism—have frequently, confidently, and even casually used the noun ‘uniqueness’ or the adjective ‘unique’. But a number of observers complain about what one of them calls ‘the abundant sloppiness in the use of the term [uniqueness], especially in theological writing’.<sup>1</sup> The question might therefore be asked: Is ‘uniqueness’ the best available word to use when describing Christ? There are no close Hebrew or Greek equivalents for the English words ‘uniqueness’ or ‘unique’ and, as this article will point out, there are substantial ambiguities attached to the terms. So, is either the best term

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Race, book review in *Theology* 96 (1993), p. 419.

with which to defend and elaborate a biblically derived view of Christ? If not, are there better alternatives?

*(b) The biblical and theological evidence for what is usually meant by uniqueness*

If 'unique' means 'without equal or equivalent', then there is ample biblical and theological warrant for describing Christ in this kind of way.<sup>2</sup> From his unique conception to his unique filial relationship to God as his heavenly father; from his teaching authority and sense of eschatological mission to his resurrection and ascension, Jesus' many titles make his uniqueness clear. He is Son of God and Son of Man, Lord and only mediator, saviour and 'once for all' sacrifice. Two recent additions to the treasure chest of evidence for this uniqueness are N. T. Wright (who argues that Jesus saw himself as embodying those great self-determinants for Israel: Law, Land and Temple) and Larry Hurtado (who sees the way in which the cultic veneration of the glorified Jesus by the first Christians represented a distinctive and highly significant 'mutation' in Jewish monotheistic devotion).<sup>3</sup> Some contemporary Catholic writing also offers an able defence of this tradi-

tional understanding of uniqueness.<sup>4</sup>

What is meant by uniqueness can be summarized along the following lines: 'Whatever statement we may choose to make about the character of God or the nature and destiny of human beings is ultimately grounded in and governed by the self-revelation of God in Christ.'<sup>5</sup>

*(c) Several working presuppositions*

But in setting out what might be meant by uniqueness (assuming for the time being that 'unique' and its cognates are the best, or among the best, terms to use) there are several methodological issues to be considered.

(i) While it is true that the evidence for what is usually called the uniqueness of Christ is clear and assured in the biblical witness, a variety of words, images and metaphors is found even there. Moreover, 'there is no systematic and full defence of these claims as a theoretical problem set against other religions'.<sup>6</sup> Some of the questions about the implications of the uniqueness of Christ (for example about religious and other pluralism) remain unanswered—another example of the Bible simply not giving a clear answer to some of

<sup>2</sup> One reasonably comprehensive example is found in Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh: A Contemporary Incarnational Christology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> Larry W. Hurtado, 'Pre-70 CE Jewish Opposition to Christ-Devotion', *Journal of Theological Studies* ns 50 (1999), pp. 35-58; 'Religious Experience and Religious Innovation in the New Testament', *Journal of Religion* 80 (2000), pp. 183-205.

<sup>4</sup> To mention one of many possible examples: Donald J. Goergen's able defence of the sinlessness of Jesus in the discussion of uniqueness in his *Jesus, Son of God, Son of Mary, Immanuel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), pp. 163-83.

<sup>5</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (Leicester: Apolllos, 1996), p. 51.

<sup>6</sup> George Brunk, 'The Exclusiveness of Jesus Christ,' in *New Directions in Mission and Evangelization*, edited by James A. Scherer and Stephen B. Evans (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), p. 42.

our best questions!

(ii) Nonetheless, a mere parade of words and a scrutiny of etymologies will not settle questions about uniqueness. It is commonplace to observe that theology this side of James Barr and Wittgenstein generally displays a greater understanding of the way in which context (and not merely etymology) helps determine meaning.<sup>7</sup> For Wittgenstein, it was the *Lebensform* ('form of living'—meaning, the customs and forms of everyday living) to which a word refers and within which it is used that is the key for determining a word's meaning. The meaning of a word is established by its use in real life. In discussing what he calls 'the main mistake made by philosophers', Wittgenstein considers it to be 'that when language is looked at, what is looked at is a form of words and not the use made of the form of words'.<sup>8</sup> So, the Christian *Lebensform* will help establish what the concept of the uniqueness of Christ means. Part of this *Lebensform* is the need for Christians to live and witness to Christ in a pluricultural world—and to be understood.

(iii) The power and place of metaphor is another relevant methodological issue. Even a modest encounter with literary theory will show that words, images and metaphors are not merely *additions*

to thought, they are the *means* through which we think and are partly constitutive of understanding.<sup>9</sup> The power of metaphor lies partly in its invitation to the reader or listener to seek meaning in one direction—but not another. However, the force of metaphor is not easily contained; it cannot be constrained into narrow and predictable paths of meaning; there is always, in Paul Ricoeur's phrase, a 'surplus of meaning'. Once launched into the world of the hearer and reader, a metaphor cannot be recalled and tamed. This is one reason for choosing carefully from the range of New Testament and perhaps other possible metaphors and images for Christ; once launched into a pluralist setting they acquire a force and meaning beyond what might have been intended.

One simple example illustrates the need for such careful choice. In India, Christians seem often to underestimate the negative impact of traditional Christian language, especially the traditional metaphors of uniqueness. In a helpful reflection on his many years of enabling Christian dialogue with Hindus, Albert Nambiaparambil urges Christians to understand and anticipate the impact of language they might consider to be descriptive (for example, Jesus as 'Lord', 'Saviour', 'the Son of God').<sup>10</sup> The problems, he writes, are liable to be acute when Christians

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Fergus Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

<sup>8</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), p. 2. (Kerr defines *Lebensformen* as 'the network of practices which is the community to which we belong' (*Theology after Wittgenstein*, p. 105.)

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, IL: UCP), p. 1980.

