

Theme:  
Cyber-age Theology

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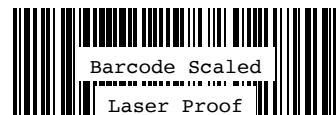
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# Editorial

From hi-tech warfare and international finances right through to entertainment and family communications, the cyber-world is an integral part of our way of life in the 21st century. So it is appropriate that the church and theology are also making profitable use of this tool—you can take your Bible to church on a hand-held computer, or even ‘do church’ over the internet, although most usages are likely to be far more ordinary—and more fruitful—than these!

In this issue we highlight some aspects of this new environment. Andrew Lord, for example, discusses the concept of ‘virtual communities’ which result from cyber-communication in relation to mission, concluding that, while there are no doubt problems of restricted scope and isolation, yet there is an inclusivism and openness to the future about them which is appealing. Mark H. Senter investigates the way theological education might be affected by cyber-technology, with an emphasis on conceptual and practical changes resulting from the fluidity of information and ease of communication. However, Paul Dekar thinks that computers ‘present us with a grave spiritual challenge’ and so raises the ethical issues implicit in the widespread use of modern technology, focusing on matters related to scholarship, piety and justice.

At a wider level, Lee Wanak’s report of the findings of a study group on theological education in

Asia urges seminaries to examine their ‘total learning experiences’, not merely the individual elements in their curricula, if they want to remain relevant and effective in the emerging context. By discussing such tendencies as contextualization/globalization, generalization/specialization, and cooperation/insular development, he points out the importance (and difficulty) of maintaining a dynamic balance in the curriculum, and thus achieving equilibrium between divergent but valid needs.

The cyber-world is not just a matter of technology and communications, but it also impacts our conceptual world. So it is not surprising that our very notion of the nature and person of God should come up for re-examination in this new age—most notably in the form of open theism. Amos Yong’s major paper tackles the hermeneutical, theological and philosophical presuppositions of the debate, realizing that although it has stimulated ‘fresh study of the Bible’ there may also be a tendency to close off discussion prematurely for less than satisfactory reasons. John J. Davis’ concerns for ‘new paradigms’ in economics and business ethics can be seen as a counterpart to this quest in a parallel area, which taken together with the other matters in our pages, serves to emphasize just how much theological work is required in the cyber-age.

**David Parker**, Editor.

# Virtual Communities and Mission

Andrew M. Lord

**Keywords:** Community, mission, internet, Trinity, church, postmodernism

## 1. Introduction

The role of the community has become increasingly central in understanding mission. This has been, in part, motivated in reaction against the individualized mission of the 'missionary era', in a recognition of the hunger for relationships found in western societies, and in an awareness of the key role of community in non-western society.<sup>1</sup> In thinking about how best to further the church's mission, various definitions and characteristics of church communities have been explored. So we find the World Council of Churches (WCC) project on the 'missionary structure of congregations'<sup>2</sup> and Warren's work on 'missionary congregations'.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, the wider under-

standing of community has changed as society has changed. One key change over the last hundred years has been the increasingly mobile nature of society arising out of developments in transport.<sup>4</sup> This has weakened the link between physical location and community. Looking forward, one of the key changes for the next century appears to be the development of 'virtual communities' in cyberspace. This is the culmination of the development of the internet over the last 25 years.

The aim of this paper is to examine the nature of virtual communities in the context of current mission thinking. To do this we will need to start by examining our understanding of the term 'community', both in general and in terms of current mission thinking. Then we will trace the

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1 David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis, 1991), pp. 368 f.

2 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 472.

3 Robert Warren, *Being Human, Being Church* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1995).

4 Warren, *Being Human*, pp. 167-71; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 240 ff.

development of virtual communities and their definitions. We will then be in a position to explore virtual communities from the perspective of mission.

## 2. Communities

Sociologists have developed many definitions of community. These definitions have been divided into three groups: descriptive definitions, value definitions and active definitions.<sup>5</sup> Communities are an example of a social group: 'a number of people who interact with each other on a regular basis'. Such regularity of interaction tends to weld participants together as a distinct unit with an overall social identity. Members of a group expect certain forms of behaviour from one another that are not demanded of non-members.<sup>6</sup> Such groups come in primary and secondary forms differentiated by the level of emotional involvement.<sup>7</sup>

In this article I am interested in descriptive definitions of primary Christian communities which are designed to enable mission. Although most authors do not give precise sociological definitions of

such communities, I want to suggest here that they have particular elements to their social identity, behaviour and forms of interaction. As a part of their overall social identity, such communities will obviously have a shared commitment to the Christian faith, although understandings of that faith may differ from one community to another.<sup>8</sup> Within this, Jesus is the central character around whom the community revolves.<sup>9</sup> They will be a community characterized by praise and hope, two features largely lacking in modern society.<sup>10</sup> Through modelling what is needed but absent from society, the social identities of such communities will point forwards towards a new social order and act as a witness to those outside.

This social identity will be seen in the behaviour of individual members of the community. Their behaviour will be characterized by love, following the 'great commandment', the work of the Spirit, the self-giving Christ, and the wider life of the Trinity. As Warren points out, 'In this work of community building the church participates in the Trinity, for the dynamic of a missionary congre-

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5 Accounts of social forms, structures and interactions that can be observed; statements about how people ought to relate; and definitions related to the process of community development. Greg Smith, *Community-Arianism, Chapter 1: Introduction*, web book (<<http://www.communities.org.uk/greg/chap1.html>>, 1996), 1. Smith's particular interest is in communitarianism, 'a 1990's political philosophy stressing the importance of community and shared values for social order and stability'; Tony Bilton, et al., *Introductory Sociology*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), p. 504. Smith puts this interest within a much wider context.

6 Anthony Giddens, *Sociology*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), p. 285.

7 Giddens, *Sociology*, pp. 285-86.

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8 This article will not delve into definitions of 'Christian faith' but assumes a general definition such as those given by the historic creeds.

9 In line with recent New Testament thinking on Jesus as the key to the redefinition of Israel; N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God, Vol. 2 (London: SPCK, 1996), p. 317.

10 Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (London: SPCK, 1989), p. 227; Esther D. Reed, 'Community of Hope' in *Essentials of Christian Community*, David F. Ford and Dennis L. Stamps (eds.) (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), p. 281.

gation living in the image of God expresses the nature of the God revealed in Christ—*giving, celebrating, creative and love-in-community*.<sup>11</sup> It is a love that enables people to look outward in confidence for the future. This behaviour displays a commitment to live for others, particularly those outside the community and especially the poor.

Individuals' behaviour is shaped by various interactions within and outside the community. Relationships between people are sustained by forgiveness and affirmation in an atmosphere of vulnerability that gives a greater ability for people to work together in mission.<sup>12</sup> The community will also interact with God in worship, particularly through word and sacrament. Further, 'A congregation which experiences worship in these ways will undoubtedly have something to say to a needy world.'<sup>13</sup> It is important to note that such interactions are expected to take place largely when people are gathered together in particular locations, which is an important difference from virtual communities, as we will see.

Christian communities should be seen as 'the primary bearer of mission'.<sup>14</sup> Such communities will, I suggest, be characterized by certain interactions between its members and with God. These will form the behaviour of individuals and give a

social identity which points the way forward for society. Key to such communities is the impetus to look outwards to the needs of those outside the community and towards God.

### 3. Virtual communities

The internet has grown from 1000 to 10 million users over the last 25 years.<sup>15</sup> It developed on the back of computer developments and was initially aimed at facilitating information exchange between defence and research staff. Computers have been seen as enabling society to focus on information rather than on the material goods that were a focus of the industrial revolution. Hence recent western society has been termed an 'Information Society' with the computer being the defining key symbol.<sup>16</sup> However, the advent of the internet goes beyond information to community.

The first development from information exchange to community came as a result of a Bulletin Board (BBS) in 1978, and users of the system were heralded as 'agents of a new kind of social experiment' with the first message being 'We are as gods and might as well get good at it.'<sup>17</sup> This developed into news-

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15 Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Finding Connection in a Computerized World* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1994), p. 8.

16 David Lyon, *The Information Society: Issues and Illusions* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988), pp. x, 16, 123.

17 Alluequere Rosanne Stone, 'Sex and Death Among the Disembodied: VR, Cyberspace, and the Nature of Academic Discourse' in *The Cultures of Computing*, Susan Leigh Star (ed.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 247.

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11 Warren, *Being Human*, p. 124.

12 Warren, *Being Human*, p. 91.

13 Michael Nazir-Ali, *From Everywhere to Everywhere* (London: Collins, Flame, 1990), p. 205.

14 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 472.

groups on the internet of which there are now more than five thousand, involving in excess of 2.5 million people.<sup>18</sup> In such groups the exchange of information leads to a clearly defined social identity based on key community members and subject foci. In a related, but separate, development the World Wide Web has grown and simulates a world-wide community, each member having their own 'shop front' web pages. This has led one sociologist to claim that the internet has moved us from a 'culture of calculation' to a 'culture of simulation'.<sup>19</sup> Virtual communities are a prime example of this change.

Virtual communities come in many different forms, often denoted by letters: WELL, MUDs, BBS, Usenet, IRC and, of course, good old newsgroups. These form a whole 'ecosystem of subcultures'. We can broadly see two types of virtual communities: those linked with real-life and those based on assumed identities. An example of those based on real-life is WELL<sup>20</sup> conferencing system. Rheingold describes this as a community of people he has come to care deeply about, a community that develops over time and meets the practical needs of daily life. Turkle comments on how one person involved in WELL reflected how 'one ceases to believe in a self independ-

ent of the relations in which he or she is embedded'.<sup>21</sup>

An example of communities with assumed identities is one inspired by the TV series *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. You choose an identity 'as close to or as far away from one's "real self" as one chooses' and enter into the *Star Trek* environment, building the rules of social interaction as you go. Such simulations offer 'parallel identities, parallel lives' and are derived from the fantasy role-play games of the 1970s.<sup>22</sup> Both of these forms of community are (currently) text based, with community members communicating via written sentences or letters.

Thus in virtual communities 'we participate with people from all over the world, people with whom we converse daily, people with whom we may have fairly intimate relationships but whom we may never physically meet'.<sup>23</sup> This is in line with the general compression of spatial and temporal worlds that is a characteristic of postmodernism.<sup>24</sup> Virtual communities provide a sense of fulfilment, answers to our questions and support for one another—the 'collective goods' that Rheingold suggests define a community. For many people virtual and real-life communities are mixed together in their minds:

Not only do I inhabit my virtual communities; to the degree that I carry around their conversations in my head and

18 Nancy K. Baym, 'From Practice to Culture on Usenet,' in *The Cultures of Computing*, Susan Leigh Star (ed.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 31.

19 Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the internet* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1996), p. 19.

20 Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link

21 Turkle, *Life on the Screen*, p. 257.

22 Turkle, *Life on the Screen*, pp. 11-14.

23 Turkle, *Life on the Screen*, pp. 9-10.

24 Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, pp. 240 ff.



begin to mix it up with them in real life, my virtual communities also inhabit my life. I've been colonized; my sense of family at the most fundamental level has been virtualised.<sup>25</sup>

Virtual communities affect both our expression of society and our individual self-identity. They can help develop self-identity in a positive way. But, particularly with simulation communities, they pose the problem of how people can have multiple identities and yet remain sane. Turkle suggests an answer to this based on Lifton's concept of a 'protean self' capable of 'fluid transformations but is grounded in coherence and a moral outlook. It is multiple but integrated. You can have a sense of self without being one self.'<sup>26</sup>

In all of this the internet medium has developed to a level far beyond what its creators envisaged. Rather than just serving us by providing a means of exchanging information, it begins to be a basis from which our self-definition comes. Turkle argues that 'Computers don't just do things for us, they do things to us, including our ways of thinking about ourselves and other people'.<sup>27</sup> Future understandings of self and community need to take account of this impact computers have.

The debate still continues as to the sense in which virtual communities are communities in sociological

terms.<sup>28</sup> However, I want to suggest a definition for virtual communities. For any one community the interaction between individuals can be seen to be characterized by four factors:

- (1) interactions are between geographically dispersed individuals;
- (2) they use text-based communication;
- (3) communication is one-way with delayed responses; and
- (4) members may assume identities not their own.<sup>29</sup>

It is hard to generalise on the actual content of such interactions without reference to particular communities; this goes beyond the scope of this essay.

It is harder to identify how such interactions affect the behaviour of individuals. It is clear that virtual communities can stimulate their members to care for one another and understand the needs and views of those from different cultural backgrounds, as Rheingold illustrates. Yet, I suggest, there is a tendency to look no further than the virtual community. Edwards argues that virtual communities can become 'closed subjective worlds' and as such can lead to a disconnection with the real

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<sup>28</sup> Greg Smith, *Community-Arianism, Chapter 8: Community Connections in an Information Society*, web book (<<http://www.communities.org.uk/greg/chap8.html>>, 1996), p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> It is useful to compare these with communities formed through the technological advances of telephone and ham radio. They are similar except for the use of voice and not text and less delayed responses. This also, perhaps, makes it harder for individuals to assume other identities in those mediums.

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<sup>25</sup> Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*, p. 10.

<sup>26</sup> Turkle, *Life on the Screen*, p. 258.

<sup>27</sup> Turkle, *Life on the Screen*, p. 26.

world.<sup>30</sup> Rheingold argues that virtual communities could revitalize wider social democracy, which in one sense illustrates an outward looking attitude. This view is based on including more people in virtual communities rather than building links between virtual and non-virtual communities. The counter example to these is where communities are able to include those usually excluded from other communities, such as the ill or disabled.

The social identity of virtual communities is highly relational and based on particular shared interests. They are characterized by mutual encouragement and exploration of new ideas and ways of being society, through simulation and use of alternative identities. But we need caution because many virtual communities are fluid and transitory and so will have changing identities.<sup>31</sup>

#### 4. Virtual communities and mission

Before we look at virtual communities from the perspective of mission, there are a number of issues that need clarifying. When we look at the definition of virtual communities it is

clear that there is a difference between them and the use of the internet in 'networking', which focuses more on information exchange. Much has been done in using the internet in networking amongst world mission agencies, and Siewert gives a comprehensive review of these.<sup>32</sup> Less thought has gone into virtual communities, which are our concern here.

In comparing virtual and non-virtual communities we need to bear in mind that they are not distinct, and each influences the other; there is a constant interplay between 'technology' and 'society'.<sup>33</sup> We also need to be aware that virtual communities exist in a time of change, and so further changes can be expected. In particular, Lyon has noted that 'the expanding diversity of channels and commodities within the "electronic culture" is leading, paradoxically, to less rather than more choice. That is to say, choice is increasingly circumscribed by commercial criteria.'<sup>34</sup> Microsoft's attempts to dominate the internet browser market illustrate this pressure, and show that a possible result is the setting up of new limits to virtual communities.

I want to suggest that the appearance of virtual communities reflects the *missio dei* of the creator God. It has been widely noted that computer users have suffered a common

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30 He uses the example of how a US Air Force surveillance centre during the Vietnam war gave people the cosy view of great victories, belied by the failure on the ground. A closed computerised world cuts people off from the real events they were supposed to be affecting. Paul N. Edwards, 'Cyberpunks in Cyberspace: The Politics of Subjectivity in the Computer Age,' in *The Cultures of Computing*, Susan Leigh Star (ed.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 70-71.

31 See Smith's review of virtual communities in the light of Etzioni's criteria of community. Smith, *Community Connections*, p. 6.

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32 John A. Siewert, 'Information Technology and the Communication of the Gospel', paper presented at Congress on the World Mission of the Church (Luther Seminary, Minnesota, 1998).

33 Lyon, *The Information Society*, p. viii.

34 Lyon, *The Information Society*, p. 129.

pattern of addiction and isolation.<sup>35</sup> Where there is isolation we could expect God to be at work bringing community, for God did not create us to be alone (Gen. 2:18) and later went about forming the communities of Israel and the church. Virtual communities offer new forms of community particularly appropriate for computer users. These should be approached in a positive light as a part of God's working. That is not to say that they cannot be used for ill as well as good, and neither is it to deny that human responsibility is important.<sup>36</sup> As more people use computers we may expect the importance of virtual communities to increase, but as yet their application is limited by the level of computer knowledge that users have.

Comparing the definitions of Christian mission and virtual communities, we see the important need for virtual communities to be directed outwards if they are to be a vehicle for Christian mission. It is not sufficient to talk, as Rheingold does, about 'collective goods' as if community is all about goods received from others. The desire to include others in virtual communities is a step along the way to looking outwards, but it is a step that finds it hard to include people if they are unable or choose not to join the virtual community. This contrasts with Christian mission

which does seek to incorporate people into a Christian community through evangelism, but which seeks to serve others even if they don't respond to the evangelistic outreach.<sup>37</sup>

The pressure against looking too far outwards is inherent in any emphasis on community in this post-modern era. Harvey notes that one response to the time-space compression is to find 'an intermediate niche for political and intellectual life which spurns grand narrative but which does cultivate the possibility of limited action. This is the progressive angle to postmodernism which emphasises community and locality, place and regional resistance, social movements, respect for otherness, and the like.' He argues that it is hard to stop this approach sliding into parochialism, with the risk of narrow and sectarian politics.<sup>38</sup> Christian mission needs to challenge this tendency in virtual communities in order to look beyond the narrow views and self-understanding of such a community.

Looking outwards with a commitment to the poor is a key emphasis for Christian communities in mission, most often seen in liberation theology and Base Christian Communities.<sup>39</sup> This commitment is more than just intellectual understanding; it is about working to change the conditions that keep

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<sup>35</sup> See, for example, the sociological work of Turkle quoted by I. Barbour, *Ethics in an Age of Technology*, The Gifford Lectures 1989-1991, Vol. 2 (London: SCM, 1992), p. 158.

<sup>36</sup> see Barbour, *Ethics*, pp. 175-76 for a summary of the good and bad uses of computer technology, although he writes without reference to the internet.

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<sup>37</sup> The distinction between evangelism and mission is important here, as outlined by Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, pp. 411-12, with mission being the wider call of the church sent into the world.

<sup>38</sup> Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 351.

<sup>39</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, pp. 432 ff.

people poor. It is difficult to see how virtual communities can be committed to the poor, especially since technology is usually seen as increasing the divide between rich and poor. Barbour comments on how computers increase the divide in terms of information and hence power.<sup>40</sup> Smith expresses the cultural exclusion that comes from the internet with its bias towards educated English speakers.<sup>41</sup> People such as Rheingold suggest the need is to encourage more and more people to join the internet, and yet this is meaningless for the poor who may not even have a radio, let alone a computer.<sup>42</sup>

The centrality of Jesus to mission communities suggests the need for an incarnational approach which connects a virtual community with people where they are. One approach would be to establish explicit links between a virtual community and a community of the poor. An example along this way is the newsgroup of the Christian Peacemakers Team in Israel-Palestine. They work amongst the poor and oppressed and distribute news of the people they work with, using the newsgroup, in a way that helps the virtual community to enter into the suffering of others, face the challenges and then to act.<sup>43</sup>

We need to be careful that this

approach does not degenerate into a 'church-for-others' rather than a 'church-with-others'; it would then be easy to divide between 'us' (in the virtual community) and 'them' (the poor).<sup>44</sup> But inclusion of the voices of the poor into the virtual community and the communication of the discussions of the virtual community with the poor could work towards wider understanding and involvement. They can offer the poor a greater voice than we often find with existing mission links around the world, where the perspective often comes from letters by a western missionary edited by a western media department.

It is difficult to identify the general content of virtual community interactions, but if the community is to act as a witness in mission then these interactions need to be characterized by forgiveness, affirmation and a sense of working together. By doing so they will reflect the life of the Trinity.

Various people have noted the relevance of the Trinity in a postmodern world,<sup>45</sup> but I think further reflections on virtual communities over the internet will provide new models for understanding the Trinity. That is not to say that we can reduce God to the exchange of 'bits' of information, but

40 Barbour, *Ethics*, p. 175.

41 Smith, *Community Connections*, p. 3.

42 Lyon, *The Information Society*, p. 14.

43 <<http://www.prairienet.org/cpt/>>.

Although not a true virtual community in that it does not usually include interaction from outside Israel-Palestine, I believe it points a way forward.

44 I am using the terms as does Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 436, although I am aware, for example, that Bonhoeffer uses the phrase 'church for others' in a way that corresponds to Bosch's 'church with others'. The important issue here is that an incarnational approach implies a level of identification with others that goes beyond charity at a distance.

45 For example, P. Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology*, Trinity & Truth Series (London: DLT, 1998), pp. 3-18.

the model of diversified communication represented by the internet may lead to a more complex understanding of Trinitarian life. It is a life comprised of a multitude of communications happening at once which encompasses a world of different situations and interests simultaneously.<sup>46</sup> This may lead to an understanding of God that is more attractive evangelistically in this postmodern age and one which also fits with the 'everywhere to everywhere' understanding of mission currently underlying the work of many mission agencies.<sup>47</sup>

This reference to the life of the Trinity signals the need to ensure that virtual communities interact with God. The reliance on text by virtual communities suggests the potential importance of Scripture in the definition and mission of such communities. This could end up being reduced to the passing round of Bible texts, but the simulation opportunities of virtual communities suggest a more creative way forward. In Ignatian spirituality, the 'Exercises' work at enabling people to enter into biblical stories in order to encounter the God behind the story.<sup>48</sup> This often involves imagining being a character in the story and thinking about the

reaction of such characters to what is happening, and where they sense God at work in this.

This process is not so different from assuming a different identity and entering into a simulated world. It would be a challenging way forward to simulate a world based on the biblical text and the stories contained within it, and then to ask people to enter into that world, experience situations in that world and through that encounter God. Such an approach has much to commend itself in the work of mission, enabling people to enter into a Christian world-view, pose their questions, gain a greater understanding of God and thus re-evaluate their identity. It is an approach which combines dialogue with evangelism—two aspects which are often found in tension in mission.

Worship is another requirement if virtual communities are to interact with God and be characterized by praise. A recent survey of US teenagers and adults suggests that 'by 2010 we will probably have 10% to 20% of the population relying primarily or exclusively upon the internet for its religious input'.<sup>49</sup> Thus this issue is likely to become more crucial. The most obvious way forward, given the textual nature of the medium, is to consider the inclusion of liturgical worship into the life of virtual communities.<sup>50</sup> The internet

46 Compare with the more strict understanding of Trinity represented by S. Pickard, 'The Trinitarian Dynamics of Belief' in *Essentials of Christian Community*, David F. Ford and Dennis L. Stamps (eds.) (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), pp. 63-75, or S. Chan, 'Sharing the Trinitarian Life' in *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia*, Thomas F. Best and Gunter Gassmann (eds.) Faith and Order Paper, no. 166 (Geneva: WCC, 1994), pp. 85-90.

47 Nazir-Ali, *From Everywhere*.

48 Gerard W. Hughes, *God of Surprises* (London: DLT, 1985).

49 Barna Research Group, 'The Cyberchurch is Coming' web page (<<http://www.barna.org/Press/CyberChurch.htm>>, 1998).

50 It may also be possible to include graphics such as icons which are an important part of worship for many.

vastly increases the number of sources for liturgical worship and allows more easily the construction of locally appropriate (contextualised) liturgies.<sup>51</sup>

However, worship needs to be linked in with a historical and theological tradition if it is to form a part of the worship of the Christian community world-wide and through the ages. It also needs to be enriched from cross-fertilization with other areas of the Christian faith such as doctrine and social justice.<sup>52</sup> Again we are encountering the danger of virtual communities becoming cut off from the wider communities, which are essential to their growth and vitality.

However, I would argue that if worship is encouraged then these other things will follow. As White states, we 'must take the power of worship seriously...[it] has the power to shape individuals and communities; to provide a vision of the world as God intends it to be; to inculcate the biblical values of justice, peace and the integrity of creation'.<sup>53</sup> We must let virtual communities be shaped by the experience of God, bringing hope for the future.

Virtual communities offer a significant challenge to church communities in many different ways. For example, they arise in the context of the internet, which is often linked with the postmodern culture<sup>54</sup> and

are perhaps more in touch with some people outside the church, and more contextualised, than are traditional Christian communities. In this they challenge the church to look outwards to include those of other cultures who have little church contact. Virtual communities also break down some of the barriers between countries and peoples and make communication and understanding possible. This raises the question of the extent to which the world-wide church has broken down the barriers between its members in different countries and enabled them to understand situations and cultures very different from their own. I suspect there is much work to be done in this area, and mission agencies have only just begun to address the issue.

Virtual communities also allow great freedom of expression without censorship by authorities. This is a challenge to the church leadership who may want to control who speaks and what they speak about. Young people, for example, often feel excluded from leadership and expression.<sup>55</sup> At another level virtual

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51 Susan J. White, *Christian Worship and Technological Change* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), pp. 48-49.

52 White, *Christian Worship*, p. 58.

53 White, *Christian Worship*, p. 124.

54 Smith, *Community Connections*, p. 2.

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55 There are two down-sides to this freedom of expression. Firstly, the internet gives as much validity to fringe groups as to 'main-line' groups, so it is possible to get an unequal say; it is not possible to evaluate how many people hold to an expressed view by the number of web pages or communities devoted to the view. I owe this observation to Bill Damick of Trans World Radio. Secondly, this freedom can lead to expressions which the majority of people would find morally unacceptable, such as communities encouraging child pornography. More work needs to be done in the area of ethics and virtual communities.

communities challenge the church in the way that they give personal support that the local church pastoral system may not be able to match.

## 5. Conclusion

Virtual communities will continue to grow and develop, becoming an increasing part of the identity of many people. They are a vehicle for both good and ill, and the challenge for the church is to find ways of using them for good. If we are to use virtual communities as a vehicle for mission, then we need to challenge their tendency towards narrowness and find ways of directing them outwards. Ways need to be found of linking virtual communities with real-life communities, especially those of the poor and oppressed. They also need to be linked with an experience of the Trinitarian God through worship and Scripture. Despite their limitations, virtual communities are managing to include people who often feel excluded from institutional church life, and the church needs to learn about contemporary postmodern culture from the contextualisation inherent in virtual communities. The possibility of new theological and missiological insights must be pursued. Some progress has been made in these directions, but more is required.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>56</sup> This essay illustrates some of the progress made in the very helpful suggestions given to the author by members of the Lausanne research community. Particular thanks to Dave Nesmith, Bishop Brian Carrell, John Roxborough, James Craig, Bill Damick, Greg Smith, John Siewert and Tony Whitaker. I may not have taken all their comments on board, but they helped me see new angles on the subject.

