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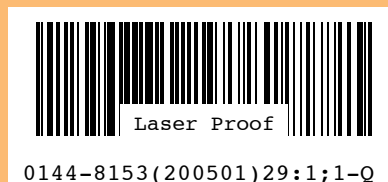
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*Articles and book reviews reflecting
global evangelical theology for the purpose
of discerning the obedience of faith*



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Editorial: Gospel Foundations and Expressions

THE APOSTLE PAUL was 'not ashamed' of the gospel, because he knew it to be 'God acting powerfully to save all—Jews and others—who have faith'! (Rom. 1:16) So as we commence a new volume, we come again to reflect on the foundations and expression of this message in which God acts to establish his righteousness and to bring people into a right relationship with him (v. 17)

We commence with a thoughtful article by Don McLellan of Tasmania in which he discusses justice, forgiveness, and reconciliation in relation to the atonement; these, he argues, must be preserved in the right balance to ensure that the saving work of Jesus can be understood and proclaimed with integrity.

Michael Burgess of Zimbabwe focuses on the holistic expression of the gospel, drawing attention to the multifaceted and widespread theological orientation of Evangelicalism in its three main dimensions— 'word', 'experience', and 'mission'. This means that to 'to be addressed by the word of God, to experience the way of Christ, and to be engaged in God's will on earth as it is in heaven (mission), is to live the normal Christian life'. Therefore, drawing people into the kingdom of God involves 'hearing God's truth for us, experiencing it, and

servicing it as it penetrates the human story'.

Just how important this 'human story' is for our gospel witness is examined by Steve Taylor of Thailand. Using different models, he analyses some of the ways in which Thai thought differs from typical western thinking, and makes useful proposals regarding presuppositions, methods and content for a contextual theology.

We turn next to the difficult topic of theodicy in the extremely acute example of the Jewish Holocaust and the questions it raises for proclaiming the justice and love of God. John J. Davis (USA) tackles this issue by acknowledging how this 'enormously painful and difficult question' still 'haunts the religious conscience' and can lead to people abandoning faith in the biblical concept of God. Seeking to redress the minimal evangelical response to this issue, he proposes an interesting 'martyreo-eschatological' hermeneutic which he suggests may also help in dealing with the sad story of anti-Semitism.

Finally, Robert E. Coleman (USA) shows that if we are going to share this gospel effectively, then we will need to follow the 'master plan' of making disciples, not just converts, by emulating the servant ministry of Jesus himself.

David Parker, Editor

Justice, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation: Essential Elements in Atonement Theology

Don McLellan

KEYWORDS: *Sin, atonement, justice, forgiveness, reconciliation, selfishness, salvation, law*

EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY, in the face of many challenges, has until recently generally held to the view that our reconciliation with God has been made possible through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, and that there was no other way. But the scandal of the cross of which Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 remains to this day. To some it is foolishness; to others the idea that Jesus must shed his blood is totally repugnant. There have even been claims in recent times that the idea of atonement through a violent act may lead to the justification, indeed the glorification, of violence,¹ and this has given rise to attempts to develop theologies of atonement that repudiate the

theology of justification through the cross.²

In the following discussion, I will not attempt any rebuttal of such viewpoints, nor offer a restatement of traditional atonement theology involving satisfaction or penal substitution. Instead I will explore what I regard as three essential elements in atonement theology: justice, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Without specifically revisiting penal substitution which I firmly believe the New Testament teaches, I intend to demonstrate that if any of these essential elements is misunderstood, misused or overlooked, we are bound to have an incomplete or inadequate theology of atonement. That demonstrated, we will find ourselves coming back to the penal substitution theory, and for all its faults, we will recognize that it cannot be abandoned.

My approach is anthropological: I

1 J. Denney Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), p. 5.

2 Anthony W. Bartlett, *Cross Purposes: the Violent Grammar of Christian Atonement* (Harrisburg PA: Trinity Press International, 2001); Weaver, *Nonviolent*.

Don McLellan is a Baptist pastor who has taught theology and New Testament Studies at the Worldview Centre for Intercultural Studies in Launceston, Australia. His advanced degrees are MA(StTheol) and PhD from the University of Queensland, Australia. His PhD research involved a critical study of the atonement theology of noted evangelical scholar, Leon L. Morris.

will seek to demonstrate that for human reconciliation to be complete and genuine, all three of these elements are essential, and from this I will extrapolate the dependence of atonement theology on the same three. A fourth element, repentance, is also imperative in the process of reconciliation with God. This should be taken as a presupposition to this discussion and is mentioned only occasionally. Repentance is also mostly necessary for reconciliation between people. However, if Joe believes that Fred has sinned against him when Fred has not, repentance on Fred's part would be a sham. In that case the process of reconciliation must take another route, but the essential elements remain.

Justice without forgiveness cannot produce reconciliation. Forgiveness without reconciliation is possible, but by definition it leaves the relationship issues unresolved. And while reconciliation obviously cannot occur without forgiveness, there are important reasons for insisting that when forgiveness is offered, to overlook justice is to endanger the whole concept of forgiveness. My discussion of these will highlight how these elements cannot be overlooked in the question of reconciliation with God.

Reconciliation and atonement are highly congruent, to the point of being synonymous. However, the word 'atonement' is more commonly applied to the process of restoring the relationship between humankind and God, rather than between human beings.³

'Atonement' is an old English word, derived simply from its elements, 'at-one-ment'. 'Reconciliation' is mostly used of restoring human to human relationships, although it is also used with reference to God (1 Cor. 5:19). I therefore believe that studying reconciliation may give us important insights into atonement.

1. The problem of sin

The most obvious place to start to formulate a theology of forgiveness and reconciliation is with the problem that makes forgiveness and reconciliation necessary. Biblically, sin is the state in which humankind finds itself as a result of the fall (Rom. 5:12). However, in this exercise I will concentrate on the nature of the sinful act, assuming here that we may and should apply such an epithet to reprehensible human behaviour while admitting that the world scarcely thinks this way.⁴

It is not overstating it to assert that the whole theology of atonement pivots on whether sin exists and if so, whether it is serious. If human behaviour that causes pain and suffering for no moral reason is to be explained in some way other than in terms of sin, and if that pain and suffering does not matter to God, then we do not need a theology of atonement. Psychology, anthropology and sociology have yet to come up with convincing explanations of the pleasure human beings appear to get out of doing things that hurt or

³ Andrew H. Trotter, Jr, 'Atonement', in Walter A. Elwell (ed.) *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), p. 44.

⁴ D. A. Carson, 'Where Wrath and Mercy Meet' in Alison Hull (ed.) *Thinking Aloud: Keswick Lectures 1999* (Carlisle, UK: Authentic Lifestyle, 2002), p. 87.

harm others, except to explain them in purely animal terms. Social and behavioural sciences have provided us with many important insights into human behaviour, but I take the view that unless the concept of morality is dropped altogether, the concept of sin still has its place in psychology as well as theology. A number of behavioural scientists, not all Christians, have been embracing this notion recently.⁵ As Leon Morris constantly asserts in his publications on atonement, sin is serious, and its seriousness must never be minimised.⁶ In a world where all sorts of factors other than sin are proposed to explain negative human behaviour, it is important to assert firmly that sin exists and that it is a serious problem.

Many of the words for sin in OT and NT are words relating to actions: *shagah* and *planomai* denoting error; *chata'* sometimes suggesting failure as a deliberate act and the corresponding *hamartano*; *'abar* used in Dt. 26:13 of transgression of the covenant commandments; *parabasis*, the word Paul chooses to describe a violation of the law in Rom. 4:15.⁷ There are many

other deeds-related words. We may also define sin in terms of the commandments the synoptic Jesus identifies as 'the great commandment' and 'the second which is like it' (Mt. 22:36-40) and the Golden Rule (Mt. 7:12) and say that sin is any action or inaction that causes pain or harm unjustly. Three concrete NT definitions of sin are also worth considering:

1 John 3:4 Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. RSV has paraphrased here. In the Greek, this verse twice uses *anomia*, 'without law', the antonym of *nomos*, 'law'. This text could be translated (rather crudely), 'all sin-doers also act lawlessly; indeed sin is lawlessness.' In other words, sin is equated with total disregard for the law. As far as the sinner is concerned, the law does not exist; and precisely this defines him or her as a sinner in John's view. To sin is to make a decision that nothing will restrain: not the discomfort of the victim, not the moral values of the law, and not the law itself.

1 John 5: 17 All wrongdoing is sin... Here the writer paints with a rather broader brush. 'Wrongdoing' translates *adikia*, the antonym of *dikaios*, usually translated 'righteous'. Older translations usually use 'unrighteousness' to translate *adikia*. Morris has shown the strong forensic element in righteousness,⁸ but true righteousness goes much further than the law, as the Sermon on the Mount posits forcefully (Mt. 5:21-48). Even

⁵ e.g. M. Scott Peck, *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983); Ted Peters, *Sin: Radical Evil in Soul and Society* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994); Roy F. Baumeister, *Evil: Inside Human Cruelty and Violence* (New York: W.H. Freeman, 1997); c.f. Karl Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1973).

⁶ Leon Morris, 'Atonement, Theories of the', in Elwell, Walter A. (ed.), *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), p. 100.

⁷ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, (Second Edition) (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), p. 586.

⁸ Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Leicester: IVP, 1965), p. 269. 'Righteousness' is the alternative translation to 'justification'.

though we may correctly regard righteousness as primarily a forensic status, there is always a strong behavioural element in what Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount. 'Wrongdoing' is any behaviour that does not care that it causes avoidable pain or harm to another.

When all this is taken into consideration, it is evident that selfishness is a major factor in the act of sin: I sin when I decide that your interests simply do not matter as I pursue mine. In this act therefore, I am not only devaluing your interests, but in the process devaluing you. Thus I am arrogating to myself a position of superiority over you of such magnitude that I consider it my right to harm you. Later we will explore the teaching of Jesus that in God's eyes precisely the opposite happens: my sin against you diminishes me and places me in your debt.

Rom 14:23 ...everything that does not come from faith is sin. Paul's thesis in Romans, based on Hab. 2:4, is that righteousness is concomitant with faith: 'The just shall live by faith.' In Rom. 14:23 we have a corollary from Paul which is simply Hab. 2:4 written in negative form: 'whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.' This emphasizes the relationship aspect of righteousness. To put it another way, the rightness or otherwise of behaviour may always be measured in terms of what it does to the relationships involved, rather than merely in terms of whether or not some law code has been observed. Jesus taught that the law is simply not enough when it comes to righteousness (Mt. 5:17-30).

In life, sin causes a degeneration in human relationships. At the lowest level, sin creates disappointment in the

observer or victim, often because trust has been betrayed. As the level of seriousness of the offence rises, so the level of estrangement between offender and victim rises, until the point of complete alienation may be reached. If that alienated relationship was once loving, there can be much grief and anger.

But sin can generate much more than pain in its victims. It is the nature of sin to beget sin. Wrongdoing has a terrible ability to compound itself, sometimes in the guise of seeking justice. A characteristic common to many of the great conflict zones in today's world is that horrible crimes have been committed in the name of justice. The slaughter of Moslems in the Balkans during the recent conflicts is justified in the eyes of many non-Moslems in that zone because of atrocities, sometimes generations ago, allegedly committed in the name of Islam. In Israel and Palestine 'an eye for an eye' appears to have become 'ten eyes for every eye' on both sides—a sure recipe for escalation. In Ireland, a culture of non-forgiveness has fed on past events even after hundreds of years, as history is recalled selectively on both sides.

It is this very propensity for purported acts of justice to violate the principles of justice that makes the whole issue of justice so difficult. The distance between a totally inadequate response to injustice, and a response that becomes a new and possibly worse injustice, is exceedingly short. It is precisely here that the idea of atonement can provide not only a solution, but a vital circuit breaker to the vicious process of revenge and retribution, as I will show later.

2. The consequences of sin

The Decalogue is seen in Judaism and Christianity as containing the conditions of a covenant that, *inter alia*, sets forth both the righteousness of God and God's divine values. Sin breaks covenant with God, and breaks relationships between people. The relationship is broken because the offender has unjustly and either wilfully or thoughtlessly caused some kind of harm to the victim. The result of this breach is separation and, since in Hebrew thought death was seen as separation, death is terminology that may be applied metaphorically to describe the result of sin. But it is more than a metaphor. The association of sin with death is an integral part of Judeo-Christian thought (Gen. 2:16-17; Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:56).

The Bible speaks most profoundly of consequences in terms of what sin does to the relationship with God, but the human dimension also features. First, on the human plain, sin causes injury or harm to its victim. Sin is that which causes harm or injury unlawfully. Obvious though this is, it needs to be stated. The secondary result of sin is that it effects the relationship between the offender and the victim. The relationship is no longer trusting, comfortable, or normal. Jesus sometimes likens sin to debt. He equates sin with debt in the Lord's prayer, where instead of *hamartia*, he uses *opheilema*, which is usually translated 'debt'. He teaches us to pray, asking the Father to forgive our debts, as we forgive the debts of others (Matt 6:12), then goes on with an explanation in which he uses *paraptomata*, another synonym for sin.

For if you forgive others their trespasses (*paraptomata*), your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses (Mt. 6:14-15).

In Matthew 18, when Peter asks how many times a person may sin (*hamartano*) before he ceases to forgive (18:21-22), Jesus launches into a parable that is about debtors (*opheletes*, 18:23-35) and ends with the solemn warning,

This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive (*aphiemi* = forgive, release from debt) your brother from your heart (Mt. 18:35).

The relationship between offender and victim, then, is likened to that of debtor to lender. Some kind of transaction has taken place that demands an equal and opposite transaction. However, instead of insisting that the demanded transaction be carried out, Jesus instead demands that the offended person carry out a different transaction, that of releasing the debtor from the debt. This is to be done on the basis that God releases us from our debts, an important principle of atonement which we will revisit later.

But sin also injures the offender. Externally and objectively, it is seen as placing the offender in the 'debt' of God and of the victim, harming the relationship with both. Internally, the offender is diminished as a person both by the fact of the transgression and by the relationship breakdown. In biblical theologies, one may generalise that sin is never against only one other person. It is also sin against the perpetrator himself or herself, and sin against God.

My relationship with myself as well as my victim is damaged and my relationship with God is broken. I therefore can be described as a victim of my own sin.

3. The imperative of justice

It scarcely needs to be established that justice is a major theme of the Scriptures. Curiously, evangelicals committed to the authority of the Bible have sometimes overlooked this emphasis, failing to appreciate that in the NT generally speaking, *dikaiosune*, which we usually translate 'righteousness', also means 'justice' in a moral as well as a forensic sense.⁹ A righteous person is *inter alia* someone committed to justice and fairness.

Sociologically, the notion of justice requires that the ambient society disapprove of the offence, either through the development of norms and mores or through the more formal process of legislation. Punishment may be justified as an attempt to reform a wrongdoer, and the threat of punishment may be justified as providing deterrence to would-be offenders. But, as Morris has argued, if that is all there is to it, then punishment ought to be abandoned, since it succeeds all too rarely on both counts.¹⁰ A frown, a word of disapproval is scarcely enough. Unless the ambient community does something to the perpetrator that reflects its disapproval *and inflicts pain*, mere disapproval does nothing to reinforce the importance of the law.

Weaver attempts to make a case against this¹¹ but while he may have convinced himself, he would have a hard time convincing most people in most societies, since punishment remains a fundamental element in the dispensing of justice. Evidence that our courts hold this view was provided forcefully to me recently when a friend whose life had changed completely since his conversion felt it his duty as a Christian to go to the police and confess to a crime committed ten years earlier. The best efforts of his lawyer to keep this now upright citizen out of jail failed. My friend's present good citizenship was taken into account in the sentencing, but it was not enough. The judge's view was that society's disapproval had to be reinforced by inflicting punishment, but in terms of rehabilitation or deterrence the sentence was meaningless. A theology that wants to leave the concept of punishment out of atonement will scarcely be convincing, even though it may be attractive. Which leads to the next observation:

Justice also requires that penalties against the offender be adequate. That is why there is a natural inclination to regard *lex talionis* as the epitome of justice, of which I will say more in a moment. One of the great difficulties facing justice systems today arises from the question of exactly what is an adequate penalty.

This is a vast topic, but there are a couple of things worth saying here. First, adequate penalties would appear to require that some effort be made by the perpetrator of the offence to compensate the injured party. In societies

⁹ Gottlob Schrenk, *TDNT* II, p. 198.

¹⁰ Leon Morris, *Glory in the Cross: A Study in Atonement*, revised edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), pp. 39-44.

¹¹ Weaver, *Nonviolent*, chapter 7.

with a Judeo-Christian heritage, compensation of some sort is regarded as an important part of penalties because it emphasizes the 'debt' aspect of offences. However, the demand for adequate penalties would appear to require also that in some way the offender experience what the victim experienced. The Levitical law used *lex talionis* to ensure that justice was seen to be done. *Lex talionis* literally means 'the law of the tooth', the Latin phrase encapsulating the OT notion of 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' (Ex. 21:24). The logic appeared to be that the offender should experience the same suffering that his victim had experienced. Importantly, however, the offender was not to experience more suffering than the victim, except insofar as restitution would entail hardship.

The problem is that, as society has become more complicated, *lex talionis* has become more inept and inadequate. For example, a clever lad in the Philippines created the 'I love you' virus and damaged thousands of computers world wide. Can he be dealt with under *lex talionis*? How do the purveyors of justice do the same to him? What compensation does he pay? The nature of adequate penalties therefore remains an unresolved issue in today's world, and will continue to be so. But whatever the penalties, justice requires that they be carried out. Where there are no penalties or the sanctions are inadequate, there is no sense of justice. The natural logic is that having afflicted others, offenders must somehow feel the pain of their crimes and misdemeanours in their own persons. Yet this immediately brings us to the problem of what justice cannot do.

4. What justice cannot do

It is in human nature to desire justice, and every society develops its system. Nevertheless, justice alone is a very inadequate entity. Justice may go some way, though it can never go all the way, to satisfying the victim's need for retribution, or the group or society's need to indicate its displeasure, or to providing some form of deterrence. However, justice is completely powerless in two important ways:

First, justice cannot undo the offence. One of the difficulties people have with *lex talionis* is that it appears to require society to commit the same crime. This is one of the great counter-arguments against capital punishment: its opponents argue that it makes the whole society guilty of the crime it condemns.

Second, justice very often takes no thought of its ramifications on innocent people connected to those it punishes. It is very difficult to deny that justice may well compound the problems that it sets out to solve. An incarcerated breadwinner may leave a family in poverty and worse. Nor can justice reconcile the victim and the offender. While the exercise of justice may provide some level of satisfaction to a victim, reconciliation is rarely the result. Indeed, it may only engender more bitterness.

Justice therefore is always necessary and always inadequate. It is like a mechanic whose only tools to fix a car are a hammer and a cold chisel. Not only can it not undo the offence, but it can aggravate the very situation it tries to address. It is for this reason that forgiveness is so important because justice alone solves very little, and may

even exacerbate the alienation caused by sins and offences.

This inadequacy of human justice, however, finds something of an answer in atonement. Paul's theology of atonement in particular provides some important answers to the impossibility of human justice systems to both provide justice and result in reconciliation, whether those systems exist on the group or the state level. I will argue below that the notion of God both demanding justice and carrying it out *in himself* provides an indispensable circuit-breaker for the just process of retribution following wrongdoing. However, before I do that, we must look closely at the concept of forgiveness.

5. Ethical issues concerning forgiveness

Surprisingly, forgiveness contains a number of quite serious ethical problems. While these ethical problems are rarely expressed, anyone who ever desires to forgive knows instinctively that they exist and that they often make forgiveness difficult. It will be useful to spell some of them out.

The first and gravest danger that arises from the act of forgiving is that forgiveness may tend to make laws and mores ineffective. Among other things, to forgive is to waive the right to see the offender punished. Now plainly, if forgiveness is offered too freely or too often, an offender may never receive the penalties that justice so clearly demands, in which case the law or the mores may as well not exist. This is what makes the demand of Matthew's Jesus that we forgive seventy times

seven (Mt. 18:22) seem emotionally impossible if not morally bizarre.¹² The effect of forgiveness is to waive the penalties, whether legal or personal, that may be expected to be the response to wrongdoing. And if there are no possible penalties, the gravity of the offence must surely be abrogated.

The strength and significance of a law is measured by the penalties that accompany it. The same can be said of mores, and social groups demonstrate an almost instinctive ability to develop penalties that impact upon people who do not observe group mores. When it comes to crime, the more serious the crime, the more serious the penalties need to be. If a law defining a crime or misdemeanour has no penalties, it exists in name only and will be ignored.

This was demonstrated very clearly in the early 1990s when one state government in Australia legislated for the compulsory wearing of bicycle helmets but, because children would be the ones effected most, chose to provide no penalties. The law was almost universally ignored by cyclists until penalties were introduced much later, whereupon helmet wearing instantly became fashionable. Similarly, if breaches of mores are always forgiven or overlooked, in effect there are no penalties, and the mores lose effectiveness and eventually disappear. This has clearly been the case with the wholesale abandonment of sanctions against breaches of Judeo-Christian mores in our society. Things are condoned today that

¹² In the quasi-parallel of Luke 17:4 this complaint is ameliorated somewhat, because repentance is the prerequisite for the forgiveness.

would not even have been spoken of a generation ago. Similarly to forgive offenders for breaking laws may tend towards the destruction of the credibility of those laws.

Another danger is that forgiveness may trivialise the offence. If forgiveness is offered or granted too willingly, the effect can be that the offender may overlook or not understand the seriousness of the offence. Forgiveness, therefore, must be a very careful process. Notwithstanding the words of Jesus in Mt. 18:21-22, which we need to deal with more fully later, forgiveness is not to be dispensed mindlessly, lest the offence actually become trivialised. God's own forgiveness must operate against a similar background. Sin becomes trivialised if forgiveness overrules justice. This is also a vital point in the development of atonement theology.

Another ethical problem arises when forgiveness is laid upon Christians as a moral necessity. The result of the demand to forgive may bring condemnation to the victim. By this I mean that because Jesus commands us to forgive, pressure can sometimes be put on the victim to forgive the offender, even where the offender has not faced justice and has not shown any kind of contrition.

This is an issue that needs to be carefully thought through by clergy, especially conservative evangelical clergy who may tend to apply the Scriptures indiscriminately. It is very unseemly in the church to see victims being condemned, sometimes by the very same people who have sinned against them, because they appear unwilling to forgive. The greater likelihood is that the offence has been

repeated often and the victim has lost all trust. I am sure I am not the only pastor to have seen wicked people laying guilt on their victims by quoting the demand of Jesus to forgive when all that the victim is doing is refraining, legitimately, from trusting the offender too soon. Forgiveness cannot be earned. Trust can be earned, but where it has been breached, that may take time. The imperative of forgiveness based on Mt. 6:14, 18:15-35, Col. 3:13 and other NT references must never be presented as if the ethical problems outlined above do not exist.

6. The imperative of forgiveness

Nevertheless, forgiveness is clearly a Christian imperative. It is the demand of God and Jesus. What we have observed so far about justice and the morality of forgiveness must not be used to cloud the fact that the biblical writers demand that we forgive, as Col. 3:13 says, 'just as the Lord has forgiven you'. The Lord's Prayer (Mt. 6:9-13) is packed with ideas regarding the relationship of God with his people, the kingdom of God, faith, forgiveness, and much more. But Jesus does not expand on any of these except forgiveness, when he says:

For if you forgive others when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins (Mt. 6:14-15).

This is expanded further in the parable that follows Peter's query concerning how often he should forgive a 'brother' (Mt. 18:21f.).

‘Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart (Mt. 18:33-35).

These words must not be minimised. I propose that they should be understood thus, in the light of the parable: The person who has experienced forgiveness will appreciate the enormity of this gift, and will in gratitude offer forgiveness to all who may offend him or her. Failure to offer forgiveness indicates a devaluation of God’s forgiveness, and to devalue it, according to Jesus, is to despise it.

It is perhaps too obvious, but nevertheless necessary, to note that without forgiveness there can be no reconciliation. On the other hand, but apparently not so obvious, is the fact that reconciliation is notionally not possible where the offender has shown no remorse or repentance, and has not sought forgiveness. Sometimes Christians express surprise at this statement, but it is clear that this is what the biblical writers say about God.

In a major article, Leon Morris points to the consistent teaching of the OT, carried forward into the NT, that the best word to describe the attitude of God towards sin is ‘wrath’.¹³ Salvation history suggests that God has done everything possible to reconcile people to himself. He was ‘reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them’ (2 Cor. 5:19). But if people will not be reconciled, they are under the wrath of

God (Mt. 18:35 etc.). Morris’s studies have shown, at least to my satisfaction, that the biblical literature speaks of a God who has provided and has offered forgiveness to all people for all time, but that same literature affirms that there is still no reconciliation until the offender has repented and accepted the offer.

The biblical demand that we forgive is therefore tempered with this fact: while it is imperative that forgiveness be our attitude, no matter how serious the offence, the victim has no obligation apart from that. If forgiveness is offered but not received for whatever reason, reconciliation has not occurred, a situation for which the victim is not responsible. Victims who truly want to forgive sometimes find this lack of reconciliation difficult. The victim may find anger welling up periodically, and bitterness can be an unwelcome companion in life. But the old adage, ‘To err is human, to forgive, divine’, while trite, contains an important theological idea: the victim becomes the outlet of God’s forgiveness to the offender. Provided that outlet is there, the victim may be at peace, no matter what emotions may well up from time to time.

Lack of reconciliation with the offender may also cause a problem of the victim’s reconciliation with himself or herself. It is common for rape and child abuse victims to suffer severe guilt. This was the great struggle for Debbie Morris, the victim in the famous ‘Dead Man Walking’ case in the USA.¹⁴

¹³ Morris, *Apostolic*, pp. 144-213

¹⁴ Debbie Morris (with Gregg Lewis), *Forgiving the Dead Man Walking* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

She found full release from the trauma only when she learnt to forgive herself, even though there was nothing to forgive. Self-forgiveness led to self-reconciliation, and ultimately to the ability to forgive the offender. He never sought forgiveness, and had made no attempt to be reconciled to his victim at the time of his execution.

7. Atonement and forgiveness

What happens when I forgive? At the point of forgiveness, I am in effect relinquishing all personal claims to seeing the process of justice carried out on the offender. I make a decision that only one person will bear the pain of the offence, and that will be myself, the victim. I absolve the offender of his or her debt. This is one of the not-so-obvious implications of the forgiving king in Matthew 18:25-35. The cause of the debt is not explained, but in terms of the economics of the day, a debt of 10,000 talents is unbelievable. It is Jesus' way of saying that it is beyond repayment. Surely Jesus' words must therefore have been greeted with astonishment:

Out of pity for him, the Lord of that slave released him (*apoluo*) and forgave him (*aphiemi*) the debt (Mt. 18:27).

What is not so obvious, but an important adjunct here, is that it is not the servant who has suffered the unrepayable loss, but the king. Forgiveness is at a price, and the price is born by the victim. In a profound sense, what traditional atonement theology is saying is precisely that. Whatever problems there may be in the concept of substitutionary atonement, in the long run it

is emphasizing this point: that in the death of the Son of God the loss and pain suffered in the act of forgiveness is suffered by God himself.

Forgiveness therefore is arguably one of the most profound expressions of love, and the cornerstone of atonement. The atonement, the work of God in which he makes his own reconciliation with humankind possible, requires that God absorb in himself the guilt of the offence against him. And the atonement actually becomes both the means and the motivation by which we human beings may forgive and be reconciled to each other.

Psychologically, we may regard the sacrifice of Jesus 'once for all' as being the one and only, and final, point at which the need for an injured party to exact retribution, the need for God's laws to find fulfilment, and the need for the wrath of God against sin to be expressed, find their meeting point. Viewed in this way, on the one hand substitutionary atonement through the death of Christ is not abandoned, and on the other hand the trenchant criticisms that accuse it of justifying violence¹⁵ are ameliorated. There was violence towards the Son of God from humankind's side to which God did not respond. He did not and does not respond because in the cross, and in the God-man Jesus, the wrath of God is met. There is no place for further violence.