<sup>10</sup> Albert Nambiaparambil, 'Evangelization and Inter-Religious Dialogue', *Indian Missiological Review*, 17.2 (June 1995), pp. 76f.

use the language of uniqueness with a dialogue partner whose worldview makes difficult the grasping of notions of uniqueness. And, Nambiaparambil asks, 'am I as a Christian disposed to grasp the offence that our Hindu... friends may take who hear my faith-assertion as totalitarian, monopolistic, exclusive, possessive and isolationist?' The solution is not Christian silence or compromised belief in Christ but more thoughtful consideration of *how* the Christian position is communicated.<sup>11</sup>

### 1. Some problems with the concept 'uniqueness'

(a) *Ambiguities: unique as singular or significant?*

The ambiguities attached to the meaning of uniqueness centre, in part at least, on the presence or absence of *significance*. It is probably Gabriel Moran in his *Uniqueness: Problem or Paradox in Jewish and Christian Relations*<sup>12</sup> who has provided the most acute analysis of the ambiguities attached to the word unique and its cognates. The semantic range is paradoxical; it actually runs in two quite different directions. There is what Moran calls

meaning A: unique as particular and singular—in the sense that every thing, event or person is different. This singular and individual sense is exclusive or tends to exclusiveness of identity: no two snowflakes are the same. But it is also trivial; it is an interesting curiosity but of no great consequence that no two snowflakes are the same.

Then there is what Moran calls meaning B: unique as inclusive and relational—somehow reaching out beyond itself to include or challenge in some significant sense worthy of universal note. Moran uses the Holocaust to illustrate the difference. Obviously the Holocaust is unique in sense A; but no one, especially no Jewish person, leaves it at that. The Holocaust is usually called unique because it has *significance* and not merely *singularity*. The uniqueness of a snowflake might evoke, 'so what?'—but that's not the response to the existential uniqueness of the Holocaust, an event that is at once uniquely Jewish and uniquely and universally human.

There is a difference, therefore, between two meanings commonly assigned to uniqueness and this can lead to a degree of impatience with the word. On the one hand, its claim seems so trivial as not to be worth making. On the other hand, as Moran puts it, 'its claim is so exalted as to be beyond realization'.<sup>13</sup> The key differences between the two meanings seem to be (a) the degree of commonality and (b) significance.

<sup>11</sup> Nambiaparambil, 'Evangelization and Inter-Religious Dialogue', p. 77. (He goes on to urge the avoidance of comparative language that implies the superiority of the Christian position; let Christ remain absolute while Christians use the language of witness to explain what Christ and the church mean to them.)

<sup>12</sup> See, especially, chapter 1, Gabriel Moran, *Uniqueness: Problem or Paradox in Jewish and Christian Relations*, Faith Meets Faith Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992).

<sup>13</sup> Moran, *Uniqueness*, p. 13.

The elements in common between one snowflake and another are what render them perhaps interesting; but it is unlikely that any one snowflake, despite its unique singularity, could ever be called *significant* because of that singularity. And it is this meaning of uniqueness that has become embedded in popular usage. People employ the word 'unique' simply as a means of being emphatic about the importance of something. 'Often, the difference between an event and a unique event is merely that the speaker wishes to call attention to the latter'.<sup>14</sup> At the very least, 'uniqueness' is a word that most certainly had the wand of ambiguity waved over it.

*(b) Popular semantics: modifying the unmodifiable*

The grammatical convention is that the notion of uniqueness cannot be modified; it cannot be given a comparative or superlative form. If 'unique' means 'without equal or equivalence' then something is either unique or it is not unique. It cannot be more unique or less unique or rather unique. That convention is widely ignored—for example, when it is said that 'the Qur'an has Jesus in a very unique position'.<sup>15</sup> But one reason for the grammatical confusion is because of the wide semantic range that the notion of uniqueness embraces.

*(c) Theological and cultural*

*objections: unique as alienating and offensive*

Many of these objections are found within the Christian world where it is said that the traditional notions of uniqueness must be abandoned as alienating and harmful. The most recent and perhaps most persuasive of these theological disavowals of uniqueness are those of John Hick and Paul Knitter. Both link their disavowals with their distaste for what they see as the inevitable and unacceptable implications of that uniqueness.<sup>16</sup> Hick's well known call for a 'Copernican revolution'<sup>17</sup> to move the Christian worldview from a christocentric to a theocentric pluralist perspective derives in part from what he repeatedly describes as the unacceptable consequences of belief in the uniqueness of Christ. Knitter simply assigns the language of uniqueness to what he sees as the legitimate confidence of Christian believers in their personal experience of Christ<sup>18</sup> although this does not imply assent to all or any of the traditional metaphysical claims. (Discussion returns to Knitter in section 5b below.)

It is not surprising, then, to find Gerald Anderson in a recent survey,

<sup>16</sup> One of the clearest statements of these supposed implications is found in Hick's 'The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity' in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, Faith Meets Faith Series, edited by John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis/London: SCM, 1987), pp. 16-36; see also the critique in Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, 'In Search of Justice', in the same work, pp. 149-61.

<sup>17</sup> John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths* (rev. ed., London: Fount/Collins, 1977), p. 131.

<sup>18</sup> See the widely read volume by Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes towards the World Religions* (NY: Maryknoll: Orbis/ London: SCM, 1985), pp. 182-86.

<sup>14</sup> Moran, *Uniqueness*, p. 133.