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# Asking Questions about Technology, with Specific Reference to Computers

Paul R. Dekar

**Keywords:** Technology, justice, globalization, virtual reality, research, communication, scholarship, pedagogy, piety, mobility, justice, environment

*Where is the Life we have lost in living?  
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?  
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?  
T. S. Eliot, Choruses from 'The Rock'*

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Historically, appraisals of twenty-

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first century technology and tools such as computers differ. Some see technology as entirely good, the beneficent basis of higher living standards and the benign source of solutions to problems. Others eschew technology. Warning that the tools of change threaten, *inter alia*, human freedom, and lead to cultural genocide and the mechanization of human life, they point to increased alienation and the undermining of earth-keeping values. Others assert technology is morally neutral. Its impacts vary according to context and use.<sup>2</sup>

My angle of vision falls in the third grouping. Technology needs to be approached with caution and

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1 I am grateful to Carrie Beverly, Martha Brahm, David Ciscel, Rich Cook, Nancy Dekar, Ross Lawford, Randy Leslie and Randall Mullins for comments on a draft of this article. The errors are mine, all mine!

2 Ian Barbour, *Ethics in an Age of Technology. The Gifford Lectures 1989-1991* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), v. 2, ch. 1. Barbour examines science, technology and religion. He won the 1999 Templeton Prize.

applied with wisdom. Like all forms of technology and like any tool, computers have the potential to be used in constructive or destructive ways. If we are to benefit from the former and not succumb to the latter, we need to be conscious of the potential dangers inherent in accepting technology unquestionably.

In terms of various theories of justice, I am concerned with an ethics of consequences and responsibility.<sup>3</sup> The ultimate question of responsibility has to do with life itself. In this article, I write of justice as a matter of creating a society that meets basic human needs and looks beyond to ensure that all people live well.

A central tenet of the thought of French theologian Jacques Ellul is that one cannot take the good parts but leave the bad. The two faces are inextricably linked. Like Ellul, I am shaped by a Reformed Tradition that accents the right use of God's gifts. We are to use the good things of life in so far as they help us to promote the common good and do not become ends. It is idolatry to value earthly things disproportionately.<sup>4</sup>

I am also shaped by the social ferment of the period when I came to adulthood. From 1961-65 I attended

the University of California at Berkeley. The campus simmered with the fervour of the Civil Rights, the Feminist, the anti-Vietnam War and the Free Speech movements. On December 3, 1964 as I prepared to enter Sproul Hall, the main administrative building on campus, Mario Savio concluded a speech with these words:

There is a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can't take part; you can't even passively take part, and you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you've got to make it stop. And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you're free, the machine will be prevented from working at all!<sup>5</sup>

These days, such warnings about the extent to which machines and bureaucracies were invading our lives seem especially prescient. While the euphoria of the 1960s has faded, positive values of the movements of the period, for example community and justice, continue to lead me and others to wrestle with basic questions about technology. I work against war, injustice and ecological degradation. Technologies contribute to each and vice versa. In terms of technology, Nazi Germany was a highly advanced country. Technology helped perpetuate genocide. Today, many toxic chemicals pose a threat to human life and to the

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3 Paul R. Dekar, 'Towards a Theology of Responsibility', *Theodolite* 7 (1987):11-19. The thought of H. Richard Niebuhr, Reinhold Niebuhr and John Rawls shaped my perspective.

4 Calvin, Institutes 3.10.1-6. Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (New York: Vintage, 1964); idem, *The Presence of the Kingdom* (New York: Seabird, 1967); idem, *The Ethics of Freedom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976). For a discussion of Enlightenment thought as exacerbating the problem of humans over-valoring human reason, see R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1946).

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5 <<http://fsm-a.org>>. To recall the period, I read material in my personal files. Highlighted articles in the May 1965 issue of *Fellowship* (six deal with moral and technological implications of peace on earth) and the April-May 1970 issue of *Motive* on the environmental crisis suggest their influence on me at the time.

ability of the earth to clean up after us. At the same time, the struggles to prevent genocide and to clean up the environment have birthed new technologies and modified others in the service of the common good.<sup>6</sup>

New technologies and tools quicken change. For example, in ancient Egypt the invention of papyrus stimulated a shift from a primarily oral-aural society to one based on writing. In China, the invention of gunpowder in the ninth century contributed to the unification of the country.<sup>7</sup> In Europe, the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century fuelled an increase in literacy.

At least in highly industrialized countries, computers are central to a revolution that influences almost all aspects of our lives. In the United States, word processors, E-mail and Automated Teller Machines invade our living. We are sometimes scarcely aware of how our lives, to say nothing of the world at large change as a result. Computers that understand speech, read script and perform tasks previously carried out by humans foreshadow an age in which many industries are automated, including banking, insurance and tourism. The three main institutions driving economic globalization (the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund and the

World Bank) extend corporate power structures of the highly industrialized countries to the far reaches of the world, often to the detriment of local communities and relatively self-sufficient national economies.<sup>8</sup>

The startling rapidity and pervasiveness of cultural transformation that computers foster is remarkable. Modern technology, including the world of computers, is not simply an extension of humans making things through the power of improved science but a new way of knowing and making. While it is too early to know what impact the computer will have on human thought, we seem to be dealing with a co-penetration of science and technology that defines life in North America, and perhaps world-wide in unique ways.<sup>9</sup>

Technology critic Neil Postman warns that computers threaten to impose on us the ways they are used. 'The fundamental metaphorical message of the computer ... is that we are machines—thinking machines, to be sure, but machines nonetheless.... It subordinates the claims of our nature, our biology, our

6 Stephen G. Greene, 'Technology Helps Small Environmental Group Get Big Results', *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, January 11, 2001 <http://philanthropy.com>.

7 'War, Technology of', *New Encyclopedia Britannica*, 29:541-2. The Arab Muslim world and European countries benefited even more from this advance of technology. Whether this was good is another question.

8 Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr., *For the Common Good. Redirecting the Economy toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future* (Boston: Beacon, 1994); Jeremy Rifkin, *The End of Work. The Decline of the Global Labor Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era* (New York: Putnam's, 1996); Michael Zweig, ed., *Religion and Economic Justice* (Philadelphia: Temple, 1991).

9 Michael Heim, *Electric Language: A Philosophical Study of Word Processing*, Foreword by David Gelernter (2d. ed., New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

emotions, our spirituality.’<sup>10</sup>

Is he serious? Yes, as evidenced by recent discussion in which serious thinkers suggest that cyberspace knows no boundaries. For some, cyberspace is an out-of-control place in which any attempt to impose real world laws would be akin to an attempt to impose new laws on a conquered or colonized people. This perspective suggests that computers have potential constructive or destructive use when placed in the hands of sinful humans.<sup>11</sup>

Computers give rise to a new entity, the virtual reality. Overwhelmed by images on television, computer screens and videos, people withdraw to a private world and refuse to accept responsibility, to acknowledge that doing things face to face and doing things in cyberspace are not the same. Can we educate people to tell when people are real? Laurie Anderson writes, ‘When I’m working with computerized voices, I have the illusion that I’m in touch with another intelligence. On bad days — when everything crashes — I start yelling at my computer.’ Patricia Volk states, ‘Technology Makes Me Mad: First there was breast-feeding. Then there was formula. Now

there’s patent No. 5,571,084, a micro-processor-controlled breast-pump vested with a programming chip that vacuums out milk for your baby without human contact. Why? So you can answer more E-mail?’<sup>12</sup>

We are discussing something more troubling than doublespeak or Murphy’s Law (anything that can go wrong will). New computers are powerful. In addition to good uses of this technology, we are subjected to new abuses such as hacking and the disabling of entire communications networks by the transmission of ‘viruses’. The same technology that enlarges access to data can be used to spawn complex surveillance and information systems such as nanotechnology. We must address ethical concerns raised by twenty-first century computers.

Futurist Alvin Toffler describes an experiment he conducted with high school students. He gave them index cards and said, ‘Write down seven things that will happen in the future.’ They said things like there will be war, or we will all drown in ecological sludge. He noticed that very few used the word ‘I’ but that changed when he gave them another set of index cards and asked them to write down seven things that would happen to them. The responses were much more personal: I will marry; I will graduate; I will die; and so on. Toffler concluded that there was a large gulf between the world that they were seeing out there and their own. ‘[T]he image of reality that

10 Neil Postman, *Technopoly. The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Knopf, 1993), p. 111. George Parkin Grant, *Technology and Justice* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986) expands on this point.

11 Bill Joy, ‘Why the Future Doesn’t Need Us’, *Wired Archive* 8.04-April 2000 <<http://www.wired.com>>. As an example of anti-technology rage, Joy cites Theodore Kaczynski and his dystopian vision. See also Chris Wood, ‘Dealing with Tech Rage,’ *Macleans*, March 19, 2001, <<http://www.macleans.ca>>.

12 *New York Times Magazine*, September 28, 1997, pp. 68, 116.

they're getting from the media is one of high-speed rapid change, and the image that they're getting in the classroom is one of no change at all.<sup>13</sup>

Another scholar tried the experiment at a private school in 1996. The conclusion drawn from 127 responses was the same. The school then spent in excess of \$300,000 to install and update technology in the classroom. No follow-up study has been requested. The effort to bring technology into the school was not designed to raise student knowledge or skills. The school long enjoyed the reputation that all graduating seniors had full scholarships to major universities. Technology was the answer to falling enrolment, not student achievement or improvement. This does not make the administrators guilty of unethical or immoral acts. The survey results revealed some very important determinants of how we avoid responsibility and how we continue to teach this avoidance to the next generation, even to students who learn technology from an early age.<sup>14</sup>

I replicated Toffler's simple survey at Memphis Theological Seminary and discovered a similar disjunction between the world in which we live our private lives and the world at large. This has led me to explore implications of introducing computers into Memphis Theological Seminary and the wider community it serves.

### What is Technology?

Technology is 'the application of organized knowledge to practical tasks by ordered systems of people and machines'.<sup>15</sup> The word in English has origins in two Greek words, *techne* (which means an art or craft) and *logia* (which means the systematic treatment of). Hence, classically technology may be understood as the systematic study and application of arts, crafts and the practical or industrial arts.

Technology is an applied science. The distinction between theoretical and applied science is crucial. When Albert Einstein advised President Franklin D. Roosevelt that in the light of modern discoveries of physics, atomic weapons could be built, and that the United States should do it, he was making the case that the pure science of physics should be directed towards political and social ends. President Roosevelt might have decided not to proceed from theory to application. Urgent practical considerations of the day led to the decision to develop and use nuclear weapons.

Is there ever a time when, if we can build it, we should not? I think there is, at least when technology has advanced faster than ethical reflection on that technology. (However important the following case studies are, they require examination that is impossible in this article.) For example, in my view we should have refused nuclear weaponry. In the light of Three Mile Island (1979) and Chernobyl (1986), the jury is still out

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<sup>13</sup> *Wired magazine* 1.05 November 1993, <<http://www.wired.com>>.

<sup>14</sup> Carrie Beverly, personal correspondence.

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<sup>15</sup> Barbour, II:3.

in relation to nuclear energy. Arguably we should not move ahead in the area of cloning. A recent headline announces, 'Defiant trio of researchers insist they'll clone children.'<sup>16</sup> In the arena of climate change and global warming, Art Bell and Whitley Strieber argue that self-conceived and designed machines are needed if humanity is to survive the 'coming global superstorm'. If we do, it will be because machine intelligence is superior to human intelligence.<sup>17</sup>

I am suspicious of claims that celebrate technology mindlessly, without a cautionary tale. An old French riddle for children told to a meeting of the Club of Rome, a group of respected bureaucrats, educators, industrialists and scientists, describes the human predicament:

Suppose you own a pond on which a water lily is growing. The lily plant doubles in size each day. If the lily were allowed to grow unchecked, it would completely cover the pond in 30 days, choking off the other forms of life in the water. For a long time the lily plant seems small, and so you decide not to worry about cutting it back until it covers half the pond. On what day will that be? On the twenty-ninth day, of course. You have one day to save the pond.<sup>18</sup>

Many challenges confront us. In

itself, each is serious. Together, these worries combine to make the situation more intense. Like the water lily, together they gather momentum exponentially. Our pond, planet earth, has reached the twenty-ninth day in terms of the carrying capacity of earth, a subject that animates the work of the Club of Rome.

Is it true with computer technology? I will examine this question in two ways. First, I will identify areas that are good in computer technology and those that elicit concern. I will then articulate criteria by which to address the issues raised.

### What is Good about Computers?

I am not a neo-Luddite.<sup>19</sup> A modern person, I am grateful for advances in transportation, medicine and other areas. I use computers all the time. To prepare this article, I have downloaded material from the World Wide Web and used search engines to identify books not available in the Memphis Theological Seminary library. Word processing has enabled me to produce this article efficiently.

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16 *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, March 10, 2001.

17 Art Bell and Whitley Strieber, *The Coming Global Superstorm* (New York: Pocket, 2000).

18 Donella H. Meadows et al, *The Limits to Growth* (New York: New American, 1974), p. 37. Meadows argues a sustainable society is still attainable. Maturity, compassion and wise policies are required more than economic growth or technological fixes. Donella H. Meadows et al, *Beyond the Limits. Confronting Global Collapse. Envisioning a Sustainable Future* (White River Junction: Chelsea Green, 1992).

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19 In early 19th century England, introduction of machinery for textile production led to unemployment and poorer conditions for those still working. Under a real or imaginary leader named King Ludd, organized bands of men known as Luddites smashed the machines and burnt down factories to draw attention to their plight. They carefully avoided attacking people until one employer responded with force. Severe repression followed. At a mass trial in 1813 at York, many Luddites were hung; others were transported to Australia. Supporting their cause, poets Byron (1788-1824) and Shelley (1792-1822) ridiculed the militarist policies of the government. For an introduction, 'Luddites and Friends', *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Ideas*, 17, 24 February 1997, Transcript 9706.

Two computer breakdowns have not led me to return to my typewriter. To elicit feedback on my ideas, I can forward this article as an attachment to friends by E-mail and receive helpful critique.

As with most other technologies, the potential effects of computers are mixed. Let me cite one area in which computers have proved enormously helpful. A major justice issue concerns the gap between the information-rich and the information-poor. E-mail and the Internet have increased access to information, at least in the United States and elsewhere. Let me illustrate how technology can make information available to increasing numbers of people. In East Africa, civil wars, human rights violations and the HIV-AIDS epidemic have decimated Uganda's population. For three decades Makerere University, Uganda's principal medical faculty, has not had funds to purchase books or journals. Ease of communications through the 'electronic highway' makes crucial medical knowledge widely available and mitigates the need for the university library to upgrade library holdings.<sup>20</sup>

Computers are relevant to health when used in medical research. They can also aid medical understanding on the part of ordinary individuals as well as medical professionals. Recently, technology empowered a friend, who accessed medical information through his personal com-

puter, to take a more active role in his treatment for a medical condition. In Hamilton, Ontario, Barbara Patterson runs an eighteen hundred member discussion group on the Internet about Parkinson's Disease.<sup>21</sup> Readers can multiply such examples of positive uses of computers when combined with the judgment of physicians and plain common sense.

### Three Baskets of Concern

The mission statement of Memphis Theological Seminary states that we seek to cultivate a love for scholarship, piety and justice. Let me articulate concerns within each basket.

#### Scholarship

The first is scholarship. The computer has entered the world of higher education. Is this beneficial? And to whom? Are we rightly using this gift of God? My response to these questions is mixed. I use computers and other tools of the technological revolution. In my twenty-seven years of teaching, I have always used slides, overheads and a wide variety of teaching techniques. Now, on occasion I do so with the aid of powerful tools such as PowerPoint. I welcome experimentation in distance learning.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *Hamilton Spectator*, May 12, 2000.

<sup>22</sup> I have encouraged projects that seek to bridge the information divide such as Jericho Road and Cooperative Computer Ministries. I have encouraged use of computers in the church. I have seen value in offering a limited number of courses such as that taught by former dean Donald K. McKim, "Cyber" Barth, *Teaching Theology and Religion* 1, 3 (1998):183-6. I am designing a course to be offered as an experiment in distance learning settings two continents apart. I am aware of logistical issues and possible losses as well as potential gains.

<sup>20</sup> Graeme MacQueen, Rick McCutcheon and Joanna Santa-Barbara, 'The Use of Health Initiatives as Peace Initiatives', *Peace and Change* 22 (April 1997):175-97. Conversation with Dr. Charlie Clements.

In his work with the Fetzer Institute, a nonprofit foundation that supports research, education and service programmes exploring the integral relationships between body, mind and spirit, teacher Parker Palmer names a malaise that permeates education as the pain of disconnection. Faculty members are disconnected from colleagues, students from their own hearts. To address this pain and infuse learners with confidence that our search for ways to love and serve God is purposeful, Palmer calls for a spirituality of learning that establishes an intimate link between loving, community and knowing. So to teach is to create space in which obedience to truth is practised.<sup>23</sup>

I have long yearned to be part of truth seeking, truth telling servant leadership communities that Palmer describes. Inescapably, we humans need to have a sense of life's final meaning and to come into relationship with that meaning. Our life as God's beloved children is centred around not a body of doctrine but a Person who calls us to himself, in whom we find meaning and whose hands and feet unite with ours. Education is one context in which we grow in our knowledge and love of Jesus.

As I reflect upon my own experience I am awed by the richness of theological education as a resource, indeed an ideal locale in which to

realize Palmer's agenda. For example, at Memphis Theological Seminary, one can seek and be found by God. Truth and Light can seize one. One can practise obedience to the truth. As a teacher in this setting, I feel freedom to pursue God. I have developed courses intended to facilitate self-directed, problem-solving, action-oriented learning. I have encouraged students to identify their own goals and objectives for each class. I have sought to encourage creativity and the use of arts. I have moved from content-based to process-based learning.

As an illustration, I once offered a course on the history of spirituality. As I developed lectures on movements and theologians, I discovered that what students and I myself wanted was neither history, nor doctrine. We wanted to grow in Christ. I transformed the course into one highlighting spiritual formation. Every other year I offer Memphis Theological Seminary students 'Merton, Monasticism and Religious Pluralism'. It includes a week's retreat at the Trappist Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky. Students often comment that it is the course of mine from which they benefit most.

Reflecting on my practice of teaching, I am convinced that good pedagogy cannot be reduced to technological innovation. In every class I offer, my ability to connect with students depends less on the methods that I use, and more on my vulnerability, my willingness to be a guide, my commitment to free students to make connections between my story, course themes and their journeys.

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<sup>23</sup> *To Know as we are Known, Education as a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Harper, 1983); *The Courage to Teach. Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998).



The entry of computers at every level of education will intensify two adverse trends that already exist in higher education.

One is turning education into an agency of corporate society. A student jumps through hoops as a means of getting a job or letters behind her or his name on a calling card. She or he comes to value education as a ticket to some earthly paradise. According to Palmer, this leads to a 'divided life'.

A number of critics have called attention to the other trend, named variously as the alienating, deskilling or dumbing down of students.<sup>24</sup> Like television, the computer becomes entertainment. It stupefies people. At least, it does not hinder stultifying of people. The presence of personal computers in the lives of students at an earlier and earlier age is not necessarily bad, but computers are not being used to teach children to think in sound ways.<sup>25</sup> Creativity is

reduced to technique. Wisdom is reduced to a bottomless well of data accessed, manipulated, regurgitated but rarely reflected upon. This is a product or side effect of forces that pre-date the entry of computers in education, but computers may intensify the problem.<sup>26</sup>

### *Piety*

The second basket of concern involves the life of the Spirit. We live in a consumer society. Greed has become a norm. Amidst the noise of advertisers hawking their wares, it is difficult to accept that there are any limits to commercialism. It takes a special consciousness to counter the many advertisements that tell us, 'You cannot be happy unless you buy this' or 'You are a nobody unless you own this.' It is difficult to put things in right perspective. What we are grateful for, we cherish. As a whole, North Americans are preoccupied with money. We are people in a rush. We are people addicted to size. We are people who exalt youth. Yet we are people experiencing the breakdown of community, the degradation of the self-worth of people and the apotheosis of things. Despite material prosperity and a boom in religious activity, a malaise of modernity infects many individuals.

Among most insightful recent analyses of life in the United States is *Bowling Alone* by the sociologist Robert Putnam.<sup>27</sup> The title derives

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24 David Nobel is a major proponent of the deskilling thesis. In *Forces of Production: A Social History of Industrial Automation* (New York: Knopf, 1984) and other books, Nobel argues management supports automation to replace highly skilled unionized workers. A 'friend' of seekers of truth, Ivan Illich updates his analysis of educational practice, *Deschooling Society* (New York: Harper, 1971), in a recent series, 'The Corruption of Christianity. Ivan Illich on Gospel, Church and Society', *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Ideas*, January 3-7, 2000, Typescript 2000. Other critics include Sven Birkerts, *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1994); John Taylor Gatto, *Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling* (Philadelphia: New Society, 1991); Grant, 'Faith and the Multiversity', *Technology and Justice*; Theodore Roszak, *The Cult of Information. The Folklore of Computers and the True Art of Thinking* (New York: Pantheon, 1986).

25 Shelley Emring, 'Children Are Losing Creativity, One Click at a Time', *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, February 11, 2001 is one study.

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26 When I used 'technology and justice' as key words, a search engine produced 951,000 titles!

27 Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone. The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

from finding that from 1980-1993 in the United States, league bowling decreased by 40% while the number of bowlers increased by 10%. This is not trivial. Eighty million Americans went bowling at least once in 1993, nearly a third more than voted in the 1994 congressional elections and roughly the same as claim to attend church regularly.

For Putnam, people bowling by themselves signals the decline of life in connection or association, seen as the heart of civic culture in the United States since Alex de Tocqueville reported on Democracy in America in the 1830s. By every measure Putnam details, we are becoming more individualistic, less committed to the common good and even less tolerant. Sustained by massive documentation, Putnam shows we have become a collection of objects without a sense of responsibility to the greater whole.

Why has this happened? Changes in family structure, time pressure, suburban sprawl and, especially, television are the main culprits. Putnam discounts residential mobility (steadily declining for the last half century) and computers as a primary cause. The trend towards loss of community, compassion and civic culture predates Internet! The pervasiveness of the computer revolution may intensify the trend. On the other hand, the primary effect of widespread ownership of home computers will be to strengthen existing social networks, as the telephone has done, or to provide a glorified television. It is too early to ascertain.

My experience is mixed. I use E-

mail to keep in touch with family and friends. I use the Internet to access information and support farsighted causes.<sup>28</sup> But these same computer technologies threaten to overwhelm me. Am I being socialized to sanction an enormous expansion of an already frenetic pace of life? Am I unconsciously coming to accept homogeneity and mindless consumption? Am I being anesthetized by a phenomenon that is at once dehumanizing and enslaving? I hope not, but I agree with Putnam that it is now past time to begin to reweave the fabric of our communities.

In reflecting on my own experience, I am aware of the warning not to practise one's piety before others (Mat. 6:1). Still, God calls us to live holy lives as participants in the Divine Nature as persons who bear God's image and likeness restored by Christ (2 Pet. 1:4). This is done in community. The Body of Christ knows no solitary individual. Christianity is incarnational. Just as God became one of us in Jesus, we share Jesus by making him manifest in our lives as we bless, encourage, give testimony, heal, listen, love, strengthen and practise compassion.

By contrast, a group of editors of the religious press once sought to explain why guides to contemplation, meditation, prayer and other spiritual practices flood the market. They discovered their readership of how-to books on spirituality comes almost entirely from the upper income bracket of society. Their

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<sup>28</sup> With a click of the mouse, hunger, rain forest and other web sites contribute to good causes.

readers had virtually no interest in social justice. Similarly, National Public Radio recently reported a vast increase of religion web sites and chat rooms precisely due to their anonymity. These findings suggest that some forms of modern spirituality reinforce individualism and isolation and do not assist believers to order their lives in the light of God's concern for the marginalized and the lost.

### *Justice*

A third basket of concern has to do with justice in several spheres: economic, social and political. With computers have come automation, the electronic office and homeworking. The record is mixed. Computer technologies are often introduced in the name of efficiency and the elimination of repetitive work. Many jobs have been lost. The loss of jobs is serious, but jobs have also been created, especially in such areas as computer science, electronics and telecommunications.

Since the Industrial Revolution, some individuals have accumulated enormous personal power through their control of resources and engines of change: communications, transportation and tools of mass destruction. We may be in the midst of another 'revolution', the transition to a so-called information society. Might the arrival of the new workerless, information society replicate patterns of the Industrial Revolution with vast accumulation of wealth on the part of a very few? Does this portend realization of a massive substitution of machines for human labour? Clearly, it is too early to say.

The recent legal battle involving the United States Department of Justice and Microsoft recalls earlier struggles to restrain the 'barons of industry'.

The bitter experience of blue collar workers, African-Americans and women is one of massive technological displacement. Many of those laid off have not been retooled for the new economy and find employment in low-income, low-creativity service jobs. Computers do not specifically 'cause' this phenomenon, but they do strengthen the power of the economically privileged. Studies on the face of poverty reveal a growing gap between those that have access to technology and those that do not. Computers have a disproportionate high presence among information élites while those that are traditionally marginalized continue to fall behind.