Luke's Gospel has a textually disputed word from the cross (Luke 23:34): 'Father, forgive them, for they

¹⁵ Bartlett, *Cross Purposes*; Weaver, *Nonviolent*.

do not know what they are doing.’ As Morris points out, the reason for the omission of this text in some otherwise reliable manuscripts may simply be the antagonism of an early copyist towards both the Romans who crucified Jesus and the Jews who allegedly were behind that event.¹⁶ This is just as plausible as the contrary position based on the principle of *lectio brevior*.¹⁷

Whether original or not, these words encapsulate my understanding of atonement: Jesus absorbs the wickedness of his tormentors without any demand for retribution. From the overall picture the evangelists paint of a Jesus Christ who preaches forgiveness, the words of Luke 23:34 are completely consistent with the words from the Sermon on the Mount which provide a response to *lex talionis*, as Jesus urges his followers to turn the other cheek and to go the second mile (Mt. 5:38-42). It is not a long journey from here to a view of atonement which sees the Son of God as God absorbing in himself the wickedness of humanity directed towards him, and the Son of God as man absorbing the wrath of God which would have been expected in retribution. (Naturally, this does not work for non-Trinitarian theologies!)

Thus we can affirm with Paul, ‘God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them...’ (2 Cor. 5:19). The

cross was much more than symbolic, but nevertheless it is symbolic too: it symbolizes starkly how God himself absorbs the offence of the sinner and suffers the pain of the offence, yet offers forgiveness. Forgiveness is indeed difficult. That is why Peter spoke of the suffering of the Christian in 1 Peter 3:13-4:2. But we have an example to follow; and the example is Jesus, by whose death we ourselves are reconciled to God. So we forgive rather than demand justice, while never diminishing the importance of justice, and the result is social and interpersonal harmony which justice by itself can never achieve.

Conclusion

Plainly what I have done here covers very little of the theology of atonement. I have merely sought to highlight the fact that justice, forgiveness, and reconciliation are three indispensable elements in good human relationships and in the production of a peaceful society, and to suggest from this that they are essential elements in atonement theology. The aim of forgiveness is reconciliation, but reconciliation without justice is an oxymoron, and justice without penalty is meaningless.

For all of its difficulties, only the biblical theology of substitutionary atonement covers all the bases. Evangelical Christians have always found it difficult to defend, but defend it they must. The alternatives are wishy-washy forgiveness that produces no true reconciliation, ineffectual justice that trivialises sin, or blunt-instrument justice that perpetuates conflict. Society, and Christianity, can afford none of these.

¹⁶ Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester: IVP, 1988), p. 356.

¹⁷ *Lectio brevior* is the name given to the textual criticism principle that the shorter readings found in some early manuscripts are more likely to be original than the longer readings found in others.

Dimensions of the Faith: A Shaping of Evangelicalism

Michael Burgess

KEY WORDS: *Word, experience, mission, knowledge, language, belief, revelation, witness.*

1 Introduction

In this short essay we are going to take a brief look at the evangelical orientation that exists throughout much of the global church and which also has expression here in Zimbabwe. As this will be a general discussion, we will be considering evangelicalism as a whole, rather than focusing simply on the Zimbabwean evangelical context. Since evangelicalism is a widespread and multifaceted phenomenon, we can attempt only a broad overview of the orientation. By orientation, we mean an approach to being Christian, and doing Christianity, that is held by a significant number of people at any one time.

Evangelicalism, rather than being a rigidly static system (as over against fundamentalism), is characterized by stability as well as change. The basic evangelical garden remains firmly in place, but there is room for develop-

ment or differences between individual gardeners. Various issues attract differing and sometimes contentious views. For example we have the debate on annihilationism¹, or the issue of the 'openness of God'.² Differences appear also in the various cultural expressions of the faith, as existential contexts and theological points of departure diverge from each other. The above phenomena are to be expected due to the 'umbrella'-like nature of evangelicalism. We would do well, furthermore, to remember that the orientation is trans-denominational and not bound to any particular church polity, as McGrath reminds us.³

We have chosen to look at evangelicalism through the various 'dimen-

1 David Edwards & John Stott, *Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1988).

2 John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove: I.V.P., 1998).

3 Alister E. McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1994), pp. 74-76.

sions' that characterize it. These, we believe, derive from the orientation itself and can be delineated as the dimensions of 'word', 'experience', and 'mission'. We will further note the integration of these dimensions—in that they operate holistically or integratively as one. It is our opinion that it is in these areas where most of the constructive and deconstructive critique of evangelicalism occurs.

It should be stated at the outset that our desire is to contribute to an understanding of what it means to be Christianly human before God; it is not to engage in some form of theological empire building. It would indeed be arrogant to maintain that *only* evangelicalism provides authentic theological constructions. Being generally aligned with a particular theological orientation does not preclude one from being informed by the ideas of others. Obviously our discussion will be limited by the constraints of space, while the main emphasis will be placed on the dimension of 'word', as this has proved to be the most challenged area by non-evangelicals.

2 The Dimension of 'Word'

2.1 The Revealing God

One thing that strongly characterizes evangelicalism is the firm belief that God has revealed both himself and an accompanying body of conceptive truth through general and special revelation. It is believed that to a degree, reality *can* be conceptualized by the human mind. This is seen in the fact that God helps us to understand reality cognitively through the agency of 'word'.

Christians, (who are spiritually capable of appropriating the divine word or truth [1 Cor. 2:6-16]) are called upon to nurture their minds with this 'word'. The path of understanding, or truth, especially redemptive truth, travels from God to humanity. As we are addressed, so must we respond. We agree with Morris who emphasizes this approach as he disagrees with Barr's contention that scripture reflects mere *human* theologising about God.⁴ For Barr, who would represent liberal thinking on the matter, the Bible may indeed portray the human *witness* of God's alleged revelatory acts in history, but it is not *itself* identical with the 'word of God'.⁵ For evangelicals, however, the theological starting point lies in our attendance to the actual a-priori revelation of God.

Evangelicalism has been stigmatised as an orientation that is guilty of 'bibliolatry', caught up in a fixation on propositional revelation. This is an unfortunate perception. While we would indeed affirm the notion of propositional communication from our revealing God, we would propose a holistic nature to God's special revelation. In fact we agree with McGrath who suggests that revelation concerns 'the *oracles* of God, the *acts* of God, and the *person* and *presence* of God'⁶ (Emphasis original). It must be said

4 Leon Morris, *I Believe in Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 104-106.

5 James Barr, *The Bible in the Modern World* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1973), pp. 118-119.

6 Alister E. McGrath, *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (Leicester: Apollis, 1994), p. 107.

that God has given both himself to be in relation with us, as well as conceptual data to inform us and to help us to interpret our very existence. God, then, has acted and spoken *for us*.

For most evangelicals, the Bible as the *written* word of God, is the inspired recording of, first, the acts of God in human history, second, conceptual revelation *from* God to us, and third, the experiences of the friends and enemies of God. The recordings of the above, and the acts of personal historical research on the part of some biblical writers concerning the meaning and significance of the incarnate Christ (Lk.1:1-4), are equally inspired. We would insist, furthermore, that the 'word' of God stands over against our own human theologising. Any human theological construction cannot claim to be inspired!

Black and white evangelicals in Zimbabwe continue to hold to a high view of scripture, even though this is an 'imported' position from the West. Some of our leaders who have been trained in liberal western institutions will of course look down with disdain upon the so-called 'fundamentalists'. Interestingly, these leaders, who rightly call for contextualisation, are very *western* in their liberal approach to scripture.

2.2 The Place of Reason

It is ironic that liberal scholarship generally finds evangelicalism to be intellectually wanting while also accusing it of being too rationalistic. One would surely hold that sound intellect and reason presuppose each other. Be this as it may, we wish to assert that scholarly evangelicalism has a healthy rela-

tionship with the reasoning process. As beings created in God's image we are endowed with the capacity to think. We are able to cognitively appropriate and interpret our environment, especially when we listen to the God who has spoken.

In line with recent thought, evangelicals understand that thinking or reasoning simply cannot take place in a vacuum. We are indeed socially and culturally conditioned creatures and as such our reason can never be fully autonomous or value free. In this context we would affirm Davis who adds that the human race finds itself with a conflict between regenerate and unregenerate reason.⁷ One's moral and spiritual use of reason reflects one's spiritual condition. As evangelicals, we would believe that this holds true in any given cultural or religious tradition.

Reason, we would contend, is not an end in itself. Newbigin speaks out against what he believes to be the rationalistic dogmatism of both fundamentalism and liberalism.⁸ Proper Christian understanding requires reason to be in concert with faith. We concur with Newbigin that reason is 'not a substitute for information' and being informed requires 'acts of trust in the traditions we have inherited and in the evidence of our senses'.⁹ In a similar

⁷ John J. Davis, *Foundations of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), pp. 131-135.

⁸ Lesslie Newbigin, *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt and Certainty in Christian Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 94.

⁹ Newbigin, *Proper Confidence*, p. 96.

vein, Holmes rightly argues for the unavoidability of personal act or commitment in thinking.¹⁰ We accordingly maintain, then, that Christian *reason* is an act of Christian *commitment* that results in Christian *belief*. This is said in the light of our contention that God, who is Absolute Person, made a divine commitment to privilege us, as human persons, with a reasoned and personal self-revelation. For evangelicals, the act of reasoning must involve an interfacing of subjective and objective factors, especially as we thoughtfully respond to God's revelation.

God's reasonable revelation to mankind allows, *inter alia*, the inbreaking of the supernatural into what to us is the natural. Evangelicalism believes that the act of reason does not preclude the existence and activity of the supernatural and the miraculous in history. We agree with Brown that miracles were revelatory events helping people to interpret the meaning of Jesus and God.¹¹ They were signs, and thus were 'indicators, summoning a response of insight, faith, and obedience'. This response, we believe, was to the Word of God as he broke into history as well as to the conceptive word of God as it was revealed. Talking of 'words' brings us to the controversial issue of language.

2.3 The Place Of Language

In light of the pressing challenge of postmodernist deconstructionism, we

must allow ourselves to make a few pertinent comments. To begin with, it must be said that language is indispensable. We would agree with Silva who argues that God is a language being and relates to us as language beings.¹² The very existence of both the incarnate 'Word' and the written 'word' of conceptive revelation presupposes this linguistic basis. Indeed it is very difficult to imagine how either God or humankind could articulate reality without some form of language. We agree that language in certain respects can be seen as a 'game' or as a form of social power play, but this does not annul the functional usefulness of verbal communication. It takes language to question language!

Language can inform, command, prohibit, exhort, question, doubt, affirm, express emotion, reveal intentions and will, and even address mystery. Thus, while recognizing the possibility of the manipulative and relativistic use of language, evangelicalism finds language to be necessary and useful and would deny the charge of 'logocentrism'. In other words, the fact that we are language beings does not mean that language defines our very existence. We would argue that human existence precedes the articulation of the same. The existence of social power plays or rationalistic dogmatism is not the fault of language (or reason, for that matter)—it is, rather, the

10 Arthur F. Holmes, *Contours of a World View* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 136-137.

11 Colin Brown, *Miracles and the Critical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), p. 286.

12 Moises Silva, 'God, Language and Scripture: Reading the Bible in the Light of General Linguistics', 1990, pp. 204-217, in M. Silva (gen. ed.), *Foundations in Contemporary Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

expression of the prior human state. As human beings, we are free to use language negatively, for evil, or to use it positively, for good.

2.4 The Place Of Knowledge, Belief, And Truth

2.4.1 Knowledge And Reality

The history and philosophy of the notions of knowledge, belief, and truth is a vast, complex and fascinating field. Nevertheless, at least some comments must be forthcoming here, as evangelicalism boldly claims that it has 'truth', or a picture of reality, to offer. The primary question to be asked, of course, is do we in fact have any real access to reality? Is reality, or at least the grasp of it, hidden away (at least from the 'common' person) in the sphere of Platonic universals or in the Kantian realm of the noumenal, ultimately frustrating the human quest for knowledge or truth? Evangelicalism would like to maintain that it in fact *does* have at least some grasp of reality, especially as it pertains to the questions of human existence, including the persistent quest for the ultimate.

In connection with the search for knowledge, the paradigm shift from enlightenment certainty to postmodernist doubt has raised many epistemological questions. In the light of this, Curtis and Brugaletta suggest a 'multidimensional' approach to achieving a comprehensive understanding of reality. They point out that postmodernism rightly emphasizes our limitedness as far as any in-depth analysis of reality goes. Further, it would benefit evangelicalism to combine the strengths or acceptable points of mod-

ernism and postmodernism in the search for, and the construction of, philosophical and theological truth.¹³ We would agree with the above authors. They are in fact saying that, without becoming avowedly postmodernist, evangelical scholarship in the main recognizes the need to balance a confident use of reason (modernism) with a definite epistemological humility (postmodernism).

Since we have not travelled *throughout* reality we cannot say just how far we have penetrated it, that is, if we define it simply as 'that which *is*', irrespective of our attempts to understand it. Our own self-understanding is inextricably linked to our perception of reality, or worldview. In and of itself, the 'that which *is*' forms the backdrop to our quest for existential meaning. Evangelicalism is intensely interested in the scientific, philosophical, and of course the *redemptive* meaning of human existence. Given our belief in divine conceptive revelation, we are able to say that we can potentially 'know' that which God has revealed, our human theological differences notwithstanding. As Curtis and Brugaletta point out, we can attain a correct appropriation of value and truth in line with what God has specially revealed (concerning at the very least redemptive reality) if we attend to that revelation in the context of spiritual faith.¹⁴ Implied in all of this, for evan-

¹³ Edward M. Curtis & John Brugaletta, *Transformed thinking: Loving God with all Your Mind* (Franklin: J.K.O. Publishing, 1996), pp. 66-67.

¹⁴ Curtis & Brugaletta, *Transformed Thinking*, p. 70.

gelicals, is the belief that *God*, as personal and Trinitarian, is the supreme reality behind the rest of reality, the 'that which is'.

To some degree, then, we can say that we have a limited knowledge of reality as a whole, but a fair knowledge of the historical interrelationship between Creator-God and mankind. Knowledge of this relationship derives from our own human experience and from divine revelation, which, along with conceptual communication from God, also includes God's active participation in human history and the message and impact of the whole incarnation event in and of itself. For evangelicalism, the interpretation of the above leads to our various theological constructions, or, *beliefs*. The relationship between the notions of 'knowledge' and 'belief' is a very complex issue, which we cannot go into here. It may be said, at least, that the former implies a true grasping of a 'bit' of reality, which exists objectively, while the latter implies a subjective interpretation of the same. Our 'beliefs' may accord with reality, including God's self-revelation or, they may be disastrously mistaken.

When we human beings think or reason, we do so as subjective agents (using language). It is therefore well nigh impossible to come up with a completely objective understanding of the objective world around us. Evangelicals of course believe in a created objective universe *out there*. As human beings, individually and collectively, we have to relate to the *it*, the *thou* and the *THOU* outside of us. (For Christians, of course, we also have to relate to the *THOU* inside of us, in other words, the indwelling God.) This act of relating, however, is inescapably sub-

jective. Epistemologically speaking, evangelicals would find extreme subjectivity as problematic as a cold impersonal objectivity. We would opt for a balanced and holistic epistemology. In this light, we agree with Holmes that 'metaphysical objectivity' is compatible with 'epistemological subjectivity'.¹⁵ Things, in other words, can exist irrespective of our physical or non-physical perception or ignorance of them. Reality, however, is not inherently undermined by our understandably subjective appreciation of it. Holmes also puts forward the idea that we cannot really avoid interpreting our environment; thus what we consider to be facts could be called 'interprefacts'.¹⁶

2.4.2 Truth and Belief

Our hunger for truth is ongoing. The definition of 'truth' of course varies according to the subject in hand as well as to one's cultural and logical-linguistic tradition. Also, the battle between absolutism and relativism rages on, sometimes with verbal weapons of mass de(con)struction! For the purposes of this discussion, we use the word 'truth', as far as the cognitive realm is concerned, to mean a correspondence between actual reality and human articulation of it, however limited. We could never attain to mathematical certainty of course because this would presuppose a previously existing 'metaphysical manual' by

¹⁵ Arthur F. Holmes, *All Truth is God's Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 6.

¹⁶ Arthur F. Holmes, *Contours of a World View* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), p.151.

which to evaluate our understanding. The existence of such a manual would obviate the need to search for truth anyway.

The dynamics of *redemptive* truth involve God and his revelation. For evangelicalism, conceptual authority is located in the inspired written word of God as well as in the historical event of the incarnate Living Word who acted and spoke and said of himself 'I am the way and the truth and the life' (Jn. 14:6. NIV). In this sense, truth is more than mere propositional data, although it definitely includes that. Carson supports this in his discussion of the biblical idea of truth in opposition to pluralism.¹⁷ He also reflects the evangelical view that in the process of informing us, the primary function of scripture is to redemptively point the way to the true God.¹⁸ In addition to this, we would agree with Nicole's view that the biblical picture of truthfulness is that of 'factuality, faithfulness and completeness' in relation to God's word and activity in history.¹⁹ For evangelicals, then, the Bible redemptively portrays the holistic self-revelation (and therefore truth) of God as it in turn holistically impacts the human situation.

Of course this does not automatically mean that we have always correctly interpreted this revelation. As

evangelicals, we are cognisant of the fact that our theologising is not inspired. However, we feel free to proclaim that theologically and existentially we do have access to God's revealed knowledge or truth for us. As mentioned earlier, our interpretation of this leaves us with our 'beliefs'. Naturally we would be slow to equate our beliefs with the notion of final truth as our theological constructions are always developing. While we are sensitive to the fact that the notion of *foundational* beliefs or truths has been under attack for some time, we still choose to maintain that we are the inheritors of divine revelation that necessarily includes the reality of a certain body of fixed truth. At the very least, then, we talk of primary or foundational truth (for evangelical theology, the equivalent of theological absolutes). Where we are confident of our interpretation, we talk of primary or foundational beliefs, which in turn precede secondary and tertiary beliefs. These last two are always undergoing development. Interestingly, Nash, in support of Plantinga, points out that included in foundational beliefs is the non-provable belief in God himself.²⁰

Evangelicalism believes it has a story to tell. That is, we have the core gospel message and the body of theological assertions that attach to it. We are still learning, but we have a substantive body of knowledge or truth or set of theologically confident beliefs to proclaim. We follow Newbigin who in this context says: '[W]e do not have all

¹⁷ Don A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 164-165.

¹⁸ Carson, *The Gagging of God*, p. 167.

¹⁹ Roger Nicole, 'The Biblical Concept of Truth' in D. Carson & J. Woodbridge (eds.), *Scripture and Truth* (Leicester: I.V.P., 1983), p. 296.

²⁰ Ronald Nash, *Faith and Reason: Searching for a Rational Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), pp. 85-88.

the truth, but we know the way along which truth is to be sought and found.²¹ Against the postmodernist charge of 'logocentrism', (that we are bound to relativistic beliefs as a result of the social manipulation of language), Sire maintains that our story revolves around the undeniable and absolute historical fact of Jesus Christ.²² Indeed, evangelicalism places fundamental significance in the Christ story that talks about the Christ who *is* the 'way, the truth and the life' and who opened up the path of truth along which to walk. Fundamental to the story is the coherent identity between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith.²³ In response to postmodernist relativism, then, we believe that actually we *do* have an historically backed metanarrative to offer. In this light, Hinkson and Ganssle rightly declare that the gospel 'is the ultimate metanarrative declared to a culture incredulous of metanarratives'.²⁴ This last would not specifically apply to black

Zimbabwean evangelicals who, in good African tradition, would be open to existentially meaningful metanarrative.

On being asked to enumerate the foundational beliefs it holds to, evangelicalism would offer, *inter alia*, the following: the Trinitarian personal Creator-God; the deity of Christ; God's self-revelation and the inspiration of the Bible; the fallenness of humankind; the redemptive gift of salvation based upon the substitutionary atonement; the real death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; the ongoing historical interaction between God and humanity, including the inbreaking of the supernatural into the human story; the demand upon the church to be 'salt and light'; the literal second coming of Christ in order for him to execute eschatological judgement, and consummate the kingdom of God, already inaugurated during the first coming; and the final ushering in of the New Age, including the final realities of heaven and hell. The above 'list' indicates the basic markers of the biblical story line. Obviously the theological explication of these markers or if you will, foundational beliefs, is to be found in the abundant evangelical literature already existing.

2.5 The Act of Theologising

We have earlier highlighted the fact that the reasoning process must recognize the subjective element and the need for personal commitment. As evangelical Christians we find ourselves in the personal-cognitive act of articulating our faith and responding to its existential implications for us. For evangelicalism, the theological act is

²¹ Lesslie Newbigin, *Truth to tell: The Gospel as public truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 34.

²² James W. Sire, 'On Being a Fool for Christ and an Idiot for Nobody: Logocentricity and Postmodernity' in T. Philips & D. Okholm (eds.), *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World* (Downers Grove: I.V.P., 1995), pp. 120-122.

²³ I. Howard Marshall, *I Believe in the Historical Jesus* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1977), pp. 73-74.

²⁴ Jon Hinkson & Greg Ganssle, 'Epistemology at the Core of Postmodernism: Rorty, Foucault and the Gospel' in D. Carson (gen. ed.), *Telling the Truth: Evangelising Postmoderns* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), p. 85.

at once a challenge and an indictment. While there is an increasing body of serious evangelical scholarship worldwide, it must be allowed that outside of the academy a significant proportion of the evangelical population is either afraid of or too lazy to enter into the intellectual dimension of the faith. Wells bemoans the weakening, at least in his part of the world, of 'theological profundity'. For Wells there has been too much alliance with modernity and a letting go of God's transcendent demand upon us. Also, the church and the theological academy have not taken each other seriously enough.²⁵ Noll goes a step further and calls for a revitalisation of intellectual pursuit across the board (secular and religious) of disciplines. We must entertain a creative and broad based intellectual life of the mind.²⁶

Evangelical theology worldwide is now opening up more to the call and action of contextualisation. We believe that this is a good development as long as it is done seriously rather than fadishly. Curtis and Brugaletta rightly point out that a 'dialogue with the world' is critical for Christian understanding, with the proviso that we do not get sucked up into the *zeitgeist* of the world.²⁷ Different cultural con-

texts, of course, provide somewhat different worlds. On a broad level, the 'African Renaissance' movement currently being spearheaded by Thabo Mbeki of South Africa has presented a serious challenge to evangelical theology in Africa, as the movement impacts directly on the 'Africanisation' of Christianity. Unfortunately we have no space to discuss the intricate relationship between culture and theology in this particular essay, other than to say with Grenz and Olsen that theology involves 'trialogue', that is, allowing the interplay between scripture, theological heritage and culture.²⁸

It goes without saying that one's theological agenda or prior theological orientation directly affects how one would contextualise. In the African context, we have the example of the evangelical Bediako²⁹ and the non-evangelical Oduyoye³⁰ who similarly criticize the evangelical theologian Byang Kato for an alleged insensitivity to local culture and lack of desire to enter into inter-religious dialogue, as well as for his belief that divine revelation is to be found only in the Christian tradition. Even within given orientations, then, including evangelicalism, the various points of departure of the-

²⁵ David Wells, *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 290-292.

²⁶ Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

²⁷ Edward M. Curtis & John Brugaletta, *Transformed Thinking: Loving God with all Your Mind* (Franklin: J.K.O. Publishing, 1996), pp. 35-36.

²⁸ Stanley J. Grenz & Roger E. Olsen, *Who Needs Theology?: An Invitation to the Study of God* (Downers Grove: I.V.P., 1996), pp. 112-113.

²⁹ Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture Upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992), pp. 397-413.

³⁰ Mercy A. Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1986), pp. 63-65.

ologians across the globe result in differing theological confessions, although the fundamental or foundational beliefs must remain globally and recognizably Christian. For evangelicals, the existence of positional differences in theology does not abrogate the truthfulness of God's revelation in and of itself. In all of this, the centrality and authority of Christ remains key.

Theologising ideally is an *act* in that it should involve the interplay of the following factors: subjective knowledge and belief; the objective content of revelation; general context; personal worldview and point of departure; theological agenda; and absolute personal commitment. Along with this, of course, is the fact that God and his word continually address us. The role of *faith* is vital here, and evangelicalism is cognisant of the ongoing debate over the precise relationship between faith and knowledge. At the end of the existential and theological day, however, it can still be said that we accept a particular theological formulation as true by an act of faith. For evangelicalism, our response to the divine revealer and his revelation strengthens our faith. Holmes reminds us that faith in and of itself is not knowledge; rather, it is a subjective and trusting response to God and his revelation.³¹ The act of theology, then, is none other than our faithful participation in the dimension of 'word'. Faith and act speak of experience, the dimension to which we now move.

3 THE DIMENSION OF EXPERIENCE

3.1 The Givenness Of Experience

As human beings, we do not merely exist; we also grow in subjective experience. In this, we do not live as isolated beings. All human beings (including rugged individualists and existentialists) live in relation to each other, the environment, and God, either as estranged or reconciled. Further, we find ourselves to be creatures of space and time, and thus experience duration. This linear progression from one moment to another allows us to keep building on the fountain of human experience. The preceding tells us that it is impossible to live a human life without gaining some degree of knowledge and wisdom. This also includes the unavoidable experience of the historical tension between good and evil, although Christians will have a different historical perspective from non-Christians. As a whole, the human experience is anything but uniform. This is because of the multitude of cultural, social, religious, geographical, and political points of departure. Evangelical theologians are becoming more aware of the above scenario as they attempt to articulate Christian experience in this day and age.

The issue of specific Christian experiences actually engenders much debate in evangelical circles. Klaas Runia offers the interesting concept of 'clusters' of experience as far as Christians are concerned. For Runia, *justification* implies the experiences of becoming Christian, *sanctification* cov-

31 Arthur F. Holmes, *All Truth is God's Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), pp. 71-72.

ers the experiences of spiritual growth and witness in the world, and the *charismata* lead to the experiences of serving God and each other in the church and the world.³² In all of this, we would contend, evangelicals share the whole package of discoveries and disappointments, certainties and doubts, suffering and freedom, stagnation and purpose. Unfortunately, evangelicalism is marked by in-house tensions between non-charismatics and charismatics over such issues as baptism of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues. However we approach these issues, and the broader field of experience, evangelicalism must be careful to actualise the unity that exists amidst diversity.

We have discussed earlier the place of subjectivity in our attempt to understand reality. Evangelical scholarship will see our cognitive faculties and subjective daily experiences as epistemological siblings. The dialectical tension between the two can only stimulate the growth of our Christian understanding. In Zimbabwe, black and white evangelicals will sometimes have different tensions to deal with. Black Christians, for example, face the issues of ancestral spirits and the relationship between the natural and the supernatural, as well as the issue of cultural identity. White Christians will tend to focus more on western issues of experience and doctrine. Whatever the tensions are, however, evangelicals will tend to define what is normative via the conceptual

rather than the experiential. Davis rightly feels that experience is not the norm of truth as such, but it is a channel for it, and it makes truth 'real'.³³ Indeed it can be said that experience often validates or invalidates a given conceptive idea. For evangelicalism, though, truth in and of itself is normative and universal, whereas sometimes experience can be misleading.³⁴

3.2 The Place of Christ

Evangelicalism holds fast to the claim by the Word that he is the vine and believers are the branches and as such are to 'abide' in the vine (Jn. 15:1-4). For evangelicalism the centrality of Christ in Christian experience cannot be over-emphasized. The demand to abide is given to believers as individuals and as members of the 'body' of Christ. This implies that the 'image of Christ' to which we are to be conformed must be reflected on both the individual and corporate levels. For Christians, then, one's existential focus should be to *actualise* one's dependence on Christ. Runia rightly insists that the very source of Christian experience lies in our union with Christ, which union is engendered by our relationship to the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Christ.³⁵

Kraus presents us with the stimulating idea that our understanding of personhood is linked to Jesus being the self-disclosure of God. As such, Jesus

³² Klaas Runia, 'Towards a Biblical Theology of Experience' in I. Howard Marshall (ed.), *Christian Experience in Theology and Life* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1988), pp. 187-193.