<sup>15</sup> Ajith Fernando, *The Supremacy of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1995), p. 53.

concluding that the

greatest threat to [Christian] mission today comes from within the church itself, from a rampant, radical, theological relativism that denies the unique, ultimate and universal claims of the gospel.<sup>19</sup>

And, quite apart from the world of theology, recent western cultural history has also found fault with the Christian claim to uniqueness and the exclusivism that it seems to imply. Arnold Toynbee urged his readers to

try to purge our Christianity of the traditional Christian belief that Christianity is unique.... We have to do this if we are to purge Christianity of the exclusive mindedness and intolerance that follow from a belief in Christianity's uniqueness.<sup>20</sup>

*(d) Are there other ways of defining uniqueness?*

So, given these problems with the notion of uniqueness, are there other words or metaphors that might better state what we want to say about Christ? A number of alternatives are available and it is helpful to use the well-known continuity-discontinuity model to arrange and to help assess the possible alternatives. As well as its organizational convenience, the model itself is still useful in pointing to a key tension that it seems must be maintained to enable

faithfulness to the biblical revelation and honesty about the experience of religious pluralism. (It is interesting to note that as recently as 1999, Gerald Anderson used the continuity-discontinuity model to describe the relationship between the gospel and the religions.<sup>21</sup>) The strength of the continuity component of the model is that it affirms the cosmic, loving and universal relationship of God's relationship with the world; its principal weakness is that it can underestimate alienation from God. The discontinuity portion of the model affirms the particularity of and reality of the revelation and salvation-history that culminate in Christ; its weakness is that it can leave little or no place for revelation outside Christ.

## **2. Alternatives that emphasize continuity/commonality**

Even with the alternatives that seem to relate to the continuity side of the model, there is not space to consider them all (for example, 'unparalleled', 'unsurpassable', 'unequaled', 'irreducibility').<sup>22</sup>

*(a) Centrality*

Robert Webber provides a good example of the use of centrality. His is a biblically derived argument based on 'the centrality of Christ to the entire created order'—a kind of cosmic christology in which 'that focal point around which everything else is

<sup>19</sup> Gerald H. Anderson, 'Christian Mission in our Pluralist World', in *Kein anderer Name. Die Einzigartigkeit Jesu Christi und das Gespräch mit nichtchristlichen Religionen*, ed. by Thomas Schirrmacher (Nürnberg: Verlag für Theologie und Wissenschaft, 1999), pp. 234-37 (quote from p. 234). He goes on to illustrate his assertion from a range of North American sources.

<sup>20</sup> Arnold Toynbee, 'What Should Be the Christian Approach to the Contemporary Non-Christian Faiths?', in *Attitudes towards Other Religions*, ed. by Owen Thomas (London: SCM, 1969), pp. 160f.

<sup>21</sup> Anderson, 'Christian Mission in our Pluralist World', pp. 238f.

<sup>22</sup> Some of the terms that are discussed read better as adjectives rather than nouns—so there is a certain mixing of these two different parts of speech in what follows.



gathered is Christ'.<sup>23</sup> This provision of a centre is, he feels, 'highly pertinent to the postmodern search for a center to the universe.... In the disparaging relativism of postmodernity the Christian faith speaks directly to the desire for a unified center to the world.'<sup>24</sup>

However, the notion of centrality does not adequately describe Christ. Some of those who reject traditional notions of uniqueness are happy to speak of the centrality of Christ—even if it is in a qualified sense. To cite Ariarajah: 'We do not mean that we should give up the centrality of Christ for the Christian faith, in both its historical and transcendent dimensions.'<sup>25</sup> It is, of course, precisely these latter dimensions that led to the notions of uniqueness and finality but Ariarajah wants to restrict such claims to the Christian worldview. Ariarajah further qualifies his position when he adds that 'it is not the positive affirmation of the centrality of Christ... that makes these words [uniqueness and finality] obsolete in a religiously plural world, but the negative implications....'<sup>26</sup> (The notion of christocentrism is discussed below in the category of discontinuity.)

### (b) Supremacy / Primacy

Stephen Neill used the term

<sup>23</sup> See chapter 7, 'Christ, the Center', Robert Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith. Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), pp. 62-67 (citations from pp. 62, 66).

<sup>24</sup> Webber, 'Christ, the Center,' pp. 62, 67.

<sup>25</sup> S. Wesley Ariarajah, *Hindus and Christians. A Century of Ecumenical Thought* (Amsterdam and Grand Rapids, MI: Rodopi and Eerdmans, 1991), p. 211 (emphasis added).

<sup>26</sup> Ariarajah, *Hindus and Christians*, p. 211.

supremacy in his 1984 work, *The Supremacy of Jesus*<sup>27</sup> and so, more recently, did Ajith Fernando.<sup>28</sup> Julius Lipner writes in equivalent terms when stating that Christ 'is theologically pre-eminent, i.e. that, in the final analysis, there is no theological equivalent for him.'<sup>29</sup> The description of Christ as supreme or ultimate has clear overtones of ultimacy and primacy. Nonetheless, the terms are often understood as implying continuity. They recognize what Fackre calls 'the unsurpassability of Christ, a first among equals'. In what he calls the mountain range of the great founders of religions 'the Mt. Everest in this Himalayan chain is Jesus Christ. At this summit the view of the heavens is the clearest'.<sup>30</sup> To be fair to both Neill and Fernando, it seems that their views of supremacy are not as generous (in the sense of an implied continuity with other the leaders of other religions) as Fackre's elaboration of the position implies.

### (c) Superiority

An assertion of the supremacy or primacy of Christ among the world's religions is close to an assertion of his superiority—but, again, continuity might be implied. Eugene Hillman, for example, uses the language

<sup>27</sup> Stephen C. Neill, *The Supremacy of Jesus: The Jesus Library* (London and Downers Grove, IL: Hodder and Stoughton and IVP, 1984)—though it must also be added that the book is oddly rambling in tone and content; in fact, the implication of its title is only fitfully asserted in its actual contents.

<sup>28</sup> Fernando, *The Supremacy of Christ*.

<sup>29</sup> Julius Lipner, 'Christians and the Uniqueness of Christ,' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 28 (1975), p. 364 (original emphasis).