A focus on gender reveals structural barriers for women. Some women cannot afford to purchase computer equipment or to pay for Internet services. This is especially true in the Two-Thirds World, but it is also the case in the United States, where the full impact of welfare reform legislation is yet to be felt. Approximately a third of the population is poor. So-called welfare reform has erected new obstacles to gaining public assistance, including job training for the new economy. As a result, women coming off welfare are unable to attain a level of income needed to live independently. Women also face a structural barrier in the schools, where women experience anti-gender bias in computer education. In short, while cyberspace may yet

prove to be an equalizer where race and gender disparities disappear, for now, 'electronic apartheid' reigns.<sup>29</sup>

Is there any sign of change in the direction of social justice? A number of the studies accent the role of the third sector (churches, non-profit organizations, neighbourhood-based organizations and the like; government and business are the other two sectors). The latest technological innovations are providing some individuals with increased freedom by making more time available for creative pursuits, community service and family, to say nothing of other good ends. The high tech/high touch formula holds out the promise that new technologies will empower individuals to build strong, self-sustaining communities able to withstand the forces that made the last century so destructive.<sup>30</sup>

Another justice concern arises in the area of environmental ethics. Many tout computers as creating a paperless society. This is not true for me; if anything, I have experienced a tremendous increase of paper. I acknowledge that this may be a

product of upbringing and preference. I like to touch what I read! Moreover, I acknowledge that computers have made possible, economically and technologically, a less harmful relation of humans to the natural world, for example through recycling or through accessing information on appropriate and sustainable technologies. For example, I am part of a Mission Group of the Memphis School of Servant Leadership that is developing a place of retreat. We envision building a house of prayer using solar energy, information about which we have accessed by computer. I can network with organizations such as The Nature Conservancy and Sierra Club. More broadly, I can use the tools of technology and the wisdom of our elders to open self and others to cast a more 'loving eye' on the natural world about me, including that in the damaged lands of our cities, and struggle against the mass estrangement from things natural.<sup>31</sup>

Yet another justice issue has to do with the potential abuses of communication and information technologies, including Internet. Examples of questions raised include the following:

- security risks: credit card numbers have been stolen, grades in university records changed and erroneous information placed in consumer credit reports. The problem is not unique to computers, and we

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29 Gisèle-Audrey Mills, 'Online Democracy', *Other Side* 33, 3 (1997): 41. For a local study, David H. Ciscel, *What Is a Living Wage for Memphis?* (Memphis: Center for Research on Women, University of Memphis, 1999). Marsha Siefert, George Gerbner, Janice Fisher, *The Information Gap: How Computers and Other New Communication Technologies Affect the Social Distribution of Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Kimberly Marie Mackay, 'The Effects of Anti-Gender Bias Instruction on the Attitudes of Student Perceptions Regarding Computers,' Master of Technology in Education thesis, University of Dayton, 2000.

30 John Naisbitt, *Megatrends. Ten New Directions Transforming our Lives* (New York: Warner, 1982).

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31 Robert Michael Pyle, *The Thunder Tree. Lessons from an Urban Wildland* (New York: Lyons, 1993); Sallie McFague, *Super, Natural Christians. How We Should Love Nature* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997).

may yet find ways to protect ourselves better.

- intellectual property rights: how can the work of artists, writers or scholars be protected?

- regulation: access of children to pornography has been restricted. Are there limits of freedom? When is censorship appropriate?

- privacy and electronic monitoring: computerized personal databases store vast amounts of information. Every time one uses a credit card, makes a phone call, sends an E-mail, logs on to the Internet, borrows a book from the library, pays a bill, personal details are recorded. Why are such details stored? Who should have access to this information? What controls should exist?

- identity theft: the capacity of communication and information technologies to stimulate new images has raised concern about the apparent malleability of identity. A *New Yorker* cartoon pictures Peter at the gate of paradise interviewing a prospective candidate for admission. 'You're not coming up on my computer. How long did you say you've been dead?'<sup>32</sup>

A final justice concern is the military use of computers. Since the Vietnam conflict, the United States has come to depend on ground-based and on-board computers in ballistic missile guidance systems, air

defence systems and the exploration of space. Some seventy percent of all government research and development funds goes to defence and space programmes (which are interconnected). While there are civilian spin-offs, most military applications are highly specialized and have little commercial potential. The end of the so-called cold war promised a peace dividend. Instead, military personnel and the public alike could watch the action in two modern conflicts in the Gulf and former Yugoslavia from a distance, scarcely aware of the cost, the potential failing of technical systems and the continued massive deployment of nuclear, biological and chemical means of ruin.

### **What Criteria shall be used to Assess Technology?**

Are these areas a few glitches yet to be fixed? Or are we on the cusp of an ethical revolution commensurate in scale with the scope and scale of technological change? In household economics, I am discerning when faced by decisions about a purchase or use of innovation. 'Do I need this?' 'What are the hidden costs (externalities)?' 'Will this purchase contribute to somebody's loss of a job?' 'How will it effect my life?' Such questions are the sorts of criteria by which to assess computers.

If we want human community to flourish and cohere within the common weal, we need to be concerned about the impact of technological change on the members of that community. The computer should not replace or disrupt anything good, such as family or community. If

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<sup>32</sup> *New Yorker*, 21 April 1997. David Lyon, *The Silicon Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986); idem, 'The Internet: Beyond Ethics?' *Science and Christian Belief* 9, 1 (1997):35-45; idem, *The Electronic Eye: The Rise of Surveillance Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994) and, with Elia Zureik, *Computers, Surveillance, and Privacy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

'labour saving' computers undermine the local economy or lead to massive unemployment, these externalities may not be worth the cost. Thus, when computers are introduced, costs and benefits should be measured on the basis of the premium we place on human interaction and human labour. For example, computer automation may be deemed beneficial if it frees people to spend more time with people, or if it is cheaper and better than whatever or whomever the computer replaces. The computer should be purchasable near to home. The computer should be durable so that our land fill sites are not overwhelmed with our garbage. People of ordinary intelligence should be able to maintain them.<sup>33</sup>

Criteria by which I or any individual may assess the relative contribution for good or ill of an individual technology such as the computer differs from the wider arena of ethical reflection on technology as such. Like most other technologies, the effects of computers are very mixed. The consequences for earth require reflection and wisdom that goes beyond technology. Technologies that raise few ethical problems are those that serve us on a human scale, allow us to take responsibility for our choices and consequences, protect the integrity of creation, ease the burden of work, facilitate communication, protect confidentiality and

privacy, enhance social justice and brighten our day. Memphis Theological Seminary is developing guidelines through which technologies are responsibly admitted, acquired and used. Some serious work lies ahead.<sup>34</sup>

### Summary

Technological change is a reality. The consequences for humanity, especially in terms of meeting basic human needs (not simply survival and security needs, but the need to belong, the need for self-esteem and the need for realizing one's potential) depend on choices made in the creation, development and use of these powerful new tools. It remains to be seen whether technological change in the area of computers will prove appropriate to or beneficial in every circumstance.

New technologies and tools have given some persons great power. Will the consequences lead to a better world? The possibility exists, but only, in my view, if we show restraint and humility. Christian apologist C. S. Lewis warned in 1943, 'What we call Man's power is, in reality, a power possessed by some men which they may, or may not, allow other men to profit by ... what we call Man's power over Nature turns out to be a power exercised by some men over other men with Nature as

33 Wendell Berry, *Another Turn of the Crank* (Washington, D. C.: Counterpoint, 1995), pp. 19-21; idem, 'Why I Am Not Going to Buy a Computer', *What Are People For?* (New York: North Point, 1990).

34 Carrie Beverly, 'Ethics of Technology in Education', <http://rgfn.epcc.edu> and Lester J. Pourciau, ed., *Ethics and Electronic Information in the Twenty-First Century* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1999). The American Academy of Religion and Society for Biblical Literature offers workshops on the ethics of technology.

its instrument.<sup>35</sup>

The computer presents us with a grave spiritual challenge. To promote the common good, I pray that

we may connect the potential and good of tools like the computer with our own fundamental intelligence and spiritual nature as well as with the wisdom of traditions and communities of which we are a part. Wisdom goes beyond technical knowledge. Let us think carefully about the consequences and limits of technology, including computers.

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35 C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man. Or Reflections on Education with Special Reference to the Teaching of English in the Upper Forms of Schools* (Glasgow: Fount Paperbacks, 1978), pp. 34-5.

## Called to One Hope: Perspectives on the Life to Come

Editor: John Colwell

Academics and lay people alike ask the question, 'What will happen when I die?' The Drew lectures on immortality were set up to encourage theological experts to research and write on this and other 'end time' themes.

This collection brings together the very best of these lectures, founded on a desire to expound the Christian eschatological hope. Seventeen papers, split into biblical, historical, and doctrinal and philosophical sections, cover a wide and varied field of subjects. Papers include **Howard Marshall** on universalism, **James Dunn** on Christ's return, **Tom Wright** on the new creation, **Thomas Torrance** on immortality, **Paul Fiddes** on apocalyptic in novels, **Richard Bauckham** on the millennium, and **Colin Gunton** on the eschatology of church membership. The diversity of authors and subjects on a single theme produces a fascinating and deeply rich volume, which will leave many keen readers re-thinking and re-evaluating the centrality of their Christian hope.

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# Napster, Moody Bible Institute and Christianity Online

Mark H. Senter III

**Keywords:** Internet, theological education, copyright, tuition fee, technology, in-service, textbooks, ministry.

Let's put educational technology and theological education into context at the beginning of the new millennium. 'Of the 332 million people online in the world, less than 1 percent are in Africa. Developing countries as a whole contain fewer than 5 percent of the computers connected to the internet.'<sup>1</sup> While the world wide web and its availability to theological schools around the world is

not the totality of educational technology, computer mediated educational systems are shaping educational design and availability. So why should we put energy into exploring applications of educational technology to theological education? I would suggest three reasons:

First, theological education has become the domain of the wealthy. Most theological schools are to one degree or another tuition dependent. Few schools accredited by ICETE<sup>2</sup> related associations draw tuition dollars from governmental sources. Fewer still have sufficient endowments to provide scholarships to worthy students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Therefore only those people with access to large amounts of money can obtain the type of education that is comparable to the

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1 R.C. Longworth, 'Digital efforts encounter web of challenges', *Chicago Tribune* 5 August 2000.

2 International Council for Evangelical Theological Education, affiliated with World Evangelical Alliance.



training of other leaders in their various countries.

Second, theological education is done outside the context in which leaders will minister. One Southern Baptist leader in Chicago bemoaned the fact that emerging African-American leaders had to be sent to Louisville, KY (300 miles, 480 kilometers) for a seminary education because the contrast in culture between Black, urban, northern Chicago and Caucasian, small town, southern Louisville were so great. If this is true within the United States where many other factors would appear to be so similar, how much greater the problem in the nations represented in this convocation.

Finally, theological education is being provided for the wrong people. A look at a list of the graduates from your school in 1980 might be very revealing. How many of those people are in leadership positions in the church twenty years later? How much of the Christian impact in your country came from those graduates? Fortunately we have shining examples of effective ministry in evidence at this convocation. But if your country is anything like mine, many of the most gifted leaders are like the description of the Peter and John—'unschooled and ordinary men' (Acts 4:13). Their learning came outside the schooling system understood by the religious leaders of the day.

So we turn our attention to educational technology to help theological schools address these problems. Yet the pursuit of educational technology in theological education is not without risks. An uncritical use of educa-

tional technology for the purpose of theological education is likely to create a cyber-colonialism in higher education. To appropriate G.K. Chesterton's famous quotation about the church, 'Educational technology in theological education has not been tried and found wanting, but found difficult and not tried.'

All Christian ministry is local. Growing churches in all cultures are rediscovering this principle. Similarly, the training of Christian ministry leaders must be local. Unfortunately, schools specializing in pastoral training appear to be late in coming to terms with this reality. The challenge before this collection of leaders is how to use the tools of the twenty-first century to prepare the church for a century of challenges to her very survival in the increasingly complex cacophony of cultures in our world.

One myth must be put to rest at the outset. According to Daniel O. Aleshire, Executive Director of the Association of Theological Schools, addressing the faculty of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School last month, theological education mediated through educational technology is not likely to save schools money in either the short or long term. The savings will be realized by students rooted in communities who no longer have to relocate in order to expand their biblical and theological knowledge and skills. Perhaps this reason more than any other should drive theological education to pursue the benefits of educational technology.

Whether we rush to embrace edu-

cational technology or not, we need to be aware that computer mediated education is already changing the manner in which Theological education happens. Napster, Moody Bible Institute, and Christianity Online represent fundamental changes in theological education as the twenty-first century begins.

### **Napster—shared curriculum**

Sixteen months ago, Napster, a small online company, began providing a service by which people could 'share' music through the internet. As of last month, *Businessweek Online* reports that 20 million people had traded copyrighted music—free.<sup>3</sup> Despite legal ongoing challenges based on alleged copyright infringement, Napster has left an imprint on the world of intellectual property. 'Whether Napster wins or loses is highly irrelevant', said Mark Mooradian, an analyst with Jupiter Communications. 'What everybody should be looking at is who's going to be smart enough to create a business model based on this service.'<sup>4</sup>

Like Christian publishers and theological schools, the record industry has a fierce commitment to intellectual property rights and expects emerging theologians to be ethical in their use of texts, books and curricular materials. Yet the laws have not caught up with cyber-ethics. Arising theologians may have their own set

of ethical issues with kingdom people who increase their net wealth based on intellectual property rights.

With more and more theological schools placing curricular materials on the internet or in digital formats, it may not be long before all of these materials will be available to students who will merely 'copy each other's notes' via the world wide web. Though 'fair use' rules limit the extent to which professors can distribute materials for classroom purposes, student to student collaboration is not affected in the same way. All that is needed is an index of people who have digital curricular materials and in time word will spread. Students from all over the world will have relatively free access to the finest of theological courseware with total freedom to contextualize apart from the classroom influence of a western professor.<sup>5</sup>

Implication: Professors and educational institutions need to rethink the issue of intellectual property rights of books and course materials lest they find themselves in embarrassing legal suits that serve as a scandal to the Body of Christ.

### **Moody Bible Institute—tuition free**

Since its founding, Moody Bible Institute has provided tuition paid

3 Spenser E. Ante, 'Inside Napster', *Businessweek Online*, 14 August 2000, p. 1.

4 Jim Hu, 'Record firms learn Napster lesson slowly', *CNT News.Com*, 2 August 2000, p. 1.

5 On February 14, 2001, a three judge panel of the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals held Napster liable for copyright infringement, in effect shutting down the on-line service that allows free sharing of files containing music. Despite this fact, the technology remains in place and will be used by others in much the fashion that copying machines have allowed copies of articles and even books to be made.

undergraduate education. While students must pay for room and board, donors and other sources of revenue provide the income to cover tuition costs. As the Institute seeks to expand undergraduate educational offerings through the Department of External Studies, the question arises, 'Should not external education be free as well?' While currently at a modest \$120 per semester hour of credit, that is \$120 more per hour than residential students pay.

Radio was the 'e-commerce' of the 1920s. When WMBI went on the air in 1926, the Institute made a commitment to be commercial free. The bills would be paid by listeners who could afford to give and programmers who had the option to appeal for support over their broadcasts. That policy is still in effect today.

Perhaps the future of theological education lies, not in tuition driven strategies, but in tuition paid approaches that are free to students. The question is 'how?' In the pre-'e-commerce' days, options were few. Appeals for donations and effective stewardship departments constituted the primary approach.

E-commerce may have provided an entirely new approach to funding theological education. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* provides an interesting parallel to schools who have not chosen to follow the example of Moody Bible Institute. Just at a time when the standard of the encyclopedia industry appeared ready to go out of business, the decision was made to put its massive resources on line—free. Links to other web sites, products, and banners (advertising) pro-

vide a revenue stream that should keep the publisher profitable.

The key to free on-line theological education is an ability to attract people a web site constructed like [www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com). To my way of thinking, the three organizations that have the best possibility of creating a critical mass for such a venture are Moody Bible Institute, Focus on the Family and *Christianity Today*. With James Dobson's hesitancy to commit to theological positions, only two agencies appear positioned to lead the way to tuition paid theological education funded through e-commerce.

### **Christianity Online— alternative curriculum**

One of the most fascinating changes in education in general and theological education in particular, is the move from pre-service to in-service training. Peter Drucker, writing in *Management Challenges for the Twenty-first Century*, comments:

The center of gravity in higher education (i.e., postsecondary teaching and learning) may shift to the continuing professional education of adults during their entire working lives. This, in turn, is likely to move learning off campus and into a lot of new places: the home, the car or the commuter train, the workplace, the church basement or the school auditorium where small groups can meet after hours.<sup>6</sup>

Educational technology is at the heart of this shift. In May, Christianity Online, the cyber arm of *Christianity Today*, opened a web site at

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<sup>6</sup> Peter F. Drucker, *Management Challenges for the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Harper-Business, 1999), p. 101.

www.preachingtoday.com. The response has been overwhelming. Pastors have a seven day cycle in their life long learning programme. Each Sunday they must have taken another step in their education as they step into the pulpit with new perspectives on the timeless truths of Scripture. Even before the web site had their bugs worked out, five thousand pastors had paid \$50 a piece to have full access to the resources provided. Admittedly, the most popular feature has been fresh sermon illustrations, yet the idea of pastor-defined rather than school-defined (or accrediting association defined) in-service educational programmes may provide a profound shift in theological education.

Perhaps the most profound shift in theological education may come as a result of in-service education. If theological education can re-frame itself as life long learning, serving Bible school and seminary graduates as well as established leaders who have no formal educational credentials, educational technology in its various forms will prove to be an essential tool. Graduates of traditional Bible colleges and seminaries may soon find their greatest benefit from their alma mater is the continuing education they receive through the internet after graduation.

### **Conclusion**

If time would permit, I would love to discuss the manner in which e-books could make textbooks and even libraries, obsolete. Already the technology is in place for an instructor to personalize a textbook for classroom

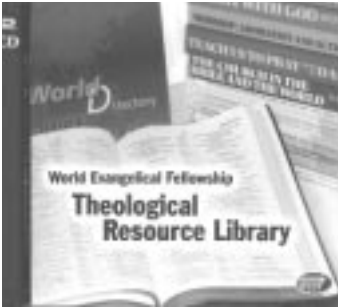
use (see [www.digitlearn.org](http://www.digitlearn.org)). The range of options is endless as the instructor is permitted to insert his/her own notes as well as links to helpful web sites on the world wide web. Discussion questions and chat rooms in which to explore the issues raised in class, further enable the instructor to serve the students.

For those unable to access the internet, e-books and CD ROMs will become live options as prices fall and 'obsolete' models become available to schools in the regions represented by the constituents of this conference. For example, it is already possible to load an entire semester's worth of text books onto a single e-book the size of the popular Palm Pilot<sup>7</sup>. If licensing agreements could be worked out with publishers of theological works and e-books, devices already obsolete in technologically advanced countries could be provided in a manner similar to that by which pharmaceutical companies provide medicines to less affluent nations, then textbooks could become available for minimal costs each semester. The same e-text books could be reloaded with new texts at the beginning of each semester throughout the educational process. At graduation, the e-text books could be returned to the school for the next class of incoming students.

While these and many other ideas may seem unrealistic for theological education in the portions of the world where they might be the most useful, the question is not one of technical possibility, it is a question of vision and facilitation. Just as bil-

lions of dollars worth of medical products annually are provided to mission agencies with minimal charges, so theological books could be similarly distributed. All that is

needed is a champion from the technology sector to become the advocate for theological education in the countries represented within this convocation.



### **ERT on CD from WEF**

World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF) has released WEF The Theological Resource Library on CD ROM. This CD ROM is completely searchable using Logos system and is rich in material for missions, evangelism, discipleship, church history and theology. If you purchase all the material the CD contains in print it would cost you over \$1000. The CD

normally sells for \$49.95. But the special for **ERT subscribers** is only **\$40** plus shipping. The complete run of the WEF Theological Commission journal *Evangelical Review of Theology* 1977-2000 is on the CD. The journal contains articles from a global perspective covering a wide range of topics in missions and current theological issues such as homosexuality, ethics, salvation, and theological education. Among the title on the CD are the acclaimed, **A Contemporary Evangelical Perspective on Roman Catholicism** both in English and Spanish is included. The resource library contains Bibles, ASV and KJV, in English, Spanish, French, Dutch, Portuguese, Arabic and Chinese. Historic Creeds and Confessions, **History of Christianity**, eight vol. set by Schaff, sermons by Wesley and Whitefield and WEF publications are also on the CD.

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# Theological Curriculum Change for the Local 21st Century Context

Lee Wanak

**Keywords:** Globalization, contextualization, cooperation, life-long learning, integration, skill development, mission

What will be the shape of theological education in Asia five or twenty-five years from now? What will be its varied forms and patterns? What events and issues will shape theological education? Schools want to pursue a balanced path in developing curriculum for theological education in the 21st century. However, balance in one context may be imbalance in another. Each institution and organization needs to determine its own curricular equilibrium. Curriculum is more than

just course listings. It includes the total of learning experiences (formal, informal and nonformal) offered by an institution or organization.

An often-overlooked component of the curriculum is school culture. This is where important, but not necessarily apparent, nuances of the curriculum are expressed. Organizational culture is the system of values, symbols and shared meanings of a group including the embodiment of these values, symbols, and shared meanings into material objects and ritualized practices. Culture governs what is of worth for a particular group and how group members would think, feel, and behave.<sup>1</sup>

School culture brings out the nuances of theological education. For example, does the atmosphere of the school teach holiness or legalism? Does it develop mature critical

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1 Thomas J. Sergiovanni and Corbally, John E. (eds.) *Leadership and Organizational Culture* (Urbana Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1986), p. viii.

thinking or mere conformity? Reformulating curriculum requires us not only to examine course listings but also to address the effect school culture has on students.

As we look to shaping the 21st century, there are at least six issues in formulating the total learning experiences of our charges. During the Curriculum Design workshop at the Asia Theological Association Triennial General Assembly in August 2001, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 120 theological educators were asked how they would address the following questions related to developing theological curricula in Asia.

1) How do we balance the forces of globalization and contextualization in theological education curricula?

2) How do we balance classical and contemporary theological emphases in the curriculum?

3) How do we balance generalist and specialist emphases in the curriculum?

4) How do we balance experiential learning in the field with the theoretical learning in the classroom?

5) How do we balance inter-school cooperation with insular development?

6) How do we lead curriculum change for the 21st century, appropriately balancing the forces and counter forces of the theological school?

Many of the practical principles in this paper are a result of the insightful work of the General Assembly.

The operative word 'balance' in the above questions needs some explaining. Any particular balance is

not to be viewed as universal across schools and cultures, and neither should it be viewed as timeless. Certainly, there are universal and timeless principles to be taught in theological education, but not necessarily in regard to these six questions. These questions require practical wisdom which is strong in addressing specific contexts at a point in time. Thus arriving at balance is not a static once-achieved exercise. Rather it is dynamic, requiring constant adjustment, like a tightrope walker achieving new positions of balance every step along the way.

### **Contextualization and Globalization**

First, how do we balance the forces of contextualization and globalization in theological education curricula? How do we determine if our curricula is too global for the local good or so localized that the school becomes an educational ghetto? We often think of contextualization in theological terms. However, the three other means of contextualization articulated by the Theological Education Fund Commission of the World Council of Churches should already be well known to us. Missiological contextualization asks if our message and ministry fit our people. Structural contextualization asks if the forms and structures of our institutions are appropriate for our context. Pedagogical contextualization seeks to develop a type of theological training that is liberating and creative. It seeks to close the wide gap between the academic and the practical.

The term 'globalization' means to extend worldwide. Current usage has emerged out of the international expansion of business and commerce in the post-colonial era. International business interests discovered that if they attended to cultural differences they enjoyed greater productivity.<sup>2</sup> Globalization in theological education, however, takes on some new meanings. North American seminaries and especially the Association of Theological Schools in North America, have, 'sought to develop a new global context crystallized under the banner of globalization during the 1980s'.<sup>3</sup>

Based on the concept of the universal reign of God, globalization refers to:

- 1) the church's universal mission to reach the world;
- 2) ecumenical cooperation;
- 3) dialogue with other religions, and
- 4) the need to address the inequality, human rights, and justice issues in the world.<sup>4</sup>

It is common for Asian schools to be wary of globalization and, given the abuses of the colonial era, there is good reason to resist globalizing forces. Yet, J.R.R. Tolkien's *Fellowship of the Ring* gives some sobering counsel. The leader Gildor says to a timid Frodo, 'The wide world is all about you: you can fence yourself

in, but you cannot forever fence it out.'<sup>5</sup> The use of the internet as a curricular tool is an important example. Virtually every country in the world has internet access (Myanmar and North Korea are current exceptions). The internet, dominated by the West, is clearly a globalizing force. Nevertheless, Asia is developing Web sites at a fantastic rate. The contextualizing power of the internet in Asia will be harnessed in the years to come. The growth of theological education in Asia will also become a globalizing force toward the West.

What are some practical principles in addressing contextualization and globalization? Workshop participants pointed out that these forces are not mutually exclusive, but poles of a continuum. Though we have a timeless message in Scripture, spirituality and consequently the Christian life must be reshaped in each context and era. This requires unpacking and repacking our understanding of both text and context. Balancing contextualization and globalization requires knowledge of marketplace issues and religious pluralism in modern life. We must address how to contextualize the Christian faith in the midst of Asian religions. Globalization, urbanization and modernity create many ethical challenges.

Theological curricula must embrace these challenges rather than avoid them by silence. We teach our students by what we don't address as well as what we do. The

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2 Alice Frazer Evans, Robert A Evans and David A Roozen (eds.) *The Globalization of Theological Education* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 1993), p. 123.

3 Evans, *Globalization of Theological Education*, p. 5.

4 Evans, *Globalization of Theological Education* p. 35.

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5 J.R.R. Tolkien, *Fellowship of the Ring* (Ballentine Books: New York, 1965), p. 123.



computer is quickly becoming an essential connection to the world around us. Like illiteracy, the inability to utilize this powerful tool is a form of ghettoization. Our schools need both to supply the tools and teach the skills of computer literacy. Faculty development is important, not only in terms of computer literacy but also in developing and delivering a 21st century theological curriculum.

The theological curriculum does not just reside on paper, but rather it is expressed in engagement and interaction, particularly between faculty and students. At its deepest level it is not knowing things, but engaging ourselves, our world, and our Creator in a community of learning. The theological school, more than ever, will have to wrestle with balancing the forces of contextualization and globalization in the 21st century.

### **Classical and Contemporary Curricular Patterns**

Second, how do we balance classical and contemporary theological emphases in the curriculum? Classical theological curriculum stresses mastering the best thinkers throughout the history of Christendom. For Evangelicals an important emphasis is given to a historic, authoritative Word of God. Contemporary curriculum stresses mastering the skills of doing theology and practising ministry in specific contexts—an important emphasis in light of our mandate to minister.