³³ John J. Davis, *Foundations of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), p. 167.

³⁴ Holmes, *All Truth*, pp. 80-81.

³⁵ Klaas Runia, 'Biblical Theology of Experience', pp. 177-179.

reveals the ‘ultimate nature’ of personal being and relationship—in fact, he is the ‘other in whose presence the nature of our own selfhood is disclosed’.³⁶ Evangelical theology will be quick to insist that this does not mean that we become divine, but it does mean that our divine saviour is the means of our existential self-understanding. None of this could happen, it must be said, without the ministries of the Holy Spirit within believers and the body of Christ as a whole. Our experience of, and our relationship with, the Son and the Spirit further picture our filial relationship with the Father.

4 The Dimension of Mission

4.1 The Witness of Mission

To be a Christian is to participate in the human story. For evangelical theology the *Christian* human story lies within the greater human story, and both stories answer to the biblical story line. The individual believer and the corporate body of Christ actuate the Christian story which becomes the story of mission; the branches of the Vine are to bring forth fruit. Mission, then, is the natural outworking of faith. It is public witness, by Christians, to the Christ and his existential demands upon us. It is the announcement of the divine answer to the human question. This answer required God’s identification with the human story and this took place through the deeds and words of the incarnate Son.

We must not forget, of course, that God has always been answering mankind via his revelatory address throughout human history; but the supreme address was Jesus Christ. The ascension of the historical Christ meant that those who follow him are to continue with, and participate in, the mission of Christ in the world. This participation must follow the pattern of the Son—deeds and words. Our mission or witness, then, is representative, that is, we labour under the ongoing authority of Christ. Kraus explains that we ‘represent him [Christ] in acts of witness (*marturia*) that continue his witness to the father’³⁷ (Emphasis original). We are serving *Christ*, not ourselves or the institutional church. For evangelicalism, there is an integral relationship between the act of proclamation and the demand of service, and it is to be empowered by the Spirit.³⁸

Our witness-service is constantly under fire from the pluralistic world surrounding us. Non-religionists and adherents of other religions consider it arrogant for Christians to promote only the Christian story line and the biblical Christ. Evangelicalism, the in-house debate between exclusivists and inclusivists notwithstanding, holds firm to the priority and uniqueness of Christ. As Kirk argues, the *uniqueness* of Christ is indeed the central issue in inter-religious encounter.³⁹ For evangelicalism,

36 C. Norman Kraus, *Jesus Christ our Lord: Christology From a Disciple’s Perspective* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1987), p. 120.

37 C. Norman Kraus, *Jesus Christ our Lord*, p. 243.

38 Donald G. Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit: Authority and Method in Theology* (Downers Grove: I.V.P., 1992), p. 234.

39 J. Andrew Kirk, *What is Mission?: Theological Explorations* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), p. 135.

the Christ of Christianity is ontologically a member of the Trinitarian Godhead—there can be no other religious Christ.

Naturally the Christian stand against pluralism involves more than what we think about Jesus Christ. Carson reminds us that this stand covers more than epistemological and Christological differences; in fact ‘an entire vision of reality is at stake’.⁴⁰ We are advocating for a complete worldview and it is incumbent upon us to be familiar with the biblical story line in this regard. Our witness implies that we have a grasp of reality, however limited, and our bold call is for others to adopt a Christian worldview and submit to Christ. It is our goal that others should become Christianly human (the debates on election-predestination notwithstanding). In all of this we affirm Kirk’s view that the world and its cultures must not ultimately control our agenda; rather, the church is to be faithful to the apostolic witness.⁴¹ None of this means that evangelicalism is automatically anti-dialogue with other religions as there are benefits to be obtained through dialogue, but it is not prepared to relegate Christ to mere equality with competing ‘saviours’ or systems.

The whole question of stewardship and justice as avenues of witness is a major discussion in its own right. At this point we shall just state that the biblical injunctions to environmental responsibility and the doing of peace and justice (Gen. 1: 26-30; Mt. 25:31-

46) are open and clear. Evangelicalism has for some time been conscious of its peace and justice mission, but its sensitivity to ecological issues is fairly recent. Wilkinson speaks of our creative relation to the environment to the effect that human beings and especially Christians cannot avoid their God-given task of responsible environmental management. Creation is obviously important to the creator.⁴² In fact creation ‘is fallen through human sin and will be redeemed through human redemption’.⁴³ For evangelicals, our environment and justice record now forms a major part of the witness of mission. Our deeds in fact constitute a significant part of our word.

4.2 The Eschatology of Mission

Evangelicalism maintains that at some point in space-time history, the witness of mission as we understand it for now, will come to an end. The church does well to realize its historical perspective arising from the ‘salvation’ and ‘theological’ histories that precede and accompany it. Our proclamation and activity of today can never be isolated from what has gone on before. This means that just as human history is linear, so is church history, and in fact this falls in with God’s eschatological plan for humanity. For evangelicalism there is a definite consummation to this present history or age; indeed, we expectantly await the real and historical second coming of the

⁴⁰ Don A. Carson, ‘Christian Witness in an Age of Pluralism’ in D. A. Carson & J. D. Woodbridge (eds.), *God and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 63.

⁴¹ Kirk, *What is Mission?*, p. 92.

⁴² Loren Wilkinson, ‘The Uneasy Conscience of the Human Race’ in D. Carson & J. Woodbridge (eds.) *God and Culture*, pp. 316-319.

⁴³ Wilkinson, ‘The Uneasy Conscience’, p. 317.

Christ who has impacted history. Our present history will give way to the eternal history of the New Age.

The continuity-discontinuity debate over the coming in of the New Age is an interesting one. For our purposes, it will suffice to say that the consummation of our history does not imply a complete discontinuity. We would agree with Berkhof that there is no *absolute* contrast because 'Christ who is the first fruit, and the Spirit who is the guarantee of our glorification, are already active in the world'.⁴⁴ Christ and the Spirit, then, are actualising the kingdom of God in this world through their own sovereign activities and through the church. When this history ends (when the kingdom of God has grown up into the big mustard tree and the yeast has done its work [Mt. 13:31-33]), there will be a carry over of the fruit that has been achieved into the new age.

In the light of the above, we would agree with Kuzmic in his desire to see the discontinuity-continuity tension maintained and who states that we are 'invited to both the responsible *participation* in the Kingdom-already-arrived, and to the watchful *expectation* of the Kingdom-still-to-come'.⁴⁵ (Emphasis original). This means that we can in fact talk of *the accountability of mission*. We have only a limited time period in which to accomplish the *missio Dei*; it is in *this* history that we must realize our Christ-

ian being and witness. Evangelical theology firmly holds that at the eschaton we will inescapably have to account for our lives and service to the kingdom (Mt. 25:14-30; 1 Cor. 3:11-15).

5 Together as One

5.1 Holistic Unity

The above discussion on the dimensions of word, experience, and mission does not mean that they operate independently. Evangelical theology is keen to emphasize a holistic understanding of these dimensions, that is, they must be treated as an integrated unity. To be sure, the dimension of 'word' receives much attention because of the evangelical propensity for conceptive or cognitive revelation along with an attendant programme of theological construction. It is this dimension that other theological orientations and the spirit of postmodernism challenge the most. Nevertheless, evangelicalism affirms the idea that knowledge, truth and belief derive from an integration of our three dimensions. The three are understood as being in dialectical tension with each other. Indeed the very contemplation of, and search for, reality or truth already implies experience; the evaluation of experience already implies the ability to think and make value judgments; and the realities of contemplation and experience become meaningless apart from a sense of existential mission, at least for Christians. The objective, subjective and missional operate holistically to form the platform from which the Christian self can relate to *the it, the thou, and the THOU*.

⁴⁴ Hendrikus Berkhoff, *Christ the Meaning of History*, trans. by L. Buurman, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1966), p. 184.

⁴⁵ Peter Kuzmic, 'History and Eschatology: Evangelical Views' in B. Nicholls (ed.), *In Word and Deed: Evangelism and Social Responsibility* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1985), pp. 153-154.

The above idea can be carried over into the concept of holistic spirituality. Traditionally, the idea of spirituality has been related to the activities of the human spirit or soul where one's 'religious' experience of God is supposed to take place. To our mind, while the written word of God does seem to speak of the materiality and immateriality of the human constitution, it nevertheless cannot be accused of promoting some sort of Platonic dualism. Our contention is that *all* of life's dimensions comprise a realistic spirituality. The physical and non-physical are lived equally before God. If we define spirituality as living according to the revealed will of our Maker, in whose image we have been created, then this will involve the totality of our human existence. For believers spirituality, that is, living in a conscious relationship with the Father, Son and Spirit, must be expressed in the physical, mental, volitional, emotive, 'religious', social, work, play, family, and ecological areas.

5.2 Holistic Diversity

Our overall human history has reflected many sub-histories, ranging from the tragic to the triumphant. Also, human experience is punctuated with diversity, which seems to reflect the creative will of God, barring the problems of sin and evil of course. Be all this as it may, there is still only one human race with all non-Christians standing equally in need of salvation. Those who are saved have the awesome responsibility of demonstrating how to be Christianly human in whatever particular historical situation one finds oneself. The truth of the biblical storyline does not change even if our

situations and theologies do. God and his word can still directly and holistically impact the human situation in all its diversity.

We are all children of our culture and cultural language. This applies also to the historical body of Christ even as responsible 'strangers in the world' (1 Pet. 2:9-12). Our historical-cultural diversity will of course affect how we interpret the world and the word. In the light of this, evangelicalism recognizes the need for informed and scholarly hermeneutics, but it also continues to insist on the existence of foundational truth or universals or absolutes, which holistically apply to all aspects of living. It is realized that this insistence precedes our fallible human theologising. Our constructs may vary, but the Constant is Jesus Christ and his prior conceptive word.

Evangelicals may disagree on various issues, but if Christ is the Constant, we *can* talk of a global Christian faith, embodying the above-mentioned unity, with the proviso that there will be various or diverse contextual expressions of it. The global church will still hold to foundational Christian truth as the kingdom of God continues to grow and the sovereignty of God remains intact. There can be only one body of Christ anyway, incorporating the fact that all Christians, wherever they are, live out their Christian faith via the dimensions we have been discussing. In all of this we should be together as one.

The unity and diversity issue of course brings up the vital and somewhat controversial question of *final theological authority*. This requires a separate study in its own right. Who or what does one listen to? Obvious can-

didates are God, or the Bible, or one's denomination, or experience, or traditions and confessions, or geographical location (the contextualisation issue). We do believe that God has linguistically revealed truth to us, but our contextual and methodological differences, even as evangelicals, may sometimes cause a stirring of the theological waters. Most evangelicals would probably opt for the view that all the above candidates contribute to the platform of authority, with an emphasis on the dimension of 'word', as this combines the aspects of truth and God himself. However we end up on the issue of authority, evangelicals will still reiterate the view that concept, experience and mission interrelate with one another and that these in turn relate to Jesus Christ.

6 Conclusion

It should be clear that we have been discussing evangelicalism on a general level, as it is a very broad based trans-denominational orientation. In a short essay we, of course, have been able only to touch on issues rather than discuss them in depth, including the sensitive dimension of conceptive revelation and the grasping of truth. Nevertheless, we trust that we have presented a fair picture of the evangelical mind and methodology. As in any other theological orientation, we have indicated that there will be in-house debate over the specific application of what we have said.

We have been proposing, then, that evangelicalism functions around the dimensions of word, experience, and mission and that these three operate together. God has spoken and acted in

history—we are to do the same, that is, to participate in God's 'salvific' and 'general' historical programme. To be Christian is to be Christianly human before other humans and to draw them into the kingdom of God. We do this by *hearing* God's truth for us, *experiencing* it, and *servicing* it as it penetrates the human story. Our personal and corporate experience of being Christian, and our public witness of the divine initiative and demands, must be holistic, faithful, and buoyed by the hope of Christ within us.

The evangelical picture is always undergoing development, especially in the areas of methodology and belief. Further, evangelical scholarship is becoming more constructively engaged with other theological orientations, the need to do deeper in-house theologising notwithstanding. In all of our theological activity, the belief that the Trinitarian God has historically acted *and* has accordingly revealed a certain body of truth remains an evangelical watershed. There *are* things to be understood and believed. What we believe directs and motivates the equally important areas of lifestyle and sense of mission. We need to be reminded here that emphasis on the dimension of word does not contradict or abrogate the holistic unity of the three dimensions, all of which interface with each other and attach to the living Word. For evangelicalism, it is accepted that all three contain constants and variables, and that this can be at once liberating and problematic. Nevertheless, to be addressed by the word of God, to experience the way of Christ, and to be engaged in God's will on Earth as it is in Heaven (mission), is to live the normal Christian life.

A Prolegomena for the Thai Context: A Starting Point for Thai Theology

Steve Taylor

KEYWORDS: *Thailand, contextualization, contextual, theology, systematic, philosophy, define, narrate*

Introduction

'The Thai are not interested in systematic theology.' This statement puzzled me earlier on in my missionary career but I soon came to realize that even among the faculty of theological institutions, little enthusiasm exists for the subject.

The reason is not too hard to find. Most, if not all, of the theology taught in Thailand, as in most other parts of the region, is western in origin. This theology was formed and developed historically in the context of the questions, epistemology and philosophy of the western mind. D. T. Niles once expressed this concern with brilliant imagery. 'Christianity in Asia', he said, 'is like a potted plant which has been

transported without being transplanted.'¹

More specifically, the thought processes and epistemology of the Thai have generally not developed along western lines. They hold different presuppositions and world view from those of the West. Furthermore, 'local theologies which are directly applicable to the Thai mind and culture have not yet emerged'.² The gospel of Jesus Christ cannot yet be said to have become rooted in the Thai mind. Further, given the make up of Eastern thought, some have also questioned the place or timeliness of *systematized*

1 Douglas J. Elwood, "Asian Christian Theology in the Making: An Introduction," in *Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Themes* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1980), p. 27.

2 John Davis, *Poles Apart?* (Bangkok: Kanok Bannasan, 1993), pp. 31-37, 141.

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theology in the Asian context.³

The attempts that have been made so far at contextual theology in Asia have by and large been theologies *from below* where primarily the context, rather than revelation, has dictated the agenda. These have generally not been well received by the more orthodox evangelical sector and the result has been a wariness of any form of contextualization.

If we are to be not only orthodox, however, but also effective then the context of the recipient must of necessity be considered. Orthodoxy places importance on revelation, the authority of scripture and attention to the historical faith as handed down to us. Effectiveness places importance on the mode and style of communication within any particular context. Under the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the fruit will be not only interest but also excitement as truth is received in the cognitive, affective and evaluative dimensions of the recipient.

The Necessity for *Thai* Theology

Parallels between theology and the emergence of philosophy in the Thai context may be observed. Some debate has gone on as to whether a Thai philosophy is possible. Dr Soraj Hongladarom, Associate Professor of philosophy at Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, suggests that so long as the Thai commu-

nity reflects upon itself then Thai philosophy is not only possible but it is actually taking place.⁴ In a similar manner, so long as Thais reflect upon God and truth related to him, then Thai theology is taking place. Although I have lived and worked among the Thai for the past twenty-three years, I am acutely aware that in my own pursuit and desire to contribute to Thai theology, I am doing so from a non-Thai, etic (outsider's) perspective. To the extent that I may be a catalyst to help the Thai to think theologically themselves, however, I shall have made a positive contribution. Further, a collaboration of the etic and emic (insider's) perspectives may well be the most fruitful route to an orthodox and effective Thai theology.

Professor Kirti Bunchua, a leading Thai thinker and teacher of philosophy at Assumption University, notes, however, that it is hard to find a creative Thai philosophy among the Thai. One of the main reasons he gives is that Thais who study western philosophy are not ready to follow the advancements of western philosophy to the extent that they can make a positive contribution. He is certain, nevertheless, that Thai thinkers are capable of being creative in the same way as anyone else of other cultures. Thais who were interested in philosophy, however, had to start with ideas developed from the West, which they were not able to fully appreciate nor contribute to. Dr Kirti believes that the Thai will

3 See Douglas J. Elwood for example, 'Asian Christian Theology in the Making: An Introduction', in *Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Themes* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1980), p. 30.

4 Soraj Hongladarom, *How is Thai Philosophy Possible?* (Bangkok: [Online]. Available: <http://pioneer.netserv.chula.ac.th/~hsoraj/web/Thai.html>, 2002)

truly excel and make a unique contribution to philosophy in their own creative way only when they do it in the Thai way and in the context of what the Thais are interested in.⁵ His sentiments may be perfectly paralleled to the need for Thais to do theology in the Thai way and in areas that interest them.

While not agreeing with all elements of his theology, M.M. Thomas, an Indian theologian, rightly says: 'Where a people's pre-understanding is left alone without bringing it under the service of the Christian Gospel (believers) will remain pre-Christian in their mind and this will affect the whole person in due course. Their response to the Christian faith, being unrelated to their inner thought patterns, will remain limited and immature.'⁶

This present study is partly the result of earlier research I made concerning the extent to which traditional Thai beliefs (Buddhism, Animism, Brahmanism) and the Thai social structure influence the Thai Christians' concept of God.⁷ The study confirmed that in a variety of ways the Thai Christian's concept of God is

influenced by traditional Thai beliefs which produce what I call 'gaps' in his or her belief system. More concerning, however, was that the study also revealed that these gaps are still equally evident, despite the length of time the respondent has been a Christian.

This clearly displays a deficiency in the content of Christian education in the Thai context. The teaching, predominantly western in origin and geared more to the westerner's questions and needs, is insufficient to penetrate the specific areas where the Thais need emphasis, leaving these 'gaps' untouched. My burden for contextual theology in the Thai context is that it be developed so as to emphasize those areas specific to the Thai need in order that these and other *gaps* may be addressed.

The Necessity for Thai *Systematic* Theology

Paul declared to the Ephesian elders that he had not hesitated to proclaim the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26-27). This probably has reference to his two years of daily discussions with both Jews and Greeks in the hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9-10) and presumably involved a framework of teaching which encompassed the whole scope of God's revelation. Without proposing a tight logically dependent system of theology, Paul's example may provide a precedent for systematizing theology in other contexts.

Hwa Yung (Principal, Seminari Theoloji Malaysia) poses the question that, 'given the fact that linear logic is not the primary mode of thinking of many Asians, should theology be "system-

5 Kirti Bunchua, *Grabuantat Radap Pratyakawng Nak Kit Thai (Philosophical Paradigms of Thai Thinkers) (Thai Language)* (Bangkok: Unpublished Manuscript, Under the Sponsorship of the Thai National Research Institute, 2002), pp. 178-179.

6 M.M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance* (London: SCM, 1969), p. 303.

7 The results and framework of this research are published as 'Gaps in Beliefs of Thai Christians', *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 37(1) (2001): 72-81.

atic" in the Asian context?' In reply, he points out that, 'the preference for linear or non-linear logic is never exclusive in any culture. Rather, it is a matter of relative emphasis.' He explains further that,

rather than understanding systematic theology in terms of some *a priori* philosophical or other concept, such as existentialism or dispensationalism... what is envisaged is a systematic reflection on the key themes of the Christian faith arising out of a dialectic between text and context, and informed by mission and pastoral concerns... Systematic Theology should not be dropped out of the syllabus of Asian theological colleges and seminaries ... [Asian Christians, Thais included] ... need a framework within which to think about God's revelation of himself and his activity in the world, in the context of their own cultures and the missiological tasks they face.⁸

Further, a basic presupposition of hermeneutics is the *unity of Scripture*. The Bible, itself, is the best commentator on the Bible. Scripture should be compared with scripture for light on each passage in order to discover the unity of its teaching. Since the whole Bible is true in all its parts, the interpreter must seek the unity of the passage under consideration with all other sections of scripture. One cannot determine the meaning of a passage independent of other sections of scripture. Some degree of systematization

of biblical truth is necessary, therefore, whatever the context.

Finding a Model

Already stated is the necessity for theology to be both orthodox and effective. Both revelation and context need to be taken seriously. The harmony of these two considerations is of utmost importance and is a most delicate enterprise. Hubbard graphically compares it to the fiddler in *The Fiddler on the Roof*:

Fall to the right and you end in obscurantism, so attached to your conventional ways of practicing and teaching the faith that you veil its truth and power from those who are trying to see it through very different eyes. Slip to the left and you tumble into syncretism, so vulnerable to the impact of paganism in its multiplicity of forms that you compromise the uniqueness of Christ and concoct another gospel which is not a gospel.⁹

Several approaches to doing contextual / cross cultural theology have been categorized. Adams,¹⁰ Schreiter¹¹, Hesselgrave and Rommen,¹² all present various models or classifications.

9 David Allan Hubbard, *The Word Among Us: Contextualizing Theology for Mission Today* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1989), p. vii.

10 Daniel J. Adams, *Cross Cultural Theology: Western Reflections in Asia* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987), pp. 73ff.

11 Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985), pp. 6ff.

12 David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2000), pp. 151ff.

8 Hwa Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas: The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology* (New Delhi: Regnum Books, 1997), p. 228.

Dyrness suggests four models as follows¹³:

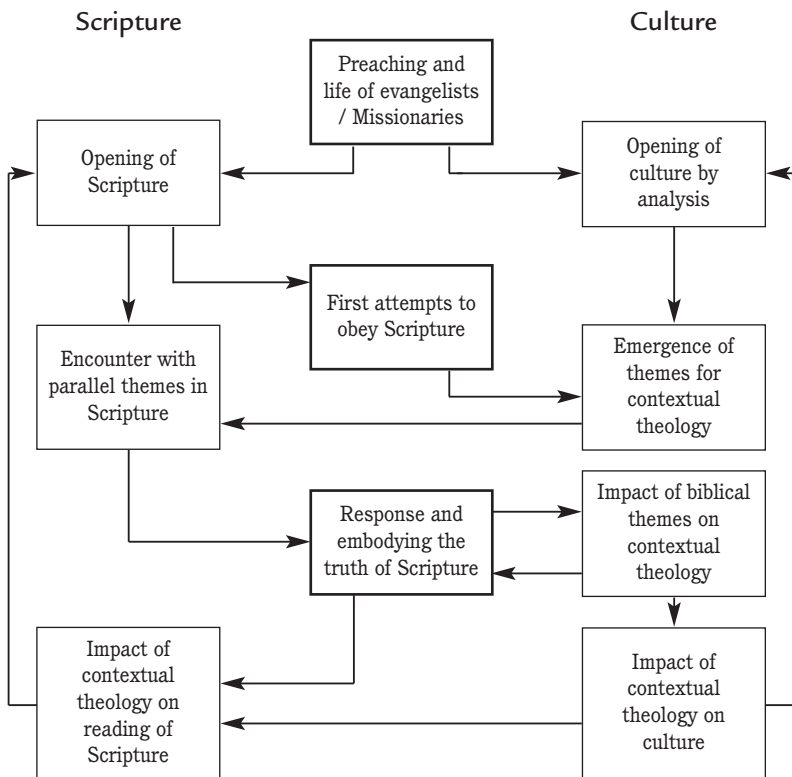
1. *Anthropological Model*, through a thorough understanding and appreciation of the culture (e.g. Asian theologian Choan-Seng Song). The assumption is that God is present in all cultures working out his purposes. This model lends itself to syncretism
2. *Praxis Model* (e.g. Latin American theologian Gustavo Gutierrez), which

likewise takes the culture seriously and more especially sides with those who are oppressed. God's involvement in history is for liberation from all kinds of oppression. While introducing the important category of *practice* as an essential component of theological insight, this method tends to undermine the more spiritual and supracultural elements of the gospel

3. *Translation Model* (e.g. American

Interaction Model of Contextualization¹⁴

Fig. 1



13 William A. Dyrness, *Learning About Theology From The Third World* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1980), pp. 25ff.

14 Dyrness, *Learning About Theology From The Third World*, p. 30.

ethnotheologian Charles Kraft), which is an attempt to place the gospel within culture without changing its content. Although God is transcultural, he communicates through culture. The goal, therefore, is to *decode* the message of the Bible so that it can be *re-encoded* so as to be heard in a dynamically equivalent manner as those in the original situation. While in basic agreement with this model, it is still weak in application to specific demands placed upon Christians originating from within their culture itself

4. *Interactional Model* (Dyrness's own suggestion) consisting of proclamation of the Scripture message in culturally appropriate fashion, taking seriously the life of the evangelist which will speak to the situation of the hearer, and then the needs and aspirations of the culture are to be understood and shown to be important to God who is already working within the culture. The believer then responds to those themes of Scripture that parallel the questions of the culture. It is this fourth Model which appears most attractive and is presented diagrammatically in Fig. 1.

A final helpful model was suggested to me during a personal interview with Bruce Nicholls, former Executive Director, WEA Theological Commission¹⁵. His own model is that of a *spiral* moving continuously between God's Word (revelation) and context but going in an eschatological direction. In this way, theology is not static but heading towards Christ's second com-

ing and the establishment of his kingdom.

Investigating Thai Philosophy and Thought Patterns

'All theology rests upon presuppositions and principles'¹⁶ and these form the basis on which the arguments are amplified. Both the *orthodoxy* and the *effectiveness* of the final work may be predicted from careful analysis of the prolegomena. Indeed Spykman states, 'Show me your prolegomena, and I will predict the rest of your theology.'¹⁷

Most theological systems in the west have developed within the context of the prevailing philosophies of the time, and those philosophies have helped shape the prolegomena. An appropriate starting point for developing a prolegomena for Thai theology, therefore, is a study of Thai philosophy and thought patterns.

'The study of Thai thought', however, 'is still a new subject in academic circles.'¹⁸ A seemingly endless stream of books is readily available on Thai culture and religious belief. Source materials on the philosophy and the

¹⁵ Bruce J. Nicholls, *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1979).

¹⁶ Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics Volume 1: Prolegomena to Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), p. 53.

¹⁷ Gordon J. Spykman, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), p. 40.

¹⁸ Thirayut Bunmi, *Brawatsat Kwam Kit Kawng Sangkom Thai Chuang Ton (History of Traditional Thai Thought) (Thai Language)* (Bangkok: Seminar Notes 30th September 1986 Quality Research Society, Chulalongkorn University Research Institute, 1986), p. 1.

epistemology of the Thai, however, are extremely rare and almost conspicuous by their absence. Their very absence, however, is in some way an indicator of the thought structure of the Thai, as will be discovered through the contributions of Professor Kirti Bunchua.

My study involved both research in the libraries and archives of Bangkok universities and a series of interviews with some leading Thai thinkers (both Christian and non-Christian). Interview questions centred around the following topics: whether the Thai think predominantly deductively or inductively; why the Thai believe what they believe (epistemology); what is true or real; the role of experience, feelings, reason or revelation as a basis for faith; the Thai world view; conceptual versus empiricism; miracles; mythology, among others. Significant findings are summarised in the following paragraphs.

Animism, Brahmanism and Buddhism are the traditional religions of Thailand. Only animism, however, is truly their own, the other two being imports. Often the Thai need a *dependence point* in the form of magical objects made potent through incantations to invoke the spirits. The purpose is to relieve oneself of suffering or to gain success or to protect one from danger e.g. bullets or knives.¹⁹ As people become more educated and modernized, it would be expected that

these beliefs and practices, which are usually seen as characteristics of peasant society, should be phasing out. Research, however, has shown that this is not the case.