<sup>30</sup> Gabriel Fackre, 'Christ and Religious Pluralism: the Current Debate,' *Pro Ecclesia* 7 (1998), p. 392.

of superiority to claim that Christ is the best but not the only way to God.<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, however much it might be seen as a factual matter of asserting superiority 'not as an attitude, but as a truth and value judgement'<sup>32</sup> (especially because of what might be seen as distinctiveness and originality), it is difficult to escape the negative contemporary implications of the notion of superiority. This is why others reject it. Hans Küng, for example, writes of 'the Christian self-confidently but unsuccessfully attempting to prove the superiority of Christianity'.<sup>33</sup>

(d) *Normative / definitive*

When used of Christ and salvation, Schineller sees the term normative as meaning that which 'corrects and fulfils all other mediations'.<sup>34</sup> Calvin Shenk believes that the term 'normativeness' best describes the witness of the biblical revelation.<sup>35</sup> D'Costa prefers 'normative' to 'exclusive' or 'unique' because

by normative, one affirms more precisely the important connotations of exclusive and unique. Normative implies that nothing that is of God can contradict what

we know of him through Christ.<sup>36</sup>

He goes on to offer a helpful analogy for the notion of normativeness. It is, he writes, not merely a question of whose photograph (or image) provides the best likeness of God, as if we were choosing from differing photos of a friend; 'Jesus is the friend that we know and in this respect all other images are judged by this one.'<sup>37</sup> He also adds that

by virtue of being normative, it is being said of Jesus that here is the decisive self-utterance of God—and in this respect the important sense of uniqueness is being retained in the clearer term normative.<sup>38</sup>

McGrath also wants to extend and clarify the meaning of uniqueness by adding that Christ is not merely unique but definitive as well (or, more precisely, by arguing that the defence of Christ's uniqueness is 'an important first step in the defence' of his definitiveness).<sup>39</sup>

The advantages of the term are that it does leave room for revelation beyond the revelation found in Christ. That, of course, can also function as a disadvantage depending on the range of the inclusivism that the continuity is said to imply; whether, for example, it supposedly extends to salvation as understood in Christian categories. Much contemporary Catholic christology understands the notion of normativity in this extended manner. Roger Haight's recent

<sup>31</sup> Eugene Hillman, *Many Paths. A Catholic Approach to Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989).

<sup>32</sup> Origen Vasantha Jathanna, *The Decisiveness of the Christ-event and the Universality of Christianity in a World of Religious Plurality* (Berne: Peter Lang, 1981), p. 28.

<sup>33</sup> Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian* (ET: Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), p. 112.

<sup>34</sup> J. Peter Schineller, 'Christ and Church: A Spectrum of Views', *Theological Studies* 47 (1976), p. 556.

<sup>35</sup> Calvin E. Shenk, *Who Do You Say That I Am? Christians Encounter Other Religions* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1997), pp. 176f.

<sup>36</sup> Gavin D'Costa, 'Toward a Trinitarian Theology of Religions,' in *A Universal Faith?*, ed. by Cornille and Neckebrouck (Eerdmans, 1992), p. 149.

<sup>37</sup> D'Costa, 'Toward a Trinitarian Theology,' p. 149 (emphasis added).

<sup>38</sup> D'Costa, 'Toward a Trinitarian Theology,' p. 150.

<sup>39</sup> McGrath, *A Passion for Truth*, p. 25.

comprehensive work on christology in a postmodern setting emphasises its universal range: 'because God is salvifically present to other religions, other representations of God can be universally normative, and thus, too, for Christians, even as Jesus Christ is universally normative'.<sup>40</sup> Needless to say this notion of a normativity that is both universal and reciprocal might be seen as logically odd and a redefinition of the conventional meaning of normativity.

(e) *Fullness*

The notion of 'fullness of revelation' is the way in which Jacques Dupuis defines Christ. He means that in Christ there is found a qualitative fullness, a fullness of intensity not found elsewhere. This fullness of revelation is not quantitative nor one of extension in all-comprehensive categories. Because God's revelation in Christ is 'expressed in a particular, relative culture... it does not—it cannot—exhaust the mystery of the divine', nor does it deny true divine revelation elsewhere.<sup>41</sup> The weakness of the notion of fullness is that, in common with traditional fulfilment theories, it may be 'fulfilling' needs and aspirations that are not, in fact, central to the traditions and their adherents but only to Christian interpretations of those religions. To put it simply: the non-Christian religions are not trying to be 'Christian' but failing; they are not trying to be

Christian at all, and it is something of a hollow victory to fault them for being what they do not intend to be.

(f) *Finality*

The dictionary definition of 'finality' is usually along the lines of 'a quality of being definitely settled or irrevocable'—and so is an appropriate word to summarize the redeeming significance of the death of Christ.<sup>42</sup> There was a small flurry of works in the 1960s that used the phrase 'the finality of Christ', including a major study process organized by the World Council of Churches on 'The Finality of Jesus Christ in an Age of Universal History'. Lesslie Newbigin entitled chapter IV of his *The Finality of Christ* 'The Clue to History.' A central part of his argument is that, 'To speak of the finality of Christ is to speak of the Gospel as the clue to history.'<sup>43</sup> In particular,

To claim finality for Christ is to endorse the judgement... that in this life, death and resurrection God himself was uniquely present and that therefore the meaning and origin and end of all things was disclosed.<sup>44</sup>

Julius Lipner has also used the language of finality about Christ and explains it as meaning 'that ultimately there is no theological substitute for him'.<sup>45</sup> More recently still, Clark Pinnock gave his volume *A Wilderness in God's Mercy* the subtitle:

<sup>42</sup> *The Finality of Christ: A Symposium on the Doctrine of Christ*, ed. by Dow Kirkpatrick (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966); Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Finality of Christ in an Age of Universal History: a Dilemma of the Third Century* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1966); J. E. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Finality of Christ* (London: SCM, 1969).

<sup>43</sup> Newbigin, *The Finality of Christ*, p. 65.

<sup>44</sup> Newbigin, *The Finality of Christ*, p. 76.

<sup>45</sup> Lipner, 'Christians and the Uniqueness of Christ,' p. 364 (original emphasis).