Another way of looking at the classical/contemporary dyad is Pluedde-

mann's split rail fence analogy of theological education. How do we determine if theological education should be primarily upper rail, addressing rational values and the realm of ideas, or lower rail, addressing practical values and the realm of life and ministry?<sup>6</sup> Again, we see poles of a continuum. Classical upper rail theological curriculum focuses on the historic faith, while contemporary lower rail curriculum aims at doing theology in the present. The former can be true but presented in an irrelevant manner. The latter can address contemporary issues, such as ministering to AIDS victims, but lay a weak biblical-theological foundation. One 118-unit Master of Divinity programme this author reviewed was very strong in contemporary theologizing but included only four units of Bible. This raises the dual questions: How do we decide what classical theological education elements we should maintain and what contemporary issues we should address?

Workshop participants identified several guiding principles. Evangelical theological education must be Bible-based. To neglect the Word is to neglect the very heart of our faith. We must see the contemporary context through the lens of Scripture. Our teaching should bear fruit in the equipping of the church for worship and ministry in the contemporary world. It should address the needs of

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6 James E. Plueddemann, 'The Challenge of Excellence' in Robert L. Youngblood, *Excellence and Renewal: Goals for the Accreditation of Theological Education* (Flemington Markets: WEF/Bookhouse, 1989), p. 2.

the believing community ministering in the context of the wider population. Theological curriculum developers need to consider the learning styles of students. Some are strong in the realm of rational ideas, others in the realm of experience and practice.

Although our intention should be to expand the toolbox of student learning skills, we must begin with their present learning abilities. Participants pointed out that many Chinese and Indian students can be very philosophical and metaphysical. Students from other people groups may have a bent toward the practical. Finally, we must remember that classical theology was shaped around contemporary issues. It is the task of the theological educator to recapture that context and utilize the classical in resolving issues of contemporary life.

### **Generalist and Specialist Emphases**

Third, how do we balance generalist and specialist emphases in the curriculum? Should we maintain the traditional large-core, four-part curriculum consisting of biblical studies, theological studies, church history and practical theology? Or should we increasingly emphasize large majors in professional areas such as missions, pastoral studies, Christian education, counselling, urban ministry and lay studies. Should theological education in the 21st century focus on the development of these specialized roles or should it focus on Christian thought and ministry skills which can be generalized across spe-

cialized areas? How do we nurture the unique interests, gifts and talents of students in these specialized areas and still lay a proper theological foundation?

Participants expressed a need for greater specialization, stating that, 'We must respond positively to the trend towards specialization, but resist the tendency to embrace it uncritically or wholeheartedly.' In a more diversified curriculum with several specializations, it is important to reach consensus on core elements essential for all students. These may be expressed through foundational courses. Coursework should be integrative in nature, tying academic learning to specific roles and issues that graduates will face.

Another principle is that of lifelong learning. It is impossible to teach students all they need to know throughout life. In order for learning to be ongoing and self-directed, students need to develop lifelong learning skills. The ideal minister is someone who is always growing and maturing, always learning new perspectives and ideas. This ideal cannot be achieved by spoon feeding students with material to be memorized and regurgitated in objective examinations. The self-directed learner is self-disciplined, reflective, analytical, curious, open, motivated and confident. He has a love for learning and has information-seeking and retrieval skills as well as problem solving skills. Whether the curriculum is more generalist or specialist in nature, these attitudes and skills must be intentionally developed in the curriculum and present in our faculty if

students are to be growing and maturing ministers.

Understanding the giftedness and life station of learners is also important. Learners already in ministry will tend toward development of their specific roles. They will learn what they will use. A generalist curriculum may not provide the specific kinds of learning experiences they are seeking. Younger students need help in assessing their gifts and guidance in developing those propensities.

How do we know we are at the right place on the generalist-specialist continuum? Maintain an ongoing dialogue with graduates and other significant voices in the church and society. Ask them if the knowledge, attitudes and skills they acquired in theological school prepared them adequately for their calling. Sincerely ask them in what ways they think the ethos of the school and the nature of the curriculum should change.

### **Field and Classroom Integration**

Fourth, how do we balance experiential learning in the field with theoretical learning in the classroom? How do we use the classroom to strengthen current practice in the field, and the field to rethink our theoretical positions? How do we demonstrate that experiential learning is as important as theoretical learning? What teaching methodologies will enhance creative and critical thinking needed for the challenges of the 21st century?

Brian Hill asks the question, 'Theological education: is it out of prac-

tice?'<sup>7</sup> Often in theological education, there is significant disjuncture between classroom and field. Kornfield identifies three levels of field education: Skill Development, Theology to Practice and Practice as Locus of Pastoral Theology.<sup>8</sup>

**Skill Development:** Field education is to develop practical ministry skills usually based on social science theory rather than theology.<sup>9</sup> Kornfield sees this as an unacceptable but common arrangement whereby the student studies theology and practises ministry but does not integrate the two. This occurs through a lack of intention in the curriculum and school culture to link theology and practice. Either the goal of integration is not properly thought through or the actualities of the programme thwart the goal.

**Theology to Practice:** A one-directional approach whereby field education is 'the application of theology to the practice of ministry'.<sup>10</sup> Theological learning occurs only in the academic setting. Theology is not critiqued in light of experience, but rather applied only to the field. Experience must conform to theology. The social sciences may be seen as a threat. The goal is to guide the student in relating the classical categories of theology to experience.

7 Brian V. Hill, 'Theological Education: Is it Out of Practice?' *Evangelical Review of Theology* 10:2 (1986) pp. 174-182.

8 David Kornfield, 'Seminary Education Toward Adult Education Alternatives', in Harvie M. Conn and, Samuel F. Rowen (eds.), *Missions and Theological Education in World Perspective*, (Farmington, Mi.: Associates of Urbanus, 1984), pp. 180-181.

9 Kornfield, 'Seminary Education', pp. 180-181.

10 Kornfield, 'Seminary Education', p. 180.

Practice as Locus of Pastoral Theology: Kornfield sees this as a two-directional approach whereby theology and practice are in dialogue, each mutually enriching the other.<sup>11</sup> Reflective practice is to enlighten theology just as theology is to inform practice. The action of God is explored in experience as well as in the Christian tradition. The goal is that the student will become a skilled and critical overseer of the dialogue between one's Christian tradition and Christian experience.

Only in the last model is there a proper integration of pastoral theology and practice. Although many would agree that our practice of Christian ministry is less than perfect, it is more difficult to recognize imperfections in our theology. Affirming a two-directional approach allows students (and faculty) to integrate theology and practice in ways that strengthen both.

How can the seminary better integrate theology and practice? Participants stated that, 'Professors are the key to integration'. Encouraging faculty to participate in varied ministry experiences will provide the experiential depth necessary for a dialogue between theology and ministry. It is not enough to hire a field education director; faculty should embrace, advocate and participate in an integrative field education programme.

Another principle stated was that students' field experiences are to be taken seriously even to the point of changing the academic curriculum. Simply put, ministry cannot be

learned in the classroom. Learning must be extended beyond the academy and academics integrated with ministry experiences in the church and life in general. This may require removing some precious content courses in favour of experiential learning approaches. It will require culture change in some schools. Participants identified the need for a 'learning environment that encourages such thinking'. Both faculty and administration need to value practice as the locus of pastoral theology if the school is ever to develop an integrative curriculum.

### **Cooperation and Insular Development**

Fifth, how do we balance inter-school cooperation with insular development? How can inter-school cooperation enhance the 21st century curriculum without losing individual school uniqueness and identity? How can we learn to trust each other enough to make cooperation easier?

Evangelicals sometimes operate like isolated islands. Even schools within proximity of each other maintain only cordial relations. We are fond of saying we have organic unity in the body of Christ but do little to express it in cooperative theological education. Participants asked themselves, 'Why do we need to cooperate?' Generally our schools are small and our size affects the quality, depth and breadth of our programs. Cooperating with local schools will improve our ability to contextualize. Cooperating with distant schools will improve our ability to globalize.

11 Kornfield, 'Seminary Education', p. 181.

Beyond these practical reasons, cooperation is an expression of theological maturity. Participants called it, 'maturing to a kingdom mentality', as opposed to creating our own little kingdoms.

Theological schools would greatly benefit by sharing innovations, resources and faculty and allowing cross-enrolment. In smaller schools faculty are often assigned to teach in areas outside of their discipline. Faculty exchange programmes would reduce this problem. Perhaps the minimum size for theological schools to operate a full curriculum is 500 students. Outside of Korea, few schools approach this size.

Working together, schools can offer a variety of programmes that are tailored to the special needs of students. Possibilities include: diversified music programmes; adequate libraries with fulltime librarians; adequately supervised field education; multiple levels and sections of course offerings; specialized course offerings such as, Theology of Suffering for the Persecuted Church; specialized student groups; guidance and counselling programmes; effective orientation programmes; evening programmes; and tutorial and remedial classes. Combining individual resources into effective cooperative structures, schools could offer a significantly improved learning environment.

Developing a spirit of respect and cooperation is more fundamental than structures. We need to accept differences, recognizing that there is often more than one mature Christian perspective on any given issue.

This provides breadth of theological interpretation for our students. Participants stated that we need to, 'imbibe generosity' between our schools. 'Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you' (Luke 6:38).

When these attitudes are present, we will be able to take mutual advantage of each others' strengths, particularly in the area of curricular specializations. For example, we may have a missions programme but not counselling or urban ministry. Developing specific specializations among cooperating schools is one way we can offer a full curriculum to our students.

Participants suggested that this could be accomplished by students spending two years in one school and a third year concentrating on a specialization in another school. Schools could work together in developing specializations such as Islamic Studies. Participants noted that the key is to cooperate without losing school identity and uniqueness.

School mergers may result in at least one of the institutions losing its identity, but there are several forms of cooperation that maintain the identity and uniqueness of individual schools. Schools may enter a consortium where they participate in forming a new institution with degree granting rights, or where the individual schools retain degree-granting rights. Boards, personnel and resources remain with the individual schools which make required

(e.g. dues) and voluntary (e.g. office space, personnel) contributions to the consortium as stated in a consortium agreement.

Schools may also enter into a network of voluntary cooperation in such areas as interlibrary loan, cross enrolment, faculty exchange, dissertation committee work, student mentoring, theological forums, journals or yearbooks, research projects, and representation to the government. Individual Boards may determine their school's areas of cooperation. Personnel voluntarily participate in a joint network committee to guide the network and to carry out its work as stated in a joint agreement. Resources are raised as needed through dues.

Schools may enter associations such as the Asia Theological Association in which a broad-based grouping of theological institutions join for the purposes of accreditation and mutual enrichment. Personnel voluntarily participate in a Board or joint committee to guide the association and to carry on its work as stated in association documents.

Other cooperative arrangements include 'niche institutes' which offer special subjects, such as missions, across a variety of schools. 'Piggy-back schools' are arrangements whereby a smaller school 'rides on the back' of a larger school in a long-term relationship. Partner schools have an arrangement whereby a new school partners with an established school for a given period. Cooperative Internet schools work together in providing internet courses that all participating schools use. Validation

programmes, where younger schools participate with such schools as the University of Wales, allow for the recognition and granting of degrees.

The words of Solomon are very helpful in considering cooperative arrangements. 'Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken' (Ecc. 4:12).

### **Leadership in Curriculum Evaluation and Revision**

Finally, how do we lead curriculum change for the 21st century, appropriately balancing the forces and counter forces of the theological school? Barriers to change in theological curricula are significant. In some institutions, the existing curriculum has become a second canon as sacred as Scripture itself. We sometimes become overdependent on specific curricula, texts and materials. Our boards, administration, constituency and even our own leadership may be too conservative and traditionalistic to allow for significant change. We allow dysfunctional interpersonal relations that inhibit change to continue. Under these conditions, our change systems are insufficient, evaluation is lacking, and we tend not to reward innovators. These barriers need to be overcome if curricular change is going to take place.

There are four key roles in curriculum change: the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), the Chief Academic Officer (CAO), the Heads of Departments (HOD) and the Chief Financial Officer (CFO). Participants empha-

sized that the 'CEO is the key in the entire process'. His task is to cast new vision throughout the school regarding revision outcomes. He approves the extent of evaluation and encourages the process of change. He promotes and models the mission, values, and goals of the institution in relation to the curriculum by using its primary documents as the guiding force in the revision process. The CEO ensures that evaluations of outcomes are based upon these documents. If these documents are not properly formulated for a 21st century curriculum, he is to lead the school constituency in reformulating them. The CEO makes sure that an appropriate timetable is set, that there is adequate follow-through, and that the overall work is done well and with integrity. He networks with his board and the CAO on the evaluation and development process; makes certain that adequate resources are available; pastors the personnel involved; and communicates relevant outcomes to the school publics.

The CAO organizes and orchestrates the evaluation and revision. He ensures that primary documents as well as notations of the regional accreditation association, government standards, and university standards are reflected in the process. The CAO champions the examination of important issues (e.g. social issues, such as urban poverty or curricular issues, such as excellence) in relation to the curriculum as indicated by primary documents. The CAO provides an understanding of curriculum theory, foundations, design and engineer-

ing. He supervises the utilization of review instruments (e.g. faculty and course evaluations, applies research skills such as survey, document analysis and interview to the review process, and guides appropriate reflections on findings. Relationally the CAO networks with the CEO, HODs and faculty. He must demonstrate authenticity (genuine, having a self-examining, open orientation) throughout the process; and must utilize relational/political skills needed to bring diverse parities together. Finally, the CAO sustains continuous evaluation of the various aspects of the curriculum as well as a major evaluation every four to five years.

HODs maintain a listening ear to what students and other stakeholders are saying. They utilize evaluation reports in relation to departmental work and curricula and make recommendations to the CAO and academic committee after gaining consensus in departmental discussions. The HODs ensure that primary documents as well as notations of the regional accreditation association, government standards, and university standards are implemented through the revision and development process. Finally they oversee implementation of departmental changes, explain changes to students and other publics related to the department, and champion excellence within the department.

The CFO plans a budget for curriculum evaluation and development. He asks what needs to be done before, during, and after the process. He plans a budget around four questions: What internal and external

personnel need to be involved? How long will they be needed? What will be the actual cost? How much will be the out-of-pocket expenses?

Leadership of curricular change should be seen as a corporate task where people and their ideas are valued. Creating an atmosphere of trust and compromise will help curriculum innovations move forward.

### Seven Key Questions to Ask

There are certain essential questions to ask in preparing to evaluate and revise theological curricula. These questions, presented by Dr. Ng Peh Cheng, keep the evaluation and revision process focused on the big picture of what the curriculum is to accomplish.

1. What is the ultimate purpose of the church?
2. What is the mission of the institution?

3. What will be the context of the institution and learner in five or twenty-five years?

4. What will be the 'levels' of workers needed?

5. What qualities should workers possess?

6. How can the institution develop these qualities?

7. How should the institution administer and implement the decisions made?

### Conclusion

Theological curriculum change is a difficult but essential process in the life of the school. Avoid this process for too long and your institution will become moribund and irrelevant. Pursue it periodically with an ear toward your constituency and an eye on the world around you and your students will become more capable ministers of the gospel.

## The Silent God

*In a noise-filled world we frequently misinterpret silence.  
Polluting our moments with relentless prattle, we struggle to fill  
the internal void;  
A hollow cacophony masks insubstantial existence, and shrewdly  
protects us from our desperate emptiness.  
Terrified of the word, we fiercely complain of divine absence to  
insulate ourselves from the risk of hearing.  
Content with our muted deity, we are safe from that comprehension  
beyond words, and the exacting demands of communion;  
Until that voiceless emptiness within reveals the listening silence at  
the very heart of God;  
And we discover the sacramental word, and the sacramental  
silence.*

Garry Harris, Adelaide, South Australia (used with permission)



# Divine Omniscience and Future Contingents: Weighing the Presuppositional Issues in the Contemporary Debate

Amos Yong

**Keywords:** Classical theism, open theism, anthropomorphism, nature of God, omnipotence, freedom, theodicy, good, evil, combatibilism, libertarianism, time, eternity, prayer

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

In recent years, the efforts of open theists to revise the classical understanding of the nature of the future about which God knows has revived an ancient controversy over the doctrine of divine omniscience. Evangelical thinkers on both sides of the debate have naturally centred their

arguments on ‘what the Bible says’ even as they have not ignored other issues. As with other long-standing theological disputes, however, neither side appears to have a knock-down biblical argument. I propose, therefore, to inquire into the interpretive presuppositions—hermeneutical, theological and philosophical—operative in both the classical and openness accounts of the doctrine of divine omniscience.

Hermeneutical issues include operative root metaphors regarding the God-world relationship, notions about the nature of biblical language, and commitments to various

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1 My thanks to members of the audience at the Evangelical Theological Society annual meeting in Nashville, Tennessee, in November 2000 for their responses and questions. I am grateful to Gregory Boyd and Tyler DeArmond for their critical reading of an earlier draft.

hermeneutical paradigms. Theological issues include the essential nature of God, divine omnipotence, and the meaning of divine freedom. More philosophically oriented issues include the problem of theodicy, the meaning of creaturely freedom, and the nature of the relationship between God, time, and eternity. Rather than being a detailed explication of these issues, my paper focuses instead on showing how intuitively made decisions in each of these areas impacts how one reads the Bible.

My purposes are threefold: a) to show the complex web of beliefs—both presuppositional and doctrinal—that go into the formulation of a single theological doctrine; b) to identify the range of historical and contemporary methods on each issue that informs and underwrites—both consistently and inconsistently—attempts to articulate a coherent doctrine of God's knowledge of the future; and c) to raise the question about whether or not there is a hierarchy of doctrines about God, and if so, where the specific doctrine of God's knowledge of future contingents fits into that hierarchy.

I also need to be clear, however, that this paper does not aim to be an exhaustive analysis of all the presuppositions that go into reflection on the doctrine of omniscience. This non-exhaustiveness should be read in at least four ways. First, my focus here is on the debate within evangelicalism, i.e., between classical theism and open theism. I do not even consider this debate in the larger historical and contemporary Christian

context.<sup>2</sup> Second, there are just too many presuppositional issues to fully enumerate, much less consider. One philosophical presupposition that I do not mention here but which I discuss at length elsewhere is the issue of the nature of possibility and how that relates to what God does and knows.<sup>3</sup> Third, even my treatment of the various issues I do engage remains on the surface in that I do not, because of space constraints, detail the arguments as developed by either side. I assume readers who are generally familiar with the overall contours of the debate will either affirm or deny that my at-times gross generalizations have hit their intended mark. Finally, I should also add that my interests are methodological rather than strictly theological in that I do not set out to resolve the current debate.<sup>4</sup> My feeling is that the issues

2 For an example of what would be entailed if this restriction were lifted, see how I develop the brief sub-section here on the question of God's relationship to time and eternity into a full article that surveys some of the most prominent responses in the history of Christian thought to this question: 'Divine Knowledge and Relation to Time', in Thomas Jay Oord, ed., *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction to Issues* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill/Nazarene Publishing House, forthcoming). It goes without saying that even a full article does not begin to do justice to the complexity of the question.

3 See Yong, 'Possibility and Actuality: The Doctrine of Creation and Its Implications for Divine Omniscience', *The Wesleyan Philosophical Society Online Journal* [<http://david.snu.edu/~brint.fs/wpsjnl/v1n1.htm>] 1:1 (2001).

4 In some ways, I am doing for the debate on omniscience what Kelly James Clark did a short while ago for the debate on divine impassibility between those represented then on the traditionalist side by Richard Creel and on the progressive side by Nicholas Wolterstorff; see Clark's 'Hold Not Thy Peace At My Tears: Methodological Reflections on Divine Impassibility', in Kelly James Clark, ed., *Our Knowledge of God: Essays on Natural and Philosophical Theology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992), pp. 167-93.

involved, even if restricted as here to the intra-evangelical debate, are extremely complex, and that those who attempt to settle the issues in the scope of a single paper do not represent the art and craft of theological reflection well. With these caveats in hand, on with the argument.

### I. Hermeneutical Presuppositions

It is certainly the case that what I call theological and philosophical presuppositions (sections two and three below) also serve as hermeneutical presuppositions in so far as they inform and influence the ways in which we read the Bible. In this section, however, my focus is on the principles of interpretation themselves. The question here revolves around how Scripture is read and understood by classical and open theists. I want to broach that question by examining how root metaphors for the God-world relationship function, how understandings of biblical language influence interpretation, and how the idea of hermeneutical paradigms plays a central role in the present debate.

#### *Root metaphors for the God-world relationship*

The Bible presents God as genuinely related to the world. However, this relationship is also depicted in a variety of ways, each of them reflecting various aspects and serving diverse functions. For our purposes, consider that God is creator, judge and sovereign on the one hand, and saviour, lover and friend on the other. There

is no question that each triad is clearly portrayed in Scripture, so neither side can accuse the other of being 'extra-biblical' in this regard. Yet, each triad also communicates distinct aspects of God's relationship with the world. As creator, judge and sovereign king, God's omnipotence and purposiveness regarding creation is emphasized. As saviour, lover and friend, God's omni-benevolence and genuine responsiveness to creation in general and to human beings more specifically is accentuated.

At one level, the debate between classical and openness theists turns on which triad of metaphors about God's relationship to the world is dominant. On the classical side, the latter set is subservient to the former at least conceptually if not rhetorically. In other words, while classical theists do not deny God as saviour, lover and friend, logical priority is placed on God as creator, judge and sovereign. The result is that God's interaction with the world is subordinated to God's intentions for the world. Another way of saying this is that classical theism emphasizes God's power, God's purposes and God's glory to the (unintentional) neglect of the more personalistic attributes of divinity. Classical theists are convinced that if one should err, it should be on this side rather than on the other.<sup>5</sup>

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5 This is evident in the collection of essays published in response to the openness position; see Thomas Schreiner and Bruce Ware, eds., *The Grace of God and the Bondage of the Will*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995); cf. also Paul Helm, *The Providence of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

Open theists, however, are not persuaded. As with the classical strategy, open theists certainly do not deny the creating, judging and ruling aspects of God's relationship with the world. However, these aspects are subordinated—clearly in this case rhetorically, but perhaps even as clearly conceptually—to the saving, loving and befriending aspects of that relationship. The result is that God's interaction with the world is understood much more in terms of a robust or mutual relationality as opposed to the more one-way or asymmetrical relationality in the classical paradigm. Another way of saying this is that open theists emphasize God's love, compassion and personableness with regard to God's relationship to the world in general and to human beings more specifically. This last point is especially important since the human experience of interpersonal relationships enables human beings to understand what it means to affirm God as personal. Open theists are convinced that because God is a saving, loving and personal God, if one should err, it should be on this side rather than the other.<sup>6</sup>

Now it is important to remember that both sides will resist any suggestion that they either deny or consciously subordinate one triad to the other. My thesis, however, is that this subordination takes place hermeneutically at the level of root metaphors. Root metaphors func-

tion underneath full consciousness at the worldview level and define what is considered axiomatic, valuable and criteriological.<sup>7</sup> This enables the resolution of tensions in the biblical text. Thus, classical theists read God's saving work in the light of God's creating work, while open theists understand God as creator in light of God as saviour. The tension between God's power and God's love is resolved by classical theists in the former direction and by open theists in the latter direction. Put another way, the divine-human relationship is understood either as predicated on God's initiative (the classical emphasis on divine sovereignty and graciousness) or as being genuinely interactive (the open theist emphasis on divine love and relationality). For both sides, the questions raised by the triad of metaphors on the 'other' side is explicated in terms of what the Bible says about the root metaphors on their own side. The question at this level, then, is whether God is first and foremost sovereign, etc., or friend, etc. Which serves as the set of root metaphors that founds one's worldview and that shapes one's interpretive intuitions?

#### *The nature of biblical language*

A second set of hermeneutical assumptions operative in the current debate concerns the nature of biblical language. One of the most hotly debated points is the question of

6 Representative of the relational emphasis in open theism is John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998).

7 On the concept of root metaphors, see Stephen Pepper, *World Hypotheses: A Study in Evidence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1942).

when language about God is anthropomorphic and when it is not. Both sides agree that the Bible contains anthropomorphic language on the one hand, but also includes clearly literal predications about God on the other. Thus references to God's wings (e.g., Ruth 2:12 and Ps. 17:8) or God's eyes (e.g., 2 Chr. 16:9 and 1 Pet. 3:12) are of the former type, and statements such as 'God is love' (1 Jn. 4:8) and 'God is light' (1 Jn. 1:5) are of the latter type. But what about statements regarding God coming to find something as if it were new to him (e.g., Gen. 18:21, 22:12 and Deut. 8:2) or having incorrectly anticipated the ways things would turn out (e.g., Jer. 3:7, 19:5 and 32:35), or cases where there is a change in the divine mind about specific actions (e.g., Ezek. 20:21-22, Amos 7:1-6 and Jon. 3:10)? Historically, these also have been read as anthropomorphisms, and contemporary classical theists insist on following the lead of the ancients.<sup>8</sup>

The response of open theists, however, has been 'Not so quick!' Rather, these kinds of statements not only tell us something about God, but they also tell us something about the future, namely that the future is open; some things are determined,

but other things, specifically that connected to what free creatures have yet to determine, are not. What has formerly been understood anthropomorphically is now, in the open theist scheme of things, literally predicable of God.

The question that arises is why one party retains the classical notion of anthropomorphism in these cases and the other party does not. I would like to explore the controversial thesis that one's notion of biblical language plays an important role in determining how one feels about anthropomorphisms. Let me suggest that the centrality of the doctrine of analogy to classical hermeneutics is a key factor. This doctrine emphasizes that while the same property signified of God and of human beings is the same, it is also different in some significant way(s). Thus, God is good, but God's goodness is not exactly similar to ours (the difference being expressible only in negative terms). Alternatively put, there is an 'excessive' dissimilarity whereby God is infinitely and perfectly good in contrast to our finite and imperfect 'goodness'. The result is not only that our knowledge of God's goodness is analogical to our experience of finite goodness, but also that our knowledge of goodness itself is imperfect.