The naturally syncretistic Thai have traditionally *added* or synthesized new beliefs into their belief system as opposed to negating or replacing the old. If asked whether they are real Buddhists or not, they would answer that they are Buddhists the Thai way. They are Buddhists with many other world views mixed in. Even though these different world views are inconsistent with each other, they have been able to adjust them so that they fit together as one. The Thai belief system has been described as being like the image of a jedi with various religions one on top of another. At the base there is animism, on top of that there are the magical beliefs stemming from Brahmanism and Hinduism, and on top of that, Buddhism.²⁰

Bunmi observes that the Thai's initial attraction to Buddhism was the *heroic* element, following the line of the Thai's belief in the protector spirit. The Thais look for one who is brave, just like the benevolent fathers of the city who were brave and did good. At that time, Thai society was an oral society. Buddhism was spread in the early days by telling the *chadok lon nibad* (a Jataka, that is, one of 500 odd stories of former incarnations of the Buddha) more so than the *lak apitam* (principles from the book of the *Tripitaka* (Three Baskets) which is the Pali canon and

¹⁹ Maryat Kitsuwat, *Kwam Chua Tang Durm Kawng Thai (Traditional Thai Belief) (Thai Language)* (Bangkok: Course Notes Thai Culture, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, 1980), pp. ii, 19, 20.

²⁰ Nuangnoi Boonyanati, 'Fortune (Duang)' in *Key Terms in Thai Thoughts* (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 1992), p. 56.

the earliest systematic and most complete collection of early Buddhist sacred literature). The point here is that the Thai were not attracted to the principles of Buddhism per se but rather to the *heroic* life of the Buddha himself, viz. the Buddha's self sacrifice, wisdom, majesty (or prestige), patience, steadfastness and tranquility.²¹

While the concepts of impermanence and karma are indeed strong in Thai thought, the idea that since over 90% of Thais are Buddhist, then their philosophy must be Buddhist philosophy has been strongly rejected by some. Dr Kirti says that Buddhist philosophy is not Thai philosophy since it originated in India, not Thailand. He explains that if Thai philosophy were Buddhist philosophy then the Thai would have thought and expanded on it, which they have not. Educated Thai were able to study and divide and memorize the teachings in great detail, but this was not their real interest. They could study and memorize the principles of Buddhism, but they didn't think and expand on them or seek to further define them.²²

Dr Kirti believes that the Buddha's style of teaching and presentation was of the type that would appeal to the Aryan mind, that is to *define*, and research in order to further define. Educated Thai who were able to be cre-

ative did so in another channel, that is along the characteristics of the Thai language and according to the innate character of the Thai. What is clear is that these were true thinkers but they thought in a Thai way even though they may not meet the specifications of the Aryan. Dr Kirti's basic premise is that whereas the westerner likes to *define*, the Thai likes to *narrate*.

The Thai are unlike the westerner in that they do not find a need to define what they see or experience. This is evidenced by the negligible use of the verb *to be* in the Thai language. Their lack of interest in defining may well explain in part why there is so little written about how Thai think or what Thai thought *is*. The Thai, on the other hand, like to *narrate*, that is to amplify, relate or find new ways of expressing the same thing. This ability is enhanced by the language which has little fixed grammar but lends itself to *narration*. Their interest would lie more in the area of what something *does* and how it may affect one. It is at this point that it is believed that the Thai may make a contribution to theology in the Thai way, rather than seeking to contribute within the western model. It is interesting to note that the Bible itself does very little *defining*. For example, we don't find any summary statement defining what sin *is*, but we do find many explanations of what sin *does* and its effects. Definitions are a peculiar ingredient of western systematic theology.

Concerning epistemology, I asked those I interviewed whether the Thai are basically inductive or deductive in their method of 'knowing'. Dr Kirti gave this rather stunning reply:

21 Bunmi, *Brawatsat Kwam Kit Kawng Sangkom Thai Chuang Ton (History of Traditional Thai Thought) (Thai Language)*, pp. 21-23.

22 Bunchua, *Grabuantat Radap Praty Kawng Nak Kit Thai (Philosophical Paradigms of Thai Thinkers) (Thai Language)*, pp. 36, 173.

The *deductive* means that you start with the general and you go to the particular. The *inductive* is where you go from the particular to the general. But the Thai argumentation, which I call the *intuitive*, is where you don't have any reason or augmentation, the intuitive is on the inside. You feel what it is. But the argumentation of the Thai people is to jump from particular to particular. And this particular is not based on understanding, but on feeling. What do you feel? A particular feeling to another particular feeling. The Thai move from *particular to particular* without working back to the source or principle.

In this way the Thai start from feeling and then they compare it to another feeling. They move from particular to particular without necessarily working back to the general. He illustrated this by explaining that if one sees a river, the inductive mind will ask where the water came from. But the Thai would think intuitively according to their feeling. They would *feel* that the water is useful... and then would think if it were to overflow then there would be trouble... and so on. They would not think of origins but rather the effect of the water on me and how it may affect me in the future.

Let us take another example. Aristotle's logic starts with the term 'man is mortal' and argues according to this proposition, that is who man *is*. But the real thought of the Thai is not like this. They have no equivalent to argumentation or reasoning in this way. They are not interested in the ontology of what man *is*. The Thai are more interested in what is the appearance of man? what

does he look like? what does he do? how does he act? Then the reasoning of the Thai comes from one's feeling. What do you feel towards this and what do you feel next? Again, quoting Dr Kirti from my interview with him,

For example, when you feel that your mother is very good, you have the feeling that your mother is very good. So if your mother is very good, what do you have to do to her? So the feeling of giving back to her, so you have to do something for her. With the feeling, there is no argumentation, like this is the premise, and this is the conclusion.

Western philosophy has sought, by and large, to control the emotion in order to get clear definition. If one wishes to express one's feelings, then they are added on later. But the Thai, who are naturally more emotion than reason oriented, start with the feeling and come to the understanding later. Dr Kirti says that the Thai speak out the feelings, and when they want to understand, they have to reformulate the feeling into the understanding. Their feelings are communicated through the medium of the Thai language which has developed in a unique way so as to effectively express the emotions and is particularly descriptive.

For instance there is the use of *chai* (heart) with its multitude of combinations, or else the use of *roo suek* (feel). Instead of asking, 'What do you know about this?' you ask, 'What do you feel about this?' Instead of a fixed grammar (subject, verb, object) which controls how something should be said (who is the subject, what is he doing? etc.), the Thai language is not so exact. Dr Kirti

observes that sometimes when they speak, one may not be aware of who or what is the subject. But what is expressed is the feeling, the true feeling of the Thai.

Dr Soraj confirmed the lack of necessity for the Thai to work back to first causes during my interview with him. He said that when they experience something that cannot be explained, or something supernatural, they are, of course, very interested. You will find it in the newspapers, especially the popular ones which like to record supernatural occurrences, and people are very interested in interpreting these into numbers so they can buy the lottery. They do not think about what the cause of the miracle is, they do not really care. It could be God himself, but it does not matter. They do not have to find some ultimate cause that unites things and brings it into a system.

It is perhaps this lack of necessity to define and to work back from particular to general, that enables the Thai to hold opposites in harmony similar to the Taoist *yin-yang*. They have a peculiar ability to appreciate both thesis and antithesis without feeling the necessity for synthesis. Whereas the westerner tends to see things clearly as *either/or* the Thai is more likely to see things as *both/and*. This tendency is illustrated by the syncretism of the Thai belief system and their ability, already observed, to add on without deleting. They can embrace many things (some of which may be contradictory), rather than having only one absolute truth. This conforms to their non-conceptual tendency since if they were conceptual they would be pure Buddhists instead of syncretistic.

The ability of the Thai to hold oppo-

sites together, however, may indeed be an area where the Thai can make a significant contribution to theology. There are many areas (such as God's predestination and man's responsibility; the grace of God and the severity of God) where western systematic theology with its emphasis on defining and synthesizing has tended to give unsatisfactory solutions.

The Thai's lack of need to define leads us to a further difference from the western approach. That is, the Thai way is not to negate but to expand on what is already there.

Since traditionally Thai thinkers were not interested in defining, they were not interested in fixing a meaning clearly and then arguing over who is right and who is wrong. Thai thinkers sought, rather, to give a new understanding to what was already there. With this goal in mind, Thai thinkers do not have the intention to erase what has gone before in order to suggest some new thing in its place, as Aryan thinkers like to do. Rather, Thai thinkers will study the effectiveness of what has already been given and then will think how one may add some new thing to it... We have words of praise for the King more and more without throwing away what went before, and we have much use of the word *spirit/ghost* without thinking it is too much... If anyone wishes to be further creative, then let him be creative according to the way of the Thai who have gone before. That is find a method of expressing something differently from the way it has been said before through the

enabling of the Thai language. This is the traditional Thai way of creativity.²³

Dr Kirti warns, however, that by saying something in a creative new way one runs the risk that no-one will understand what is being said. On the other hand, by merely saying it in the old way there is nothing to be proud of—and people will not think the person is wise!!!

The tendency to expand on what has gone before leads us naturally on to the philosophy that views everything as being in a constant state of process. Dr Warayutha Sriewarakul (in a personal interview) states that,

We just believe in process, we just believe in events. Everything is events, not substance, even though you are a man, a woman, it is an event. So you see that's why the Eastern world's ideas are very close to process philosophy, very close to quantum physics, very close to impermanence where everything is developing.

The Thai are also strongly empirical and experience oriented instead of conceptual. Their enjoyment comes from things to do with action (such as football or other forms of fun), rather than thinking through conceptual ideas. Not only this, but they generally need to experience something before they will believe. Their belief in the spirits is based on encounter, either direct or through a medium, rather than just the concept. A thing is not rational to them

if it cannot be understood in practical terms of living. This is evidenced by the fact that almost without exception, coming to believe in God is the result of experiencing something of the power of God rather than assent to a concept or statement. Prasit Ruhkpisut (personal interview) observes that the Thais do not start with what is true (*arai jing*)—they start with power (*amnat*).

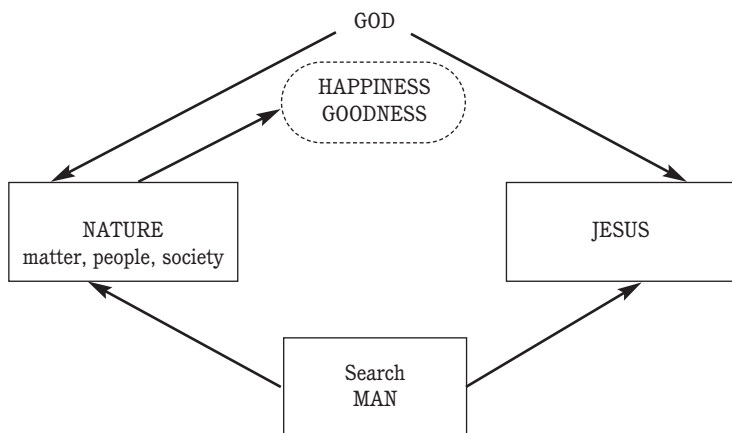
The empirical nature of the Thai has implications concerning *revelation* or *illumination* of those things already revealed. Dr Apichart Punsakworasan²⁴ (personal interview) says that there is no equivalent in the Thai scheme of things to the Christian idea of revelation. The Thai way is to obtain knowledge and this knowledge will lead one through to the desired end. For the Thai, he suggests an empirical, inductive or natural revelation approach at least to begin with. By pointing to things around them one may lead their understanding to the larger concept. This does not preclude revelation or illumination which it is agreed is necessary. But the normal progression is from the ground up rather as in Brahmanism or Buddhism where through gaining knowledge one *rises up* and becomes like a god as distinct to revelation which comes from above and draws one up. If you want to talk to Asians, says Dr Apichart, you must start from *below*. His suggested model for approaching the Thai is seen in Fig 2.

²³ Bunchua, *Grabuantat Radap Pratyta Kawng Nak Kit Thai* (Philosophical Paradigms of Thai Thinkers) (Thai Language), p. 175.

²⁴ Formerly General Secretary of Thai Christian Students. Presently joint pastor of a large Chinese church in Bangkok and also Teacher of Christian Education at Bangkok Bible College & Seminary

Dr Apichart’s Model for Approaching the Thai

Fig. 2



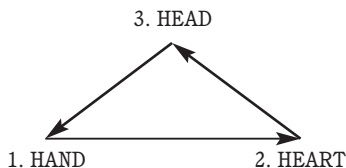
One should start with their search for happiness and goodness through nature, whether it be matter, people or society. General revelation can be explained as God’s presence and the revelation of himself through natural things. But this is not enough because firstly, it is all relative (relative goodness etc.) and secondly, we all have sin and are ignorant. The special revelation of God through Jesus as absolute good news may then be introduced.

In many respects, the Thai are existential. They are far more concerned with what may affect or benefit them here and now than with the unknowns of the future. The future is uncertain, it is impermanent. The next life is not as important as this one. What matters most to the Thai is what will bring benefit *now*, and in fact *practical personal benefit* is a primary motivation. These are factors which lead most to use their money now, rather than keep it for the future. They seek to enjoy the present.

They believe in luck, their stars, and will persuade the spirits to offer them favors—all in order to benefit the here and now. Dr Apichart suggests a further model (Fig. 3), therefore, for approaching or educating the Thai.

Dr Apichart’s Model for Educating the Thai

Fig. 3



The Thai start with the practical (that is the *hand*). Something beneficial generally needs to be received first which then may influence the *heart* (the affective dimension). From the heart, it is possible to reach the *head* or the mind. Dr Apichart laments the fact that

some, however, stop at the heart level and so do not continue to grow. When the *hand* stops, then they discontinue, which Dr Apichart suggests has been typical of Christians in Thailand for the past 160 years or so.

The above model poses a fundamental dilemma with which I am sure Dr Apichart agrees. The Thai look for salvation from suffering but God offers salvation from sin. The Thai look for immediate benefit now but God has provided Christ crucified and risen. How does one avoid presenting *another* gospel by catering to the hand first instead of the head?

Dr Soraj further laments the fact that once a certain thing is accepted as true, little further investigation takes place. For instance,

Buddhists, or those who believe in Buddhism (which is almost the entire Thai population) believe that the Buddhist teachings are true. So, when the Buddhist religion suggests a philosophical view it is understood to be automatically true, and therefore there is no further discussion. But the foundation of philosophy is that there is no final end to discussion or *argument*.²⁵

In a similar vein to what has already been stated, there is traditionally a refusal to admit the validity of *argument* in order to reach truth. Thai Buddhists tend to believe that *reason* is

only a reckoning of one's own thoughts, but it is not the correct method to arrive at truth. 'In that it doesn't use reason or logic nor does it use logical methods of discovering truth, it is in line with an attitude that has dominated Asian thinking, including the Thai, for a long time.'²⁶ Many are of the opinion that *argument* or reason is not the way to prove the truth of religion since reasoning is for those who have not yet *practised* the principles of religion. Buddhists would tend to say that one cannot reason one's way to the truth, it comes through experience, and then you'll know.²⁷ Dr Warayuth confirms this, saying:

They have insights from the authorities and the lord Buddha... But... they would try to discover those laws themselves from their practice... they would say that if you would like to discover the truth, you wouldn't be able to talk about it, because it is not a matter of discussion, but a matter of discovering it from practice. In this sense, it is similar to Taoism, where the speaker never knows, the knower never speaks, only the practitioner knows.

One may ask whether this is blind faith or a leap of faith? It is probable that the primary motivation to step out

²⁵ Soraj Hongladaran, *Kawp Fah Haeng Pratyā: Kwam Ru, Pratyā Leh Sangkom Thai (The Limits of Philosophy: Knowledge, Philosophy and Thai Society) (Thai Language)* (Bangkok: Under the Sponsorship of the Thai National Budget, 1998), p. 239.

²⁶ Hongladaran, *Kawp Fah Haeng Pratyā: Kwam Ru, Pratyā Leh Sangkom Thai (The Limits of Philosophy: Knowledge, Philosophy and Thai Society) (Thai Language)*, p. 235.

²⁷ Hongladaran, *Kawp Fah Haeng Pratyā: Kwam Ru, Pratyā Leh Sangkom Thai (The Limits of Philosophy: Knowledge, Philosophy and Thai Society) (Thai Language)*, pp. 236, 240.

and practise stems from the tradition of their ancestors, or certain authority figures in their lives. But it also infers that there is no point in arguing over concepts or principles. The Thai are used to the empiricism of *doing* something or *experiencing* something and therefore knowing, rather than through rationalism based on conceptual ideas. Not only this, but in their daily lives, feelings and intuition are so important that they are often relied upon to 'lead the way' even though there may not be a defining reason. Dr Seree Lorgunpai²⁸ (personal interview) also observes that the Thai tendency is to want something instantly, which does not come through a long process of *reasoning*, and for this there is the willingness to gamble or take a risk.

Dr Kirti, however, observes that the Thai people always have the feeling of fear of the unknown in their life. These unknowns are unpredictable and capricious, you cannot control them. One of the unknowns is the *phii* (spirit). 'Today they may favor you, but tomorrow they may not. It is not controllable, and you cannot guess what will be. You do not know what each *phii* may want. Even with the Buddhist belief, people live in fear of the unknown and its power.' Their fear is not limited to that of capricious spirits, however, as Dr Kirti continues:

You may observe, even among the scholars, in their deepest feeling, the first assumption in their hearts, they have fear in their subconscious. It is a fear of everything.

Can I live in this society? Can I live in this world? Can I be at peace? Can I trust my friends and relatives? They will always say that they aren't 100% sure of anything. And this, maybe, is the racial complex of the Thai people. They want friendship, but they are afraid in their heart that one day you may change your mind. There is always something like that. In the family, between the husband and wife, there is not full trust of each other.

Finally, Dr Seree suggests that what the Thai have been taught and what they do is not the same. They are motivated, he says, by *shame*. They know deductively one thing, but inductively they will respond to *shame*. Although *guilt* may control the heart and mind, it is the outside, or the situation, which will determine the behaviour. As far as feelings are concerned, they are more concerned by other people's feelings towards them than they are about their own feelings. Through conforming in this way, they are able to survive in society. If the relationship of Thai Christians with God is a *personal* salvation we will encounter problems when they are confronted with their society. The community is still more vivid to them than God is, says Dr Seree.

Proposals

The observations recorded above have great implications for the way theology should be done in the Thai context and the emphases that will need to be made in order to make it both orthodox and effective. The following is not yet a developed prolegomena but provides

²⁸ General Secretary of the Thailand Bible Society and Teacher of Old Testament Theology at Bangkok Institute of Theology.

some suggestions and structures that may be used in developing one. It does not embrace all the observations made above but it is hoped that from small beginnings theology will start to be developed, hopefully by the Thai themselves or through the interaction of Thai Christians and missionaries.

Preliminary issues

Before moving to presuppositions and methodology, let us look at some important preliminary issues. First and foremost, it is important to emphasize that *revelation*, both general and special, is essential to knowing God and the truth he wishes us to know. This applies to all people, no matter what their cultural background. There is no need to assume that just because there is no equivalent to revelation in the Thai context, that revelation must take a less significant role.

Paul makes it clear that the things of God are revealed to us by the Holy Spirit whom he has given to us (1 Cor. 2:10-14). Paul prayed for the Ephesians that the eyes of their hearts may be enlightened, that they might know the hope to which God has called them, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints (Eph. 1:18-19). Theology does not start with the person, but the person cooperates with the Holy Spirit in a quest to understand those things that God has revealed to us. Apart from the Holy Spirit, we are impotent to understand and appreciate these things. It follows, therefore, that although the Thai start with experience and concrete issues rather than conceptual ones, a theology from *above* rather than from *below* must be developed. It has already been observed that

most contextualized theology in Asia would come under the theology from below category. This wrongly places people, their context and their needs in the centre, rather than God.

It is also important that while developing a contextualized theology, we do not neglect the history and tradition of the church as she has developed through the centuries. The church in Thailand does not stand in isolation from the historic church but is an extension of it. The propensity we have observed for the Thai to *add to* rather than *subtract or negate from* should stand her in good stead as she carries out her task of developing what is unique in her own context.

Logic and reason have often been used in the western environment to enhance our understanding of God's revelation. Logic and reason, however, have been found to be limited in both usefulness and accuracy. While they are of some value, the truth of God is much greater and far surpasses the boundaries of logic and reason. For the Thai, intuition, feeling and experience play an important role in their understanding of God and his revelation. It must be remembered, however, that while these will be presented as valuable, they are likewise limited in both usefulness and accuracy.

Although it has been observed that the Thai are primarily empirical and not conceptual, Thai theology must also find a way to embrace concepts and interpretation as revealed in the Scriptures. A statement such as, 'Christ died for our sins' is empirical and historical (Christ died). It is also, however, conceptual and interpretive (for our sins). If Thai theology is not able to embrace the conceptual and the

interpretation Scripture gives to itself, it will be an ineffective vehicle for communicating the whole counsel of God.

Traditionally, systematic theology has struggled to find a logical first point from which to commence. Should one begin with God, presupposing a *a priori* intuitive knowledge of the existence of God, or should one begin with the sources of data whereby we may know God, along a more evidential apologetic line? For the more inquiring mind, the former approach seems less than satisfactory. As for the latter approach, natural data (general revelation) is insufficient to understand who God is apart from the special revelation of the Scriptures, which in turn depends on God for its authority. The latter approach is therefore circular.

In the Thai context, with its lack of emphasis on *defining* and in searching for the *primary cause*, and its ability to hold complementary ideas in harmony, this may not be too great a problem. One may start with both God and the Scriptures, or else even with points further down the line in the traditional system (such as man) but where the holistic nature of truth is emphasized rather than a linear approach. All the subjects to be covered, therefore, could be thought of as forming a circle. Any point/subject in the circle could be a starting point, and every subject will affirm the centrality of God. Or, putting it another way, all theology must centre itself in the Triune God. Rather than a linear string of theological topics, the body of truth may be understood as being circular, where God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) is at the centre and all other subject matter forms the circumference, each connected and dependent on the hub but

also connected to each other. Any point, therefore, may be an entry into the whole.

It is unlikely, however, that the result of Thai theology will be a neat tightly fitting system of harmonized beliefs. It is more likely to be a *yin-yang* di-polar of complementary but opposite ideas. As has already been discussed, the Thai are well able to live with thesis, antithesis but without feeling the need to synthesize. Our understanding of the complementary nature of truths will constantly develop but never totally harmonize.

Since all methodology is in itself limited, theology in the Thai context must never be thought to have *been* developed but must always *be* developing. Thai theologians should be encouraged and new approaches should be explored. Apart from the limitations of methodology, the ever changing context necessitates the continuing development of theology.

Presuppositions

The following *presuppositions* will be held if the theology is to be orthodox. Firstly, it is assumed that God has reliably and inerrantly revealed himself through the Bible which he inspired. While the records are recorded within certain contexts, they are universally profitable for teaching, reproof, and for revealing God to all mankind, whatever the context or time period.

Secondly, it is assumed that both the natural world, being God's creation, and also human experience, are also sources for knowing God and the things he desires us to know.

Thirdly, it is further assumed that within the Bible, nature and human

experience, fresh insights and new understandings of God and his will are waiting to be illuminated. These will come uniquely to each in their own context through the interaction of the Holy Spirit, the Bible, nature and human experience.

Fourthly, it is assumed that the Thai will bring their own unique contribution to theology when, under the leading of the Holy Spirit, they interact with the Bible, nature and human experience in a way that is unique to the Thai. I believe there are many insights to both traditional theological ideas as well as new ones, which wait to be unfolded by the Thai. Regarding the field of philosophy, it has already been observed that the Thai are unable to make definite contributions in this field so long as they are required to think philosophically in a western way. Their unique contribution will come when they are allowed to reflect philosophically in the Thai way. Likewise with theology, the Thai need to be encouraged to reflect and enjoy theology in a way in which they can excel and thereby make their own unique contribution.

Methodology

The following suggestions are possible methods that may be used to start formulating a Thai theological system. One possible method is to commence with *theological statements* already introduced through western theology. As already observed, the Thai do not feel they need to eliminate or negate the old when doing something new. Rather, their creativity centres around building and expanding on the old and thereby forming something new. This

starting point has the advantage of linking future Thai theology firmly to the framework of church tradition and history. Statements such as, 'The Sovereignty of God', 'The Depravity of Man', 'The Church Triumphant', or else statements taken directly from an early Christian creed (such as the Apostles' Creed—see later) may be expounded and expanded on, starting with those most relevant to the Thai's need or interest.

A further possible method is to take the *theological topics or ideas* from the basic outline of western systematic theology (God, Man, Sin, Christ, Salvation, The Church etc.). Again, the Thai find no need to negate what has gone before. And so this progression of ideas or topics, which has been so useful in systematizing theology in the western context, may also be used as a starting point for Thai theology. The uniqueness of Thai theology will be the way in which these ideas are developed.

Another possible way to start formulating a system of Thai theology is to use early Christian creeds, and to study them against their historical and contextual backgrounds. This approach is suggested by Hwa Yung:

These creeds, especially the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds, and the Chalcedonian Formula, were the first *systematic* formulations of the Christian faith which the Early Church was forced to undertake both to ward off heresy and to instruct its members. Such a study will enable us to see *how the apostolic faith that was being handed down through the Scriptures and traditions was contextually shaped in the process of its formulation by the Early*

Church. Having examined that in detail, we can then proceed to ask how the same process might be carried out afresh in the various Asian contexts today.²⁹

My own suggestion and preferred methodology combines several of the ideas and observations already mentioned in this article with Dyrness's *Interactive Approach* as the basic model. Theological statements already formulated (such as from a creed or else those basic to systematic theology in the West) are our topics.

First, a theological statement, idea or topic is selected. This may be selected interactively according to the order of interest they are to the Thai. Since our theology is unlikely to concentrate on definitions (the Thai do not tend to define) our theology could probably start at any topic with the assumption that truth will always witness and lead us to the centrality of God. It is therefore not necessary to start with God and since the Thai are more naturally conscious of *man* and *nature* these may well be selected first.

Second, identify the issues and feelings the Thai have in connection with the selected statement, topic or idea. For instance, if the topic is 'Man', the intuitive feelings of the Thai may include fear, authority, society, honour, shame, usefulness, impermanence, etc. In this way, the intuitive feelings of the Thai are taken seriously and are embedded into the theological method.

Third, identify sources of data—both biblical and natural which relate

to these intuitive feelings. Notice the interactive method of biblical revelation and Thai context here. The Scripture passages selected will be primarily narrative and empirical rather than purely doctrinal. These may be to do with the following events 1. Creation 2. Israel 3. Jesus Christ 4. The Cross and Resurrection 5. The Church in Acts. For instance, passages may be selected where a man's *honour* is at stake, or where fear is involved etc.

Fourth, by the leading of the Holy Spirit and with the propensity of the Thai to narrate and describe, the data found in three is amplified upon. Stories may be told and illustrations will abound whether they be from nature, Thai history, current affairs or personal life. Again, the feelings and intuition of the Thai are utilized. While discussion is unlikely to revolve around conceptual definitions of man (continuing to use the example of man as our topic), it is expected that the Holy Spirit will lead and guide the narrator further into the truth about man.

Fifth, conclusions are compared to doctrinal passages concerning the topic at hand. This will bring balance and checks to the conclusions made in four. For instance, having amplified on the fact that man is impermanent and fleeting, the teaching of Peter (such as 'All men are like grass' 1 Pet. 1:24) may be used to confirm, or else Paul (such as 'For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality' 1 Cor. 15:53) to prompt one to a further cycle of discussion.

While the method suggested here commences with conceptual ideas, the process is quite concrete. The overall process may be described as *inductive*,

29 Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas*, p. 228.

in which truth is gradually concluded by means of amplification of concrete examples.

It is *interactive* in that it relates to the Thai context by maximizing on Thai feelings and needs and by utilizing the Thai way of philosophizing. At the same time it commences with statements or ideas from *above*, utilizes scripture as its primary source of data, and tests the results against scripture. Thus the theology is constantly *pulled up* to make it a theology *from above*.