<sup>40</sup> Roger Haight, *Jesus, Symbol of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999), p. 422; see further on 'The Normativity of Jesus', pp. 405-10.

<sup>41</sup> Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), p. 379; see also p. 249.

*The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions.*<sup>46</sup>

Sometimes finality is used of the Christ-event as a whole, as in the passage just cited from Lipner. Gavin D'Costa can also write that

in Christ, God has uttered himself unreservedly; has given of his very self... In this one particular time in history God has spoken irreversibly and with a finality that is the basis of all Christian hope.<sup>47</sup>

But most often the notion of finality is used of the death of Christ. Thomas Torrance, for example, uses it of the atoning death of Christ<sup>48</sup> (while—as we shall see—using 'singularity' to describe the person of Christ); he even uses the phrases 'absolute finality'<sup>49</sup> and 'absolute and eternal finality'.<sup>50</sup> It should also be noted that Torrance does not seem to use finality with any kind of connection with religious pluralism in mind.

On the whole, the notion of finality does fit with the reality of a degree of continuity. Carl Braaten, for example, is another who affirms finality *and* continuity, as his section heading 'Christ is God's Final, Not the Only, Revelation'<sup>51</sup> makes clear. Stanley Grenz has opted for the term 'finality', apparently with some kind of

continuity in mind given his immediate elaboration that 'Jesus is the center of God's self-disclosure. In him we find the clear picture of what God is like.'<sup>52</sup> But there are some exceptions to the assertion of possible continuity; Roy Musasiwa also uses the language of finality but he is emphatic that there is no continuity with, in his case, African traditional religion.<sup>53</sup>

The virtue of the term finality is that it signals conclusiveness and the end of a process that has reached an ultimate purpose. It also suggests an unrepeatability, especially of the atoning significance of the cross of Christ, that is certainly defensible from the mainstream of the Christian tradition. But there are problems if the word finality is applied to divine revelation because the term could be seen as 'freezing' revelation and implying that God no longer acts revealingly. And the term remains unacceptable to an ecumenical proponent of dialogue on the grounds that 'every attempt to reflect theologically about other faiths that has begun with the finality of Jesus Christ, interpreted in its various forms, has ended in Christian chauvinism and paternalism'.<sup>54</sup> Ariarajah's conclusion is clearly disputable but evangelicals ought at least to hear his comments as a warning.

<sup>46</sup> Clark Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992).

<sup>47</sup> D'Costa, 'Toward a Trinitarian Theology,' p. 150.

<sup>48</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, 'The Atonement, The Singularity of Christ and the Finality of the Cross: The Atonement and the Moral Order', in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, ed. by Nigel de S. Cameron (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1992), especially in the section 'The Finality of the Cross' (pp. 233-48).

<sup>49</sup> Torrance, 'The Atonement', p. 233.

<sup>50</sup> Torrance, 'The Atonement', p. 244.

<sup>51</sup> See, Carl Braaten, *No Other Gospel! Christianity among the World's Religions* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992), pp. 65-82.

<sup>52</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, 'Toward an Evangelical Theology of the Religions', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 31 (1994), p. 64. He goes on to state that, 'For all the exclusivism it implies, the confession of the finality of Christ nonetheless remains an inclusivist—perhaps even a pluralist—declaration' (p. 64).

<sup>53</sup> Roy B. Musasiwa, 'The Finality of Jesus in Africa', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 17 (1993), pp. 65-69.

<sup>54</sup> Ariarajah, *Hindus and Christians*, p. 211.

## Books Reviewed

Reviewed by Max Davidson  
 Wolfhart Pannenberg  
*Systematic Theology (Vol. 3)*

Reviewed by Bernhard Kaiser  
 Max Turner  
*The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts Then and Now*

Reviewed by Norman Barker  
 Jakob Van Bruggen  
*Jesus the Son of God—The Gospel Narratives as Message*

Reviewed by Norman Barker  
 R. T. Kendall  
*Just Grace*

## Book Reviews

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### **Systematic Theology (Vol. 3)**

by Wolfhart Pannenberg  
 translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley  
 from *Systematische Theologie*,  
 Band 3, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht:  
 Göttingen, 1993).

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998  
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hb pp. xvi + 713, Indexes

*Reviewed by Max Davidson, Morling College, the Baptist Theological College of New South Wales, Australia*

Volume 3 completes Bromiley's English translation of the prestigious three volume systematic theology from Wolfhart Pannenberg. Pannenberg is described on the dustjacket as 'the greatest living theologian in the world today' (Carl Braaten), whose systematic theology is likely to be counted 'in a place alongside the classic dogmatic syntheses of Barth, Tillich, and several other writers of

genius' Avery Dulles).

Volume 1 had dealt with issues such as revelation, the attributes of God and the nature and centrality of the distinctive Christian understanding of God as triune. Volume 2 addressed the creation of the world and humanity, sin, Christology and reconciliation through and with the Triune God. The trinitarian theme is both fundamental and unifying throughout these two volumes, as it is for the third.

Volume 3, over 700 pages, is considerably longer than the other two, each of which runs to about 500. It begins by linking the gift of the Holy Spirit, the kingdom of God and the church. This sets the stage for a detailed consideration of the church as the messianic community and sign of the presence of the Christ's salvation. Central to its life are the two sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Its ministry, including ordination, is both sign and instrument of the church's unity. As the

people of God, the church constitutes his chosen people, in continuity with Israel under the Old Covenant. The goal of the church's election lies in the glorious 'consummation of creation in the Kingdom of God'. Discussion of eschatological themes such as death, resurrection, the end of time, judgment and the return of Christ complete this masterly synthesis of Christian doctrine.