Important implications follow. First, the analogical conception of biblical (and religious) language means that while God is therefore revealed to human beings in some (analogical) way, yet God remains hidden from human beings to the same extent that the language of rev-

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<sup>8</sup> Thus Bruce Ware has defended the classical view, and in the process offered to clarify the definition of anthropomorphism: 'A given ascription to God may rightly be understood as anthropomorphic when Scripture clearly presents God as transcending the very human or finite features it elsewhere attributes to him' ('An Evangelical Reformulation of the Doctrine of the Immutability of God', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29:4 [1986] pp. 431-46).

elation assumes similarities-in-differences. The apophatic strand deep within Christian orthodoxy from Augustine through Aquinas, Luther, Calvin and Kierkegaard testifies to the classical claim to both know God and yet not know God simultaneously. Second, the doctrine of analogy underwrites an allegorical, spiritualist or typological hermeneutic that understands the biblical text to communicate in multiple layers appropriate to the level of the reader or listener of the Word of God. If God is not fully revealed but remains partially hidden in the language of revelation itself, allegorical and especially spiritualistic interpretations of the text are required in order to keep us from being deceived that we have fully understood what is ultimately incomprehensible.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, might it not also be seen that the doctrine of analogy thereby supports one's intuition that anthropomorphisms permeate the biblical portrayal of God? If in fact there is a chasm between God in Godself and our human selves that is not completely bridged by biblical revelation, does it not make sense to assume that the scriptural text both reveals and conceals the essential reality of God? Would not anthropomorphisms then be the rule rather than the exception? After all, God would need to be revealed in human terms—anthropomorphically—in order for humans to grasp the divine

reality.

The alternatives to an analogical conception are to understand biblical language either equivocally or univocally. To opt for the former is to opt for a thoroughgoing *via negativa*. Because this means that we do not really know what predicates for divinity mean after all, it has not been a live option for evangelical thinkers. The notion of biblical language as univocal, however, has had its evangelical advocates. Following Scotus and Ockham, univocal language means that we are applying predicates to God and intending them in the same sense although without the imperfections attached when applied to human beings. Evangelicals who are committed to truth as propositional find this alternative attractive.<sup>10</sup> It enables them to make fairly literal assertions about God without the uncomfortable feeling that things really aren't that way, or that something else remains hidden and shrouded in obscurity (as in the doctrine of analogy). Typological interpretations and reliance on anthropomorphisms are less appealing in this framework.

Open theists do not deny there are anthropomorphisms. They only

<sup>9</sup> For the connections between an allegorical hermeneutic and the apophatic tradition, see Andrew Louth, *Discerning the Mystery: An Essay on the Nature of Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), esp. chs. 5 and 6.

<sup>10</sup> The connection between a commitment to biblical and religious language as univocal and what is now known as the openness position was anticipated by the British philosophical theologian, Richard Swinburne. In his *The Coherence of Theism* (orig. 1977), Swinburne opted for Scotus's doctrine of univocity in order to preserve the argument for God as personal (rev. ed. [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993], pp. 51-73). While his role in the present debate has been minimal because of his confessional and geographical location, I suggest that the argument for univocity operates as a hermeneutical assumption underlying openness theology.

wish to avoid the tactical temptation to hide behind appeals to mystery when pushed, a strategy that appears at least at first glance to be substantiated by the anthropomorphic principle. Instead, the Bible's statements, stories and narratives are genuinely and directly revelatory about God. The cash value of this position is that it encourages and even requires us to face up to what the Bible does say about God, at least on the surface of things—i.e., God does come to find out something new, incorrectly anticipate how things turn out, or change the divine mind. For open theists, then, the issue in the debate thus turns not on how the Bible reveals God (i.e., anthropomorphically), but on our having accurate conceptions about the nature of the future.

### Paradigm changes in hermeneutics

I wish to take this question of hermeneutical presuppositions to the next level and ask about the constellation of interpretive principles themselves. Both the relationship of root metaphors to hermeneutic presuppositions and concomitant convictions about the nature of religious language can be fruitfully explored not only with regard to where they derive from (the tensions of the biblical texts), but also with regard to the kind of hermeneutical framework they underwrite. For our purposes, I propose a heuristic exercise of distinguishing between the classical and the openness interpretive paradigms as following after the ancient Alexandrian and Antiochene schools of

interpretation respectively.<sup>11</sup>

I suggest that classical theism is intrinsically wedded to what could be called the medieval or Augustinian-Thomistic synthesis, and this, in turn, could be traced back to the Alexandrian school of hermeneutics originating in the work of Philo and Clement and Origen of Alexandria.<sup>12</sup> This interpretive framework was founded on and sustained by the ancient and medieval political models of kingship, aristocracy, and serfdom. It is, principally, an elitist hermeneutic developed by social, political, and ecclesial hierarchies. It is supported by a doctrine of inspiration connected with the ecstatic experiences of poets in the ancient Greek world and prophets in the Hebrew tradition. This leads, naturally, to an emphasis on Scripture as primarily the Word of God and only secondarily as, in or through human words.

The result is a rather authoritarian structure and fairly strict dependence on the citation of tradition. Readers are more or less passive recipients of the divine message as mediated

11 David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the Light of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), provides an excellent overview of the Alexandrian and Antiochene schools of interpretation against the background of patristic hermeneutics as a whole.

12 In opposition to open theism, Norman Geisler retrieves and reaffirms the classical paradigm, especially in its Thomistic forms; see Geisler, *Creating God in the Image of Man? The New 'Open' View of God—Neotheism's Dangerous Drift* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1997); and Geisler and H. Wayne House, *The Battle for God: Responding to the Challenge of Neotheism* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2001).

through scripture. Alexandrian hermeneutics in the first millennium and the medieval synthesis of the second millennium CE can thus be said to proceed from above to below, prioritizing God over the world, privileging Scripture as first and foremost the Word of God rather than as human words, and emphasizing the side of the (divine) author of the text rather than that of the reader.

On the other side, open theists may in large part be correct when they claim classical hermeneutics to be dependent on a Hellenistic worldview (along with its attending metaphysics and ontology), but this does not in and of itself mean their critique is also right. This is not only because guilt does not occur simply by historical association, but also because open theists themselves partake of and derive from an historically locatable hermeneutical and methodological tradition. This is the Antiochene school associated with Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia, and mediated to us through developments during the Renaissance and the early modern period.

Whereas Alexandrians drew their inspiration from Platonic and neo-Platonic categories, Antiochenes were drawn toward Aristotle's emphasis on empirical reality. The Alexandrian emphases on allegory and the spiritual sense were downplayed in Antioch in favour of the text's historical and literal sense understood against the backdrop of the author's and original audience's context. Care was thereby taken to determine the historical contexts of Scripture's origins, its canonical

development, and its transmission, all of which concerned and involved humans. Antiochene hermeneutics can thus be said to have proceeded from below in recognizing the human aspects of Scripture, even while attempting to maintain the conviction that the fully human words of the Bible nevertheless communicated the word of God.

During the Renaissance and modern periods, the Antiochene model was taken up and expanded by various schools associated with Erasmus, Spinoza and Schleiermacher. With regard to theology and hermeneutics, this marked a number of movements intrinsic to Antiochene principles: movements from elitism to democracy, from tradition to autonomous rationality, from cerebralism to experientialism, from traditionalism to individualism, from institutionalism to personalism, from conservatism to inquiry, from hierarchicalism or the 'house of authority' to mutual dialogue.<sup>13</sup>

However, whereas the patristic Antiochenes identified the Bible as both the word of God and the word of human beings, modern hermeneuticians have de-emphasized the former and subordinated it—sometimes to the point of denying the divine element altogether—to the latter. Recognition of the human dimensions of the biblical text has resulted in a change of empha-

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13 The 'house of authority' language is Edward Farley's; see his phenomenological-historical analysis of the modernity's movement away from authority and reliance on tradition in the theological method in *Ecclesial Reflection: An Anatomy of Theological Method* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), Part 1.



sis. Whereas the patristic Antiochenes focused on the text's author(s), modern hermeneuticians focus on the text's readers. Instead of seeing the message of Scripture as a monologue whereby the Bible speaks in a unidirectional manner to readers, moderns are much more conscious not only of what readers bring to the text experientially but also of the communalistic, personalistic, and dialogical dimensions of authorship, reading and inquiry. Thus can be seen the influence of what has come to be known as the Wesleyan quadrilateral on hermeneutics and theological method. While not denying the normative priority of the Bible, Scripture is interpreted in light of community and tradition, divinely constituted reason, and personal experience.

The implications of this paradigm shift in hermeneutics can now be discerned with regard to the debate at hand. In former generations, evangelicals recognized the sole sufficiency of Scripture for doctrinal and theological purposes. Classical hermeneutics continues to insist on the importance of right interpretation for theological understanding, and limits such interpretative methods and strategies to the elite who have had the requisite theological education.

Openness hermeneutics, on the other hand, fully accepts the democratic principle of Bible reading. It advocates what could be known also as a hermeneutics of the laity: the Bible speaks plainly to all persons and is to be understood simply and literally in what it affirms. Whereas

classical hermeneutics limits the Reformation doctrine of the priesthood of all believers to personal piety, openness hermeneutics extends that doctrine to biblical interpretation and theological reflection as well. And, while classical hermeneutics remains firmly committed to the authority of the tradition of Christian orthodoxy, openness hermeneutics subordinates tradition not only to the Bible but also (and this is important) to reason and experience. The latter, of course, is not just the sophisticatedly understood 'experience' of the theological elite, but the practical and unpretentious experience of every man, woman, boy and girl, forged in daily life and supported by a web of other beliefs and practices ranging from assumptions about how God acts in the world to the value and importance of prayer.<sup>14</sup>

While I will return to these points later, yet it needs to be mentioned at this juncture that openness hermeneutics is just as socially and historically conditioned as is classical hermeneutics. If open theists insist that the latter is guilty by association with Hellenism in general and Alexandrian hermeneutics more specifically, then they should confess their own guilt by association with the patriarchs of Antioch and one tradition of hermeneutics in the modern era.

I have no space here to adjudicate

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14 Exemplary of the openness hermeneutic in each of these respects is Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000).

either the hermeneutical or methodological issues.<sup>15</sup> However, my point in this section is to bring to the surface the hermeneutical presuppositions underlying the contemporary debate on divine omniscience between classical and open theists. The former insist on God's exhaustive foreknowledge of future contingents and appeal to a traditional, elitist reading of Scripture that affirms the principle of anthropomorphism and emphasizes certain root metaphors for divinity. The latter deny God's knowledge of future contingents as actual and appeal to a lay, democratic reading of Scripture that prioritizes the literalness of biblical language and emphasizes other root metaphors. These generalizations will be qualified as well as explicated as we turn to the theological and philosophical presuppositions that are also interrelated with these hermeneutical ones.

## II. Theological Presuppositions

The foregoing hermeneutical presuppositions are intricately connected with theological assumptions. As will be seen, commitments made at the level of hermeneutics predispose one in certain directions on the theological matters to be discussed. At the same time, however, theological inclinations also shape and influence hermeneutical intuitions. Again, for heuristic purposes, however, I wish

to isolate certain theological issues for discussion. Most pertinent to the subject at hand are views concerning the nature of God, divine omnipotence, and the meaning of divine freedom.

### *The nature of God*

I hypothesize here that if God's essence is conceived of in terms of the patristic and medieval doctrines of divine simplicity and aseity, then classical theism's constructs are sustained. However, if God is conceived of in social trinitarian and, especially, relational terms, then the central openness convictions take on further plausibility. Many, however, will recognize that this question about the internal life of God belongs to the realm of philosophical theology rather than biblical exegesis or theology. That is why I treat it as a presuppositional factor in the current debate on divine omniscience.

The options here are to follow the lead of the Jewish *shema* and Augustine on the one hand or of the Cappadocians on the other. The former begins with the oneness of God—God as spirit and thereby indivisible—and works out to the three persons. In the process, the doctrine of divine simplicity is adopted wherein the actions of God are understood to be unified and indistinguishable from the divine attributes.

Certain theological implications follow. First, emphasis remains on the one God rather than on any of the three persons; anything done by each of the persons is the common activity of all three persons. Second, any action of the one God is only verbally and logically distinguishable

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<sup>15</sup> I develop a postmodern hermeneutic that bypasses the classical-modernist debate in my *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective*, New Critical Thinking in Biblical Studies and Theology series (Aldershot, UK, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002).

from other actions of God but not ontologically so. The actions of God are ontologically one since there are no discursive moments to the divine intellect, nor can there be sequential operations predicated to the divine life. Finally, and most importantly for our purposes, neither God's intentions nor God's actions can undergo change from one status to another. Any change that we would wish to attribute to God derives from changes that we experience as human beings rather than from changes in divinity.

This is why the patristic theologians spoke about the eternal begottenness of the Son and the medievals about God as *actus purus*. From the divine and eternal perspective, there is no point that marks a shift between the Son as being unbegotten to the Son as begotten, nor is there a point where God who is not a creator becomes a God who is. Both doctrines point to the conviction that the actions of God are one and eternal, even if their effects are temporal—i.e., the incarnation in space-time or the creative and providential workings of God.

If one begins with the Cappadocians, however, one emphasizes the three persons and works from there toward the oneness of God. In this framework, God as irreducibly triune means that the differentiation between the three persons is safeguarded and the distinctiveness of their actions is preserved. Now certainly it is the case that the Cappadocian model did not require abandonment of the doctrine of divine simplicity, at least as far as the

history of theology is concerned. Yet it is also the case that Cappadocian trinitarianism is far more conducive to the development of a social doctrine of the Trinity than is the monism of the Augustinian tradition. Contemporary social trinitarianism in the work of Jürgen Moltmann, Cornelius Plantinga, Jr and others rely on the trinitarian framework of the Cappadocians.<sup>16</sup> The result, in Moltmann for example, is to underscore the intra-trinitarian relationality between the three persons. Theological implications follow. First, recognition of the give-and-take of authentic interpersonal relationships requires the internal life of God to be reconceived in dynamic terms. Second, the intra-trinitarian relationality serves as a model for the God-world relationship. God is involved in a personal and dynamic relationship with the world, especially with free creatures. Finally, the give-and-take between God and free creatures must be open-ended in order to preserve its veritability. This transforms the path toward the eschaton from one that is a fixed, divinely-intended blueprint to one that is open, shift-

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16 Moltmann's social trinitarianism has been developed over the past few decades. For a succinct statement, see his 'Some Reflections on the Social Doctrine of the Trinity', in James M. Byrne, ed., *The Christian Understanding of God Today: Theological Colloquium on the Occasion of the 400th anniversary of the Foundation of Trinity College, Dublin* (Dublin: Columba Press, 1993), pp. 104-111. Cf. also Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., 'Social Trinity and Trithemism', in Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., eds., *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement: Philosophical and Theological Essays* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), pp. 21-47, and John L. Gresham, Jr., 'The Social Model of the Trinity and Its Critics', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 46 (1993) pp. 325-343.

ing, and dynamic.

Each of these trinitarian moves can be seen as operative presuppositions in open theism. Openness theologians privilege the Cappadocian over the Augustinian model of the Trinity. Their tendency to accept social trinitarianism is driven, at least in part, by their conviction that the medieval doctrine of divine simplicity cannot be profitably retrieved for today. And they certainly are relational theists who understand the dynamic give-and-take as central not only to the intra-trinitarian life of God but also to God's relationship to the world and to free creatures. When it comes to God's knowledge of the future, then, their conclusion that the future is open comes as no surprise. Only a genuinely open future is able to preserve the dynamic nature of the God-world relationship.<sup>17</sup>

### *Divine omnipotence*

The conceptual frameworks undergirding either the doctrines of divine simplicity or social trinitarianism do, as we have seen, have consequences for understanding the attributes of God, at least as traditionally conceived. The doctrines of divine aseity, immutability, omnipotence, and necessity, etc., seem to hang togeth-

er, and to conceive of their doing so remains the task of philosophical rather than biblical theology. In this sub-section, I want to pursue this line of inquiry further, specifically with regard to the omnipotence of God.

The Bible clearly witnesses to an almighty God who has the power over all things and for whom nothing is impossible. This 'nothing,' however, has been qualified both morally and logically in the classical theist scheme of things. As good, God cannot do evil; as the source of rationality, God cannot do something irrational, like make square circles or rocks so big that they cannot be lifted even by God. Positively stated, God has the power to bring about all logical possibilities consistent with the divine nature and will. God therefore unilaterally intervenes (better: acts) in the world to bring about the divine purposes, both proximately and eschatologically. The alternative scenario is unthinkable in the classical scheme of things because of the unambiguous eschatological message of the Bible. If God is not omnipotent then the divine will can be frustrated and biblical eschatology cannot be guaranteed.

I will return to the question of creaturely freedom below. At this point, however, I want to connect the question of divine omnipotence with divine omniscience. Given the classical assumptions for the moment, God's exhaustive knowledge (even of things which are future to temporal beings) both follows from and sustains the doctrine of divine omnipotence. In the former case, how can God not know (or foreknow, from a

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17 I realize that the statements in this paragraph can be challenged on a number of fronts. But see the underlying relational metaphysics and social doctrines of God in the work of Gregory Boyd, *Trinity and Process: A Critical Evaluation and Reconstruction of Hartshorne's Di-polar Theism towards a Trinitarian Metaphysics* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), Clark Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), and John Sanders, *The God Who Risks*.

creaturely perspective) what God has eternally chosen to do (or will do, from a creaturely perspective)? In the latter case, how can God not bring about (eternally from the divine perspective, but temporally from the point of view of creatures) what God has eternally known—i.e., decided upon or willed? The doctrine of divine simplicity guarantees that there will be no discrepancy between what God knows and what God does. To say that God does not know the future of free creatures is to say that God may not be able to bring about what God wishes. It would also require that God's plans for the future of free agents be adjustable, allowing God to respond appropriately and in a timely manner to the dizzying number of temporal developments. But if in fact this is the case, then the assurance the Bible gives with regard to God's eschatological plans is apparently misleading.

And, unsurprisingly so, one of the most sustained objections classical theists posit against open theists lies precisely on this score: that open theology cannot logically or theologially guarantee the eschatological plan revealed in scripture since God's power to bring about such ends is limited by what creatures choose to do.<sup>18</sup> Open theists, however, respond along a number of

lines, two of which I will mention here.<sup>19</sup> First, the doctrine of omnipotence itself has been revised in conformity to the moral vision of human beings and the laws of logic. Why should the doctrine of omniscience be exempt from revision when demanded by similar moral and logical considerations? Second, why should the doctrine of omniscience follow the doctrine of omnipotence in the face of obvious conceptual difficulties? Why not the other way around? Better yet, why not revise both in order to present a doctrine of divine attributes consistent with the plurality of the biblical witness with regard to what God both does and knows?<sup>20</sup>

### *The meaning of divine freedom*

This last point of the open theist response is a call for conceptual clarity and systemic consistency. I believe that both classical and openness theologians believe their systems to be internally coherent even while they deny that of the other side. At the same time, however, it is precisely because both systems are

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19 For more in-depth responses to specific classical theistic charges with regard to eschatology, see John Sanders' 'The Openness of God and the Assurance of Things to Come', in David Baker, ed., *The Proceedings of the 1999 Evangelical Theological Society* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000).

20 This is the suggestion of the British philosophical theologian, John Lucas: '[W]e need to construe the the [sic] *omni* of omnipotence and omniscience, not in terms of some inconsistent, absolute all, but negatively, as contrasting with various forms of non-omnipotence and non-omniscience' (*The Future: An Essay on God, Temporality, and Truth* [Oxford and New York: Blackwell, 1989], p. 225). Lucas, like Swinburne, also anticipates the openness position even if he is far removed confessionally and geographically from the current debate.

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18 See Steven C. Roy, 'God as Omnipotent Responder? Questions about the Grounds of Eschatological Confidence in Free Will Theism', unpublished paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Danvers, Massachusetts, 17-19 November 1999, and Bruce Ware, *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000).

not fully coherent that there is a debate. The tensions within each system are evident when the doctrine of divine freedom is examined. Questions here include the following: What kind of freedom does God have? What are the constraints, if any, on the divine freedom? Is God free to change the divine mind?

The doctrine of divine freedom in classical theism follows from and supports the other divine attributes. As previously seen, God is transcendent, independent, and immutable. Yet the divine freedom is a complicated matter in the classical account. First, a distinction is made between the necessary will of God with regard to the intrinsic properties and attributes of divinity, and the accidental will of God with regard to non-essential properties and attributes. Second, God's willing should be distinguished typologically as a) the absolutely necessary willing of God-self; b) God's logically or morally necessary willing with the resulting outcomes being contingent; and c) God's free willing of contingencies. (A) means that God cannot will not to be God, while (b) means that as essentially good, God cannot will morally evil actions. At the heart of the Christian understanding of God's freedom, at least as understood in its plain sense, is (c). This leads to the classical doctrine of the freedom of God to either create or not create a (our) world. God did not have to create any world, much less this world. That is why we recognize this world to be contingent, and our existence in it as well.

The counter-question, however, is

how one can truly speak of God's freedom if, in the classical account of divine simplicity and eternal creation, one cannot discern at least logical, if not ontological, moments in the divine life which mark out God's choice to create a (this) world. The assumption is that unless there is at least the moment that logically distinguishes the before and after of the exercise of the divine prerogative to create, then to speak of the divine freedom is less than sincere. The question is whether or not God really had options about creating any world—not about what kind of world to create, but whether to create at all—or perhaps to do something else. Alternatively, the question might be put this way: did God deliberate first and foremost about creating anything?<sup>21</sup> If God did not, then what does it mean to say God exercised choice and freedom with regard to creating this world? If God did, then two implications follow. First, a conceptual distinction is made with regard to the before and after of God's deliberation which is suggestive of an ontological (and perhaps) temporal distinction in the divine life. This requires, in turn, a re-examination of the doctrine of divine simplicity. Second, genuine deliberation certainly means God is free,

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21 Bruce Reichenbach, 'Omniscience and Deliberation', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 16 (1984) pp. 225-36, poses a similar question in asking whether or not God can act intentionally if omniscient. He suggests first that since not all intentional acts require deliberation, God can act intentionally without deliberating. His conclusion finally that God cannot deliberate but might speculate and even infer seems to me to be incoherent.

even to change the divine mind on 'previous' decisions. But this raises questions about God's exhaustive foreknowledge of future contingents, at least with regard to choices that God would make which are dependent on the 'previous' decisions of the divine will.

Open theism argues from the biblical strand that emphasizes God as fully personal. Such a God interacts with free creatures, in part responding to their choices and actions as appropriate and in part luring and directing their actions as appropriate. Such a God anticipates, deliberates, repents, and relents of divine intentions (Ex. 32:14, 1 Chr. 21:15, Ps. 106:45, Jer. 26:19, Amos 7:3-6) even while exercising prerogatives in relationship to the world. And, of course, if God genuinely responds to the actions of free creatures, then God knows what God will decide to do in terms of possibilities rather than actualities. But counter-counter questions arise. What is the basis of the deliberations of the God of open theism? How does God decide on what actions to take to begin with? The classical answer is that God's will is determined by God's nature. Yet the fully relational theology of open theism begs the question of whether or not God's nature can be abstracted from God's relationships, specifically with the world and with free creatures. Given the reality of the world in the openness framework, the options present to God are certainly demarcated by the world's 'otherness' either over-and-against or internal to (depending on which metaphor the open theist prefers)

God.<sup>22</sup>

Another way of posing the differences, however, is to say that two different conceptions of divine freedom are driving the classical and openness projects. The former is predicated on the freedom of God to create any world. The latter begins with the freedom of God to respond to the created order in general and to free agents more specifically. Both sides assume that what is most important about the divine freedom is what they emphasize—i.e., God's freedom to create or not, or God's freedom to genuinely interact with free creatures. The result is that classical theists are able to preserve the contingency of the world, but end up with a notion of freedom removed in some ways from common human experience (in terms of the arbitrariness of creation). On the other side, open theists are able to articulate the freedom of God in more personal terms even if the divine choices are finally constrained by the choices and actions of free creatures.

The important of defining 'free creatures'—something that has not yet been done—should be evident

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22 If the 'nature' of God in the open theist framework is fully interconnected with the world's, then to say God deliberates on how to respond to the world is to say that God-in-relationship-with-the-world deliberates on how God will relate to the world—a circular notion. Gregory Boyd attempts to escape this circularity by beginning with a dispositional and social trinitarianism (*Trinity and Process*). But given the world, God's nature is intricately bound up with the world's, bringing along with that all of the attending problems that were supposedly solved by positing a primordially dispositional and social Trinity. See further my more intensive engagement and assessment of Boyd's dispositional and trinitarian theology of creation in 'Possibility and Actuality' (note 3).

from the foregoing. At the same time, the discussions of God's will and God's freedom also raises the spectre of theodicy. But both of these issues—concerning freedom and the justification of theism in the face of evil—bring with them other more strictly philosophical questions.

### III. Philosophical Presuppositions

This section is as much an effort in philosophical theology as was the preceding section. However, I am making a distinction in terms of the starting points of the discussion. In the former section, we began with theological axioms: the nature of God, of divine omnipotence, and of divine freedom. Here, we begin with problematics framed primarily by philosophical categories: the reality of evil, the nature of freedom, and the relationship between time and eternity. Granted, hermeneutical decisions and theological views both inform and undergird what one decides philosophically in these areas. But that would further prove my point: that a complex web of hermeneutical, theological and philosophical presuppositions holds both classical and open theist systems together.

#### *The problem of theodicy*

The questions raised concerning the divine attributes discussed in the previous section come to a head on the issue of theodicy. Simply stated, the problem of evil arises with the conjunction of three premises:

(a) God is all powerful

(b) God is wholly good

(c) there is evil in the world

The thesis I wish to explore in what follows is that classical theists define (b) and (c) in terms of (a) while open theists define (a) in terms of (b) and (c).

Given the root metaphors operative in classical theism and its presuppositions about God's omnipotence, the reluctance of the classical theist to qualify (a) is understandable. Classical theists consider divine omnipotence non-negotiable. This leaves either (b) or (c). Now classical theists certainly do not deny (b), but they do negotiate its meaning, and they do this in ambiguous directions. Scripture itself, after all, clearly affirms God's goodness on the one hand, but also indicates that God is the author of both light and darkness (Is. 45:7) on the other. Thus God is good, but in the infinite divine goodness, wisdom, and power, God does some things which human beings misunderstand as impugning God's goodness because they are incapable of discerning the larger purposes of God. Or, God is good, but the goodness of God is manifest in two wills, a revealed will and a hidden will.<sup>23</sup> Or, God's goodness combined with divine omnipotence means that God is responsible for evil, but only in some weaker sense; furthermore, this is without moral culpability since God's purposes for ordaining evil differ from those who actually perpe-

23 John Piper, 'Are There Two Wills in God?' in Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware, eds., *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), pp. 107-31.



trate evil and commit evil actions.<sup>24</sup> Ultimately, then, it appears that God is beyond good and evil, not in the pejorative Nietzschean sense, but in the Augustinian/Calvinist sense wherein the fallen and sinful state of human beings does not allow us to understand what goodness really is, especially when applied to God. To the age-old dilemma of philosophical ethics—is something good because God ‘says’ it is good, or is God good because God’s actions conform with an ‘external’ standard of goodness?—classical theists would tend to lean in the former direction, and do so by following Paul’s response to those who attempted to hold God accountable to ‘external’ (human) moral standards (Rom. 9:14-24).