Every attempt must be made to keep the theology practical and down to earth. Hovemyr, responding to a question posed by Barth and others as to whether the truth which is so often expressed in abstract terms in the West... could be more clearly, accurately and adequately expressed in terms of Jesus' life and acts, says that the answer to this question from an Asian horizon is a resounding *yes*.³⁰ I have suggested that the *events* of Creation, Israel, Jesus Christ, the Death and Resurrection and the Church in Acts should be utilized as sources of data. This corresponds to the *concretizing* of theology suggested by Barth, Hovemyr and others.

Koyama also confirms the need for theology to be practical and empirical, by suggesting the book of James as an appropriate book for the Thai.³¹ One's

faith must be evidenced by works and true religion means being concerned for the social needs around us. James is 'cool, yet not hot' in Koyama's words and has an emphasis on the *impermanence* of the natural realm, corresponding to the world view already held by the Thai.

The Thai respond to concrete examples. They are *hand*→*heart*→*head* oriented. The Interaction Model for contextualized theology suggests the importance of both the preaching and *life* of the evangelists and missionaries. Theology must not be done in a vacuum. Theology will be credible when it is being worked out by those whose lives are consistent with the truths they are preaching. As Gnanakan points out, 'It is only a few who chose servanthood as their role who won the hearts of the masses... can one really separate the writer from his writing?'³²

Finally, the absence of written theological texts in a particular context does not necessarily mean that no theology has been done. Listening to the sermons and teaching of the national leaders will reveal that a contextual *vernacular* theology is already emerging. The danger that this may become polarized in one direction highlights the need to form a structure for Thai theology. Depending on the denomination, two topics appear regularly in Thai sermons. Firstly, power encounter, which is consistent with the Thai tendency to start with power. One popular Thai Pentecostal preacher says that in evangelism one must start

30 Anders Hovemyr, 'Towards a theology of the Incarnation in the Thai context', *East Asia Journal of Theology* 1 No 2 (1983): 78-83, p. 79.

31 Kosuke Koyama, *Waterbuffalow Theology: A Thailand Theological Notebook* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1974), Chapter 14.

32 Ken R. Gnanakan, 'Biblical Foundations: A South Asian Study', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 7 No 1 (1983): p. 117.

with power, for instance the power of God to help you in your problems, because that is what 95% of the Thai are interested in. From there one can move on to other areas of Christian doctrine and discipleship. Secondly, relief from, or understanding of, suffering, since many Thai Christians find their understanding of God challenged by the fact that he allows them to suffer.³³ While I don't believe the theolog-

ical system should centre on these points, the fact that Thai *vernacular* theology already emphasizes them is an indicator that they will certainly major quite heavily in the discussion and narration of theological statements and ideas.

33 Stephen C.R. Taylor, 'Gaps in Beliefs of Thai Christians', *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 37(1) (2001): 72-81.

Finding the Plot: Preaching in Narrative Style

Roger Standing

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Roger Standing is a Regional Minister and Team Leader within the Southern Counties Baptist Association. He has had contributions published in the *Leadership Journal* and is a contributor to *Third Way*.

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The Holocaust and the Problem of Theodicy: an Evangelical Perspective

John Jefferson Davis

KEYWORDS: *Holocaust, theodicy, evangelical theology, suffering, Jewish-Christian relations*

'GIVEN THE ENORMITY of the horror represented by Auschwitz ... the question of how a just and powerful God could allow the annihilation of so many innocent lives haunts the religious conscience and staggers the imagination.'¹ This statement by leaders of Conservative Judaism in the United States exemplifies the tremendous challenge posed by the Holocaust to Jewish and Christian faith alike. In the last generation, Jewish, Roman Catholic, and Protestant thinkers have struggled to make some theological sense of a horrible reality that for some has brought tradi-

tional faith to the breaking point.²

The purpose of this article is to reflect, from a Protestant Evangelical standpoint, on the implications of the Holocaust for traditional theodicies, and to propose a *martyreo-eschatological* hermeneutic for addressing the issues.³ The term 'martyreo-eschatological' suggests that the concepts of *martyrdom* and the *eschatological intensification of evil* may provide some

2 Some of the representative literature will be surveyed below. As will be noted, systematic reflection on the Holocaust by Evangelical theologians has been quite limited.

3 It is beyond the scope of this paper to address the issue of alleged 'Anti-semitism in the New Testament'; for a helpful review and assessment of the literature on this issue, see James Dunn, 'The Question of Anti-semitism in the New Testament Writings of the Period', in James Dunn, ed., *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways, A.D. 70 to 135* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), pp. 177-211.

1 *Emet Ve-Emunah: Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1988), p. 25.

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points of departure from which theological reflection on this massive eruption of radical evil may proceed.

From the outset the enormously painful and difficult nature of the issue must be acknowledged. It is recognized that for many, only a respectful silence for the dead, or an appeal to divine inscrutability, or even the abandonment of any traditional belief in divine providence and the existence of the biblical God, are all possible responses to this enormous tragedy. For some, it would seem presumptuous for those who did not personally live through the years of the Holocaust to attempt to theologize about these events. Nevertheless, a generation after the event, it would seem intellectually, historically, and theologically irresponsible for evangelical theologians to remain silent in the face of the most catastrophic event of the twentieth century, one which arguably poses the most severe challenge to traditional beliefs about the goodness, power, and wisdom of God. Consequently, this article is being offered as a preliminary contribution in that direction, in the hope that it might promote a wider range of evangelical reflection on the issues raised by the Holocaust for Christian theology and Christian-Jewish relations.

This article presupposes that the reader has some general historical knowledge of the Holocaust,⁴ and some

awareness of the tragic legacy of Christian anti-Judaism in the history of the Christian church.⁵ After surveying representative Christian and Jewish theological responses to the Holocaust to date, a proposal for a *martyreo-eschatological* hermeneutic will be advanced.

Roman Catholic and Mainline Protestant Responses:

The 1964 'Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions' (*Nostra Aetate*) at the Second Vatican Council represented a major rethinking of prior Roman Catholic attitudes towards Judaism and the Jewish people in the new post-Holocaust historical context.⁶ Citing Romans 11:28-29, the declaration

1990); S.T. Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, vol.1, *The Holocaust and Mass Death Before the Modern Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). *Night*, by Elie Wiesel (New York: Bantam, 1960), remains one of the most powerful descriptions by a Holocaust survivor of the horror of the concentration camps.

⁵ See especially the seminal works of Jules Isaac, *The Teaching of Contempt: Christian Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), and Rosemary Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury, 1974); see also James Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue* (New York: Atheneum, 1974); Edward H. Flannery, *The Anguish of the Jews: Twenty-three Centuries of anti-Semitism* (New York: Macmillan, 1965).

⁶ For a helpful survey of Christian attitudes toward Judaism over two millennia of church history, see Graham Keith, 'A Rival, a Relative, or Both? Differing Christian Stances Toward Judaism over Two Millennia', *Evangelical Quarterly* 75:2 (2003): 133-156.

⁴ For general studies of the Holocaust, see Martin Gilbert, *The Holocaust: The Jewish Tragedy* (London: Collins, 1986); Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961); Israel Gutman, ed., *The Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan,

affirmed that '... the Jews still remain most dear to God because of their fathers, nor does He repent of the gifts He makes nor of the calls He issues.'⁷ Repudiating the ancient charges of 'deicide', the Council stated that the death of Christ could not be blamed upon '... all the Jews then living, without distinction, nor upon the Jews of today'. The Jewish people should not be represented as repudiated or cursed by God; the church '... deplores the hatred, persecution, and displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews at any time and from any source'.⁸ The statement did not directly acknowledge the church's own historical role in the development of anti-Judaic attitudes, nor did it address the sensitive issue of Pope Pius XII's failure to actively seek protection for Jews during the years of the Holocaust.⁹

In 1982 Pope John Paul II directed the bishops to study relations between the Church and Judaism and to seek ways to teach about Judaism '... free from prejudices and without any offences.. with full awareness of the heritage common to Jews and Christians'.¹⁰ The liturgy was to be purged of anti-Judaic references, and Roman

Catholics were admonished to '... rid ourselves of the traditional idea of a people *punished*, preserved as a living argument for Christian apologetic', and were to be reminded that the enduring existence of the Jewish people has been accompanied by a 'continuous spiritual fecundity in the rabbinical period, in the Middle Ages and in modern times'.¹¹ These post-Holocaust revisions of Roman Catholic attitudes and teachings were inspired, in significant measure, by the seminal historical research of Jules Isaac, *The Teaching of Contempt*, cited above.

Mainline Protestant theologians since the 1960s have called for the revision of Christian theology in light of the Holocaust. Notable among these calls for revision have been the efforts of Franklin Littell, Paul van Buren, and Clark Williamson. In *The Crucifixion of the Jews* Littell stated that the Holocaust '... is the unfinished business of the Christian churches, the running sore unattended by its leaders The most important event in recent generations of church history, it is still virtually ignored in church school lessons and carefully avoided by preachers in their pulpits'.¹² In Littell's estimation, the Holocaust and the subsequent emergence of the state of Israel in 1948 should be viewed as basic events

7 In Walter M. Abbot, *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Corpus Books, 1966), p. 664.

8 *The Documents of Vatican II*, pp. 666, 667.

9 On the role of Pius XII, see Saul Friedlander, *Pius XII and the Third Reich: a Documentation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966).

10 Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, 'Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church,' www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/

11 'Notes on the Correct Way'. For further reflections on the Holocaust by contemporary Roman Catholic theologians, see Michael McGarry, *Christology after the Holocaust* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977); John T. Palikowski, *Christ in Light of Jewish-Christian Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982).

12 Franklin H. Littell, *The Crucifixion of the Jews* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), p. 129.

in Christian history of the same order of importance as the Exodus, Sinai, and the fall of Rome.¹³ The very credibility of the Christian faith in a post-Holocaust world hinges, according to Littell, on the ability of the Christian church to come to terms with the legacy of its anti-Judaic past.

The most comprehensive and systematic attempt to date to reconstruct Christian theology in a post-Holocaust setting, and from the standpoint of God's continuing covenant with Israel (cf. Rom. 11:29, 'God has not forsaken his people whom he foreknew'), is the multi-volume work by Paul van Buren, *A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality*.¹⁴ Van Buren believes that through Jesus Christ the Gentiles enter into the salvation already available to the Jews through the covenant with Abraham. There are thus two valid covenants of salvation: a covenant with the Jews through Abraham and the Torah, and a covenant for the Gentiles through Jesus Christ.¹⁵ The salvation of Gentile Christians presupposes the covenant

with Abraham and is dependent upon it (cf. Gal. 3:6-9). The facts of history compel Christians to acknowledge that the redemption that they have come to know in Christ has not yet been fully realized, and that the fullness of redemption still lies in the future.¹⁶ In the meantime, Christians are called to be partners with God and with the Jewish people to work for the *renewal of creation* while history still proceeds.¹⁷

The work of Clark Williamson, a Disciples of Christ professor of theology at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, also represents a substantial attempt at reconstructive Christian theology in a post-Holocaust setting.¹⁸ In his earlier book published in 1982, *Has God Rejected His People?*, the answer to the question posed by the title is an emphatic 'No'. Williamson documents the growth of anti-Judaic attitudes in the Christian church from the time of the early apologists and church fathers down to the twentieth century.¹⁹

In his subsequent book of 1993, *A Guest in the House of Israel*, he develops a 'post-Holocaust church theology' in which the loci of biblical authority,

13 Littell, 'Christendom, Holocaust and Israel: the Importance for Christians of Recent Major Events in Jewish History', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 10 (1973): 483-497 at 497.

14 Paul M. van Buren, *A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality*, 3 pts. (New York: Seabury Press, 1980-88). Part One: *Discerning the Way* (1980); Part Two: *A Christian Theology of the People of Israel* (1983); Part Three: *Christ in Context* (1988).

15 The apostle Paul, however, in Romans 10:1, does not assume that the Jewish people are already saved through the covenant with Abraham, but need to recognize Jesus as Messiah in order to be saved: 'Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.'

16 van Buren, Pt. One, *Discerning the Way*, p. 194.

17 van Buren, Pt. Two, *A Christian Theology of the People of Israel*, p. 351.

18 A helpful review of Williamson and other recent post-Holocaust theologians is found in Beverly Asbury and Matthew C. Hawk, 'Recent Perspectives on the Holocaust', *Religious Studies Review* 22:3 (1996): 197-207.

19 Clark M. Williamson, *Has God Rejected His People? Anti-Judaism in the Christian Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982). Note especially chapter five, 'From Barnabas to Barth: Theological Anti-Judaism', pp. 89-105.

covenant, Christology, and ecclesiology are reformulated in light of the anti-Judaic heritage which Williamson sees as sources of distortion of Christian teaching in these critical areas. The Christologies of Nicea and Chalcedon are too abstract; it must be affirmed that God was incarnate not merely in a generic human nature, but in the 'Jew Jesus'.²⁰ The claim that Jesus is the 'only Savior' may be understood to mean that '... the God who disclosed God's self to us in Jesus Christ is the only God there is'²¹—not that Jews must believe in Jesus to be saved. For Williamson, the mission of the church to Israel is not one of proclamation (*kerygma*), but one of service (*diakonia*); the 'Great Commission' (Mt.28:16-20) authorizes an evangelistic mission to the Gentiles, not to the Jewish people.²²

Williamson also believes that the massive suffering of the Jewish people in the Holocaust puts into question the traditional notions of an omnipotent and impassible God found in classical theism. A Whiteheadian, process-relational model of God, he believes, in which God suffers with his creation and limits his own power in the interests of the creatures' freedom is more adequate to the biblical tradition and the facts of experience. 'Because each

creature has its own God-given power of self-creation, God is the necessary but not the sufficient cause of any event'²³; God can not be held solely responsible for the Holocaust.

Jewish Responses:

Jewish reflections on the Holocaust have elicited a broad range of interpretations, ranging from atheism to theories of divine retribution, with most responses falling between these two extremes.²⁴ This brief survey will attempt to highlight only the major Jewish theological responses represented by Richard Rubenstein, Irving Greenberg, Emil Fackenheim, and Eliezer Berkovits.

Writing from an ultra-Orthodox perspective, the late Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum of the Satmar Hasidic community claimed that the Holocaust was God's punishment of the Jewish people for the sins of 'Reformers and secularists' who had betrayed the tradition.²⁵

²⁰ Williamson, *A Guest in the House of Israel* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), p.173. It should be noted, of course, that one can affirm both a Chalcedonian two-nature Christology and the Jewishness of Jesus: the categories are not mutually exclusive.

²¹ Williamson, *A Guest in the House of Israel*, p.200.

²² Williamson, *A Guest in the House of Israel*, pp.250, 251.

²³ Williamson, *A Guest in the House of Israel*, p. 224. For a critique of process theism from an evangelical perspective, see Royce Gruenler, *The Inexhaustible God: Biblical Faith and the Challenge of Process Theism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), and John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), pp. 149-179, 'Process Theology'.

²⁴ For an insightful survey and analysis by a Jewish scholar of Jewish reflections on the Holocaust, see Dan Cohn-Sherbok, 'Jewish Faith and the Holocaust', *Religious Studies* 26 (1990): 277-293.

²⁵ Cited by Rabbi David Novak, 'David Klinghofer and His Critics: An Exchange', *First Things* (August/September 1998), p. 8.; see also Novak, 'Arguing Israel and the Holocaust', *First Things* (January 2001), pp. 11-14 at 12.

For Rabbi Teitelbaum, the most grievous of these sins of Reform and secularism was *Zionism* and support for the secular state of Israel, which represented an arrogant human attempt to bring about a reality that only God could accomplish through his chosen Messiah. This 'divine retribution' interpretation has been repudiated by the vast majority of the Jewish community.

Richard's Rubenstein's *After Auschwitz* (1966) was a major Jewish response to the Holocaust. He stated his position in the starkest of terms:

I believe the greatest single challenge to modern Judaism arises out of the question of God and the death camps.. how can Jews believe in an omnipotent, beneficent God after Auschwitz? Traditional Jewish theology ... has interpreted every major catastrophe in Jewish history as God's punishment of a sinful Israel. I fail to see how this position can be maintained without regarding Hitler and the SS as instruments of God's will. The agony of European Jewry cannot be likened to the testing of Job. To see any purpose in the death camps, the traditional believer is forced to regard the most demonic, anti-human explosion in all history as a meaningful expression of God's purposes. The idea is simply too obscene for me to accept.²⁶

For Rubenstein, the Holocaust has made it impossible to continue to

believe in the God of traditional Judaism who is personally and providentially involved in history and who has chosen the Jewish people.²⁷ Judaism, he believes, can continue to exist even without traditional theistic beliefs on the basis of rituals and customs that enable its adherents to celebrate the events of the life cycle and to cope with its crises. The majority of the Jewish community, not surprisingly, have not followed Rubenstein and his non-theistic conclusions.²⁸

The 1974 paper of Irving Greenberg, 'Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity, and Modernity after the Holocaust', has been frequently cited in subsequent discussions.²⁹ Greenberg believes that any responses to the Holocaust are inevitably dialectical in nature, filled with 'extraordinary human and moral tensions'.³⁰ The painful memories must

²⁶ Richard Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), p. 153.

²⁷ Strictly speaking, Rubenstein might not consider himself an 'atheist'. Even though he believes that we '... stand in a cold, silent, unfeeling cosmos, unaided by any purpose beyond our own resources', (p. 152), he can still say that he believes in 'God' in the sense of a 'Holy Nothingness', presumably known to the mystics of all ages, 'out of which we have come and to which we will ultimately return' (p. 154).

²⁸ As Cohn-Sherbok, 'Jewish Faith and the Holocaust', p.280, has noted, given Rubenstein's perspective, there would seem to be little motivation to remain Jewish, if there is no God who has chosen the Jewish people or revealed a divinely authorized Torah on Sinai.

²⁹ Irving Greenberg, in Eva Fleischner, ed., *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1977), pp. 7-55.

³⁰ Greenberg, *Auschwitz*, p. 54.

not be forgotten, but transformed into sources of responsibility, will, and faith.³¹ The horrors of the Holocaust evoke a principle that for any future theology, 'No statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of burning children'.³²

Christians need to honestly ask themselves the question, 'What did Christianity contribute to make the Holocaust possible?' The very harsh historical judgments which answering this question may visit upon Christianity opens the possibility, Greenberg believes, of 'freeing the Gospel of Love from the incubus of evil and hatred'.³³ The Holocaust is a 'wake-up call' to Christians to recognize the tragic legacy of Christian anti-Judaism.

Greenberg argues that the Holocaust reveals the moral and philosophical bankruptcy of 'modernity' and western civilization in its twentieth-century forms. The Holocaust calls upon Jews and Christians alike to resist 'the total authority of this cultural moment', and to reassert the divine claims of their own religious traditions that set limits on the absolutist claims of human scientific and political systems.³⁴

Religious thought cannot 'explain' the Holocaust, but religious faith after the event must seek to 'create, save, and heal the image of God wherever it still exists'. After Auschwitz, Green-

berg believes, the continued existence of the Jewish people and the reborn state of Israel are 'renewed testimony to Exodus as ultimate reality, to God's continuing presence in history'.³⁵ Despite Hitler's attempt to annihilate them, the Jewish people still exist, and the re-creation of the state of Israel shows that 'God's promises are still reliable'.³⁶

Of all the Jewish responses to the Holocaust, arguably the most influential has been that of Emil Fackenheim, the distinguished philosopher and Reformed rabbi who left his native Germany in 1939 after imprisonment in a Nazi concentration camp in Sachsenhausen.³⁷ Fackenheim's reflections have been set forth in various books and articles, most notably in *God's Presence in History* (1970) and *To Mend the World: Foundations of Post-Holocaust Thought* (1982). Even though Fackenheim can no longer affirm traditional Jewish notions of election and covenant, and rejects the idea that the Holocaust was a divine punishment for sin, he nevertheless believes that the 'Divine Presence' was somehow present in the Holocaust—not as a 'redeeming Voice' but as a 'commanding Voice'. In one of the most widely quoted passages written by any modern Jewish author, Fackenheim stated that Jews today must hear a '614th commandment' beyond the traditional 613 commandments of the Torah:

31 Greenberg, *Auschwitz*, p.55.

32 Greenberg, *Auschwitz*, p.23.

33 Greenberg, *Auschwitz*, pp.11, 25. Greenberg has in mind the legacy of Christian anti-Judaism documented by Isaac, Ruether, Parkes, Flannery, and others.

34 Greenberg, *Auschwitz*, p.31.

35 Greenberg, *Auschwitz*, pp.42, 48.

36 Greenberg, *Auschwitz*, p.50.

37 For a helpful discussion and critical response to Fackenheim's perspective, see Rubenstein and Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz*, pp. 316-29.

'Jews are forbidden to hand Hitler posthumous victories':

They are commanded to survive as Jews, lest the Jewish people perish. They are commanded to remember the victims of Auschwitz, lest their memory perish ... they are forbidden to despair of the God of Israel, lest Judaism perish ... A Jew may not respond to Hitler's attempt to destroy Judaism by himself cooperating in its destruction. In ancient times, the unthinkable Jewish sin was idolatry. Today, it is to respond to Hitler by doing his work.³⁸

This memorable statement achieved remarkable resonance in the Jewish community, eliciting heartfelt responses among many who were not conversant with Fackenheim's less accessible philosophical thought.

For Fackenheim, no adequate philosophical or theological explanation for the Holocaust is possible, but it can and must be affirmed that the Nazi 'logic of destruction' was resisted by brave men and women who maintained a sense of human dignity even in the midst of the most brutal and dehumanizing conditions of the death camps.³⁹

38 Fackenheim, *God's Presence in History* (New York: New York University Press, 1970), p. 84.

39 Fackenheim cites the eloquent testimony of Pelagia Lewinska, a Polish Holocaust survivor:

At the outset the living places, the ditches, the mud, the piles of excrement behind the blocks, had appalled me with their horrible filth ... And then I saw the light! I saw that ... They wished to abase us, to destroy our human dignity, to efface every vestige of our humanity ... to fill us with

The 'mending' (*Tikkun*) of the unspeakable 'rupture' in Jewish life caused by the Holocaust cannot be overcome in thought alone, but only in the continuance of Jewish life, represented centrally by the commitment to the existence of the state of Israel. The existence of the state of Israel is a sign of the Jewish people's 'emergence from powerlessness'⁴⁰ and a witness to the fact that Hitler's program did not ultimately prevail.

A response to the Holocaust from an Orthodox Jewish perspective is presented in Eliezer Berkovits's *Faith after the Holocaust*.⁴¹ For Berkovits, the paradigm for faith in the face of the Holocaust is to be found in the biblical figure of Job: 'We must believe, because our brother Job believed; and we must question, because our brother Job so often could not believe any longer. This is not a comfortable situation; but it is our condition in this era after the Holocaust.'⁴²

For Berkovits, even though there is no rational justification of God's ways

horror and contempt toward ourselves and our fellows ... From the instant when I grasped the motivating principle.. it was as if I had been awakened from a dream ... *I felt under orders to live* ... And if I did die in Auschwitz, it would be as a human being, I would hold on to my dignity. I was not going to become the contemptible, disgusting brute my enemy wished me to be ... And a terrible struggle began which went on day and night.

Cited in *To Mend the World* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982), p. 25.

40 Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, p. 304.

41 Eliezer Berkovits, *Faith after the Holocaust* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1973).

42 Berkovits, *Faith after the Holocaust*, p.5.

with Israel, faith must still be maintained in spite of 'God's terrible silence' during the Holocaust.⁴³ The Jew living after Auschwitz must '... make room for the impenetrable darkness of the death camps' within his faith; this darkness will accent the light of faith yet affirmed.⁴⁴

Even though the ways of God remain inscrutable, the heroism of many of the victims of the Holocaust must not be forgotten. The categories of martyrdom and *Kiddush haShem* ('sanctification of the Name') are meaningful and relevant. For Berkovits, nowhere else has faith and a conviction about the transcendent meaning of life been '... vindicated as nobly and heroically as in the ghettos and the concentration camps, in the very dominion of their worst denial and degradation'.⁴⁵ God may have been silent, but faith was not absent even in the smoke and the fires of the death camps.⁴⁶

Evangelical Responses:

For the most part, Evangelical theologians have not engaged in sustained systematic reflection on the Holo-

caust.⁴⁷ The most substantial contributions by evangelicals on the topic have been from the perspective of social ethics, rather than discussions of theodicy as such.⁴⁸ Three articles by Daniel Fuller, Stephen T. Davis, and John J. Johnson that directly address the theodicy question will be noted here.

In his 1964 article, 'Why Was There an Auschwitz?', Daniel P. Fuller, then dean of the faculty at Fuller Theological Seminary, stated that the ultimate question posed by the Holocaust is not '... why the Pope [Pius XII] failed to protest against Hitler's slaying of the Jews, but why God allowed an Auschwitz'.⁴⁹ Fuller's answer is based on his reading of Deuteronomy 28, with its stipulations of covenant blessings and curses for Israel. Israel had been scattered among the nations and had suffered disasters such as the Holocaust because '... she repeatedly failed to love God with all her heart, soul, and mind'.

The Holocaust was a divine punish-

⁴³ Berkovits, *Faith after the Holocaust*, p.85.

⁴⁴ Berkovits, *Faith after the Holocaust*, p.70.

⁴⁵ Berkovits, *Faith after the Holocaust*, p.84.

⁴⁶ Cohn-Sherbok, 'Jewish Faith and the Holocaust,' p.284, comments that Berkovits's challenge to believe in spite of overwhelming obstacles does not address the fundamental theological difficulties. He thinks that Berkovits offers no help to those who '... are unable to follow Job's example, and instead seek a viable Jewish theodicy, in which the justice and righteousness of God are defended in the face of evil and suffering'.

⁴⁷ For example, in his recent 802 page work on the doctrine of God, John S. Feinberg, in *No One Like Him: the Doctrine of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), interacts ably with a broad range of contemporary thought, but makes no mention of the Holocaust in the chapter on 'Divine Providence and Evil'.

⁴⁸ See, for example, David A. Rausch, *A Legacy of Hatred: Why Christians Must Not Forget the Holocaust* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), and most notably, David P. Gushee, *The Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust: A Christian Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994).

⁴⁹ Daniel P. Fuller, 'Why Was There an Auschwitz?' *Eternity* 15 (Dec. 1964): 27-28, 32 at 28.

ment for breaking the covenant. It is not that the Jewish people are worse than other people, but God permitted the Holocaust to impress upon humankind the 'horror of their idolatry' and to show all men '... what their fate will be unless they repent of their worship of the creature and come instead to worship the Creator'.⁵⁰ Fuller's perspective on the Holocaust as a 'divine punishment of the Jews' parallels and continues some of the elements of the anti-Judaic theology of the early church fathers and middle ages.

In his 1981 article, 'Evangelical Christians and Holocaust Theology',⁵¹ Stephen T. Davis, then on the faculty at Claremont Men's College, was willing to agree that the Christian church was in some measure directly and indirectly implicated in the rise of modern antisemitism. While it may be the case that the Christian church in general contributed to antisemitism, Davis went further in hypothesizing that the nineteenth-century liberal criticism of the Old Testament in particular helped to sever the church from its Jewish roots, undercut the divine authority of the Bible, and weakened belief in the uniqueness of the Jews as God's chosen people—thus helping prepare the

way for Hitler's extermination of the Jews.⁵²

While some 'Holocaust theologians' have been ready to revise basic Christian doctrines for the sake of better relations with the Jewish community, Davis forthrightly stated that it is unrealistic and unreasonable for Jews or liberal Christians to expect that evangelicals will alter their most basic convictions in the interests of ecumenical dialogue. While making common cause against antisemitism in all its forms, evangelicals will continue to believe that '... Jesus is the messiah and Son of God and that those who deny it are mistaken'.⁵³ While not singling out Jews as a special object of evangelism, evangelicals will continue to insist on their right to preach the gospel to Jews as well as other people, 'and will doubtless continue to do so'.⁵⁴ Davis thus defended the historic evangelical stance on Christology and evangelism, but did not directly address the *theodicy* question as such.