Pannenberg's comprehensive and integrated grasp of the whole field of systematic theology permeates the whole, and is epitomised in the concluding paragraph of Volume 3, with its references to the eschatological consummation of the grand plan of the loving trinitarian God:

On the whole path from the beginning of creation by way of reconciliation to the eschatological future of salvation, the march of the divine economy of salvation is an expression of the incursion of the eternal future of God to the salvation of creatures and thus a manifestation of the divine love.... The distinction and unity of the immanent and economic Trinity constitute the heartbeat of the divine love, and with a single such heartbeat this love encompasses the whole world of creatures.

As may be sensed from this quotation, the literary style in the English translation is rather complex. No doubt this reflects the character of the original German. However, the accessibility of the good things Pannenberg has to say would have been enhanced by shorter, simpler English syntax. A second drawback for English readers is the fact that the great majority of contemporary writers cited are German. However, despite these two reservations, there is much to be mined from Pannenberg's great skill and erudition.

Every topic is handled in a detailed, nuanced and integrated fashion. At one level, the three volumes together will serve readers as an encyclopaedia of theology, a resource providing brief surveys of the development of Christian doctrines from their biblical roots to the second half of the twentieth century. At a total of some 1700 pages, it is considerably longer than several of the standard dictionaries of theology, such as Baker's *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Walter Elwell. At another level, Volume 3 (and the others also), will provide much stimulus and challenge for theologians and students.

The church is 'the provisional representation' of the Kingdom of God (p.20), a sign of the future of humanity under God's reign. It is a fellowship of believers and 'a communion that consists of a network of local churches' (p.103). Individualistic piety is considered to be an error, because 'belonging to Jesus is mediated by the fellowship of his church' (p.125).

Not all evangelical readers will agree with the high place given the two sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. 'Regeneration is a work of the Holy Spirit in baptism' (p.233) which may be appropriately be administered to young children, in Pannenberg's view. 'Baptism and the Supper are signficatory acts.... Both, as signs, effect what they signify' (p.238). While acknowledging that the earliest Christian practice was baptism of believers by immersion, Pannenberg accepts the validity of the later church practice of bap-

tizing infants. His ecumenical interests emerge when he argues that a conciliatory approach be shown when a person baptized as an infant wishes to join a group which baptizes believers rather than infants. Frequently he identifies the validity of insights from Christian traditions other than his own Protestant perspective, such as those of Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox theology. Pannenberg urges Protestants not to discourage Roman Catholics from self-criticism in relation to the papacy, but at the same time, they should show 'themselves basically prepared to recognize the central importance of Rome for the whole Christian world' (p.517).

Engaging with current debate about the future of those who have never heard the gospel of Christ, Pannenberg is optimistic, provided people's 'individual conduct actually agrees with the will of God that Jesus proclaimed' (p.615). Evangelicals may be uneasy here. Is some kind of 'works salvation' being suggested?

Similarly, the concluding section on eschatology raises as many questions as it answers. Issues typically considered in theologies from the English speaking world, such as tribulation, the millennium and rapture are not discussed. The dominant theme considered is judgement, not as retribution, but rather as the purification of believers. (This purification is carefully distinguished from the doctrine of purgatory.) Readers may wonder at the way in which Pannenberg downplays the likelihood of eternal punishment, writing that 'we certainly cannot rule out the

possibility of the eternal damnation of some' but this 'is rather a borderline case' (p.620).

On the one hand, readers will find much to stir their thinking and challenge their assumptions in this masterly work. On the other, the underlying presuppositions about the authority of Scripture in relation to the role of critical human reason will repeatedly emerge to demand discerning evaluation. However, no responsible theologian can justify ignoring a work of this stature.

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### **The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts Then and Now**

by Max Turner

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*Reviewed by Bernhard Kaiser,  
translated by Benedict Hung-biu  
Kwok (with later editing), from  
Jarhbuch für evangelikale Theologie  
(11 Jahrgang, 1997)*

This work is intended as a contribution to the discussion for and against spiritual gifts and offers a wealth of detail on the topic indicated in the title. It is divided roughly into two parts. In the first part, the author examines numerous isolated statements concerning the Holy Spirit in Luke, Paul, and John within the scope of their individual literary works respectively. In the second part, he lays the groundwork for a systematic discussion of the spiritual gifts and tries to relate the phenom-

ena of the past and present to one another. This work considers a broad and international spectrum of literature in a constant attempt to dialogue with it.

The individual biblical statements are discussed from different perspectives in a thorough and balanced fashion. A differentiated, yet by no means contradictory, picture of the Holy Spirit emerges. Turner identifies as a kind of *leitmotiv* of biblical understanding the appearance of the Holy Spirit as the 'Spirit of prophecy'. His task of imparting wisdom, judgement, and knowledge is then shown in the different biblical authors, and is traced back to the Old Testament Jewish background. This is an important insight opposed to the modern understanding of the Spirit, which goes back to the age of Romanticism and understands the Spirit more as something organic, dynamic, and even ecstatic.

It must be no less positively emphasized that work on the content of the pneumatological statements leads to very satisfactory results. Above all, in looking at the Johannine statements, the author emphasizes the Christocentric efficacy of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, he shows that Luke sees the Holy Spirit as the medium of the presence of God through which God imparts salvation, and he makes clear how the Holy Spirit in Paul's writings effects saving knowledge as 'the Spirit of prophecy'.

In the second part of the book, Turner asks, first of all, about the possibilities of a synopsis of the biblical statements, that is, of a system-

atic theological doctrine of the Holy Spirit and his gifts. Here, fundamental questions about the possibility of a systematic view of the Bible are discussed and aspects of theological history are also considered for systematic work. The author follows the view of B.S. Childs that both testaments represent a uniform line (for practical reasons, in contrast to reasons related to the history of salvation or other theological reasons).

An important conclusion with regard to the working of the Holy Spirit is that the Holy Spirit is responsible for the entire salvation experience of the Christian. This experience is charismatic by nature. Receiving the Holy Spirit is clearly seen as an essential element of conversion—which Turner refers to frequently as 'conversion-initiation'. In this context, the author points out, in discussing different statements of Scripture, that a specific second experience, as is traditionally taught in Pentecostal congregations, cannot be assumed from the evidence of the New Testament.