Yet this series of moves affects how one understands evil as well, and at least in two ways. First, if God ordains evil in order to achieve divine purposes which are beyond our comprehension and which demand that we trust God that those purposes are indeed best for all involved in the long run, then the ‘evil’ one experiences is ultimately good, at least in the sense that God is bringing about ultimately benevolent intentions through it. Second, if our fallen and sinful nature does not really allow us to understand what divine goodness really is, then neither can we truly understand what evil really is either. It turns out, then, that evil either is not or may not be so bad after all. In other words, evil’s reality has been

transposed such that (c) is either denied or its reality redefined.

A post-holocaust theology, however, does not allow one to deny or redefine (c) very easily, and open theists are much too sensitive to the modern experience of radical evil to be enticed by either move.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, open theists also do not believe that redefining (b) resolves the issue of theodicy since too many unanswered questions remain. They are fully committed to the goodness of God understood in a fairly univocal sense with human goodness since to deny this univocity raises insoluble questions about human morality and theological ethics. This conviction together with their understanding of a fully personal God derived in part from their root metaphors leads them to re-negotiate (a) instead, a move that we have already seen them willing to make. Again, it is not as if they are denying (a), but that they are re-defining it within an openness framework. God is omnipotent, but the power of God is limited not only by the divine nature and will and by logical constraints, but also by the free acts of moral agents.

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25 Augustine took the former route: there is no positive evil, only the privation of the good. Dualistic cosmologies take the latter route: evil is an eternal aspect of the world, therefore the theodicy question is misplaced in asking, not recognizing evil as an ultimate principle. My focus here, however, is on the classical-openness responses to this question, and if the primary literature of open theists conveys a proper sense of what is important to them, it is evident that the recognition of the reality of evil is a driving concern. See Clark Pinnock, et al., *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), pp. 168-71.

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24 This is the position of the Calvinist, Paul Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God without Time* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 144-70.

In effect, the open theist solution to the problem of evil amounts to a free will theodicy.<sup>26</sup> Evil exists because either God's power is limited by the power of free moral agents, or God has intentionally restricted the divine power in order to make room for creatures to act freely. Evil happens because of the intentions and actions of free moral agents—human beings and demonic spirits—over whom God has greater or lesser degrees of control, but not absolute control. The biblical language of God regretting human actions (Gen. 6:6, 1 Sam. 15:11, 35) and of demonic powers causing misery, suffering, and pain (Jn. 10:10, 1 Jn. 5:19, Rev. 12:8-17) is understood in that light. It is usually affirmed that this lack of absolute control is itself under the control of God: God may elect to and does intervene more or less directly in human and demonic affairs at any time. Further, God is infinitely wise and resourceful in terms of responding to any and every possible act of perpetrating evil against the divine will and intentions. However, in principle, God's initial creating of a world of free moral creatures leads God to respect their autonomy—thus the widespread experience of evil, pain, suffering and tragedy. Our response is to follow God's lead in Scripture and to fight against all forms of evil. Biblical passages that highlight both this ongoing war against evil, the

devil and his minions, and the human obligation to participate in it are thus central to open theist theodicies.<sup>27</sup> In any case, open theists accept the full implications of the reality of evil and generally resolve the trilemma of theodicy by recognizing the reality of evil and preserving God's goodness, both at the expense of God's power.

So, on the one side, one begins with the power of God and then proceeds to redefine the nature of goodness and overwhelm the problem of evil with the divine majesty, glory, and sovereignty. On the other side, one begins with the goodness of God and the reality of evil, and understands the latter to be overcome in the eschatological long run by the divine wisdom, patience, and especially love. Whereas the former affirms God's explicit providential intentionality with regard to what God wants to accomplish through the creaturely experience of pain (thereby supporting the doctrine of exhaustive foreknowledge), the latter insists on God's eschatological intentionality and on the plurality of options that free creatures and God have in order to arrive at their final destination (thereby supporting the notion of the openness of the future and the corollary doctrine of divine knowledge of future possibilities

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<sup>26</sup> Thus David Basinger, *The Case for Freewill Theism: A Philosophical Assessment* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), pp. 83-104.

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<sup>27</sup> The twin motifs of actions of free demonic creatures and human involvement in the cosmic war between the divine and the demonic play important roles especially in Gregory Boyd's *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), and *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

only, rather than of future actualities).

In the classical framework, then, issues of theodicy are secondary at best—as is everything else—to issues of theology, and that of divine power, more specifically: evil is not what it seems to be after all. In open theism, however, issues of theodicy are said to shed light on issues of theology: the reality of evil requires a rethinking of the divine nature and attributes, specifically that of divine power. What then accounts for the shift proposed by open theism? Could it be that modernity has sensitized many—at least open theists—to the irredeemable and apparently wasteful features of the cosmic processes and of human experience? Yet the move toward a free will theodicy on the part of open theists confronts us again with the question of the meaning of freedom. We can no longer avoid grappling with what freedom is assumed to be.

#### *The meaning of creaturely freedom*

The problem of foreknowledge and freedom goes somewhat like this:

(a) God knows all things—past, present, future

(b) If God knows the future, then the future is determined

(c) If the future is determined, then my future acts are predetermined

(d) If my future acts are predetermined, then I am not truly free or responsible for them

(e) Yet I am judged for my sin and incur the penalty of God's wrath.

Theoretically, one could resolve the problem by denying either any of the four premises, or the conclu-

sion.<sup>28</sup> My focus, however, is on the classical-open theist controversy. I see the former as redefining (c) and the latter as redefining (a).

Classical theists have perennially responded to this well-known dilemma by analysing what it means to be 'determined' or 'predetermined.' The goal has always been to steer between Scylla of arbitrariness and the Charybdis of fatalism. These extremes mark out the limits beyond which we should not trespass in attempting to understand the dilemma of freedom and determinism with regard to human beings. On the one hand, various intentions, motives, and influences (i.e., genetic, environmental, social, political, economic, religious) constrain human actions; this means they are therefore not purely arbitrary. On the other hand, humans are held morally responsible for their actions; this means that they are therefore not irrevocably fated in what they do. In short, all actions are both determined in various ways and yet issue forth in personal responsibility. The key to the classical response lies in the distinction between two conceptions of freedom: what is called *compatibilism* and what is called *libertarianism*.

Compatibilism affirms that human freedom is congruous with determinisms of various sorts, including divine determinism. It has also been called soft determinism or the liberty

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<sup>28</sup> Denying (e), the conclusion, leads to universalism, and is therefore not a live evangelical option. (D) is practically non-negotiable in the light of moral and socio-political considerations. Considerations pertaining to (b) are better addressed in the context of discussing the relationship between time and eternity (next sub-section).

of spontaneity whereby one is free from external hindrances and makes decisions congruent with the self's wishes. In this case, the combination of one's previous dispositions with the various options presented by the situation determines what the person decides to do. Human freedom is secured, however, because we do what we want to do, even if our options are determined secondarily by external and especially internal causes, desires, and the like, but ultimately by God in the sense that even the options which present themselves to us have been providentially arranged through the divine oversight.<sup>29</sup> Libertarianism, on the other hand, is also known as the liberty of indifference or the freedom of self-determinism. Emphasis is placed here on the person's capacity to override dispositional factors and situational constraints, at least in part.<sup>30</sup> Classical theists affirm that the latter notions are incoherent. It makes no sense to say that human beings make decisions completely apart from their dispositions. And, if dispositional factors are operative,

even minimally so, then one's actions are determined at least to that extent. It therefore comes as no surprise that classical theists understand biblical texts that refer to human freedom in a compatibilist sense rather than a libertarian sense. Since all human actions are dispositional, and since the various situations that human beings find themselves are not randomly derived but providentially arranged by God, the conclusion must be that human actions are determined in at least those senses without undermining responsibility and accountability.

Open theists again respond, 'Not so fast.' What do responsibility and accountability mean if dispositional factors—most, if not all of which are beyond the agent's control—fully determine human actions? How does one take the biblical warnings and exhortations seriously if human agents are unable, finally, to exercise greater or lesser degrees of self-determination? A decision can be free and morally accountable if and only if the agent has genuine choices, options and alternatives, and could have decided otherwise. In this framework, God's intentions and actions are certainly a factor in what a person decides to do, as are that person's intrinsic make-up and other extrinsic factors to that person's history and situation calling for decision. However, none of these either separately or even together requires or predetermines, in either strong or weak senses, the final outcome. The decision finally rests with the agent's capacity to make free and responsible choices. If our decisions were predetermined

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29 Compatibilism has a long and illustrious theological pedigree, stretching from Augustine through Luther and Calvin. Contemporary advocates of compatibilism who have weighed in on the open theism debate include Schreiner and Ware, eds., *The Grace of God, The Bondage of the Will*; John M. Frame, *No Other God: A Response to Open Theism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company, 2001), esp. 119-42; and, John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God*, Foundations in Evangelical Theology 2 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), esp. pp. 677-734.

30 For recent arguments for libertarianism, see John Thorp, *Free Will: A Defence against Neurophysiological Determinism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), and Peter Van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

then moral responsibility is a sham. The biblical injunctions, admonitions, exhortations and warnings themselves presume libertarian freedom, and such freedom is confirmed in the biblical narratives of God's relationships with human beings. Passages that appear to support compatibilist notions of freedom need to be understood in light of libertarian intuitions.

The result, obviously, is that classical theists understand the future as pre-determined in various respects while open theists emphasize the future as comprised of open possibilities. In the former case, God obviously knows the future in all the ways in which it is pre-determined while in the latter, God obviously knows the future as a realm of possibilities rather than as a realm of pre-determined actualities. Of course, open theists affirm that with regard to the eschatological picture, God has pre-determined various outcomes, and thus knows them as such. Yet God does not and will not override the libertarian freedom of moral agents in the process of accomplishing God's eschatological intentions. My point here is that how one understands human freedom predisposes one to interpret the biblical passages pertinent to the doctrine of God's knowledge of the future in one or another direction.

### *God's relationship to time, and eternity*

All along, the question concerning the relationship between time and eternity on the one hand, and between God, time and eternity on the other has been percolating underneath our discussion. Having addressed this issue more complete-

ly elsewhere, let me very quickly identify the complexities of the questions involved.<sup>31</sup> First, is time's flow ultimately real or might it be illusory (neo-Platonism), perhaps being a product of the psyche (Augustine), or perhaps understood best in relationship to movement (Aristotle), space (Newton), or earlier-than and later-than relationships (McTaggart's B-series)? Second, what is the nature of eternity? Is it the endless duration of time's flow (Heraclitus)? Is it best conceived as the basket containing time (Plato)? Is it the togetherness or simultaneity of time's past, present, and future (Boethius)? Third, what is God's relationship to time and eternity? Is God eternal, timeless, and the creator of time (Augustine)? Is God timeless and yet, mysteriously, subject to duration but not succession (Eleanor Stump and Norman Kretzman)? Is God eternal in some ways and temporal or related to time in other ways (Alan Padgett)? Was God timeless prior to the creation of the world and temporal since the creation (William Lane Craig)? Or, perhaps God is everlasting and endures through all moments of time (process theism and perhaps Nicholas Wolterstorff)?<sup>32</sup> Finally, and here we come to an important question, what is the status of the future? Is it determined by past and present, and if so, in what ways or to what degrees? Is it a realm of actualities (classical theism),

<sup>31</sup> See my 'Divine Knowledge and Relation to Time', (note 2). See also a recent issue A recent issue of *Philosophia Christi*, Series 2, 2:1 (2000) also includes a slate of articles representing diverse viewpoints of the relationship of God to time.

<sup>32</sup> On these alternative positions, see Gregory E. Ganssle, ed., *God and Time: Four Views* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

possibilities (open theism), or perhaps even probabilities (Gregory Boyd)?

These and many other models of time, of eternity, of eternity's relationship to time, of God's relationship to eternity and time, and of the future have derived from extra-biblical considerations since the Bible itself is ambiguous about these notions. The disciplines of cosmology and physics, in particular, inform one's philosophical intuitions on this matter. And, how one answers the question of God's relationship to time predisposes one in either a classical or open theist direction, not only in terms of one's overall theological vision but also in terms of the doctrine of divine omniscience more specifically. Classical theists, of course, follow Augustine, Boethius, and Aquinas in assuming God to be eternal in the sense of being either timeless or above time, and the divine action(s) as eternal with temporal effects. Open theists do not believe these notions to be coherent. Instead, they understand God as everlasting (sempiternal or enduring endlessly) through time and omnipresent through space.<sup>33</sup> Rather than attempt to untangle the knots surrounding this set of questions, however, let me tease out the implications of the classical and openness intuitions with regard to God, time and eternity with regard to three other somewhat practical issues: that of God as personal, the nature of biblical prophecy, and how one understands prayer.

First, Christian theism has always affirmed God as personal. Yet because of the classical conception of God's essential eternity and timelessness, it has also wrestled with what it means to say that God is personal. Our experience of personhood is immersed in temporality. How can a being who is above time's flow be said to think, to remember, to anticipate, to act, to know, etc.? Are these not all discursive functions? Classical theists, have made strenuous efforts to defend the thesis that at least with regard to God as super-person, conceptuality, memory, purpose, knowledge and agency do not require temporality, and so there is no a priori reason why God cannot be personal and non-temporal.<sup>34</sup> Of course, open theists are not convinced that such an abstract argument does justice to the rich biblical descriptions of God as personal vis-à-vis human beings.

What about biblical prophecy? Is prophecy to be understood first and foremost as revealing either God's intentions about the future (minimally) or God's exhaustive knowledge of the future (maximally)? These have certainly been central to classical conceptions of biblical prophecy. On the other side, perhaps prophecy reveals God's response to human actions that are conditional—i.e., if you do such and such, then such and such will happen—and are meant to motivate human beings. Or, perhaps prophecy reveals God's exhaustive knowledge of past and present

33 On this, see again Clark Pinnock, et al., *The Openness of God*, pp.120-121.

34 See, e.g., Paul Helm, *Eternal God*, pp. 56-72. But note then that this would simply be a negative, rather than a positive, argument.

causal conditions and their implications for the future? Yet the underlying questions of whether or not God is timeless or temporal, and whether or not the future is real or not yet real, are central to how one views biblical prophecy. In classical accounts, God is timeless and sees past, present and future (our coordinates) all in the one eternal glance of the divine 'eye': the future is therefore as real as the past and can be predicted either in general or precision as God sees fit. In openness accounts, God is temporal and sees past and present exhaustively, but sees the future as a realm of possibilities (and perhaps probabilities): the future is therefore not yet real, although actualizable, and can be predicted to a greater or lesser degree of exactness in accordance with its probabilities as ascertained by God's knowledge of the past and present.<sup>35</sup>

Finally, what is the nature of prayer? Is prayer about our conforming our wills to God's will (the classical position)? Or is the intention of prayer to either change God's mind and/or move God's hand to alter circumstances or intervene in the processes of the world (the openness position)? Alternatively, does it make sense, as in classical Arminianism or Molinism, to say that prayer does change God's mind but only in an eternal sense and not in a tempo-

ral sense—i.e., that God has for all eternity factored foreknown prayers into the eternal decisions and acts of God which are, in turn, played out with temporal effects? Of course, whether one intuitively God as timeless or temporal predisposes one toward either the classical (of which Arminianism and Molinism could be considered variants) or the openness position. If God is timeless, then God sees and hears prayers 'all at once' in the simultaneous eternity of the divine life. If God is everlasting or sempiternal, then God sees and hears prayers successively in accordance with how the divine temporality interacts with created modes of temporality.<sup>36</sup>

#### IV. Questions instead of a Conclusion

We can now clearly see how presuppositions made in one area inform decisions made in other areas, and how the combination of these presuppositions and corollary decisions systematically underwrite the classical and openness theological frameworks. In fact, I don't even think it is appropriate to choose any one issue that has been discussed and say that is *the* starting point for either classical or openness construals. I began with the question of root metaphors, but could just as easily have begun

35 This is Peter Geach's position in *Providence and Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). Like Swinburne and Lucas, Geach is also a British philosopher who has anticipated openness doctrines, but whose confessional, geographic, and temporal distance from the current debate has made him a non-factor except in the footnotes of those advocating or castigating the openness vision.

36 Terrence Tiessen, *Providence and Prayer: How Does God Work in the World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), provides excellent overviews of how one's view of prayer follows from one's overall theological vision. The value of this book is that it covers not only classical and openness models of providence and prayer, but also makes distinctions within each model and includes other models such as fatalism, deism, and process theism.

with the question of time and eternity, with theodicy, or with the nature of freedom. My point is, in effect, the Wittgensteinian one that both classical and openness interpretations of the Bible are couched in an interrelated hermeneutical, theological, and philosophical system. Their claims about whether or not God has exhaustive (fore)knowledge of the future actions of free creatures cannot be assessed in isolation from that system. Each system interprets the Bible consistently and coherently within its presuppositional framework.<sup>37</sup> Of course, the question this raises is that of how we determine where in the system to begin.

The further question of what an evangelical commitment to the priority of Scripture means also appears. I have highlighted in this paper only select issues, but even this non-comprehensive discussion identifies the range of historical and contemporary methods that inform and underwrite—both consistently and inconsistently—attempts to articulate a coherent doctrine of God's knowledge of the future. Theological method, I propose, proceeds more along the lines of the Wesleyan quadrilateral than it does the Reformers' *sola Scriptura* in that while both classical and open theists claim evangelical commitments to Scripture,

factors extraneous to the Bible itself determines how one reads and interprets the biblical text, both with regard to one's overall theological vision in general and with regard to the doctrine of divine omniscience in particular.<sup>38</sup> I realize that I have made extremely broad generalizations throughout this paper. However, I also believe that the cumulative weight of my argument is significant with regard to the question of theological method both of doctrinal and speculative theology.

The present classical-openness debate on divine omniscience brings a final complex of questions to our consciousness. Granted, some open theists deny that this is a debate about divine omniscience, preferring instead to frame this as a debate about the nature of the future—i.e., God knows with certainty all there is to know, which is about the past and present, and God knows the future according to its mode of reality as possibility rather than actuality. Yet the latter move certainly implicates the doctrine of omniscience. So, this raises the question about whether or not there is a hierarchy of doctrines about God, and if so, where the specific doctrine of God's knowledge of the future approximates in that hierarchy. Is the doctrine of divine omniscience a central doctrine of Christian faith, or does it better fit Luther's category of *adiaphora*?

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37 This, I think, is Nicholas Wolterstorff's point that the classical doctrines of God stand and fall together: removal of any one plank—omniscience, in this case—is impossible in isolation and actually occurs simultaneously amidst the overhauling of the entire system; cf. Wolterstorff, 'Interview with Nicholas P. Wolterstorff: Does God Suffer?' *Modern Reformation* 8:5 (1999) pp. 45-47.

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38 For more on how I understand the Wesleyan quadrilateral, see my 'The Demise of Foundationalism and the Retention of Truth: What Evangelicals Can Learn from C. S. Peirce,' *Christian Scholar's Review* 29:3 (Spring 2000):563-88, esp. pp. 579-88.



What are the criteria by which we evaluate the centrality of doctrines to Christian faith, and who formulates such criteria? Does not the investigation conducted here show that even one's criteriology can never be purely or objectively biblical? Or, to ask the underlying question, does the close connectedness between omniscience, omnipotence, etc., with the classical Platonic ontology of hierarchies itself make a difference in how one understands doctrinal categorization—i.e., are or should doctrines be categorized as hierarchical with those higher up being more central to Christian faith than those lower down?

On this, as with the other questions, agreement on the answer does not appear to be soon forthcoming. The 'blessing' of open theism, if one could call it that, is that it has motivated a fresh study of both the Bible and of these many related issues—and this has also been admitted by classical theists. Open theists themselves consider their own initial work as part of a long term research programme directed at revisiting traditional doctrines defined within a classical or Hellenistic framework. Should not this research programme be allowed to run its course? Some classical theists do not believe it should, or that if it does, it should not be allowed to proceed as an acceptable activity within the boundaries of evangelical orthodoxy. There has therefore been some movement to exclude open theism from evangelicalism, and prevent advocates of open theism from being members of the (largely North American) Evan-

gelical Theological Society (ETS).<sup>39</sup> To do so would be a mistake, in my estimation, not because I hold to the open view. Rather, as I have argued here, the doctrine of God's foreknowledge emerges not from a straightforward reading of Scripture (as some classical theists want to claim), but from a complex interplay of hermeneutical, theological, and philosophical presuppositions. If the argument has any merit whatsoever, then the evangelical world in general and the ETS in particular should take Gamaliel's advice—'Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God' (Acts 5:38-39, NIV)—and allow the debate to proceed.

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39 The debate has only intensified during the last two years, as evidenced by the large number of papers devoted to arguing against the open view at the most recent meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Colorado Springs, Colorado, November 2001. For a snapshot of where the debate is at the end of the calendar year 2001, see Douglas Wilson, ed., *Bound Only Once: The Failure of Open Theism* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2001); Clark H. Pinnock, *The Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001); and James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001). And, of course, we can still expect volume three of Gregory Boyd's warfare theodicy from InterVarsity Press within the next two or three years to keep the debate afloat: *The Myth of the Blueprint* (tentative title).

# Economic Growth vs. the Environment?

## The Need for New Paradigms in Economics, Business Ethics, and Evangelical Theology

John Jefferson Davis

**Keywords:** Creation, free market economics, free market environmentalism, neo-classical economics, ecological economics, stewardship, 'theocentric, creation-connectedness'

'Animosity has traditionally existed between environmental advocates and those whom they perceive as the enemy—business,' noted Gregory Adamian, president of Bentley College, on the occasion of a conference hosted by his institution on the theme of 'The Corporation, Ethics, and the Environment.'<sup>1</sup> This tension between environmentalists and the

business community can be observed in global, regional and local settings—as, for example, in the controversies surrounding the deforestation of the Amazon rainforests, and battles between the logging interests in the Pacific Northwest and animal rights activists seeking to protect the habitats of the spotted owl.<sup>2</sup>

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1 In W. Michael Hoffman, Robert Frederick, and Edward S. Petry, Jr., eds., *The Corporation, Ethics, and the Environment* (New York: Quorum, 1990), p. xii.

2 See, for example, Robert Bonnie, et al, 'Counting the Cost of Deforestation', *Science* 288 (9 June 2000), pp. 1763-4; Lisa Newton and Catherine Dillingham, 'Forests of the North Coast: the Owls, the Trees, and the Conflicts', in Laura Pinchus Hartman, *Perspectives in Business Ethics* (Chicago: Irwin/McGraw-Hill, 1998), pp. 704-11.

It is not the purpose of this paper<sup>3</sup> to address the issue of 'economic growth vs. the environment' in general, but rather to argue more specifically that the current paradigms in economics, business ethics, and evangelical theology are inadequate and in need of substantial revision.<sup>4</sup> After a brief review of the historical development of the current discussion, it will be argued that neo-classical economists, business ethicists, and evangelical theologians have not generally in the past taken *creation* or the *environment* seriously enough as a crucial element in the frameworks and paradigms of their disciplines. The paper will conclude with a proposal that these disciplines need a new paradigm of 'theocentric, creation-connectedness' to deal more adequately with the environmental challenges of our time.

### Historical Context of the Debate

Since the 1970s two powerful trends around the globe have been in conflict: the movement toward free market economies, and the growth of the environmental movement.<sup>5</sup> Environmental concern and activism has accelerated since the first Earth Day in 1970, and the movement toward

free market economies has accelerated since 1989 with the fall of communism in the former Soviet Union. The influential 1972 publication by D.H. Meadows and others, *The Limits to Growth*, argued that present trends in economic growth begun with the Industrial Revolution could not be sustained indefinitely without producing environmental catastrophe.<sup>6</sup>

The concept of 'sustainable development' was popularized by the 1987 report of the Brundtland Commission, a panel of experts assembled under the leadership of the then prime minister of Norway.<sup>7</sup> This report evoked various responses defending continuing economic growth and questioning the seriousness of environmental problems, notably works by Julian Simon and Herman Kahn.<sup>8</sup> This debate

6 D.H. Meadows, et al, *The Limits to Growth* (New York: Universe, 1972).

7 The report of the Brundtland Commission was published under the title *Our Common Future* (London: Oxford UP, 1987). 'Sustainable development' has been defined as 'development that does not destroy or undermine the ecological, economic or social basis on which continued development depends'. In Rudi M. Verburg and Vincent Wiegel, 'On the Compatibility of Sustainability and Economic Growth', *Environmental Ethics* 19 (1997), pp. 247-65 at p. 250. See also Christopher B. Barrett, 'Markets, Social Norms, and Governments in the Service of Environmentally Sustainable Economic Development: The Pluralistic Stewardship Approach', *Christian Scholar's Review* 29:3 (Spring 2000), pp. 435-54.

8 Julian L. Simon, *The Ultimate Resource* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1981), arguing for the long-term economic benefits of population growth, and Julian L. Simon and Herman Kahn, eds., *The Resourceful Earth* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1984), questioning the environmental pessimism of the *Global 2000 Report to the President* of 1980. For other arguments that economic growth has led historically to environmental improvement after an initial period of environmental damage, see John M. Antle and Gregg Heidebrink, 'Environmental Devel-

3 The author wishes to thank Rev. William Messenger of the Mockler Center for Faith and Ethics in the Workplace for the generous support provided for this research project.

4 The standpoint assumed by the author in this paper is that known as 'sustainable development', as defined in note 7 below.