John T. Johnson's 2001 article published in the *Tyndale Bulletin*, 'Should the Holocaust Force Us to Rethink Our View of Good and Evil?' interacts with the previous work of Jewish and Christian scholars. He is aware of the revisionist Holocaust theologies of Clark Williamson and Paul van Buren, but unwilling to accept their premise that the Holocaust requires a fundamental restructuring of Christian theology.

50 Fuller, 'Why Was There an Auschwitz?', p. 32. Fuller does not comment on the fact that many Holocaust victims were not *secular* Jews, but more observant Orthodox Jews from eastern Europe.

51 First published in the *American Journal of Philosophy* 2:3 (1981):121-129; reprinted in Richard W. Rousseau, *Christianity and Judaism: The Deepening Dialogue* (Scranton, PA: Ridge Row Press, 1983), pp.107-115.

52 Davis 'Evangelical Christians and Holocaust Theology', p. 111.

53 Davis 'Evangelical Christians and Holocaust Theology', p. 109.

54 Davis 'Evangelical Christians and Holocaust Theology', p. 114.

While the Holocaust represents 'one of the most demonic expressions of human evil the world has yet witnessed', and was connected to centuries of Christian antisemitism, Johnson believes that this horrible event was not utterly different from other instances of massive suffering in human history. He cites the Black Death of the middle ages, which killed one-third of Europe's population; the Taiping Rebellion in China of the 1850s, killing twenty million, and the Chinese civil war of the 1930s and 1940s, which may have consumed somewhere between 34 and 62 million lives.⁵⁵

Johnson finds in the book of Job a paradigm for reflecting on the Holocaust. Johnson admits that instances of evil that have no apparent good purpose can 'dishearten even the most devout among us', and that in such cases honesty requires us to simply admit that we do not know why such things happen.⁵⁶ At the end, Johnson's answers to the question posed in the title of his article is 'No': the Holocaust does not and should not be the basis for fundamental revision in an evangelical understanding of either God or evil. Christian faith must be maintained even in the face of gratuitous and massive evil, and the challenge of such evil for faith would be '... just as vexing had the Holocaust never happened'.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Johnson, 'Should the Holocaust Force Us to Rethink Our View of God and Evil?' *Tyndale Bulletin* 51:2 (2001): 117-128 at 123.

⁵⁶ Johnson, Holocaust, p.126.

⁵⁷ Johnson, Holocaust, p.128. Johnson points out that the revisionists who use his-

Theodicies: Representative Approaches

Before presenting the proposal for a 'martyreo-eschatological' hermeneutical framework, four other possible perspectives on the Holocaust and theodicy will be briefly noted: a 'non-theodicy' approach; 'divine retribution' theories; 'greater good' theories; and the 'limited God' proposals of process theology and 'Open Theism'.⁵⁸

'Divine Inscrutability': John J. Johnson

Under the heading of 'non-theodicies' could be included those authors who opt either for some form of atheism or divine inscrutability. As we have seen above, John J. Johnson is a representative of the latter option, ultimately appealing to divine inscrutability: evil must finally be accepted in faith as an 'impenetrable mystery' for which no theodicy or rational explanation can be forthcoming. It could be said that such an approach could be supported by the overall message of the book of Job, where in the final analysis Job reaffirms his faith in God in the face of inex-

torical experience to revise theological doctrine seem somewhat inconsistent in apparently not giving sufficient weight to the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 and its subsequent military successes as signs of God's continuing providence: p. 127.

⁵⁸ On the question of theodicy generally, see John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1977). See also Alvin Plantinga, 'Suffering and Evil', in *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 458-499, and also by Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

plicable suffering, despite not having received direct answers to his questions posed to God. Further, it might be said that this perspective recognizes the fundamentally *irrational* nature of evil, which inherently places limitations on any human attempts to rationalize its existence, nature, or extent.⁵⁹

Nevertheless, an appeal to divine inscrutability as the theological ‘bottom line’ would appear to be unsatisfactory. Those who appeal to divine inscrutability also generally appeal to the believer to maintain faith in the face of radical and massive evil such as the Holocaust—without *giving reasons why such faith should be maintained*. Without some rational justification for maintaining faith, this approach devolves into bare fideism.

‘Non-Theodicy’: Richard Rubenstein

The atheistic response to the Holocaust of Rubenstein represents another possible ‘non-theodicy’. For Rubenstein, the radical evil of the Nazi extermination of the Jews puts into question not merely the goodness or power of God, but the very existence of the God of the Jewish and Christian Bible. To state the obvious, Rubenstein’s approach is not a viable option for those who wish to maintain belief in the existence of the God attested in the scriptures.

Nevertheless, it could be said that Rubenstein’s perspective has the merit

of avoiding a bare fideism—a stance which would make religious faith immune from all empirical considerations. If Christian faith is grounded in historical events such as the resurrection of Jesus, then in principle, faith must be open to the risks of events in history (such as the Holocaust) which could put that faith in question.⁶⁰ From an Orthodox Jewish perspective, Exodus and Sinai, and for historic Christian belief, the Cross and Resurrection—and for both perspectives, the re-emergence of the modern state of Israel—continue, despite the Holocaust, to provide warrant for belief in a God who is present in history. God’s ways are indeed inscrutable in the sense that no finite human understanding can completely comprehend the infinite ways of God; nevertheless, attempts at partial understandings can appeal to such evidences in history that are relevant to religious belief.

‘Divine Retribution’: Teitelbaum and Fuller

The responses of Teitelbaum and Fuller⁶¹ are examples of ‘divine retribution’ theodicies: the Holocaust was a

⁵⁹ This point concerning the irrational nature of sin has been expounded by G.C. Berkouwer, *Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971).

⁶⁰ In a frequently cited discussion of ‘Theology and Falsification,’ the philosopher Anthony Flew pointed out that if there are *no possible conditions* under which the believer would question a proposition such as ‘God is a loving Father,’ then it is hard to see how such a belief remains a meaningful proposition: in Anthony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre, eds., *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1955), pp. 96–98.

⁶¹ Cited in n. 24 (Teitelbaum) and n. 48 (Fuller) above.

punishment for the sins of the Jewish people. Such analyses seem inadequate, and even harsh and simplistic for a number of reasons. While it is certainly true that all human beings are inherently sinful and subject to punishment, biblical texts such as the book of Job and Jesus' teachings in Luke 13:1-5 and John 9:1-3 warn of the dangers of too quickly concluding that an individual's suffering is a direct consequence of personal sin. There may in fact be other factors to consider.

On the hypothesis of the Holocaust as a direct act of divine retribution, is it to be supposed that the victims at Auschwitz were more wicked than those who happened to survive? If the victims of the Holocaust were 'targets' of God's justice, how accurate was the 'targeting'? What of the fact that many of the victims were the more observant and pious Jews of Eastern Europe? Is a scenario in which God punishes more severely the pious and spares the wicked a vindication of God's justice, or a compounding of the problem? And from this perspective, is it to be supposed that God's wrath was being poured out on the Jewish babies who were incinerated in the gas chambers, while the babies of their Nazi tormentors were spared? Does such a perspective in fact vindicate divine justice, or does it leave us with a picture of a 'just' God who appears to be arbitrary, cruel, and even sadistic?

Daniel Fuller's appeal to Deuteronomy 28 to support the divine-retribution understanding seems problematic. The text states that the curses of exile and judgment will be the result of 'not obeying the Lord your God and not following his commandments' (28:15). Such covenant curses were experi-

enced by the Jewish people during the Exile and Babylonian captivity as a result of the sins of *apostasy* and *idolatry*. The observant Jews who perished in the Holocaust died as victims who had not forsaken the God of Abraham or the law of Moses, but as those who were willing to 'sanctify the Name' and were ready to die for their faith.⁶²

Any biblical interpretation which moves directly from the premise 'God punishes Israel for forsaking the God of Abraham and the Torah' (28:15) to 'the Holocaust is God's punishment for Jews who have not accepted Jesus as Messiah' should not be accepted without much more justification than is usually provided.⁶³ A 'Jewish rejection of Jesus' explanation of the Holocaust is also highly problematic in light of the murky picture of Jesus culturally and historically available to European Jewry. After 1500 years of church history sadly marked by anti-Judaic attitudes, pogroms, Talmud-burning, and the Crusades, how would such a 'gospel' be perceived by a typical European Jew? Had the Jewish people heard a clear and winsome message of faith?

⁶² As will be argued below, the category of *martyrdom* rather than retribution would seem to be a more helpful way of understanding the horrible injustices perpetrated by the Nazis.

⁶³ These comments move beyond Fuller, who said that the Jews, like all people, are guilty of failing to 'love God with all.. heart, soul, and mind' ('Why Was There an Auschwitz?' p. 32.), and hence were punished as an example. Fuller does not *specifically* argue that 'not believing in Jesus' is the pre-eminent expression of this apostasy, though such a conclusion has been frequently drawn in Christian church history.

Would the justice of God be vindicated by seeing the Holocaust as God's severe judgment on the Jewish people for rejecting a portrait of Jesus so marred by the darker sides of Christian history? Such explanations raise more questions about the justice of God than they resolve.

'Free Will' and 'Greater Good': Hick and Kushner

Historically, most theodicies have appealed to various forms of the 'free will defence' or theories of a 'greater good.' John Hick, for example, is one of many who have argued that the power of moral choice is inherent in the meaning of personhood: 'God is able to create beings of any and every conceivable kind; but creatures who lack moral freedom ... would not be what we mean by persons.'⁶⁴ The power of moral choice is the power to choose evil as well as good, and the possibility that humans would misuse their freedom was inherent in the creation of the human race.

Rabbi Harold Kushner appealed to the free will defence in his best-selling book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. Man is free to choose good, but this also means that he must be free to choose evil.⁶⁵ Some choose to do evil on a small scale, but in the Holocaust Hitler and those who followed him chose to do evil on a massive scale. God did not intervene because God '... does not control man's choosing between

good and evil.'⁶⁶ Hitler, not God, should be blamed for the Holocaust. If the question is asked, 'Where was God at Auschwitz?', Kushner's answer is that 'He was with the victims, and not with the murderers.'⁶⁷

Many theodicies have appealed to some form of a theory of 'evil as a (regrettable) means to a greater good'. The greater good could be, for example, the formation of such higher human virtues as compassion, courage, and generosity that might have little occasion to arise except in the face of suffering, injustice, and evil. As John Hick has put it, from this perspective the world is not seen as being designed for the '... maximization of human pleasure and the minimization of human pain', but rather adapted to '... the quite different purpose of "soul making"'.⁶⁸ The existence of evil, then, is seen as a necessary means in the moral development of the human race.

Various writers on the Holocaust have pointed out that the emergence of the state of Israel and the world's greater sensitivity to the evils of anti-Semitism are goods that have emerged from the massive evil of the Holocaust. While such observations may be true, critics are quick to raise the questions, 'Wasn't the Holocaust too high a price to pay for such goods? How can you say that the good outweighed the evil? And good *for whom*? What about the 'good' of the victims? Should not God have chosen better and more just means to accomplish whatever good might have been in view?'

⁶⁴ John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 39.

⁶⁵ Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), p. 82.

⁶⁶ Kushner, *Bad Things*, p.84.

⁶⁷ Kushner, *When Bad Things*

⁶⁸ Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 42.

Such questions cannot be easily dismissed. As Dan Cohn-Sherbok has pointed out, theodicies that discuss the Holocaust without having appeal to a doctrine of a future life and the possibility of compensation for the innocent have no adequate way of maintaining the justice of God.⁶⁹

In defence of the 'greater good' type of theodicy, it could be noted that the critics have their own set of questions to ponder: 'If you say that God should have stopped Hitler, how about Mussolini? If Mussolini, then how about Pearl Harbour ... If God should have intervened to stop the slaughter of six million, how about five? Four? 400,000? 40,000? 4,000? 400? 40? 4? On what basis can you say that 'X amount of evil' is inconsistent with the ultimate purposes of God? How can you know that precise quantity 'X'? Do you fully understand the universe that God has created or the eternal purposes of God?'

If in fact there are *independent reasons* for believing in the existence of God, considerations, for example, of design in the universe, the resurrection of Jesus, religious experience, and so forth—then these grounds still remain on the 'evidential table', so to speak, despite the fact of the Holocaust. If in fact there are independent grounds for believing in such a God as attested in the Jewish and Christian scriptures, then it will be the case that humans, from their finite and limited perspectives, are not able to set *a priori* limits on the amount of evil that could be consistent with the final purposes of an

infinite God—purposes which transcend this life and the present universe as we know it.

'Limited God': Kushner and Boyd

Yet another approach to the problem of evil in general that has been gaining some ground in recent years could be termed 'Limited God' theodicies, i.e., an understanding of God in which either God's power or knowledge, or both power and knowledge are limited. Examples of such theodicies can be found in a Jewish writer such as Harold Kushner, in process theology⁷⁰, and in the movement somewhat influenced by process thought known as 'Open theism'.⁷¹ Such approaches purport to take human freedom very seriously and consistently, and argue that God, in order to 'make space' for human freedom, an essential defining characteristic of human persons, voluntarily limits his power, knowledge, or both. God cannot be blamed for evil, for God

⁷⁰ Most notably expounded by David Ray Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil: a Process Theodicy* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976).

⁷¹ See, for example, Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger, *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994); Gregory Boyd, *God of the Possible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000); Gregory Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001); for an incisive critique of the 'Open theism' position see Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000).

⁶⁹ Cohn-Sherbok, 'Jewish Faith and the Holocaust'.

is simply not able to prevent all evils without undermining the integrity of free human choices.

Harold Kushner, for example, writes that while God wants the righteous to live peaceful and happy lives, '... sometimes even He can't bring that about. It is too difficult even for God to keep cruelty and chaos from claiming their innocent victims.'⁷² Even if God is a just God, but not a God who has all power, '... then He can still be on our side when bad things happen to us'.⁷³

Gregory Boyd, an exponent of 'Open Theism,' in which God's knowledge of the future is limited by free human choices, proposes a 'Trinitarian warfare theodicy' as a response to the problem of evil. God's will is not the immediate explanation for a massive evil like the Holocaust; world history is the story of innumerable acts of evil perpetrated by both human and supernatural agents, who are at war with the purposes of God. Hitler, not God, is to be blamed for the Holocaust; and not just Hitler but the myriads of others who cooperated actively or passively in Hitler's genocidal acts.⁷⁴ God values freedom and the genuine love of his creatures so much that he is willing to take the enormous risks of massive evil in order to achieve his final purposes.

These 'limited God' theodicies have some appeal, in that they would purportedly let God 'off the hook' for massive evil. God can not be blamed for the Holocaust if God, for whatever rea-

sons, could not have prevented the Holocaust. Open Theists and process theologians claim to present a picture of a 'religiously available' God who can sympathize and identify with the victims of suffering and injustice. Nevertheless, from the perspective of Evangelical theology, for which the biblical witness is normative, such approaches can be seen as seriously if not fatally flawed.

It is difficult to square the notion of a God of limited power with the biblical witness to the all-powerful 'Maker of Heaven and Earth'. It could be noted at the outset that the history of modern theology would suggest that displacing the primacy of biblical authority in *theology* makes it more difficult to maintain the primacy of biblical authority in *ethics*; 'slippery slopes' in doctrinal foundations have tended to produce slippery slopes in morals.

And just how is one to determine *exactly how limited* is the power of God? Limited enough to 'make space for human freedom', but still powerful enough to raise the dead? Does it make sense to say that a God powerful enough to raise the dead and overcome the Second Law of Thermodynamics has *limited* power? On the other hand, if God does not have the power to raise the dead, then how can either the *compensatory* or *retributive* justice of God be vindicated in the world to come? Without a hope in the resurrection, and the retributive justice of God, is it the case that Adolf Hitler, by committing suicide in a Berlin bunker in April 1945 and having his body cremated, has escaped all human and even divine justice?

How much power must God still have to ensure the classic Christian

⁷² Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen*, p. 43.

⁷³ Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen*, p. 44

⁷⁴ Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, p. 174.

and Jewish hope that God will ultimately prevail against evil? If God's power is very great, but finite, and the power of evil, while finite, grows exponentially over time, then on what basis is it certain that God will prevail over evil, or that the total amount of good will outweigh evil at the end?

Even as a limited-God theodicy puts into question the possibility that the justice of God will be finally vindicated, so it would appear to raise questions about the *wisdom* of God as well. Should God have taken the risk of creating the world in the first place, if his knowledge and power were limited to the extent that there was no assurance that good would finally outweigh the evils? Would not a wise and prudent God have better abstained from creating the universe at all, rather than creating a 'fiasco' in which God's intentions for goodness and justice were mocked with no prospect of final redemption? These problems concerning the power, wisdom, and justice of God in relation to the clear biblical witness would seem to indicate that 'limited God' theodicies create as many problems as they purport to solve.

Proposal: a Martyreo-Eschatological Hermeneutic

Having surveyed a range of Jewish and Christian responses to the Holocaust, an attempt will now be made to sketch the outlines of what might be called a 'martyreo-eschatological' hermeneutic of the Holocaust. It will be suggested that the categories of *martyrdom* and *eschatology* are appropriate and even essential for any discussions of theodicy in relation to this subject.

The category of martyrdom is, of course, a venerable one in both the Jewish and Christian traditions.⁷⁵ Jewish writers have not been in agreement about the helpfulness of this concept in relation to the Holocaust. Emil Fackenheim, for example, has questioned its viability. In the post-Holocaust situation, Fackenheim believes, it is time '...to suspend the time-honored Jewish exaltation of martyrdom ... after Auschwitz, Jewish life is more sacred than Jewish death, were it even for the sanctification of the divine Name'.⁷⁶ The supreme value for the Jew is the continuation of Jewish *existence*, and this is demonstrated in unwavering commitment to the state of Israel and Jewish self-defence—lest 'Hitler be given posthumous victories'. In Fackenheim's view, the dehumanization of so many in the death camps, that reduced human beings to the living dead, removed the real possibility of ethical choice presupposed by the traditional understandings of martyrdom.

The Orthodox writer Eliezer Berkovits has, however, defended the traditional Jewish notion of *Kiddush haShem* ('sanctification of the divine Name'—in martyrdom) as very relevant to the death camps and the ghettos. Though the faith of many failed or was non-existent, there were tens of

⁷⁵ A notable example from the intertestamental period is the account of the Jewish mother who though she saw her seven sons tortured and killed during the persecution of Antiochus IV, yet 'bore it with good courage because of her hope in the Lord' and faith in the resurrection: II Macc. 7.

⁷⁶ Emil Fackenheim, *God's Presence in History* (New York: New York University Press, 1970), p. 87.

thousands who went to the ovens in the death camps with the name of God on their lips, saying the *Shema* in the same courageous way as did Rabbi Akiba before being martyred by the Romans during the time of Hadrian.⁷⁷ Such a 'sanctification of the Name' is not just one final act of affirmation in the face of death, but can be a form of behaviour and daily conduct. Continuing with the routine of daily prayers, even under the most degrading of circumstances, '... and ignoring the world that is bent on crushing the Jew is one of the marks of *Kiddush haShem*.'⁷⁸

The perspective being argued here is more in keeping with that of Berkovits than Fackenheim. While Fackenheim may be strictly correct in saying that many Holocaust victims were so dehumanized that meaningful ethical choices of a heroic sort were no longer a realistic psychological possibility, could one not still appeal to a notion of the solidarity of the Jewish people, and say that one (heroic Jewish martyr) died for the many? A traditional Jewish reading of Isaiah 53 would see the Suffering Servant who was 'led like a lamb to the slaughter' and whose form was 'marred beyond

human likeness', to be a figure of the Jewish people as a whole, who have been called by God to suffer for the Name over the many centuries of history. A Jew, even a non-religious Jew, who was murdered merely *for being a Jew*, the bearer of a name associated with the God of Abraham, could thus, in an extended sense, be viewed as a martyr. 'Jew-hatred is God-hatred': antisemitism is a *theological* phenomenon, in that hatred of the chosen race is in the final analysis hatred directed against God himself.

For the Christian, viewing the Holocaust through the lens of a category such as martyrdom would help to rescue the Christian tradition from its tragic legacy of anti-Judaism and its tendency to see post-biblical Jewish history through the grid of a theology of 'divine punishment of the Jewish people'. Reflection on the reality of martyrdom would honour the lives of the Jews who died under Hitler, and help to retrieve for American Christians living in the affluent and comfortable West a noble category in their own Christian tradition. The experience of Jewish martyrs during the Nazi years should offer a grim reminder to Western Christians to reflect on the fact that in the last one hundred years, *more Christians* lost their lives as martyrs than in all the previous centuries combined.⁷⁹ The memory of the Holocaust

⁷⁷ Berkovits, *Faith after the Holocaust*, p. 82.

⁷⁸ Berkovits, *Faith*, p. 83. Victor Frankel, himself a Holocaust survivor, has written: 'The experience of camp life shows that man does have a choice of action. There were enough examples, often of a heroic nature, which proved that apathy could be overcome, irritability suppressed. Man *can* preserve a vestige of spiritual freedom, of independence of mind, even in such terrible conditions of psychic and physical stress.' *From Death Camp to Existentialism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), p. 65.

⁷⁹ Todd M. Johnson, 'Global Christianity at 2000', *Contact* 33:2 (Summer 2003), p.15. Most of these Christian martyrs died under Communist regimes, but even after the collapse of communism, Christians were being persecuted by secular, Islamic, Hindu, and even 'Christian' regimes.

summons both Jews and Christians to be willing to live and if necessary die for the 'sanctification of the Name'.

'Eschatological Intensification of Evil':

The hermeneutical approach being presented here is 'eschatological' in three respects, in that it posits first the eschatological *intensification* of evil, then the eschatological *vindication* of divine justice in the punishment of evil, and finally the eschatological *transvaluation* of evil and suffering in the New Creation. This hermeneutic presupposes that reflection on the Holocaust must incorporate a perspective that looks toward the end of history, and beyond history to the new creation and the world to come.

With respect to the first point above, it can be noted that both Jewish and Christian tradition expect an intensification of evil and growing persecution of the righteous as history approaches the end. The prophet Ezekiel speaks of the enemies of God and God's people under the mysterious figure of Gog and Magog (Ezk.38, 39) who attempt to destroy the people of Israel in the time of the end. The prophecy of Daniel foresees the rise of a wicked ruler who 'exalts and magnifies himself above every god', who 'honours a god of fortresses', and who brings unparalleled distress upon God's people (Dan.11:36-39; 12:1,2).

In rabbinic literature, the coming of the messiah is heralded by a time in which 'presumption will increase..., the empire shall fall into heresy ... Galilee will be laid waste ... and the people ... shall go about from city to city with

none to show pity on them.'⁸⁰ In the Talmud it is stated, 'When you see a generation ever dwindling, hope for him [the Messiah] ... R. Johanan said: When you see a generation overwhelmed by troubles as by a river, await him, as it is written, *when the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him* [Is.59:19 ?], which is followed by, *And the Redeemer shall come to Zion* [Is.59:20].'⁸¹

Christian apocalyptic teaching also expects growing persecution of the people of God as the time of the end draws near. The coming of the Son of Man will be preceded, according to Jesus, by a time of great distress, 'unequalled from the beginning of the world until now, and never to be equalled again' (Mt. 24:21-27). The apostle Paul expected the appearance of a 'man of lawlessness' who would 'oppose and exalt himself over everything that is called God', whose coming would be in 'accordance with the working of Satan' (2 Thess. 2:3-9).⁸² The John of Revelation has a vision of believers who have '... come out of the great tribulation' and who as martyrs have 'washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb' (Rev. 7:14). This is not to say that Hitler and the Holocaust are to simply be identified with the 'Antichrist' and

⁸⁰ Mishnah *Sotah* 9:15.

⁸¹ BT *Sanhedrin* 98a.

⁸² It is recognized that both these passages—Matt. 24 and 2 Thess. 2—raise a variety of complex exegetical questions; however, they are cited here only in relation to the more limited point that the tradition expects an intensification of evil prior to the end.

'Great Tribulation,' but from the perspective being suggested here, it would seem consistent to see the Holocaust as an *anticipation* of the end and an example of the *intensification* of evil as history approaches its climax.

Many have seen in Hitler not merely a human 'evil genius', but an evil leader energized by a demonic power. His ability to commit evil was amplified and intensified by the modern technology of a totalitarian state, a technology of death not available to tyrants in earlier periods of history.⁸³

Secular history during the last hundred years would, in fact, seem to be consistent with the pattern suggested here. The twentieth century has been called the 'century of mass murder' and genocide, with an estimated 60 million people being killed in civil wars, disturbances and genocides. This tragic record of massive brutality and killing includes the Holocaust; the brutal assault on the Armenians by the Turks, 1915-1923; Stalin's planned famine in the Ukraine, starving millions during the period 1932-33; some 3 million executed under Mao Tse-tung; massacres in Indonesia, 1965-66; mass killings in Bangladesh (1971), Burundi (1972), Cambodia (1975-79), East Timor (1975-79), Rwanda (1994); and the devastations

in the former Yugoslavia, the Congo, and Chechnya.⁸⁴ And as already noted above, it should be recalled that *more Christians* were killed for their faith in the twentieth century than in all the previous centuries combined.⁸⁵

Eschatology and Divine Justice:

A second element in the proposal being offered here involves the *eschatological vindication of divine justice*. That is to say, any viable theodicy that attempted to deal with the Holocaust would involve God's action not only during history, but beyond history, in the life to come. Such a theodicy would incorporate the categories of *resurrection* and *judgment*, in order to provide a conceptual apparatus for maintaining both the *compensatory* and *retributive* justice of God.

Dan Cohn-Sherbok has noted the limitations of Jewish discussions such as those of Fackenheim and Rubenstein in this regard, where no appeal to the afterlife is made. 'If the Jewish faith is to survive', in his view, 'Holocaust theology will need to incorporate a belief in the Afterlife in which the righteous of Israel who died in the death camps will receive their due reward.'⁸⁶ He notes that many modern Jewish thinkers have abandoned the tradi-

⁸³ This point was made by Albert Speer, Hitler's Minister of Armaments and War Production: 'The criminal events of those years were not only the outgrowth of Hitler's personality. The extent of the crimes was also due to the fact that Hitler was the first to be able to employ the implements of technology to multiply crimes.' Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich: Memoirs* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), p. 615.

⁸⁴ James E. Waller, 'Human Nature and Genocide,' *Stillpoint* 18:3 (Summer 2003): 11-13 at 11; drawing from Waller's book, *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁸⁵ Note 77 above.

⁸⁶ Cohn-Sherbok, 'Jewish Faith and the Holocaust,' p. 277.

tional categories of the resurrection of the dead, the coming of a messianic age, and divine judgment in the world to come, and consequently have no convincing way of conceptualizing how the justice of God could be maintained. 'Without the eventual vindication of the righteous in Paradise', he argued, 'there is no way to sustain the belief in the providential God who watches over His chosen people.'⁸⁷

An Evangelical theodicy can be in agreement with Cohn-Sherbok on this crucial point. If the God of history acts beyond history in raising the dead and in punishing the wicked, then there is a way of understanding how the justice of God could be vindicated, despite the atrocities of the Holocaust. The God who raises the dead can compensate righteous victims for the injustices they have suffered, and visit retribution on those who perpetrated the atrocities.⁸⁸ If God indeed can raise the dead, an Adolf Hitler who committed suicide and had his body cremated to escape human justice can still be called to account by the Righteous Judge who raises the dead and is the almighty Maker of Heaven and Earth.

Holocaust and Eternal Salvation?