Particular stress is placed upon the discussion of the spiritual gifts of prophecy, healing, and speaking in tongues. In conjunction with this, he deals with the question whether or not, and to what extent, the spiritual gifts have ceased. A detailed and largely controversial discussion is conducted with representatives of the 'cessationists', those who teach that the miracles and spiritual gifts ceased with the apostolic era; B.B. Warfield is a key example. This leads to the conclusion that these gifts are for the church in every age.



In regard to speaking in tongues, Turner maintains that private edification is the element which joins present-day speaking in tongues with that of the early Christians, although the early Christian practice is conceded other functions as well. Basically, the thesis remains, nonetheless, unclear, especially because Turner thinks that the present-day tongues could still be a gift of the Spirit, even if the tongues described by Paul were something different from those of today. The modern phenomenon of speaking in tongues would then have to be judged by other criteria. Here the author lists psychological elements, alongside the doxological and Christocentric character; if its effects are 'personality integrating, cohesive, anxiety minimising', then the phenomenon can be rated positively. However, whether this corresponds to the biblical understanding of edification is questionable, at the least.

Further starting points emerge for even more questions. Turner does not differentiate between the specifically revelatory and the theopneumatic working of the Holy Spirit connected with it on the one hand, and his activity in the congregation on the other hand. However, this distinction is necessary, otherwise special revelation, with its specific manifestations of the Holy Spirit, is not recognized in its distinctiveness. Neglect of this fundamental distinction has as its consequence that the question is not raised at all of whether or not a manifestation of the Holy Spirit reported in Scripture is really only to be associated with the

revelatory-theopneumatic working.

The appraisal of 'cessationism' suffers greatly from this shortcoming. Interestingly, biblical statements about the role of signs and miracles are not considered here, but only positions are discussed, so that, finally there remains simply subjective head shaking at the rationalism, the stubborn insistence upon evidence, and the bare biblicism of the 'cessationists'. In opposition to this, the thesis is presented and developed that the New Testament itself foresees the continuation of the gifts of healing, prophecy, and tongues. The 'cessationists', especially Warfield, are said to have rewritten history with a polemical slant. It may well be admitted that Warfield was subject to the direction his own interests took him; but he wanted to draw attention to the possibility, clearly included in the Bible, of false signs and miracles. In fact, it is this very possibility which the author does not consider in regard to the new Pentecostal movement. On the other hand, he maintains and tries to prove that the gifts of tongues, prophecy, and healing have also occurred throughout church history.

The option that speaking in tongues as a sign of judgement for Israel could be a sign within the history of salvation, is likewise not seriously considered. Also, the view that it is an apostolic sign and marks the apostolic church (community) as the people of God of the new covenant is certainly perceived, but it is not considered as a possibility. Because of this an important aspect of 'cessationism' is not really discussed.

In regard to the gifts of prophecy and healing, it is assumed that the present phenomena stand in a theological and functional continuity to the early Christian spiritual gifts. So, a person should certainly expect that God communicates certain things to him above and beyond what the Holy Scriptures say, and grants him salvation not only intellectually, but also in the bodily dimension, and, consequently, holistically.

The term 'charismatic' is also not defined more precisely. It is used in the sense that the Holy Spirit works directly in the congregation. It is assumed without examination that the Spirit enters into direct communication with the Christian. While this is, indeed, the case within the realm of the revelatory and theopneumatic working, to what extent this is the case, though, for each individual Christian must be distinguished from it. Also, the anthropological and hermeneutological implications of this postulate are not considered. Scripture does not teach, even in Rom 3:16, that the Holy Spirit enters into direct verbal communication with the Christian, but, rather, uses the biblical word he has already spoken in order to impart the knowledge of Christ, spiritual wisdom, and faith. This corresponds to what the author has emphasized in the first part of his study. That the Spirit also distributes gifts within this framework is no justification for the direct religious preoccupation with the Holy Spirit as it is practised in charismatic circles.

Turner's overall argument, therefore, tends toward mediation

between the charismatic side and the traditionally non-charismatic side. The former may overemphasize the charisma, the latter marginalizes them. The former points out that the experience of salvation includes the whole person, the latter that the preaching of the Word has the task of explaining the work of Christ. The author wishes to bring together the wisdom of both sides.

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**Jesus the Son of God—The Gospel Narratives as Message**

by Jakob Van Bruggen

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Grand Rapids: Baker 1999

ISBN 0-8010-2216-9

320p pb

*Reviewed by Norman Barker,  
Emeritus Professor, Presbyterian  
Theological Hall, Brisbane Q  
Australia*

Jakob Van Bruggen retired recently from his NT chair in the Theological University of the Reformed Churches in Kampen, Netherlands. Among other publications he has written on the Gospels as history and has produced commentaries on all three synoptic gospels. So he is on familiar ground in this volume. Rejecting the view that the later church 'coloured' the Gospels, the author asserts that these must be allowed to speak for themselves. So in an earlier volume, *Christ on Earth: the Gospel narratives as history*, (Baker, 1998) he focused on the histori-

cal aspects of the Gospel narratives. Now in this follow-up work, he examines the message of the narratives, and in so doing, discusses all the distinctive aspects of Jesus' ministry—background, miracles, titles, death, resurrection and other aspects of the future of the Son of God. Two appendices deal with the Pharisees and the Son of Man. As his title indicates, the key message of the Gospels is that Jesus is the Son of God. (Although quotations are from the NIV, he leans to the 'Majority Text' position.)

John the Baptist occupies a crucial role, not only as forerunner and witness, but in heightening the significance of Jesus at many points. Rather than a general Jewish background, the ministry of John the Baptist provides the specific background for our understanding of Jesus.