5 Denis Collings and John Barkdull, 'Capitalism, Environmentalism, and Mediating Structures: From Adam Smith to Stakeholder Panels', *Environmental Ethics* 17 (1995), pp. 227-44 at p. 227.

between the so-called 'cornucopian', pro-growth and 'sustainable development,' limits-to-growth points of view has been reflected in evangelical circles as well.<sup>9</sup> The standpoint assumed by this author is that of 'sustainable development,' and from this perspective the paper will proceed with an examination of existing paradigms in neo-classical economics, business ethics, and evangelical theology.

### Neo-classical Economics

Since the 1970s a growing number of environmentalists and ethicists have argued that the traditional categories of neo-classical economics that have prevailed in the discipline since 1870 are conceptually inadequate to deal with current ecological problems. Traditional categories of cost-accounting such as Gross Domestic Product and depreciation

have not reflected the true environmental and social costs of industrial activity. The cost of cleaning up the oil spillage of the *Exxon Valdez* disaster, for example, is counted as a gain to the Gross Domestic Product rather than as an environmental loss. Keynesian economics counts the cost of depreciation of a factory, but tends to ignore the depreciation of natural resources such as soil fertility and clean water, treating the environment as a 'free' good.<sup>10</sup>

Neo-classical economics' model of the modern economy as an 'auction' where prices are determined by consumer preferences tends to undervalue and under-represent the interests of future generations who have no direct voice in the 'auction.' The assumption that those in the auction have 'perfect information' to inform their preferences overlooks the fact that in the real world consumers may lack scientific knowledge about the possible damage that certain chemicals and technologies, e.g. mercury and DDT, can inflict on human health and the ecosystem.<sup>11</sup> The damage may already be done before the information is available, and the damages may be irreversible, at least within the limits of a human lifetime.

The economic category of commodity price is inadequate to deal with the full range of aesthetic, his-

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opment: Theory and International Evidence', *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 43 (1995), pp. 603-25, and Gene Grossman and Alan Krueger, 'Economic Growth and the Environment', *Quarterly Journal of Economics* (May 1995), pp. 353-77. For other expressions of 'environmental optimism', see also Mikhail Bernstam, *The Wealth of Nations and the Environment* (London: Institute of Economic Affairs, 1991); Gregg Easterbrook, *A Moment on the Earth: The Coming Age of Environmental Optimism* (New York: Viking, 1995); Michael B. Barkey, ed., *Environmental Stewardship in the Judeo-Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Acton Institute, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Richard T. Wright, 'Tearing Down the Green: Environmental Backlash in the Evangelical Sub-Culture', *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 47:2 (June 1995), pp. 80-91, responding to the 'cornucopian' point of view in Larry Burkett, *Whatever Happened to the American Dream* (Chicago: Moody, 1993); E. Calvin Beisner, *Prospects for Growth* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1990), and *Where the Garden Meets the Wilderness: Evangelical Entry into the Environmental Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

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<sup>10</sup> A.J. McMichael, *Planetary Overload: Global Environmental Change and the Health of the Human Species* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), pp. 298-301; see also Al Gore, *Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992), pp. 183-91.

<sup>11</sup> John M. Gowdy and Peg R. Olsen, 'Further Problems with Neo-classical Economics', *Environmental Ethics* 16 (1994), pp. 161-171 at pp. 169-70.

torical, religious, and scientific values that are important to humane societies.<sup>12</sup> Would it make any sense to place the Statue of Liberty on the auction block and sell it to Walmart on the basis of market forces alone? Should the market alone determine the allocation of monies for fundamental scientific research in areas such as high-energy physics, that may have no immediate payoff in economic terms? Critics of neo-classical economics think that the answers to such questions are an obvious 'no'.

Academic economists are not unaware, of course, of these problems. The term 'externalities' is used to describe cases of market failure where economic transactions impose costs on non-consenting secondary parties.<sup>13</sup> A chemical plant that dumps mercury wastes into a river imposes external costs on the surrounding residents who prefer clean water. The market price of the chemical does not in such a case reflect the true social cost, since the manufacturer is not assuming the full responsibility for his actions.

One attempt to remedy these limitations of traditional economic theory is known as 'contingent evaluation' or 'shadow pricing'.<sup>14</sup> Consumers are polled and asked how

much they might be willing to pay to preserve an old-growth forest, for example, from logging or real estate development. The problem with such a methodology, however, is that it assumes that consumer preferences are well informed as to the scientific and other intangible values of the property in question. Consumers who are polled as to their preferences regarding the preservation of the Amazonian rainforest may not be aware of the role that such ecosystems play in the stabilization of regional and global climates.<sup>15</sup>

The sub-discipline known as 'free market environmentalism' has also tried to address these problems.<sup>16</sup> Proponents of this point of view believe that many environmental problems can be handled more efficiently by the private sector rather than government through a more thorough assignment of property rights. Tradeable pollution permits, for example, rather than top-down emission controls are said to be more effective in controlling water and air pollution. The property-rights approach is not adequate, however,

12 Holmes Rolston, III, 'Valuing Wildlands', *Environmental Ethics* 7 (1985), pp. 23-48.

13 James D. Gwartney and Richard Stroup, *Economics: Private and Public Choices*, 3rd ed. (New York: Academic Press, 1982), p. 610.

14 See, for example, Steven Edwards, 'In Defense of Environmental Economics', *Environmental Ethics* 9 (1987), pp. 73-85, and Bernard J. Nebel and Richard T. Wright, *Environmental Science: The Way the World Works*, 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), pp. 387-88.

15 Mohammed H. I. Dore, 'The Problem of Valuation in Neo-classical Environmental Economics', *Environmental Ethics* 18 (1996), pp. 65-70 at p. 69. On the crucial role and valuation of 'ecosystem services,' see Gretchen C. Daly, ed., *Nature's Services: Societal Dependence on Natural Ecosystems* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1997).

16 Terry L. Anderson and Donald R. Leal, *Free Market Environmentalism* (San Francisco: Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy, 1991); Peter J. Hill, 'Can Markets or Government Do More for the Environment?' in Michael Cromartie, ed., *Creation at Risk? Religion, Science, and Environmentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 121-136; PERC Reports and various publications of the Political Economy Research Center, Bozeman, MT, ([www.perc.org](http://www.perc.org)).

in such cases as migratory animals or preserving the integrity of the ozone layer. Government must still establish acceptable levels of air or water pollution in a given region based on scientific—not merely market—considerations of acceptable health risks.

'Shadow pricing' and 'free market environmentalism' represent 'tinkering' with the existing paradigm in tradition neo-classical economics. More radical critics such as Herman Daly have argued that the paradigm itself is inadequate and are calling for a new 'ecological economics'.<sup>17</sup> According to Daly, traditional economic theory is based on a 'pre-analytic vision'<sup>18</sup> of the world in which creation or nature is largely absent or simply assumed as a 'given'. In the traditional model the economy is an

isolated system in which firms produce goods and services and households supply factors of production in a never-ending circular flow. A new paradigm is needed in which the global economy is seen as a *subset* of the global ecosystem, and dependent upon it. The new paradigm recognizes that in this period of history it is *natural* capital, not man-made capital, that is emerging as a fundamental constraint on economic growth.<sup>19</sup>

Traditional neo-classical economics, emerging in the 1870s, tended to assume the environment as a given 'background' to human economic activity, an unlimited set of 'sources' of raw materials and 'sinks' for waste products. Economic growth was assumed as a self-evident good.<sup>20</sup> Since the 1870s, world population has more than quadrupled. Humans in the twentieth century used *ten times* more energy than humanity used in the entire thousand year period before 1900.<sup>21</sup>

Traditional neo-classical economics with its categories of markets and

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17 Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr., *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy Toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future* (Boston: Beacon, 1989); Herman E. Daly, *Beyond Growth: The Economics of Sustainable Development* (Boston: Beacon, 1996); Rajaram Krishnan, Jonathan M. Harris, and Neva R. Goodwin, eds., *A Survey of Ecological Economics* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1995); Juan Martinez-Alier, *Ecological Economics: Energy, Environment and Society* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987). See also Robert Costanza, ed., *Ecological Economics: The Science and Management of Sustainability* (New York: Columbia UP, 1991), where 'ecological economics' is defined as an economic theory that recognizes '... the web of interconnections uniting the economic subsystem to the global ecosystem of which it is a part' (v). Costanza is a founder of the International Society for Ecological Economics, which publishes the bimonthly journal *Ecological Economics*.

18 On the concept of 'pre-analytic vision', cf. the discussion of 'vision' in Thomas Sowell, *A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles* (New York: William Morrow, 1987), p. 14: 'A vision has been described as a 'pre-analytic cognitive act.' It is what we sense or feel *before* we have constructed any systematic reasoning that could be called a theory ... A vision is our sense of how the

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world works.' Michael Novak has helpfully called attention to the fact that economic systems do not function in isolation from the political and moral-cultural systems of which they are a part, but Novak does not take the further step of seeing the economy embedded in the global ecosystem: Michael Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982), pp. 171-86.

19 See figures 2 and 3 in Daly, *Beyond Growth*, pp. 47, 49

20 According to McMichael, *Planetary Overload*, p. 302, neo-classical economics '... has not only discounted impacts upon the environment; it has explicitly encouraged excessive extraction, harvesting, consumption and waste—all in the exalted cause of expanding the GNP'.

21 J.R. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World* (New York: Norton, 2000), p. xvi.

prices is a very efficient means of resolving the issues of *allocation* ('What goods and services shall we produce?') and *distribution* ('Who shall enjoy the goods and services that are produced?'), but has ignored the issue of the *absolute scale* of the global economy relative to the global ecosystem that supports it.<sup>22</sup> 'If there was ever a time', observe Gowdy and Olsen, 'when economic theory could ignore the natural world, that time has past.'<sup>23</sup> If one billion Indians and 1.2 billion Chinese were to demand the number of automobiles, refrigerators, and washing machines consistent with western patterns of consumption, and were to burn fossil fuels at western rates, it could not be assumed that the impacts on global warming and on the ozone layer would be benign. It is high time for economists to recognize the global ecosystem and to make it a fundamental part of the governing paradigm of their discipline.

### Emerging Trends in Business Ethics:

In recent years there has been an emerging awareness in the business community that perspectives in business ethics must be more comprehensive than considerations of the 'bottom line'. As W. Michael Hofman has observed, the new 'business ethics' movement rejects the mistaken belief that '... business only has responsibilities to a narrow set of its

stakeholders, namely its stockholders'.<sup>24</sup> At least since the 1980s there has been a growing recognition that business has ethical obligations that include the environment as well as the local human communities that provide the infrastructures within which business activity takes place.<sup>25</sup> Ethics in business is not a matter of 'mere compliance', operating within the letter of the law, but should involve a more active posture of 'doing no harm' to human communities and the environment, and 'doing good' wherever possible.<sup>26</sup>

Mainstream publications in business ethics and management have tended to ignore faith perspectives. As Laura Nash has noted, these discussions have marginalized religious concerns as they may relate to decision making, and have focused instead on 'proper values' for business as theorized by economists such as Milton Friedman or sociologists such as Amitai Etzioni, on issues of corporate ethics codes and training programmes, and on ethical dilem-

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24 Hofman, 'Business and Environmental Ethics', pp. 697-703 at p. 703, in Hartman, *Perspectives in Business Ethics*; also reprinted in Tom L. Beauchamp and Norman E. Bowie, eds., *Ethical Theory and Business*, 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1993), pp. 217-23; originally published in *Journal of Business Ethics* 9 (1990), pp. 579-89.

25 The volume *The Corporation, Ethics, and the Environment*, Hofman, ed, cited above, is an example of the attempt to integrate business ethics and environmental concerns.

26 Kirk Davidson comments on the willingness of corporations such as Chevron to 'accept ... [environmental] responsibilities and go beyond mere compliance [to environmental regulations] in his article 'Straws in the Wind: The Nature of Corporate Commitment to Environmental Issues', pp. 57-66 at p. 61, in Hofman, *The Corporation, Ethics, and the Environment*.

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22 Daly, *Beyond Growth*, p. 56.

23 Gowdy and Olsen, 'Further Problems with Neo-classical Economics', p. 171.

mas presented as case studies in the business schools.<sup>27</sup> This paper would call for a conception of business ethics that incorporates both environmental concerns and faith perspectives.

Evangelicals writing in the area of business ethics have brought biblical perspectives to the issues, but by and large have not integrated environmental concerns into their discussions. Richard Chewning, professor of Christian Ethics in Business at Baylor University, has edited a series of books on biblical principles in business and economics. In the first volume on 'Foundations,' one contributor, Kenneth Kantzer, notes that the biblical doctrine of creation implies that humans are to exercise dominion over nature in such a way as '... to guard those resources ... seeing to it that they make their greatest possible contribution for the good of all humanity'.<sup>28</sup> This environmental concern is largely lacking, however, in the volume where biblical principles are applied to specific areas of business such as planning, marketing, advertising, accounting, and investing.<sup>29</sup>

In a text intended primarily for students at Christian colleges, *Business Through the Eyes of Faith*, Chewning, Eby, and Roels devote three pages to a section titled 'Respon-

sibility for the Environment'. They note that Christians '... should be concerned for the environment as a matter of good stewardship', and in a study question challenge the student to think of ways that such stewardship could be exercised so as to benefit future generations and those living in other parts of the world.<sup>30</sup>

William Diehl's *The Monday Connection* is one of the more helpful contributions to the growing literature relating Christian faith to the workplace. Diehl discusses specific ways that Christians can be effective witnesses on the job, through competency, caring presence, lifestyle choices, and ethical integrity, but environmental issues in business are not addressed in any substantial way. 'Stewardship' is developed in terms of personal giving, use of time, and lifestyle choices, but not in relation to larger environmental concerns.<sup>31</sup>

The *Complete Book of Everyday Christianity* is presented as 'An A-to-Z Guide to Following Christ in Every Aspect of Life'. Strangely, however, the index of 'Ethical Issues' contains no entry on 'Ecology' or 'Environment', and the article on 'Business Ethics' is silent on these topics as well.<sup>32</sup> Alexander Hill's *Just Business: Christian Ethics for the*

27 Laura L. Nash, *Believers in Business* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1994), pp. ix, x.

28 In Richard C. Chewning, ed., *Biblical Principles and Business: The Foundations* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1989), p.25.

29 Richard Chewning, ed., *Biblical Principles and Business: The Practice* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1990).

30 Richard C. Chewning, John W. Eby, and Shirley J. Roels, *Business Through the Eyes of Faith* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990), pp. 219, 220.

31 William E. Diehl, *The Monday Connection: On Being an Authentic Christian in a Weekday World* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), pp. 145-161.

32 Robert Banks and R. Paul Stevens, eds., *The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1997), pp. 1158; 90-96.



*Marketplace* is notable for its environmental awareness, devoting a complete chapter to such concerns. Hill argues that a biblical understanding of stewardship '... leads us to care for nature as one aspect of our vocational calling to love God and neighbor'.<sup>33</sup>

### Evangelical Ethics and Theology

If evangelical authors working in the area of business ethics have had a mixed record concerning the incorporation of environmental issues into their fields of vision, this may only be a reflection of the state of evangelical ethics generally. This writer's own *Evangelical Ethics: Issues Facing the Church Today*, now in its second edition, deals with issues of human relationships and sexuality such as marriage, divorce, abortion, homosexuality, and euthanasia, but does not address global environmental problems.<sup>34</sup>

Carl F.H. Henry, the editor of *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, did include an article on 'Environmental Pollution' in this reference work. V. Elving Anderson, the author of the article, observed that the concept of 'dominion' in the first chapter of Genesis does not mean exploitation. The command to subdue and to exercise dominion is bal-

anced in Genesis 2 by the instruction to dress and to keep the land. 'Stewardship' should not be limited to money and personal talents; environmental concerns should be included in stewardship programmes in churches.<sup>35</sup>

John and Paul Feinberg's text, *Ethics For a Brave New World*, like Davis's, tends to focus issues of sexual and medical ethics. There are chapters on abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, birth control, homosexuality, divorce, remarriage, genetic engineering, and war, but the index contains no entries for 'ecology' or 'environment' or 'environmentalism'.<sup>36</sup>

Robertson McQuilkin's *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics* does include the environment in his field of concern. In a brief (3 pages out of 535) but insightful section, he notes that at the root of much of the current environmental problem is a '... consumer economy aimed at material affluence, which deliberately sacrifices long-range benefit for short-range economic profit'. Love for the 'neighbour' includes love for and care of creation, and love for God requires the stewardship of creation for the glory of God and the welfare of humanity.

The uneven record of evangelical ethicists in matters of environmental concern reflects the state of evangelical theology generally. A recent

<sup>33</sup> Alexander Hill, *Just Business: Christian Ethics for the Marketplace* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1997), p. 196.

<sup>34</sup> John Jefferson Davis, *Evangelical Ethics: Issues Facing the Church Today*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1993). The author recognizes the need to remedy this serious omission in a future edition of the text!

<sup>35</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, ed., *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), pp. 209-12.

<sup>36</sup> John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg, *Ethics For a Brave New World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993).

examination of the content of twenty representative evangelical systematic theology textbooks published since 1970 found that in the chapters on the doctrine of creation, the median figure for the amount of space devoted to matters of environmental stewardship was about 1%. The median figure for the amount of space devoted to matters such as evolution, the age of the earth, and the days of Genesis one was about 31%. It was apparent that evangelical theologians have tended to devote disproportionate amounts of attention to matters of *origins* and too little to matters of humanity's proper *relationship* to creation.<sup>37</sup>

As Paul Santmire has pointed out, the history of Christian theology in general has shown a very mixed record in its sensitivity to and concern for nature. Some theologians such as Irenaeus, Augustine, and St. Francis have been very affirming of nature, while Origen and others have been very 'otherworldly' in their spirituality and have not fostered appreciation of the material order.<sup>38</sup> Luther and Calvin are very appreciative of the wonders of nature and look forward to a new nature, but the centre of their theological inter-

est is soteriological, focused on grace and the God-human relationship. In the twentieth-century neo-orthodox theology of Barth, Brunner, and Bultmann, this soteriological concentration is accentuated, 'redemptive *history*' is brought to the forefront, and nature becomes a marginal concern.<sup>39</sup>

The formulation of the church's doctrine of creation has always been influenced by the conditions of the time. The early church asserted the goodness of the material world (Genesis 1) against the Gnostics, and developed the understanding of creation *ex nihilo* in the face of Greek notions of the eternity of matter.<sup>40</sup> Today, the Christian doctrine of creation needs to address the challenges of the global environmental crisis. The need is not merely to repeat earlier affirmations of the metaphysical goodness of creation, but to emphasize the intrinsic value of the created order and humanity's moral obligation to preserve and care for it.

The need for new conceptual frameworks that connect the con-

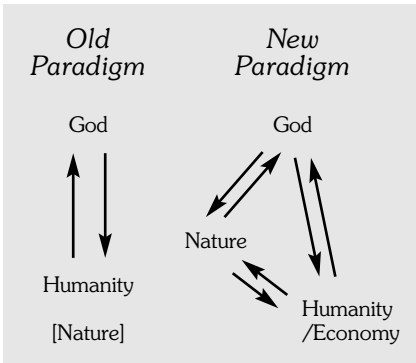
39 Harold Oliver, 'The Neglect and Recovery of Nature in Twentieth-Century Protestant Thought', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 60:3 (1992), pp. 379-404 at pp. 381-3.

40 On the history of the development of the Christian doctrine of creation, see Denis Carroll, 'Creation', *The New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, and Dermot A. Lane (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1987), pp. 249-258; Emil Brunner, 'On the History of the Doctrine of Creation', in Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption* (London: Lutterworth, 1964), pp. 36-39. On the development of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, see G. May, *Creatio ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of 'Creation out of Nothing' in Early Christian Thought* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1994), and the review of May by Paul Coppen, 'Is *Creatio ex nihilo* a Post-Biblical Invention?' *Trinity Journal* 17 NS (1996), pp. 77-93.

37 John Jefferson Davis, 'Ecological 'Blind Spots' in 'The Structure and Content of Recent Evangelical Systematic Theologies', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43:2 (June 2000), pp. 273-286. On this point see also Jonathan R. Wilson, 'Evangelicals and the Environment: A Theological Concern', *Christian Scholar's Review* 28/2 (1998), pp. 298-307, and R.J. Berry, 'Creation and the Environment', *Science and Christian Belief* 7/1 (1995), pp. 21-43.

38 H. Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985).

cerns of environment, economy, business ethics, and theology has been recognized by various writers.<sup>41</sup> This paper concludes with an appeal for Christians working in economics, business ethics, and evangelical theology to consider the merits of a new paradigm, indicated in the diagram below, that could be termed 'theocentric, creation-connectedness':



In the proposed paradigm, the natural world is not just a 'background' for human activity, but has *intrinsic*

41 In addition to the work of Herman Daly noted above, see also Frederick Ferre, 'Persons in Nature: Toward an Applicable and Unified Environmental Ethics,' *Zygon* 28:4 (1993), pp. 441-53 at p. 442, calling for a revised worldview of 'personalistic organicism' in which persons are in '... continuity with—but not on all fours with—the rest of the natural order'; Sandra Rosenthal and Rogene A. Buchholz, 'Bridging Environmental and Business Ethics: A Pragmatic Approach,' *Environmental Ethics* 20 (1998), pp. 393-408 at p. 408, proposing a neo-pragmatic conceptual framework in which there is a recognition that '... the corporation has its being through its relation to a wider environment and this environment extends to the natural world'; Raymond E. Grizzle and Christopher B. Barrett, 'The One Body of Christian Environmentalism,' *Zygon* 33 (1998), pp. 233-53 at p. 244, calling for a 'cosmocentrism' that places value on the integrated whole of creation, with humans having a privileged place of authority as the most important of God's creatures.

value as the creation of God (Gen. 1:31), and is recognized as itself being included in the redemptive purposes of God (Rom. 8:31,32; Col. 1:15-20). Human beings are understood theologically not only terms of the God-human and human-human relationships, but also as being integrally related to the natural environment that makes human life possible<sup>42</sup> and for which humans bear ethical responsibility. Because creation has intrinsic value, and because economic activity is integrally connected to the ecosystems which sustain such activity, business leaders have a moral responsibility not merely to *appear* to be environmentally responsible, but to be actually so.

Theologically, taking such a new paradigm seriously would involve rethinking basic Christian doctrines from the perspective of 'creation-connectedness'. Discussions of the doctrine of creation would not be preoccupied with questions of origins and evolution, but would articulate humanity's obligation to be rightly related to creation and to care for it. Christian *anthropology* would take seriously the biblical insight that man is 'dust', connected with the

42 In this paradigm humans are understood both in terms of 'dust' (Gen. 2:3) and 'dominion' (Gen. 1:26); i.e., as both dependent on the natural order and integrally related to it, and at the same time having responsibility to exercise wise stewardship over the natural order. For the history of Christian understanding of the concept of 'dominion' in Genesis 1, see Peter Harrison, 'Subduing the Earth: Genesis 1, Early Modern Science, and the Exploitation of Nature,' *Journal of Religion* 79:1 (January 1999), pp. 86-109, arguing that not until the 17th century was this text appealed to as a justification for the exploitation of nature by Christian interpreters.

earth and with the larger terrestrial and cosmic processes that sustain human life and make it possible. The doctrine of *original sin* would be seen as a reminder that man's fall affected not only humanity but creation itself (Gen. 3:17). *Personal sin* involves not only sins against God, the neighbour, and the self, but sinful abuses of the earth as well.

In the area of Christology, the *Incarnation* would be seen as God's own affirmation of the intrinsic value of creation, and the manifestation of God's enduring intent to enter into a redemptive relationship with it. The *atonement* provided the basis not only for humanity's reconciliation with God, but also for the ultimate reconciliation of creation as well (Col. 1:19,20). In the area of *ecclesiology*, the mission of the church would be seen to incorporate not only the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20), but the cultural mandate (Gen. 1:26-28) as well, including all those activities that bring redemptive influences to bear on culture and creation. The *sacraments* of baptism and the Lord's Supper remind the church that the grace of God is mediated through the structures of creation and the elements of the material world, and not apart from them. A Christian and biblical eschatology would not be limited to an

individualistic hope for a 'heaven' disconnected from the world, but to a New Heaven and a *new earth* (Rev. 21:1), in which a redeemed humanity enjoys communion with God in the context of a *new creation*.

Christians should welcome the efforts of those working in the area of 'ecological economics,' and encourage efforts to enlarge the categories of traditional economic theory so as to recognize that *natural capital*, not just buildings and machines, need to be depreciated and reckoned in schemes of cost accounting. Business ethicists need to be encouraged to enlarge their paradigms beyond shareholder and letter-of-the-law interests to incorporate the real connections with the human communities and physical environments that provide the infrastructures that ultimately make the creation of wealth possible.

The interconnected nature of the environment, the global economy, and human activity is becoming increasingly evident in the contemporary world. It is time for Christians working in the areas of economics, business ethics, environmentalism, and theology to explicitly recognize the new realities in the basic conceptual frameworks of their respective disciplines.

## Books Reviewed

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## Book Reviews

ERT (2002) 26-3, 276-278

0144-8153

### **Educating Evangelicalism: the origins, development and impact of London Bible College**

Ian Randall  
Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000  
ISBN 0-85364-873-5  
Pb 320pp illus index

*Reviewed by David Parker, Editor,  
Evangelical Review of Theology*

Ian Randall, on the faculty of Spurgeon's College London and the International Baptist Theological Seminary, Prague, has attempted to tell not only the story of the London Bible College but, more importantly, to show its relationship to and its impact on the British (and world) evangelical movement. So this book is far more than an institutional history of one particular albeit very important organisation, but it is mainly the story of the wider movement. The author freely acknowl-

edges that he used as a model for this enterprise George Marsden's similar account of a leading American seminary, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Eerdmans, 1987).

This dual purpose explains the main features of the book. It is structured around various periods of the College's life from its establishment during the Second World War, largely associated with the leadership of the various principals, E.F. Kevan, G. W. Kirby, M. Griffiths, P. Cotterell and the present incumbent, D. Tidball. The broad framework of the college's development is clearly presented, but particular details relating to personnel, programmes and property are not stressed or perhaps are not even mentioned.

On other hand, there is a great deal of discussion about relationships with other evangelical bodies and the impact of trends in those bodies on the life and direction of the College. Hence the pages are filled with references to the work and ministry of key evangelical scholars and leaders since the 1940s with names such as Stott, Packer, Lloyd-Jones and many others being found throughout. This is appropriate because the College had its origin in the evangelical movement of Britain rather than from a single visionary individual. Furthermore, the purpose of the founders was to create an educational institution that would work at a high level of scholarship with the object of providing top quality leaders who could guide the evangelical movement through the troubled and uncertain times in which it found

itself, especially during the earlier years.