It must be recognized, of course, that an evangelical theodicy for the Holocaust faces an issue not faced in the same way by Cohn-Sherbok, i.e., the category of 'righteous victim' in relation to the question of *eternal salvation*. Would it not be the case, given the doctrines of original sin and the necessity of faith in Christ for salvation, that the category of '[eternally]righteous [non-believing Jewish] victims' of the Holocaust be an 'empty set'?

In attempting to respond to this important point, it may be admitted at the outset that any suggestion on this matter is in the nature of the case speculative. Nevertheless, it could be suggested that an evangelical theodicy would hold that a) any person who is ultimately and eternally redeemed is so redeemed only on the basis of the merits of Christ; b) that we can form (fallible) human judgments as to any person's eternal destiny only on the basis of their *response* to Christ and the gospel; and c) that while it is *conceptually* and *hypothetically* possible that an individual might be *ontically* in a state of salvation without that individual or others being *epistemically aware* of that state of salvation, we cannot claim to *know* that such a state of salvation actually exists for a given individual, apart from their actual response to Christ and the gospel.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Dan Cohn-Sherbok, 'Jewish Faith and the Holocaust', p. 292.

⁸⁸ In their revisionist, post-Holocaust theology, Roy and Alice Eckardt reject the historical, bodily resurrection of Jesus, which they see as the legitimization of 'Christian triumphalism and supersessionism'; Jesus will be raised at the end of history—together with the victims of the Holocaust: *Long Night's Journey into Day* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982), pp. 132, 150.

⁸⁹ Compare the statement in Article IV.23 of the 1989 'Willowbank Declaration on the Christian Gospel and the Jewish People': 'We deny that we have *sufficient warrant* [emphasis added:JD] to assume or anticipate the salvation of anyone, who is not a believer in Jesus Christ.'

The upshot of this line of reasoning is that it is, in fact, possible, within the parameters of traditional evangelical doctrine, to *conceptualize* the post-mortem ‘compensation’ of a righteous (Jewish) Holocaust victim—and even their eternal salvation⁹⁰—while admitting that it is not possible to know that such is actually the case. Nevertheless, such a line of reasoning is far from being devoid of merit, in that it at least *in principle* provides a way for understanding how the justice of God and the dignity and rights of the victims could be vindicated in a future state.

At this point a further word might be said concerning perhaps the ‘hardest of the hard cases’: the babies who were murdered and burned in the ovens of the death camps. The grim challenge of Irving Greenberg should be recalled: ‘No statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of burning children.’⁹¹ No theodicy attempting to reflect on the horrors of the Holocaust can avoid this challenge. Does Greenberg meet his own challenge, neglecting, as he does, to appeal to a faith in the resurrection and the reality of a world to come? Is it not at least possible to *conceptualize* a future state of affairs in which such victims could be compensated, if a righteous God does indeed raise the dead?

And to move even a step further, what if the position of Charles Hodge on the matter of infants dying in infancy—that *all who die in infancy are*

saved—turned out to be correct? Hodge, writing in the nineteenth century, did not, of course have the Holocaust in view, but rather the common circumstance of high infant mortality in his own historical era. Appealing to Romans 5:18, 19 (‘by the obedience of the one man many will be made righteous’), Hodge argued that the scriptures nowhere exclude any class of infants, believing or unbelieving, from the benefits of Christ’s redemption; ‘all the descendants of Adam, except those of whom it is expressly revealed that they cannot inherit the kingdom of God, are saved.’⁹² Hodge was arguing that all infants dying in infancy are *presumptively elect* and saved through the merits of Christ and the sovereign decree of God. If Hodge were correct, then this speaks directly to Greenberg’s challenge. It may not be possible to *know* that Hodge’s position is correct, but even the possibility that it *may* be correct is significant for a Holocaust theodicy.

The Eschatological ‘Transvaluation’ of Suffering:

A final element in the perspective being offered here might be termed the ‘eschatological *transvaluation* of evil and suffering’. This notion is suggested in the statement of the apostle

⁹⁰ One might posit, hypothetically to be sure, a ‘secret work of the Spirit’ and a ‘seed of faith’ in such cases, known to God alone.
⁹¹ Cited in notes 28, 31 above.

⁹² Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, v.I ((Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, repr. 1975), p. 26. On the issue of infant salvation, see also the study of R.A. Webb, *The Theology of Infant Salvation* (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1907), written in the context of a controversy on this topic in the Southern Presbyterian Church.

Paul, 'I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us' (Rom. 8:18).⁹³ The (merely) temporal (or, eternal) perspective within which the suffering is viewed is crucial for a person's valuation of the suffering. The apostle is not denying the reality or intensity of his own or anyone else's suffering; only affirming, from the perspective of faith and eternity, that such suffering can be seen as 'transvalued' from that eternal, eschatological perspective. The *fact* of pain remains; the *meaning* of pain can be transformed if it can be viewed from a longer, wider, and even eternal perspective within which at least the *possibility* of some meaning is held open.

The transvaluation of the 'present suffering' is not dependent on a full or even partial understanding of the 'reasons' for the suffering; it may be sufficient from the perspective of faith to have some grounds to believe that it is *possible* that God has reasons for permitting the suffering, even when I cannot imagine what those specific reasons might be. The categories of *martyrdom* and the vindication of divine justice in resurrection, divine judgment, and life in the world to come at least provide a theological framework within which the sufferings and atroci-

ties of the death camps could be transvalued.

Viewing the matter from the perspective of a purely utilitarian calculus of the balance of pain and pleasure,⁹⁴ the question could be raised, 'Is it possible that any finite amount of suffering, however great or intense, could, in principle, be "counter-balanced" by an eternal, unending experience of pleasure and satisfaction in some future state? Would it be better not to have existed at all, rather than have existed, suffered terribly, and then experienced intense, never-ending satisfactions in a life to come?'

It at least seems plausible that the latter, 'counter-balancing' scenario could be reasonably preferred by a moral agent who was given the choice. In a more this-worldly context, a woman's experience of labor and childbirth might be invoked as an analogy. Labour and childbirth can be one of the most physically painful human experiences; yet countless women have said 'It was worth it', when the pain was recalled after the fact, and from the perspective of the satisfactions experienced as the mother of the child. The pain had been 'transvalued'.⁹⁵ It makes all the difference in the world as to

⁹³ Similarly, the apostle writes in 2 Cor. 4:17, 'For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal weight of glory that far outweighs them all.' This is not to say that any given suffering—whether Paul's or that of someone in a death camp—is in itself 'light and momentary'; only, that *from the perspective of a future life* it could be seen as such.

⁹⁴ It is not being argued here that such a utilitarian perspective is adequate theologically for wrestling with the theodicy question; only that it might be one element among many in the overall discussion.

⁹⁵ Jesus uses precisely such an illustration in John 16:21 to put the disciples' grief at his departure in a larger context: 'A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child has been born into the world.'

whether the pain in question is seen as ultimately pointless, meaningless, and unredeemable, or on the other hand, as possibly the 'birthpangs' of the messianic age or a prelude to the 'glory that will be revealed in us' in the new creation that is to come.

Reflections from the Book of Job: 'Randomness' in History

This section's discussion of theodicy will be concluded with several observations on the book of Job, the biblical book which perhaps more than any other, inevitably arises in both Jewish and Christian reflections on the Holocaust.⁹⁶ It is worth noting that the figure of *Satan* is prominent in the opening narrative. Job's inexplicable and seemingly gratuitous suffering has causes that cannot be fully understood in this-worldly terms alone; Job has been caught in a cosmic battle, a spiritual warfare between the forces of good and evil. In the eschatological hermeneutic offered here, there is a place for a *demonic* element in human history, and furthermore, a way of understanding how such a demonic dimension could intensify as history approaches the end. From such a per-

spective, the demonic dimensions of Hitler's genocidal project could be viewed as an anticipation of the eschatological intensification of evil that has been recognized in both Jewish and Christian tradition.

Satan's question, 'Does Job fear God for nothing?' could be seen as raising the issue of *self-centred religion*. Satan accuses Job of serving God for essentially self-serving reasons. Will Job really continue to love and serve God if all worldly inducements and rewards are taken away?⁹⁷ Biblical religion can be seen as providing a philosophy of history in which both *regularity* and *randomness* are built into the historical process.

God's covenant with creation ensures that 'seedtime and harvest' and the forces of nature will exhibit a certain order and predictability (cf. Gen.8:22). At the same time, the biblical writers can recognize the apparently random and gratuitous nature of human life: the race is not necessarily to the swift or the battle to the strong, 'but time and chance happen to them all' (Ecc.9:11). The virtuous are not guaranteed a normal lifespan or a fitting reward *in this life* for their righteousness; the pious and the unbeliever alike were consumed in the flames of Auschwitz.

And yet it is precisely this random element of human experience that can be seen to be a way of answering

96 Among the many commentaries on Job, see: Thomas Aquinas, *The Literal Exposition on Job*, tr. Anthony Damico (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989); John Calvin, *Sermons on Job*, tr. Arthur Golding (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1993) [facsimile of 1574 ed.]; Saadia Ben Joseph Al-Fayyumi, *The Book of Theodicy*, tr. L.E. Goodman (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1988); Gustavo Gutierrez, *On Job* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987). I wish to thank my colleague Paul Lim for drawing my attention to these references.

97 Saadia, op. cit., p. 383 notes that God does not respond by promising Job a recompense for his suffering, even though this is later the case: this is consistent with a divine testing of the sincerity and disinterestedness of Job's faith.

Satan's question: 'Is all human religion at heart self-interest? Must God inevitably fail in his project of producing a people who will love God *for God's own sake*—in spite of gratuitous and inexplicable evil?' If the righteous—whether believing Jew or believing Gentile—were always rewarded in this life for their righteousness, humans might never advance to a state of disinterested love for God, loving God for God's own sake.⁹⁸

98 This hypothesis of random, gratuitous evil as a 'filter' on selfish religion has some similarity to the perspective of Moses ben Hayyim Alsheikh (c.1508-1600), a Jewish commentator on Job: Only an apparent 'disconnect' between human action and Divine response can be the background for a truly selfless faith: see Nahum Glatzer, *Essays in Jewish Thought* (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1978), 'The Book of Job and Its Interpreters,' pp.109-134 at p. 126.

From such a perspective, the presence of random and gratuitous evil in history can be seen as an essential 'filter' to purify man from his inveterate bent to serve the Creator for selfish reasons. As such, this 'random filter' in history can be accommodated within the framework of 'greater good' theodicies.

Admittedly, this paper, for some readers, may have raised as many questions as it has answered. It is hoped, however, that by emphasizing the concepts of the eschatological intensification of evil, the special role of Israel in God's plan as witnesses to the covenant with Abraham, and the apparently 'random' and inexplicable elements in the sovereign God's plan for history, future evangelical reflections on the Holocaust will not be limited merely to 'divine retribution' understandings of the theodicy question.

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The Jesus Way to Win the World

Robert E. Coleman

KEYWORDS: *Servant, disciple, strategy, evangelism, ministry, Holy Spirit*

The Great Commission

Jesus calls us to be his disciples. The word means 'learner,' as in the sense of an apprentice. By placing the emphasis here, our Lord emphasizes not only development in the disciple's character, but also involvement in his mission to the world—an expectation finally articulated in the Great Commission (Mt. 28:19, 20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47,48; Acts 1:8; John 17:18; 20:21).

What may be overlooked, however, in setting forth the universal extent of his mission is that Jesus specifies the end result of all the activity—going out, preaching, baptizing, teaching, witnessing in the power of the Holy Spirit—is to 'make disciples', not converts.¹

¹ The Matthean version (28:19-20) especially brings this out, where the only verb in the passage translates 'make disciples.' 'Go', 'baptize', and 'teach' are all participles, which means that they derive their force from

Herein is the key to his plan to win the world.² For disciples do not stop with conversion; they keep following Jesus, ever growing in his likeness, while learning the lifestyle of the Great Commission, and someday, through the process of multiplication, the gospel will reach the ends of the earth.

Taking the Form of a Servant

It behoves us, then to look closely at how Jesus made disciples. Of course, some of his practices two thousand years ago probably would not be the

the leading verb, though the word 'go' does stand in a coordinate relationship to the dominant verb.

² The basic idea of this paper comes through in a number of my books, all published by Fleming H. Revell/Baker Book House, including *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (1963, 1964, 1993); *The Master Plan of Discipleship* (1987); *The Mind of the Master* (1977, 1989, 2000); *The Great Commission Lifestyle* (1992); and by Crossway, *The Master's Way of Personal Evangelism* (1997).

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same today. Methods are variable, conditioned by the time and situation. But principles underlying his ministry are unchanging, and offer guidelines for his disciples in every generation.

The place to begin is with the incarnation, when Jesus ‘humbled himself’, and for the sake of the world, took ‘the very nature of a servant’, a mission that inevitably led to Calvary (Philp. 2:6-8). ‘The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many’ (Mark 10:45). What this self-renunciation means has implications we will never cease to learn, but as we can understand, the principle of servanthood is inherent in taking up the cross and following Christ.

In this chosen way of life, Jesus went about doing good and demonstrating in works of compassion how much people mattered to God. Little wonder that multitudes were drawn to him. Sometimes the crowds numbered into the thousands (John 3:26; 6:15; 11:47, 48; 12:19; cf. Mark 12:12; Mt. 21:26; Luke 20:19).

There is a lesson in this for us. If our ministry does not attract people, could it be that they do not see in our life genuine concern where they hurt? Let us not imagine that our witness has greater vitality when only a handful of people seem impressed.

Yet Jesus realized the superficiality of popular recognition. As long as he satisfied the people’s temporal interests, they were with him. But when the true meaning of his kingdom became apparent, the multitudes soon changed their allegiance: The ‘hosannas’ changed to ‘crucify him’ (Mt. 21:9; 27:22).

This was the heartbreak of his min-

istry. The lovable people were easily excited by the works of Jesus, but just as quickly thwarted in their aspirations by their spiritually blind leaders. Like sheep without a shepherd, they had no one who could lead them in the way of truth.

Jesus was doing all he could to help them, but in the incarnation he accepted the limitation of a physical body. Unless men and women were raised up to multiply his ministry, the potential world harvest could not be realized. He told his disciples to get under the burden, and pray for ‘the Lord of the Harvest’ to send workers to meet this compelling need—workers with a shepherd’s heart who could lead the sheep (Mt. 9:36-38).

His Unfolding Strategy

Our Lord’s own ministry seems to unfold around this need. Before attempting to trace that pattern, however, let us recognize that any human activity that does not flow out of communion with God is an exercise in futility. With this principle in mind, I believe we can discern in the Gospels how such prayer is answered.

1. Look for Servant Workers

While ministering to people Jesus looked for some disciples in whom he could invest his life most productively. In time he selected twelve especially to be with him. Peter, James and John had an even closer relationship. It was not that he loved the multitudes any less; it was for the sake of the world that he concentrated on persons who would learn to lead them. Doubtless, those early disciples were not the most

astute students, perhaps not the most religious, but with the exception of the traitor, their hearts were big, and they were willing to lay other things aside to follow Jesus.

We, too, would do well to give attention to a few such learners, beginning at home, then reaching out to spiritually alert neighbours and friends. They are the answer to our prayers. If we get absorbed trying to please the aimless crowd, we can spend our energy perpetuating the problem rather than its solution. Better to give a year or so to a few disciples who learn to conquer for Christ than to spend a lifetime just keeping the old program going. Other persons also will have an impact, of course. Discipling involves the whole church, though our influence may make the difference with a few.

2. Stay With Them as Much as Possible

Jesus' disciples learned by being with him. For the better part of three years they were together. They walked the streets together; they ate together; they attended the temple and synagogue together. Even when he ministered to others, whether preaching in the marketplace or talking with a lonely beggar along the road, the disciples were usually at hand to observe and listen.

The policy of Jesus at this point would teach us that whatever the method of training we adopt, at its heart, must be a relationship with those God entrusts to us. The more natural the fellowship the better. Making disciples is like raising children. It will take time. There will be inconveniences. But out of such family-like

association, children can grow to maturity.

3. Show Them How to Live the Gospel

In this ongoing fellowship, the disciples of Jesus were always learning. Every aspect of his life was opened to them—prayer, use of Scripture, public worship, stewardship, caring for the needs of the sick and the poor, ever seeking their ultimate welfare in the gospel. What is also obvious is that without realizing it, the disciples were being disciplined.

He sets before us an example. It is well enough to tell people about the Great Commission, but it is far better to show them how to do it. This puts us on the spot to be sure. Clearly, we must be prepared to have students follow us even as we seek to follow the Lord.

4. Involve Them in Ministry

Jesus gave his workers-in-training something to do. First assignments were small, common tasks, like providing hospitality. But as they developed in their confidence and skill, he began to use them to confirm others in the faith. Later he sent them out into new areas two by two to produce what they had watched him do. All the while, he was projecting his vision of the kingdom, culminating in his post-resurrection commands to win the world.

So, too, disciples today must find ways to utilize their abilities and gifts while sharing the gospel. Everybody can do something. Unless opportunities are given for practical outreach, we can stagnate in self-centredness and inertia.

5. Keep Them Growing and Going

To see how the disciples were coming along, Jesus would check on them, asking them questions, responding to their queries, building in them a sense of accountability. It was 'on-the-job training' all the way. Their encounters with life situations enabled him to deal with issues when they came up, giving his teaching the ring of authenticity. Though their progress was painfully slow, especially in comprehending the cross, Jesus' patience kept moving them on toward the goal of world evangelization for the glory of God.

No less determination is necessary among those we are discipling. Offensive habits and carnal attitudes must be dealt with. The beautiful thing about it is that in discipling others we find ourselves being disciplined. The Great Commission is more than God's plan to reach the nations; it is his way to encourage the sanctification of his Church.

6. Expect Them to Reproduce

The day came when Jesus turned his work over to his followers and commissioned them to go to the world and replicate what he had done with them. The believers around him were but the vanguard of a movement that would continually expand until finally the whole world heard the gospel.

It is not difficult to see why Jesus prayed so earnestly for those men that the Father had given to him (John 17:1-26). For in a real sense, everything he had done on earth now rested upon their faithfulness. Would they 'go and make disciples of all nations'? Here finally all of us must evaluate how our

life is being multiplied. Will those persons providentially entrusted to us catch the vision of the Great Commission, and will they in turn impart it to faithful servants who will teach others also? The time will come all too soon when our ministry will be in their hands.

7. Trust Them to be Holy Spirit

As observed in his command to pray, workers for the harvest do not come forth by human ingenuity. Jesus made it abundantly clear that his life and work was possible only through the Holy Spirit. As Jesus had glorified the Father on earth, now the Spirit would lift up Christ. He would take the same place with the disciples in the unseen realm of life that Jesus had filled in his visible experience with them. The Spirit was a real compensation for the loss which they were to sustain—'Another Counsellor' just like Jesus—who would fill them with his presence. (John 14:16).

We can understand why Jesus told his disciples to tarry until this promise became a reality in them (Luke 24:49). How else could they do his work? His passion for glorifying God by accomplishing his mission had to become a burning compulsion within them. The supernatural work to which they were called demanded supernatural help—an endowment of power from on high. They needed to come by faith into a refining experience of the Spirit's infilling, and live in that obedience day by day. So it is with all that God will use. Only as the Spirit exalts Christ in and through us will our lives make disciples for his glory.

A Pattern to Follow

The way Jesus disciplined illustrates the way that in principle every believer can do it. Too easily we have relegated his work to various clergy vocations and to highly organized programs of evangelism. Not that these ministries are unnecessary, for without them the church cannot function as she does. But unless the Great Commission directs the daily life of the entire body, the church cannot function as she should.

Here the priesthood of all believers comes alive. Discipling is not a special calling or gift of the Spirit; it is a lifestyle—the way that Jesus lived while he was among us, and now the way he commands disciples to follow.

Let us then begin where God has

planted us and taking up the Cross become a true servant. As people respond to love, we can give particular attention to those few who seem hungry to learn more—persons who are not afraid to go all out for Jesus. We can afford to invest largely in these learners—spending time with them showing them the disciplines that govern our life, helping them express their gifts of ministry, monitoring their growth, and above all, never ceasing to pray for them. We can trust the Holy Spirit to bring forth the harvest as they go and make disciples. Our joy is in knowing that in generations unborn, our prayers and labour for them will still be bearing fruit, in an ever-widening circle to the ends of the earth and to the end of time.

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Andrew Walker is Canon Professor of Theology, Culture and Education at King's College, London. He is also author of *On Revival*.

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**Urban Ministry and The Kingdom
Of God**

Laurie Green

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Reviewed by Howard Carter, Presbyterian Church, Napier, NZ.

Laurie Green grew up in the ever-changing urban landscape of London's East

End and has ministered in many different inner city and urban situations in London and Birmingham. This provides a great platform to reflect on a theology for the practice of urban ministry. While facilitating a group of working class Christians in Birmingham (see his *Power to the Powerless: Theology Brought to Life*, 1987) he developed a praxis-based method to help groups to do practical theology in their own contexts, using a four step process (experience, exploration, reflection and response) that he calls the Doing Theology Spiral (*Let's Do Theology*,

1990). This, his latest book, combines many of his long-standing interests: contextual theology, urban mission, globalisation and ministry training to provide a helpful resource for people and groups engaging in urban ministry (www.bishoplauriegreen.com).

Urban Ministry and the Kingdom of God uses the Doing Theology Spiral to develop an urban theology he believes will be robust enough to meet the challenges of being agents of the kingdom of God in twenty-first century cities. He draws in stories of urban life and ministry, his own family's experience, and the changes the East End of London has faced since the Second World War. Green relates this to scripture and history and the story of the English churches' ministry in industrial and post-industrial cities. He identifies key global and local factors that dominate the development and rate of change in today's cities. His reflection on the kingdom of God as a theological basis for urban ministry uses the Lord's Prayer to provide an overarching framework that crosses theological boundaries. Green is able to embrace and celebrate local initiatives for personal evangelism, projects that work for societal change and endeavours to speak prophetically to systemic causes of poverty and injustice on a global scale. He outlines processes for responding to the city both for the individual who would embark on urban ministry and parishes wanting to do mission in their streets and neighbourhoods.

For Green the city is the focus for both God's pain and delight. It is a place where one can encounter the excesses of human deprivation and poverty and equally disturbing opulence, yet at the same time be surprised by its richness of genuine community and vibrancy of life. Green notes that Christian hope is expressed within scripture in terms of 'a

well-founded city, whose architect and builder is God' (Heb. 11:10). He explores the recent biblical scholarship (eg. William Herzog) looking at the effect of urbanisation on justice and social structures in first century Judea. His theological underpinning for ordained ministers is that they should emulate the ministry of Jesus. He engages in a frank discussion of how the priestly and prophetic functions of that ministry relate to the urban setting. He explores the dangers and rewards for those willing to take on such a vocation. The book is significant for those who want to engage in and teach contextual theology.

While much of his material is specific to an English urban setting, the processes can be adapted and applied to a wide variety of contexts. Harvie Conn, founding editor of the Journal *Urban Mission*, identified three major areas of significance for urban ministry; research, strategic thinking and targeting and connecting with communities. Green provides excellent processes for these areas requiring historical, geographical, social, economic, cultural and religious exploration. He synthesises both academic rigour and a genuine listening to people's stories. His process for a church doing a parish audit as a means of beginning to engage in mission is particularly helpful. He stresses the importance of listening to the community before beginning to act. He has practical advice for reviewing joint projects and sets out a useful process for small and struggling inner-city parishes to network and partner with other stronger suburban and rural congregations. This book would be of great use to urban ministers and those involved in the training of urban mission practitioners.

ERT (2005) 29:1, 84-86

**World Christian Encyclopedia:
A Comparative Survey of
Churches and Religions in the
Modern World**

by David B. Barrett, George T.
Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson

New York: Oxford University Press,
2001; 2nd ed.

ISBN 0-19-507963-9

Hb, 2 vols.; vol. 1: xii + 876 pp; vol.

2: vi + 823 pp

Maps, charts, illus, indexes

and

**Operation World: Twenty-First
Century Edition**

by Patrick Johnstone and Jason
Mandryk

Carlisle, England: Paternoster, 2001;
6th ed.

ISBN 1-85078-357-8

Pb, xxiv + 798 pp

Maps, charts, indexes

*Reviewed by George W. Harper, Professor
of Christian History and Thought, Asia
Graduate School of Theology-Philippines*

Otto von Bismarck is supposed to have compared laws to sausages. It's easier to enjoy them, he said, if one doesn't inquire too closely into how they're made. Much the same point might be made about volumes of religious statistics such as the two under review here. Earlier editions of both works have come to play a vital role in individual believers' devotional lives, in mission agencies' attempts to plan for the future, and even in the work of academics such as myself. For example, I recently gave a series of lectures on South Asian and Nepali church history for which I took a great deal of material from the *World Christian Encyclopedia* and even some from *Operation World*. I also drew

on these volumes for an article published in this journal several years ago ('Philippine Tongues of Fire? Latin American Pentecostalism and the Future of Filipino Christianity', *Evangelical Review of Theology*, vol. 26, no. 2 [April 2002]: 153-180). The truth is, I'd be lost without them.

But even with them I can't always be sure exactly where I stand. For example, how seriously should I take the *World Christian Encyclopedia's* claim (vol. 1, p. 11) that currently about 160,000 Christians are martyred per year? According to the accompanying 'Global Diagram 6', this reflects a steady increase over the number of those martyred in previous years, with that increase projected to continue into the future—yet as recently as 1986 Barrett himself claimed that 330,000 Christians were martyred per year (David B. Barrett, 'Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission: 1986', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, vol. 10, no. 1 [January 1986]: 22-23). Does this imply that Barrett and his colleagues now think his earlier claim was excessive? I would note that among those they count as martyrs are the victims of what others would consider to be ethnic cleansing or genocide—for example, the Rwandan Tutsis, massacred by Rwandan Hutus, most of them Roman Catholic, in 1994. Is this reasonable? If not, what shadow does it cast over the *World Christian Encyclopedia's* other claims?

And what about *Operation World's* claim that Evangelicals now make up about 17% of the population of the Philippines? I live in that country, I've made a study of its evangelical community, and I am convinced that this figure is much too high if the term 'Evangelical' refers to a category of Protestantism. Earlier editions of *Operation World* used the term in that

way, but this edition does not, in spite of its claim that 'we have largely retained the definition and classification of Evangelicals as used in earlier editions of *Operation World*' (p. xx). What about this edition's claim that the Philippine Independent Church, better known as the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI), has 5.5 million affiliates and more than 3.5 million members? What about its claim that the Jesus Is Lord (JIL) Church has 2 million affiliates and 1.2 million members? All of these figures are grossly inflated. More reasonably, Eric Smith, of Philippine Challenge, has estimated IFI membership as recently as 1995 at under 1 million, while Wonsuk Ma, a Philippine-based scholar, estimates JIL's current membership at a mere 150,000 ('Philippines', in *New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. van der Maas [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002], p. 205). If *Operation World*'s statistics for the country I know best are so unreliable, what does this say about its statistics for other countries? The bottom line is that the contents of both of these volumes must be used with a great deal of caution.

But the need for caution shouldn't stop us from using them. Patrick Johnstone began *Operation World* in 1974 with the idea of providing the sort of information that believers could put to good use in praying knowledgeably for the cause of Christ around the world. This means that its user-friendliness has always been as important as its accuracy, and the new edition is friendlier than ever. It numbers about 160 pages more than the previous edition, with the extra space used both for expanded coverage of individual nations—for example, the article on the Philippines has grown from just over four pages to almost six—and for two new

indexes, one of peoples and the other of places. Of course the specific contents have changed, with the statistics, the 'answers to prayer', and the 'challenges for prayer' all reflecting the passage of six years since the previous edition. Many of the observations are very perceptive; for example, again turning to the Philippine material, its comments concerning the declining number of expatriates serving as missionaries there, the growing number of Filipinos serving as missionaries overseas, and, related to this, the problems posed and possibilities presented by the millions of overseas Filipino workers, many of whom serve in 'closed' areas like the Middle East, are right on target. As noted above, some of the statistics are suspect, but most of them do appear to be reasonably reliable. Unfortunately, many users will be oblivious to the distinction.