John instigated a widespread religious movement, and OT expectation was focused through John on the specific expectation fulfilled by the coming of Jesus. He called people into the desert that they might re-enter the land via the waters of Jordan. But whereas John called people into the desert, Jesus called them to himself.

John prepared the way of the *Lord* (Malachi); he was the forerunner of God (Isa 40). He baptized as a preparation for the One to come, whereas 'Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples' (John 4:2); this is an indication that this baptism was into him. John's witness to the 'more powerful one' (Mark 1:7) is fulfilled in Jesus' mighty works, both in heal-

ing and nature miracles. Jesus' preaching picks up John's theme of the kingdom, except for the note, 'He is coming' because he is here!

Elements of Jewish expectation were activated by John. The hope of the Messiah was not fully defined until John, in whose ministry 'an anointed one' (as Van Bruggen interprets the anarthrous nouns of Luke 2:11) becomes '*the* anointed one'. The link between 'Messiah' and 'Son of God' is not found in pre-NT Judaism, nor based on Hellenistic parallels, but on John's application of OT promises. John's activity led to new awareness of the promise of Deut. 18 as 'a prophet like Moses'. (The term 'prophet' is applicable to Jesus, but not the most suitable title, as in Islam and some modern Christologies). Apologetically, John plays a crucial role, in relation to Jews who erase him from memory and Muslims who recognize him as a prophet but reject his witness to Christ. According to van Bruggen, 'Christian theology cannot function without this prophet and Christian apologetics must start with him.'

VanBruggen's particular designation for John is 'John the immersionist'. However, he stretches the symbolism of immersion when he comes to write of Jesus' bestowal of the Holy Spirit—on the one hand, those baptized by John in water returned 'soaking wet, to the river bank, this water eventually dried,' while on the other, the 'immersion' in the Spirit by Jesus resulted in people 'dripping with the Spirit—they will never dry!'

The element of conflict in the

Gospels also began with John the Baptist. Jesus makes it clear that John's baptism is a symbol of his own earthly fate (Mark 10:38,45). Those who refused John's baptism rejected Jesus, while those who accepted it welcomed him (Luke 7:29,30).

'The preaching of John the Baptist reactivated the prophetic promises of a *divine* redeemer and evoked the lively expectation of such a saviour.' There is no messianic secret (as Wrede), nor a post-Easter revelation (as Ridderbos). Jesus never denied his Messiahship. That he did not make it known was 'part of Jesus' pedagogic method to invite confession'. When the apostles later preached Christ or the gospel rather than the kingdom, it was because this was more suitable to the Diaspora that was not so influenced by John.

Jesus' mysterious self-designation, 'the Son of man' points to his humanness. It fits in with what most Jews thought of him. 'The phrase is simply Jesus' way of referring to himself in reaction to the way others saw him and rejected him as the Son of God.' There is a peculiar tension as Jesus uses the title when referring to superhuman and divine works.

As the Son of God, Jesus announced beforehand his programme of suffering and death. The resurrection was the vindication of his claims, and pointed to his future, as the One who baptizes with the Spirit and who is yet to come again.

The church is not an afterthought to the gospel. Jesus had every intention of forming a community with

himself as centre, comprised of baptized 'pupils.' The Twelve represent a court council of the King. Incorporation into this community is through personal baptism. 'The baptism of repentance administered in expectation of the coming of the Lord now becomes a baptism of faithfully confessing the Son of God who has already come.' Christian baptism was not *instituted* after Jesus' death and resurrection. The post-Easter commission represented a reaffirmation and extension of baptism in a renewed missionary thrust.

Van Bruggen affirms the humanity of Jesus; John 'prepared the way for the sandals of God,' a reference not to be understood metaphorically, but literally, indicating a human individual who wears sandals. But while the author affirms Jesus' humanity, does he integrate it into his theology?

Is lack of integration also evident in his treatment of the death of Jesus? As Son of God Jesus knew what lay before him. But he does not reflect the agony of Gethsemane nor the cry of dereliction. There is nothing of the note in Hebrews of the Christ who 'offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears... Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered' (Heb 5:7,8).

The stress in van Bruggen's treatment of Jesus' death falls on the rejection of his claims. He quotes Jesus' references to his 'hour,' as an indication of Jesus' divine foreknowledge but not as an indication of his supreme achievement of atonement for humankind. When we recall that Mark's Gospel in particular has

been aptly described as 'a passion narrative with an extended introduction', it may be questioned whether Van Bruggen has captured this crucial aspect of the gospel.

The book reveals a wide acquaintance with continental and English scholarship. It has an extensive bibliography and several indices (general, Scripture and other ancient writings). In spite of some reservations, this is a book to read with relish, to refresh our faith in the mighty Son of God, proclaimed to us in the Gospel narratives.

teaching that the Law has a third role, not as the basis of salvation, and beyond the role of revealing human sin (emphasized particularly by Luther). It is vital as a necessary guide and regulator of the Christian life.

At the same time Kendall stresses the danger of a misuse of Law which introduces a new legalism, and has the effect of undermining Christian assurance of the grace of God in Christ. He writes of how he became aware of this in his own study of a number of Puritan writers.

This is a simple but useful study which will encourage, guide and stimulate thought and practice at many levels.

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### **Just Grace**

by R. T. Kendall

London: SPCK 2000

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163 pp. No index.

*Reviewed by Norman Barker,  
Emeritus Professor, Presbyterian  
Theological Hall, Brisbane Q  
Australia*

R. T. Kendall, minister of Westminster Chapel, London, urges the importance of the law of God for the life of the Christian. By law, he refers to the Ten Commandments in particular, deepened and spiritualized in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, but also reinforced in the teaching of the New Testament apostles. He turns first to Jesus' attitude to and claims regarding the Law in Matthew 5:17-20, and then expounds each of the Ten Commandments in turn in the light of deeper New Testament insights.

Kendall reflects John Calvin's

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