This leads to a further feature of the book—copious material on the impact of graduates of the College, many of whom served with distinction not only in Great Britain but throughout the world. In the latter stages, a large proportion of the post-graduate students in fact have come from outside of Britain, and now the College sees serving the world church as one of its key roles. As the names of both well known and more obscure figures from all periods of the College's life are presented, it is evident just how successfully its founders' visions have been fulfilled.

The author does a good job in holding all this mass of information and interpretation together, although at times the tone becomes too hagiographic and it seems that the lists are becoming exhaustive rather than typical. It might also be questioned whether the credit for a graduate's significant ministry is necessarily due to the college at which studies were taken, perhaps many years earlier. This is particularly highlighted in a few cases where the author cites the outstanding work of a former student but at the same time concedes that this person has in fact turned away from evangelical principles.

There is considerable discussion of the development of the curriculum and intellectual life of the College. This is important, given the determined intention of the founders to work on a tertiary level, and there is illuminating explanation of some of

early difficulties encountered in working within the University of London framework. However, it is not so clear how these ideals were met and worked out in the subsequent moves away from that institutional linkage. Similarly, greater understanding could have been given about this process if there had been more discussion of comparable developments in other British Bible and theological colleges.

Nevertheless the book is essential reading for anyone wanting to understand British evangelicalism since 1940, and its impact on the world. The bibliography is a valuable record of the work of faculty and graduates. Even the small illustrations in the centre of the book are helpful in giving a clear picture of this remarkable institution.

ERT (2002) 26-3, 278-280

0144-8153

**Missions in a New Millennium:  
Change and Challenges in  
World Missions**

Edited by W. Edward Glenny and  
William H. Smallman  
Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2000.  
ISBN 0-8254-2698-7  
Pb 411 pp no index

*Reviewed by Robert J. Vajko,  
Adelaide College of Ministries,  
Australia.*

As the sub-title indicates, this book deals with the challenges faced by missions in a world where major shifts are taking place. The seventeen chapters are written by sixteen authors—all Baptists. After an intro-

ductory chapter, the book is divided into three sections dealing with biblical studies, theological studies and strategic studies respectively.

It is refreshing to see biblical and theological studies preceding strategy since there is a tendency today to wrongly divorce theology and missiology. The study by Michael Grisanti on 'Missions in the Old Testament' shows that he has done his homework in his study of the translation of the disputed Niphal verb in Genesis 12:3 and its relation to God's choice of Abraham. The endnotes to this chapter show his research taking into account the views of various OT scholars. Grisanti's statement, 'There is both a particularism and a universalism that pervades this covenantal arrangement' (p.45) is both a concise way of approaching both God's dealings with Abraham and the OT in general.

Glenny's chapter on 'The Great Commission,' explains the mandate to evangelise the world as 'multidimensional.' Glenny does an exegesis of the three post-resurrection commissions in Matthew, Luke-Acts and John. He skips Mark because he does not believe the ending to be canonical. In Matthew's version of the commission he accurately points out that the participle in Matthew 28:18-20 is to be taken with imperatival force and should be translated 'go' and not 'as you go' as some have proposed. Glenny's acquaintance with the most recent scholarship on the commission in John's Gospel by Kostenberger means he is up-to-date in discussing the Johannine mandate.

The theological section considers current debates in theology influencing the missions enterprise. The chapter on 'Hell, Motivation for Missions' interacts briefly with universalism (in particular that espoused by Karl Barth) and with annihilation as understood by the openness of God theologian Clark Pinnock. He also briefly discusses the doctrine of purgatory as taught by Catholicism.

The chapter by Michael Windsor on the uniqueness of Christ (the exclusivist-inclusivist debate) gives a general view of the present thinking on whether Christ is both epistemologically and ontologically necessary as Saviour. He interacts with theologians Clark Pinnock and John Sanders (who agree together that conscious faith in Christ is not necessary for salvation) and defends the exclusivist position. His study is probably not thorough enough to satisfy one wanting to see the issues more in depth. This reviewer refers readers to Ronald Nash's *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* (Zondervan, 1994).

The rest of the chapters in this section address various theological issues relating to missions. The question of whether Jesus must be Lord to be Saviour is dealt with from the point of view of a missionary from Japan. The question of unity is dealt with by one of the editors of the book, William Smallman. Readers will need to decide for themselves whether the problems that come from a unity that does not adequately take into account true differences really produces the desired results. Comity arrangements in the name of

unity have sometimes hindered rather than help the advance of the Gospel.

Kevin Bauder's chapter 'A Prelude to a Christian Theology of Culture' will be helpful to those wanting to interact with the question of the relationship between the world of culture and the Word of God. Bauder remarks (as others have also done) that H. Richard Niebuhr's classic book *Christ and Culture* blurred the issues by not clearly defining 'Christ' or 'culture.'

For those ministering in Catholic countries, the chapter on 'Mariolatry' will be helpful from a theological perspective, although it would have been useful to have some practical suggestions on how to evangelise or to at least communicate clearly to those holding to an unbiblical view of Mary.

The third section of this book deals with strategic issues and has an intriguing chapter by John Stauffacher, a church planting missionary in France, on 'Evangelistic Methods Used by Baptists and Anabaptists'. Stauffacher shows how a distinction must be made between the dynamic and the method used in evangelism. He also gives some suggestions as to how past methods could be adapted for our modern context.

At the risk of seeming pedantic, it is surprising that in this day of spell check that one should find 'Confucianist' spelled wrongly (p. 19).

I recommend this book for a good overall view of issues that must be addressed by those missionaries, missiologists, and theologians who are concerned to do effective cross-



cultural ministry in a changing world. Those looking for a text for a course in 'Issues in Missions Today' should find this book an answer to their need.

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0144-8153

**The Barthian Revolt in Modern Theology: Theology Without Weapons**

Gary Dorrien

Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster

John Knox Press, 2000

ISBN 0-664-22151-3

P/b 239 pp. Index

*Reviewed by Norman T. Barker,  
St Lucia, Queensland.*

The figure of Karl Barth (1886-1968) towers over the theological landscape of the twentieth century. At the end of World War I, Barth launched a revolt against the prevailing optimistic liberalism, raising a banner for a God-centred versus a human-centred theology.

Gary Dorrien, episcopal priest and theological adviser to the US National Council of Churches, presents a theological appraisal not only of Barth but also of numerous key theological figures who were influenced by Barth. He highlights key issues in the theological debates of the era.

He affirms that there is, strictly speaking, it is a 'misnomer to speak of Barthianism' (p. 195). Barth's own theology developed and changed over a long period. What we can speak about is a 'Barthian era' in theology. Dorrien outlines the cut and thrust of the strenuous, and

often acrimonious, debates between Barth and a range of early colleagues and later theologians who drew from, or reacted to, the direction and emphases of Barth's theology.

Barth was accused of contradictions within his massive 'Church Dogmatics,' but Dorrien holds that this was to be expected in someone who 'conceived theology as exegesis and reflection upon a radically open Word of Christ that subverts and transcends all theological systems,' for whom 'the priority of the Spirit-illuminated Word negated the possibility or even desirability of a definitive system' (195).

The theological revolt launched by Barth in his 1918 commentary on Romans was first referred to as 'crisis theology.' Reflecting the crisis in Western Christendom in World War I, Barth taught that 'the Word breaks into history not so much to transform it as to shake it and throw it into crisis' (54).

Dorrien, professedly a non-evangelical, does not write specifically for evangelicals. He has, however, displayed considerable interest in evangelical theology and social attitudes. In 1993, he wrote on 'The Neoconservative Mind: Politics, Culture and the War on Ideology', and in 1998 on 'The Remaking of Evangelical Theology.'

Evangelical judgments on Barth have ranged from Val Til's outright condemnation as 'the new modernism' to critical appreciation by others. While some evangelicals have strongly criticised Barth's doctrine of Scripture, Barth's Calvinistic emphasis on a theology of Word and

Spirit appeals greatly to others. These hold, however, to a closer relationship between Scripture and the Word of God than Barth allowed, and are not so averse to propositional revelation.

Evangelicals have heralded Barth's sturdy defence of the doctrine of the Virgin Birth and the historicity of the Resurrection. They have appreciated his exegetical excursions in his monumental 'Church Dogmatics,' even when they disagreed with some of his conclusions. Can we trace the recent desire to highlight the doctrine of grace to a belated influence of Barth? Is there some continuity in the modern church of Barth's admiration for nineteenth-century 'charismatics,' such as the father and son, Johann and Christoph Blumhardt?

Dorrien's book traces Barth's reaction to liberalism. While he rejected the theology of his immediate liberal mentor, Wilhelm Hermann (1846-1922), his professor at Marburg, Dorrien affirms that certain liberal elements were reconstructed in Barth's theology.

Ritschl's emphasis on the kingdom of God became for Barth an eschatological kingdom invading the sphere of human history. Barth echoed Hermann's anti-historicizing emphasis and affirmed that 'mere historicism' is of little help. He strongly affirmed the anti-apologetics stance of some of his liberal mentors. In place of the inner life of Jesus knowable only to faith, he affirmed the Word of God in scripture knowable only to faith.

Hermann's liberalism is exemplified in the frontispiece quote—

'Knowledge of God is the expression of religious experience wholly without weapons.' Liberalism's appeal to religious experience was rejected by Barth in favour of that knowledge of God which comes from above as the revelation of God. In place of 'religious experience wholly without weapons', Barth proposed a faith commitment to the Word of God in Scripture wholly without weapons.

Barth held that scripture's witness to the Word of God is not to be supported by any appeal to natural theology, human philosophy or historical judgments. In the spirit of Calvin (in the first frontispiece quote), 'those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught rest upon Scripture and that Scripture is self-authenticating; hence, it is not right to subject it to proof and reasoning.'

Most of Barth's colleagues criticized his 'uncompromising commitment to the way of faith and revelation alone'. They accused him of being a fideist who adhered to 'a sophisticated form of the old Protestant dogmatism'. They affirmed that Barth's 'revelational positivism' (a charge Barth himself denied) reduced his theology to a 'like it or lump it' enterprise. Their criticisms often touch on those aspects of Barth's theology most appreciated by evangelicals. Evangelicals are much more concerned with the directions that later secularizing theologians such as J.A.T. Robinson, Harvey Cox and the 'death of God' movement.

The theological debates of the Barthian era highlighted key issues for theology which evangelicals need

to ponder, such as the value of natural revelation, the place of philosophy and apologetics, historical judgments about the gospel circumscribed by human experience and highlighted more recently by the 'Jesus Seminar'." Many would agree with Barth that biblical scholars dissect, but do not listen to the Word of God in the Scriptures. Dorrien's book is a challenging study for evangelicals who hold to the supremacy of the Holy Scriptures.

ERT (2002) 26-3, 282-283      0144-8153

**The Covenanted Self:  
Explorations in Law and  
Covenant**

Walter Brueggemann

Edited by Patrick D. Miller

Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999

ISBN 0-8006-3176-5

Pb 148pp notes, indexes

*Reviewed by Joseph Too Shao,  
Biblical Seminary of the  
Philippines, Valenzuela City,  
Metro-Manila, Philippines*

This thought-provoking book written by an Old Testament biblical scholar who is also a biblical theologian is the fifth volume of his collected essays. With his emphasis on law, covenant and commandments, the Reformed theologian juxtaposes texts to bring out challenging and stimulating issues. As an influential biblical interpreter pressing forth some relevant issues of Old Testament, he dialogues with some scholars of other fields such as psychiatrist (p. 3), anthropologist (p. 66) and philoso-

pher (p. 89), and relates their ideas to the application of the texts.

With his expertise, Brueggemann is able to present many new inspiring ideas of law and covenant and their relationship and implication for the Israelite people. With his sensitivity to the 'Jewishness' of the Old Testament (expanded in his *Theology of the Old Testament*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), he cites important ideas given by Jewish interpreters such as Martin Buber and Abraham Heschel (citing other important Jewish scholar Jon D. Levenson in his endnote). The author also would see that both Jews and Christians agreed on some issue such as the primacy and centrality of obedience.

In some chapters, he traces many themes longitudinally from Old Testament to New Testament. His creative methodology is to interface some conflicting readings, such as Psalm 73 (which he calls 'a secular seduction') and Psalm 139 (which he terms as 'a religious seduction'). The truth of a pluralistic (another keyword which he prefers to see in Bible) church lies between the secular temptation ('stop loving God') of Psalm 73, and religious temptation ('to love God more') of Psalm 139. His fondness for the dialectical approach to the interpretation of the Scriptures allows him to see some OT believers in their daily voice of faith as 'graceless obedience', (submissiveness without questioning) and others as 'praiseless autonomy' (ingratitude and rebellion).

The depth and practicality of this book are without question. It con-

fronts the reader with radical challenges for the covenanted self to obey the commandments, which is an obedience that is not legalism, an economics of sharing, a politics of equity and a willingness to practise the 'sabbatic principle' to promote egalitarian justice. His idea of neighbourliness, presenting the revolutionary social vision of Deuteronomy and other related passages is timely and relevant to the situation in this postmodern era.

Since some of the chapters are originally published as articles in pastoral journals, Brueggemann has given another aspect of his interpretive skills in applying texts in church settings. I commend the editor for giving us some aspects of the author's life: a scholar with a pastoral heart. The last chapter 'The Truth of Abundance: Relearning Dayenu,' appears to have been a lecture as some oral forms are left in the text, which means that the reader can practically hear him delivering his speech.

The author's preface has warned reader of the possibility of repetition of some themes; thus the reader is presented with some texts more than once. The author has some preference for Deut 15:1-18 and Mark 10:17-22 more than other texts. Some favoured ideas are repeated too. The reader would be better served if the details of where these chapters were originally published could be cited in the first few pages, rather at the back. One other confusing aspect is the naming of the 'First Great Commandment' (Chapter 5) and the 'Second Great Commandment' (Chapter 6). These

nomenclatures are accepted New Testament terminology, so to find them in an Old Testament work means that it takes a while for a reader to realise what the author is referring to.

If the reader would like to explore the applicability of Law and Covenant, this book is a must. As a covenanted self, having been called and elected by the covenantal God, this book will give you many odd realities that will challenge your 'being' and 'doing' in the covenantal community. The torah piety is practical and obedience is a joy and delight! The 'Other' is 'a real, live Other who initiates, shapes watches over, and cares about the relation' (p. 38).

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0144-8153

### **Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament**

Edited by Richard N. Longenecker  
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997  
ISBN: 0802841694  
Pb 319pp.

*Reviewed by Lok M. Bhandari,  
Kathmandu Theological Seminary*

This is the inaugural volume of the McMaster New Testament Studies series, edited by veteran evangelical NT scholar Richard N. Longenecker. The purpose of the laudable and ambitious series is to 'address particular themes in the New Testament that are of concern to Christians today'. Its readership is designed to be ministers, students, and laypeople, and its goal is to 'reflect the best

of current biblical scholarship while speaking directly to the pastoral needs of people in the church today.' Thus the success or failure of this volume must be judged by these criteria.

In evangelical circles there tends to be a chasm between work being done by NT specialists on the one hand, and pastoral and devotional literature that addresses contemporary issues on the other. Can the scholars contributing to this volume bridge this gap? If nothing else they are eminently qualified to write on the books they were assigned. Prof. Longenecker has written widely in NT studies and NT ethics. Likewise, Gerald Hawthorne (Philippians), William Lane (Hebrews), Peter Davids (James), J. Ramsey Michaels (1 Peter), and David Aune (Revelation) have all written major critical commentaries on the books they are responsible for in this volume. And Larry Hurtado (Mark), Terrence Donaldson (Matthew), Jeffrey Weima (1 Thessalonians), Linda Belleville (1 Corinthians), and L. Ann Jervis (Romans) have written significant monographs on the books they discuss in this volume.

The stated goal for this volume is 'that [discipleship] needs better biblical rootage than it usually receives in the popular press and better personal application than it usually receives in scholarly writings'. Thus it is no surprise that this original treatment of discipleship is a top-flight exercise in NT theology in regard to the various NT books it examines, and that it utilizes the best in contemporary biblical studies. It is careful in delin-

eating the diverse expressions of discipleship in the NT.

However, in examining the chapters and the bibliography, it is apparent that there is very little engagement with Christian theological concerns arising from Christian dogmatics or contemporary reflections on Christian ethics. Thus, for many laypersons, I venture to say that it would take some effort to make the connections. I say this in reference to two outstanding recent works which deal, in different ways, with the same topic: Richard B. Hays *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: An Introduction to Contemporary New Testament Ethics* (Harper-Collins, 1996) and William C. Spohn *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics* (Continuum, 1999). The former is by a specialist in NT ethics, who also deals extensively with the hermeneutical issues, while the latter is a Christian ethicist, whose work is grounded in NT studies and theology.

Compared with these two books, *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* seems very thin in terms of the 'personal application' aspect of series goal. This observation is meant not so much to disparage this volume but to say what it really is: an outstanding, original exploration of the diverse expressions of discipleship in the NT, and the beginnings of a NT theology of discipleship for each book discussed. By giving a brief overview of two chapters, I hope this opinion will be made clearer.

One of the strengths of this volume is the diversity of approaches the

authors use to elucidate what discipleship means in each book. Terrence Donaldson, for example, employs narrative criticism to focus on discipleship in Matthew as a paradigmatic representation of the experience of Jesus' followers with him. In his treatment he briefly outlines the elements of narrative criticism: story (characters, events, plot, etc.); discourse (how the story is told according to its constituent elements); and reading (the experience of reading the text from the perspective of the narrator-'the implied reader'). In each case he gives the reader enough theoretical orientation to justify and elucidate this approach for Matthew.

The various attributes of discipleship in Matthew converge around the dual axis of the 'disciples' relationship to Jesus and God' and the 'the disciples' relationship to other disciples in community'. This is fleshed out by highlighting love, forgiveness and servant leadership as the characteristics of this community. Finally, his contribution on 'personal application' comes in the form of the 'implied reader' and his own perspectives. He is honest in admitting his own resistance to certain aspects of discipleship in Matthew: his failure to view Jesus' female followers fairly, and its strident anti-Jewish polemic (cf. ch. 23). Positively, he feels that today Matthew speaks to the need for the church to be a counter-culture-as salt and light. This is a very clear, sophisticated, and, concise treatment. This is one of the few contributions whose 'application' deals with contempo-

rary issues, although it is tantalizingly brief.

In contrast, L. Ann Jervis' treatment of Romans is equally sophisticated, but more conventional in orientation. Since there is no strictly lexical basis for dealing with the topic of discipleship in Romans, she utilizes a unique historical approach. In a real *tour de force*, she takes the concept of discipleship in Greco-Roman (Aristotle, Cynics, and Plutarch) and Hellenistic Jewish (Philo and sources from Qumran) contexts as a backdrop for understanding the concept in relation to Paul's 'reflections, explanations and descriptions of the significance in Jesus Christ' in Romans.

She understands apotheosis ('divinization') as the governing goal of discipleship in the ancient world (in both a moral and spiritual sense) and this frames Paul's explanation of what God has done for believers in Christ and its social consequences (Rom. 15:5-6). Thus godlikeness means conformity to Christ through the gift of God's righteousness in the death and resurrection of Jesus, appropriated by faith. 'In nuce, it means being, in an unrighteous world, righteous as God is.' This is a very original, thought-provoking treatment, but it is regrettable that there is no attempt to articulate how this view might impact or guide contemporary Christian reflection on Pauline discipleship vis-à-vis Romans.

All in all, this is volume well worth studying for its own sake, even if it does not quite achieve to its stated objective.

ERT (2002) 26-3, 286-287

0144-8153

**God's Control over the  
Universe: Providence,  
Judgment and Modern Science**

P. G. Nelson

Caithness: Whittles Publishing,  
2000

(rev. and enlarged edition)

ISBN 1-870325-88-5

Pb 88pp bibliog. index

*Reviewed by David Parker, Editor,  
Evangelical Review of Theology*

The author of this book, a lecturer in Chemistry at the University of Hull, sets out to show that the biblical and the scientific pictures of the world do not conflict with each other as much as they might appear. With extreme economy of words and a tightly argued case, he affirms that 'even if the scientist's perception of the universe is fully accepted, mechanisms still exist by which God can control the world in whatever way he wants to, and human beings can take actions for which they are responsible'.

In the opening section of the book he discusses how such a result is possible in the case of the 'universe that scientists would describe as completely determined' and also in the case of one described as 'undetermined'. Here he refers to such matters as the initial state of the universe, its constitution and its organization, as well as time and chance mainly as understood by science but also as referred to in the Bible.

Further chapters treat human agency (with attention to the issue of human freedom and its scientific basis), and God's control over a uni-

verse containing human beings (which focuses on the extent, methods and purposes of divine intervention in the world). The later chapters refer briefly to other beings, especially the devil and the question of demon possession, and contain more extensive discussion of salvation and prayer.

The overall thrust of the book supports the conclusion that 'God has complete control of day-to-day events, subject only to limitations that he places upon himself. These include respect for the freedom that he has given to men and women and to the devil.'

The author shows that this classic position can be defended by rigorous application of scientific, mathematical and logical arguments. In the process he draws attention to some of the rigorous aspects of the argument often overlooked by loose thinking on the subject.

His use of the biblical text, especially in the chapters on salvation and prayer, is straightforward and matter of fact without much attention to context or literary form. Similarly his theological concepts are those of basic theistic orthodoxy using conservative theologians only as his reference points. The discussion of salvation revolves mainly around an attempted resolution of the Calvinist -Arminian debate on determinism and free will.

Nelson begins by pointing out that, in terms of his previously established understanding of God's working in the world, either position would be possible and consistent with whatever choice God could have made

about the dynamics of salvation: 'he could have made the gospel such that sinners can accept it without further help, or he could have made it such that they need his assistance. In the second case, he can choose whom to help without regard to their responsiveness and make his help irresistible.' Thus he concludes, 'From a scientific point of view, therefore, the mechanism of salvation could be anything from Arminian to Calvinist. God can be or is sovereign whichever mechanism it is.'

To resolve the issue, Nelson claims to take a 'fresh approach' to this classic debate (mainly by commencing with the teaching of Jesus and then proceeding to the rest of the New Testament) and thus 'throw new light' on it. This 'new light' is the view that while 'God plays a part in a person's response to the gospel' he does this 'through the impact of the gospel itself' but 'he does not use coercion'. Instead, in a 'double' action, 'he has devised the gospel to draw the lowly and repel the proud'—a position which avoids the extremes of both Arminianism and Calvinism and preserves both divine sovereignty and human freedom.

The same principles are applied to discussion of sanctification, perseverance, the fate of those who do not hear the gospel and also to prayer. However, in the latter case, the argument is not so clear cut, for the author suggests that human freedom and the effects of the fall impose 'constraints' of various kinds—human limitation even results in the view that reference in Romans 8:26-27 to the Spirit's intercession means that wrongly

focused prayers of the Christian are re-directed in accordance with God's will: 'we pray, 'Lord, please do X; he [the Spirit] prays, 'Lord, do what is required—do Y.' This, the author claims, shows that 'God can still work out his purposes while respecting human freedom'.

ERT (2002) 26-3, 287-288

0144-8153

### **Metaphors of Ministry: Biblical Images for Leaders and Followers**

David W. Bennett

Carlisle: Paternoster/Grand

Rapids: Baker Book House

ISBN 0-85364-719-4

ISBN 0-8010-2091-3

Pb 207pp Bibliog. Index

*Reviewed by David Parker, Editor,  
Evangelical Review of Theology*

It is the subtitle of this book that gives the best guide to its contents (in fact, it was published previously by Regnum Books under this title). Except for a few pages, it consists of explanations, drawn from secondary sources, of a large number of images used in the NT for followers of Jesus—the index lists more than 200 of them. They range from well known terms such as servant and saint to more obscure ones like wheat, patroness and member of the household. There is no space in a 200 page book to give detailed treatment of so many—not even the 35 which are identified as major images by the author.

For ease of reference they might just as well have been arranged



alphabetically in dictionary form, but Bennett has presented them structurally in accordance with a complex taxonomy which he has devised. In this scheme, which reaches seven levels, he divides the images up into groups referring first of all to people (brother, assistant, athlete) or things (flock, first fruit, light), and then according to various kinds of relationship and different types of task.

The structure is developed throughout the book, commencing with the images found in the teaching of Jesus and then in the rest of the NT. A chart depicting this arrangement is presented at each stage of the development and is printed in full at the end, where it extends to four pages.

The point of this taxonomical approach becomes apparent only in the conclusion where the author briefly reflects on the maze of data that he has collected. He sees a consistent pattern throughout the entire NT which shows that in the Christian context, leaders are primarily followers (thus explaining the main book title). He also concludes that there is to be a balance between the church as a community of people related in various ways and the church as an organization committed to certain tasks. He uses his research to counteract tendencies in the church which emphasise one or other these functions to the detriment of the other.

He also finds that his study of these images helps to provide a balance between the role of the leader as leader, and the leader as a fellow-follower of the Lord. He helpfully points that 'Just as the leaders ought

not to have too high an opinion of themselves, so should they beware of assuming too low an opinion of the other followers of Jesus.' (p. 194) Again, he warns against stressing the priesthood of all believers so strongly that the leadership role, as expressed by such images as *episkopos*, *kybernesis* and *hegemonos*, is compromised.

Bennett bases his work on a conservative view of the New Testament that assumes that it yields accurate historical information about the teaching of Jesus and the early church. But alluding to the complex role of images in culture and language, he cautiously concedes that biblical images may not always be appropriate and meaningful to people in other times and places. However, he believes that the use of images by NT writers was rather restrained and not over-contextualised. Hence he concludes that the modern church and especially its pastoral training would benefit from the study of images that he has identified.

These reflections focus on some important contemporary issues for which biblically sound resolutions are urgently required. However, much more space than Bennett gives would be needed to draw out the implications adequately. In view of his firm conclusion that there is high level of consistency in the data, he could well have omitted treatment of many of the more minor images (some of which are dubious in their relevance) and given more detailed treatment to the major images. This would have clarified his case and given more space to expand his reflections.

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