When the *World Christian Encyclopedia*'s first edition appeared in 1982, there were numerous comments about its backbreaking bulk and budget-busting price. The second edition is a *WCE* on steroids, its page-count having grown by 60% and its sticker reflecting both the expanded format and twenty years of inflation. The heart of the first edition, its country surveys, occupies this new edition's first volume. Individual surveys have expanded in size, some only slightly and others more dramatically, with contents rearranged and bibliographies greatly enlarged. The latter will be especially helpful to researchers. Much of this edition's novelty is to be found in its second volume, which examines not countries but religions ('religiometrics'), ethnic groups ('ethnosphere'), languages ('linguametrics'), urban centres ('metroscan'), and other major civil divisions ('provincescan'). Obviously the *WCE*'s editors have a taste for neologisms, and sometimes the

basic argument is weakened by the interpretive jargon in which the statistics have been slathered. For example, does it really add anything to our understanding to be told that there are 'at least ten thousand distinct and different religions across the world' and that Christianity itself is 'a macrofamily of macroreligions' (vol. 2, pp. 3, 4)? Nevertheless, there is some fascinating material on the quickening pace of global urbanization and the (apparently) declining percentage of Christians in many municipalities. Urbanologists will take note of the editors' disturbing conclusion that the church is 'losing the battle to disciple the cities' (vol. 2, p. 534). Of course these and other such inferences rest on the sometimes shaky foundation of the *WCE*'s statistics. As noted above, users must proceed with caution.

In the interest of completeness, I should note that a supplementary volume to the *WCE* has been published: David B. Barrett and Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Trends AD 30—AD 2200: Interpreting the Annual Christian Megacensus* (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 2001). This thousand-page supplement adds analyses of Christianity's past, present, and possible futures. Also, an updated version of the *WCE*'s core data has been made available online by Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary's Center for the Study of Global Christianity at <http://www.worldchristian-database.org/wcd/>. I am very thankful to have such ready access to this material. I only regret that more care was not taken in compiling the statistics on which rest the analyses of both the *WCE* and *Operation World*. It is to be hoped that this problem will be addressed in subsequent editions of both works, for in spite of their statistical unreliability and occasional interpretive overreach, they are

invaluable. Every missions-minded Christian ought to have a copy of *Operation World*, and the *World Christian Encyclopedia* belongs in the library of every church, mission agency, and educational institution that can afford it.

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'Toronto' in Perspective: papers on the New Charismatic Wave of the mid 1990s

Edited by David Hilborn

Carlisle: Paternoster Acute, 2001

ISBN 1-84227-099-0

385pp Pb bibliog.

Reviewed by David Parker, Editor,
Evangelical Review of Theology

ACUTE (The UK Evangelical Alliance Commission on Unity and Truth among Evangelicals) and its director, David Hilborn, has rendered all those interested in the 'Toronto Blessing' (and other recent movements) a valuable, if belated service, by publishing a large book analysing 'the new charismatic wave of the mid 1990s'. It is a thorough-going attempt to deal theologically with a movement which made a serious impact, both for good and for ill, on the church in UK especially, but also in other parts of the world.

The book opens with a thoughtful 26-page introductory essay by the editor on the Toronto movement, giving reasons for the book, its method of treatment, and especially explaining the deep involvement of the Evangelical Alliance in responding to the movement itself. This essay is followed by six others (covering 87 pages, excluding notes) from various perspectives. Most are theological in approach, but one is psychological and

the last one (the longest—half the total length of all the others) is sociological. Part II of the book is an extremely detailed chronology of the movement (covering 200 pages in fine print—making it excessive and leaving the book unbalanced); this section is based on news reports and many other documents, and includes background information on all sorts of people, movements, reports and publications that are relevant to the Toronto movement. Part III consists of thirteen key statements and documents on the Toronto Blessing issued in the years 1994-97, including two from UK EA, and some denominational bodies (most UK and US but one from NZ). The book concludes with a nine page bibliography, but there is no index, which means that the vast amount of detail in the book is hard to access and thereby somewhat limited in its usefulness.

As the General Director of the UK EA, Joel Edwards, points out in his Foreword, the Toronto Blessing made a huge impact on British churches from mid-1994 to early 1996. According to the editor, it 'represented a crisis for modern-day evangelicalism' and especially for EA. Dr Hilborn points out that he is using the term 'crisis' in a technical not popular sense, referring to 'judgement' and 'opportunity'. In presenting the *raison d'être* for this book, he claims that the Toronto movement was important 'not merely, nor even so much, for what it was *in and of itself*, but for what it revealed about the state of evangelical and charismatic Christianity at the turn of the millennium'. He explains that in the 1970s and 1980s, evangelicals and Pentecostals had grown to understand each other better, but with the advent of the Toronto movement in the UK, 'old fault-lines were once again exposed, and concerns, which had either been sublimated or suppressed

for the greater cause of unity, were reiterated.' This was exacerbated by the fact that even the Pentecostal side was split over the phenomenon, as indicated by the messy expulsion in December 1995 of Toronto Airport church from the Vineyard movement because of its perceived excesses.

That this book has appeared at a reasonably lengthy period after the events it discusses and when they are no longer in the public eye, indicates that the EA believes that the Toronto blessing is of continuing theological and ecclesiological significance. Historically speaking, it is argued that for eighteen months, it 'posed a genuine threat to evangelical unity, even while presaging, in many evangelicals' eyes, a full-scale, longed-for revival'. (The 'Alpha' program emanating from the Holy Trinity Church at Brompton is regarded as one of the chief beneficiaries of this positive impact.) Even so, it is argued, such a significant movement could be left in the pages of history, but it is the point of this book that 'At its height, the Blessing was, indeed, a crisis, and crises such as this deserve to be assessed on more than a purely journalistic time scale. Crises in the life of the church—whether the crises of true revival or the crises of heresy—are studied by historical and systematic theologians centuries after they have occurred, and can still prompt new and valuable insights.' Hilborn identifies a threefold crisis—of definition, discernment and unity; more particularly, from the point of view of the EA, all of these impinged on the particular role and work of the Alliance; hence the importance of this volume at least to its originators.

The book is intended to function in the same way as EA itself did in the three forums it conducted on the movement, (Dec. 1994, Jun and Dec. 1995) in which

it gathered a wide spectrum of leadership so it could take a 'conciliar and ecumenical' approach. Spirited discussion took place at all three, and statements were produced that 'could realistically claim to have articulated the mind of the church,' emulating early church councils going back to Acts 15. According to the editor, UK EA seeks 'to operate on the same basic, ecclesial model when it engages in theology and lends guidance on movements such as Toronto'. This is especially evidenced through its Theological Commission, known as ACUTE (headed up by the editor) which has also produced reports on hell and homosexuality

A major principle for the evaluation of the Toronto movement often referred to in this book is the 'Gamaliel principle', drawn from Acts 5:34-39, which suggests that a movement should be judged by its results. However, as the material in the book indicates (not least by editor's essay), it is not easy to discern, even after several years, whether those who claim extensive personal and church blessings as a result of Toronto are in the right, or whether those who claim it as at best an aberration of Pentecostal teaching, or at worst something far more sinister, are closer to the mark. The titles of the theological essays in Part I indicate the range of views: 'A Real but Limited Renewal' (Martin Davie), 'A Sub-Christian Movement' (Stephen Sizer); 'A Spur to Holistic Discipleship' (Mark Cartledge); 'A Mixed Blessing' (David Pawson). The psychological essay, 'An Altered Christian Consciousness' by Patrick Dixon is sympathetic to the movement.

Obviously, the book does not speak 'with one voice' for the Evangelical Alliance; for one reason, there is already an EA statement that does. But more importantly, the process of reflection on Toronto is

still going on and in that case, it is ventured, that a collection of different perspectives is the most useful offering. Overall the book reflects the editor's views but, as he is deeply involved with EA in an official capacity, it is clearly an informed opinion.

The book was expected to be published much earlier, but the editor believes that the delay 'afforded certain benefits—not least the benefits of hindsight and enhanced perspective'. As such, the book is worth studying, not so much for the insights it offers on the Toronto blessing itself, but more for its impact on the UK EA and churches, and especially as a sample of how a group such as the Evangelical Alliance can deal theologically and ecclesially with controversial high profile religious movements.

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Presbyterian Worship—a Guide for Clergy

J. Dudley Weaver

Louisville, Kentucky: Geneva Press, 2002

ISBN 0-664-50218-0

Pb 132 pp. Bibliography. No index

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

Weaver stands in the tradition of the Scot, W. D. Maxwell, and in some respects the English Oxford Movement. Nineteenth century Evangelicals generally opposed the Tractarians, yet which of us has not cherished the rich hymnody of John Keble and company?

In our day there is concern about the direction many evangelical churches have taken as traditional aspects of worship are excluded. While it seems that these

are often the most virile churches, some evangelicals have felt driven to seek more 'liturgical' forms of worship.

J. Dudley Weaver, minister of the First Presbyterian Church, Portland, Oregon, touches briefly on this. He criticizes the 'market mentality' which prevails in many circles, and presents a whole-hearted *apologia* for Christian worship in the 'Reformed and church catholic liturgical heritage'. His book is designed primarily for leaders of worship, but is thought-provoking for all believers concerned for the quality of church services. Although specifically Presbyterian, he touches on worship practices in Methodist and Lutheran churches particularly.

The opening chapters set forth his view of the nature of worship, the changing face of worship, and the basic concept that worship is an offering of the whole people of God. 'The primary aim of Christian worship is not entertainment, or spiritual renewal or moral transformation, or even evangelism, but doxology' (p.2). It is an offering made to God that results in transformed lives (Rom. 12.1-2)—'Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all' (wrongly attributed to Lowell Mason).

Worship must be both 'intelligible and faithful'. It must be faithful to the church's tradition, but also awake to the problems, challenges and needs of the contemporary world. The Christian liturgy is not a new development, but has 'evolved over two millennia'. Observance of the Christian Year, balanced by Advent-Christmas and Lent-Easter, interspersed with 'ordinary Sundays', lends itself to church worship which moves with the pattern of the central saving acts of God, is played out in varying keys, and leads believers in alternation of deep solemnity and exuberant praise. Wholesome worship must embrace a

range from moments of loud, joyful, triumphant praise to those of holy awe 'so hushed that you can nearly hear yourself breathe' (p.35).

To this end, he holds that modern worship should be shaped by the liturgies of the early church, particularly the third century Church Father, Hippolytus. However, he makes it difficult for anyone unread in church liturgy, by using terms such as 'anamnesis' and 'epiclesis' without explanation.

I found his chapter on 'The Changing Language of Worship' helpful for understanding developments across a spectrum of traditional churches in the late twentieth century. Revivalism contributed new warmth to worship, but also focused worship on the preacher, not unlike the post-Trent Roman Church with the 'theological assumption that the Mass was a work of the priest and not of the people—something offered on their behalf and not by them' (p.27). The Second Vatican Council brought about radical changes by which basic Reformation principles—the primacy of grace, the centrality of Scripture, the understanding of the church as the people of God, the use of the vernacular language—became enshrined in Catholic worship. In turn Protestants in the broader church tradition borrowed much that was new in Roman Catholic worship. The result has been a convergence of worship traditions. Weaver holds that these enshrine basic principles of Presbyterian worship—focus on the adoration of God, Word-centred liturgy, preaching as a means of grace, order and dignity. The larger part of his book is in the nature of a worship resource, in which he develops his concept of such worship through the seasons of the Christian Year. I was jolted to read his plea that Christmas carols not be used in Advent, which should be a time of solemn prepa-

ration for the celebration of Christ's birth. He holds that when we sing carols throughout the pre-Christmas season we are conforming to the commercial world.

Weaver's presentation challenges evangelicals to consider whether much of our worship is in one key only. It challenges us to discern when we are adapting our worship patterns to speak to our contemporary world, and when we are succumbing to the spirit of that world. It challenges us to consider the contribution that imagination, drama and art make to the overall pattern of our worship.

On the other hand, we do well to heed our basic Protestant concern that 'forms' may become a deadening factor (Psalm 40.6-8; Micah 6.6-8). God's primary concern is heart-attitude and life-manifestation. Without the Spirit of the living God, no form of worship can bring people into the presence of the Lord and develop maturity of Christian life. Weaver is not unaware of these aspects of wholesome worship.

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From Paradise to the Promised Land:

An Introduction to the Pentateuch

T. Desmond Alexander

Grand Rapids: Baker Academic,
2002 (2nd ed.)

ISBN 0-8010-2597-4

Pb pp339 Bibliog. indexes

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

The text is a well-balanced introduction to the Pentateuch, a comprehensive and up-to-date scholarly work, presenting the

contemporary academic approaches to the first five books of Moses. The content of the Pentateuch is presented through various themes.

In this edition, Alexander seeks to address the shortcomings of the first publication (Paternoster, 1995, and Baker, 1998) by adding a discussion of the contemporary academic approaches to the Pentateuch. He is able to guide the reader through the maze of modern approaches to the Pentateuch, and superbly emphasizes it as a unified literary work, arguing that the Pentateuch should be viewed from Genesis to the Kings.

In the first part, aside from reviewing the history of Pentateuchal criticism and the Documentary Hypothesis, Alexander discusses all pertinent issues and developments with content footnotes. Starting with the rise of the Older Documentary Hypothesis, he traces the various explanations of source documents through the ideas of Graf, Vatke and Wellhausen.

Alternative methods of studying OT texts such as form criticism, traditio-historical criticism and literary criticism are presented with critical evaluations. He gives very good reviews on the development of oral accounts in life setting (form criticism), the discovery of the history of traditions (traditio-historical criticism) and presents their limitations. The failures of the Documentary Hypothesis are presented through the works of Winnett, Waner, Redford, Van Seters, Rendtorff, Blum and Whybray. Alexander presents the Sinai narrative as a test case. In his study of the Sinai narrative, he argues that it provides no evidence to support the existence of the sources and thereby negates the validity of the Documentary Hypothesis. Moreover, while links have been observed with the book of Deuteronomy, evidence of a Deuteronomic revision cannot be estab-

lished. For future Pentateuchal studies, he proposes a synchronic approach and claims the issue of historical accuracy must remain open. He maintains the composition of the first five books must be discussed in conjunction with that of the books of Joshua to Kings. As they stand, the books of Genesis to Kings form a continuous narrative.

Aside from adding Part I, a small difference between the first edition and second edition lies in the arrangement of chapters. Alexander presents the chapter on 'The Blessing of the Nations' before the chapter on 'Paradise Lost.' Since blessing is traced back to the Creator in his creation, it is logical to place this topic before the loss of paradise. In the second edition, he introduces a numbering system, rather than ordinary heading, so that readers may more easily follow the discussion. Except for the introductory chapter in Part two and minor editorial changes on few chapters, all his compositions are essentially intact. Helpfully, footnotes are used which places discussion on the same page as the main topic is treated. Of course, in the second edition, additional contemporary bibliographic entries are added. The breath and depth of his discussion on the main themes of the Pentateuch are commendable.

The author is to be commended for linking some Old Testament texts with New Testament themes. This seems to be the interest of many readers of OT survey. It would serve the public better if Alexander had included a scriptural index to allow readers to find the text under discussion. To assist with his intention of writing a unified, and progressive theme for Old Testament, the use of more charts illustrating this connection would be useful. Aside from a few drawbacks, this book is worth reading.

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**More Money, More Ministry:
Money and Evangelicals in Recent
North American History**

Edited by Larry Eskridge and
Mark A. Noll,

Eerdmans, Grand Rapids: 2000,
ISBN 0802847773
Pb 416 pp Index

*Reviewed by Gordon Preece, Macquarie
Christian Studies Institute, Sydney,
Australia*

I remember a female parishioner of mine complaining once that I was preaching too much on money and that the previous minister had never preached on it. I said I suspected her problem was not with me, but with the Bible, as it was one of the most popular topics in Scripture. This book is on that most maligned subject—money—and how North American Evangelicals have approached it in the last century or two. It is an historical study, but full of contemporary interest and instruction. The book emerges from the heart of US Evangelicalism, from a consultation sponsored by Wheaton College's Institute for the Study of North American Evangelicals. Unlike many conference volumes it has a strong sense of coherence and not too much overlap. Contributors have kept to their brief well.

The book illustrates the diversity of Evangelical approaches to money and money-raising, from the faith missions approach to Christian entrepreneurialism and managerialism. The former can be seen in Promise Keepers' bold but some would say disastrous 1998 decision to cut staff and rely on faith and free-will giving by God's people when it had previously used the latter. The 'Evangelical mosaic' (Timothy Smith) is broad and colourful. The editors note it could include

Evangelical catholic charismatics. They wisely advocate Bebbington's well-accepted fourfold definition of activist, conversionist, biblicist and cross-centred. The book succeeds in getting beyond the stereotypes of money-grubby Elmer Gantry type televangelists firmly established in the popular psyche by scandals and also the sneering Mencken-esque, elitist view of Evangelicals dating back to the infamous 1920s Monkey Trial at Little Rock.

Part I provides 'Overviews and Orientations'. The first chapter by Klay, Lunn and Hamilton fortunately sets Evangelicals' views of money against the broader canvas of the American economy. If we are to make judgements about how worldly Evangelical views of money were we have to examine that changing world. This shows how Evangelicals partly rode the wave of 'miraculous' US economic growth in the 20th century, though they were not wholly determined by it, as their continued growth during the Depression shows. It also displays the ways Evangelicalism moved out from an attachment to mainstream denominations during the 1920s to develop Bible Colleges, mission agencies and media ministries of their own through a range of corporately structured parachurch agencies. Garry Scott Smith's chapter shows the tension between the old Protestant production ethic of worldly asceticism and the developing consumption ethic from 1880-1930, a tension that still exists today. Smith discovers an ambiguous Evangelical response: critique of greed and materialism, adaptation of advertising principles, faith in economic progress but blindness to its victims, and stress on stewardship. Tensions existed too as Charles Hambrick-Stowe demonstrates in revivalists' relationship to money. Money was needed to mount huge crusades, a type of

'sanctified business', but it always threatened to compromise the revivalist's ministry. Michael Hamilton shows how evangelical growth corresponded with the post-World War II boom. The book title's slogan corresponded to empirical reality and a contestable assumption at the heart of much frantic fund-raising by Evangelicals.

The large heart of the book in Part II focuses on 'Specific Studies'. These include a fascinating study of the 'savvy, homespun business expertise' of Protestant women's organisations which became so successful they were sadly ripe for takeover by men! The China Inland Mission was the faith mission par excellence but sometimes found it difficult to stick strictly to its founding principle and was quite secretive about its records and method of 'no solicitation'. The funding of Christian College education in a favourable US climate and a helpful comparison of the US and Canada were both helpful to me in a financially challenged Australian theological college context more like Canada. So many Evangelical books focus only on the US as if it is all of America, at the cost of applicability to other nations. Larry Eskridge's very fair contemporary study of Evangelical financial counsellor Larry Burkett made me much more sympathetic to his common-sensical middle way between prosperity preachers and prophets of simple lifestyle than I thought I would be.

The book concludes with a second essay by Joel Carpenter, one of the new breed of sympathetic but self-critical Evangelical historians forcing a rethink in the academy about the role Evangelicalism in North American life. Evangelical concerns with family and financial issues he sees not as evidence of secularization as some sociologists do, but as part of the post-funda-

mentalist process of exploring the holistic implications of the gospel. John Stackhouse's concluding reflection helpfully sets money issues within a theological context, but he had little space to be more than suggestive. Two days before finishing this article Australia's largest circulation quality newspaper featured a front page article in their weekend magazine on the health and wealth gospel peddled by a large Pentecostal church renowned world-wide for its exciting music ministry. It was a disturbing article, both for the sneering, liberal, Mencken-esque tone of the reporter, but mostly for what came out of the mouths of the pastors. I hope both the reporter and the pastors might read this book for evidence of a more Evangelical approach to money needed by many, including my ex-parishioner and her pastor.

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For all the Saints? Remembering the Christian Departed

N.T. Wright

London: SPCK, 2003

ISBN 0-281-05620-X

76pp no index

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

In this short book, the well known author, now Bishop of Durham, makes a forthright challenge to contemporary trends in belief about the afterlife as reflected in his own Anglican communion (and some others). He is particularly concerned about the revival of the celebration of both All Saints Day and All Souls Day (1st and 2nd November) in the UK—the one marking the elite, heroic believers who are exempt from further cleansing and judgement (the 'saints' in the tra-

ditional catholic sense) and the other, the 'ordinary' believer who must look forward to a struggle through the afterlife to be fit enough for the ultimate presence of God.

The author argues that this differentiation denies essential truths of the gospel and cannot be justified biblically or from the practice and beliefs of the early church. Therefore, he concludes, it should be abandoned as soon as possible. He also makes some suggestions about improving the Church Year so that the authentic biblical position can be celebrated more effectively.

The book opens with an outline of traditional mainline catholic teaching on the afterlife, including purgatory, the church triumphant, saints, and hell. It then goes on to point out how the Reformers abandoned belief in purgatory because of its inconsistency with the biblical teaching about the completed work of Christ and salvation. However, Dr Wright points out that in recent times, there has been a strong tendency to revive interest in a modified but nonetheless powerful form of purgatory ('quasi-purgatory') because of liturgical pressures, but more importantly, through the impact of liberal theology which has lost 'confidence in the biblical promises' and through universalism. The emphasis in these views is not on the traditional punitive aspect of purgatory but on the idea of cleansing or preparation for heaven and on post-mortem salvation. Thus the belief in 'neo-purgatory' down-plays sin and judgement.

Wright argues that this development, which occurs at the same time as some Roman Catholic authorities have been toning down their traditional view, arises out of a defective understanding of salvation and of Christian anthropology in which death is the end of sin. In the light of these emphases, he declares strongly in favour of the final state for believers as

the resurrection of the body in the new creation; on the other hand, the intermediate state is heaven or Paradise in which, due to the saving work of Christ, there are no distinctions amongst believers. Thus there is no class of elite 'saints' over against the ordinary believer who must pass through some further stage of cleansing. All are 'saints' who, according to the New Testament, belong to Christ, and are in a glorious state of restful happiness with Jesus (as in Rev. 6:9-11 and Philp. 3:20-21).

This is the first and basic 'controversial point' which the author wishes to make in this tract, and is the basis for his crusade against the liturgical celebration of All Saints Day and All Souls Day. He argues effectively that promoting these celebrations denies the gospel and is pastorally dangerous. In the light of this criticism and others that he makes about unsatisfactory developments in the liturgical year (such as the Kingdom Season) he also makes some positive suggestions for improvement.

From this position, he is also able to critique the position of 'saints' and the process of honouring them by canonization in catholic piety, which he regards as 'misguided'. As he points out, quite apart from his basic position about the intermediate state already outlined above, there is a further powerful factor to invalidate any attempt to honour them and invoke them as if they could assist the believer to gain a (better) hearing with God—the believer already has direct access to God himself through Christ, which obviates any need for the intercession of the saints or anyone else.

Nevertheless, according to Dr Wright, the biblical doctrine of the 'communion of saints' suggests that there might be a proper relationship between the living believer and the saints in heaven. Using

Hebrews 11:39-12:2, he proposes that if prayer can be thought of as the outpouring of love (p. 73), it is natural that the believer can pray for and with the saints, not to release them from purgatorial judgement, or to seek for the completion of their salvation or to invoke their intercession, but simply as an act of continuing fellowship.

The liturgical orientation of this book would make it difficult for some readers to appreciate (although the overall position does tend to justify scepticism about the value of the church year). Yet it is a strong biblical statement which evangelical readers will appreciate—even though the author says that he regards 'the old party divisions within my own Communion [including evangelical], and the theological positions they embodied, as largely threadbare'. Its emphatic rejection of purgatory and prayer to the saints is noteworthy in an ecumenical context, and the author's evaluation of his own communion as 'simply drifting into a muddle and a mess' over the central issue will not necessarily win him friends at home. But its combination of pastoral, spiritual, liturgical and biblical material integrated together with a positive affirmation of central gospel truths provides a good model of how senior leaders of the church especially can tackle practical aspects of the church's life which involve significant theological issues.

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Christian Missions and the Enlightenment: Studies in the History of Christian Mission.

Edited by Brian Stanley

Grand Rapids, Eerdmans /
Richmond, Curzon; 2001.

ISBN 0802839029

Hb pp 264

*Reviewed by John Roxborough, Knox College,
Dunedin, NZ*

These essays focus on British Protestant missions and the influence on them of the Enlightenment, especially regarding topics such as education and the relationship between 'conversion' and 'civilization.' The study of various regions is used to help understand the role of the western missionary enterprise over the last two and half centuries. Contributors includes Penny Carson, Natasha Erlank, Daniel Hardy, Bruce Hindmarsh, Ian Maxwell, Jane Samson, Brian Stanley and Andrew Walls.

The Enlightenment and its connection with evangelicalism in general and overseas mission in particular has echoes in other writings which are further explored here. For every period characterized by a paradigm in David Bosch's *Transforming Mission* his concern for the relationship between mission and Enlightenment was not far away. Lesslie Newbigin was another who drew attention to ways in which association with the western intellectual tradition challenged the integrity of Christian faith, whatever its undoubted benefits. Both Bosch and Newbigin left a legacy of enduring frameworks for thinking about the Gospel and Western Culture. However we also need historical detail to test and develop these ideas. Historical treatment is also needed to

address the commonplace observation that the 19th and 20th missionary movement can largely be explained by their being the religious face of the Enlightenment project and European expansionism.

This book goes some considerable way towards indicating how the need for a better understanding of the nature and implications of the Enlightenment can be addressed.

Of course, however useful any one word may be as a short-hand description of the habits of an era, it is bound to be inadequate, particularly when applied to such a long period. The term 'Enlightenment' is no exception, and it would be a mistake to suggest that the Enlightenment project itself was either monolithic or uniformly rational. Brian Stanley's two contributions are particularly outstanding in their careful reflections on what it is we are actually talking about.

Other writers focus on the nineteenth century Protestant missionary movement in its British and Scottish roots, and offer a high standard of scholarly and readable reflection about the way in which leaders in one era of mission both used and challenged the intellectual assumptions of their time. The stories analysed have their foci on particular areas and personalities, but provide a wide range of illustration of the ways in which Enlightenment values, assumptions, and styles of information gathering, classification, and argument, were associated with the actions and apologetics of the missionary movement. If Enlightenment values of scientific objectivity provided missionaries with a handy critique of other cultures, beliefs and lifestyles, this apologetic not only failed to do justice to the more positive aspects of unfamiliar cultures, it was also sometimes purchased at the price of corroding their own religious

world view.

There are many enriching asides. Andrew Walls argues that the roots of the 19th century missionary movement were not so much late 18th century English Evangelicalism as Germanic pietism. Ian Maxwell's chapter 'Civilization or Christianization' revisits key debates in the development of Scottish missionary theory and fills some important gaps in our understanding. Having a debate about methods characterized by the words 'civilization' and 'Christianization' would seem to be a very Enlightenment project. Here are two groups of people trying to apply a quasi-scientific model to Christian mission in situations about which they are only partially informed, and both trou-

bled by evidence which challenges theories which do not allow for the complexity of cultural and religious change.

Disentangling cultural assumptions is painstaking, but it is also in a necessary way, also enlightening! It is the nature of the case that Christians are people of their time and culture and of a faith which both embodies and transcends the particularities of time and culture. People use the arguments at hand to support what they believe. We need the reminder of the risks involved which these essays bring. This volume is not only an important contribution to our understanding, and a challenge to self-awareness, it is also a model of empathetic and critical scholarship.

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George M. Wieland is Lecturer in New Testament at Carey Baptist College and Auckland University, New Zealand.

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