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Evangelical Review of Theology

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



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Editorial:

Mission, Vision and Witness

WE COMMENCE A NEW year of publication with a comprehensive overview of the task of Christian witness in the world of the 21st century presented by Denton Lotz, who has recently retired as General Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance where he has demonstrated his global vision and understanding in a remarkable period of leadership. Although his paper is directed primarily towards his own denomination, it contains insights, passion and hope that can be shared by all as we develop and implement vision and strategies suitable for this diverse and busy world in which we live.

An interesting aspect of the global nature of the Christian community is addressed by Amos Yong as he analyses the phenomenon of Asian-American theology, of which he is himself a prominent part. His perceptive study of the dynamics and possibilities of this movement has considerable value in itself, but it can also be considered a case-study for similar phenomena involving other host and guest communities in many parts of the world. Responses and reflections from other contexts are welcome.

Casting the vision even wider, Tony Richie invites us to consider once again the fascinating contribution of C. S. Lewis to our Christian understand-

ing and pilgrimage—this time in regard to the theology of religions. In our globalised multi-cultural world, one of the most important and delicate matters is the relationship between religions and their adherents, so further careful thought on this topic is a welcome addition to our faith.

Robert Ferris' paper, on the work of a theological seminary Dean, born out of many years of personal experience and opportunities to observe and consult in this area in many contexts, provides practical advice and wisdom for the important task of training people for gospel witness and ministry. In conjunction with this practical approach, spiritual resources are needed for those engaged in the task of living for Christ and sharing his message. So in our concluding Bible study article, Drake Williams turns our attention to a valuable text—showing how the Apostle Paul 'urges Christians then and now to have steadfast and immovable attitudes. He also encourages us to be busy for God, excelling in the great work that needs to be done in his name. Finally, he encourages Christians to remember the Lord who will reward us, for he will reward the faithfulness of Christians at the end of time.'

David Parker, Editor.

Paradigm Shifts in Missiology

Denton Lotz

KEYWORDS: *Contextualisation, modernity, eschatology, colonialism, ecumenism, theological education, social responsibility, repentance, globalization, koinonia*

MISSIOLOGY, OR THE science of missions (in German *Missionswissenschaft*) is the academic and critical study of the biblical basis, history, theology, methods and practice of the expansion of the Christian Church engaged in mission. Missiology, as an academic subject, struggled and in some places still struggles to be accepted as a proper academic discipline. The first chair of mission was actually initiated in 1867 in Edinburgh, Scotland with the former great missionary, Alexander Duff being the pioneer professor of missions. It was Gustav Wichern, however, the great German professor of missions who developed missiology as a separate academic discipline. North America and Germany continue to take the lead in integrating the study of missions into theological education. However, it is still a struggle in much of the

ological education to confront students with the necessity of studying missions. The mission of the church is weaker because of that.

As missiologists one of the first things we must do is to recognize the signs of the times in which we are living. Therefore, I would like first to deal with the world context in which we today are called upon to be a missionary people!

I The Present Context of Missiology

We are living in a period which in just a few decades has experienced a seismic shift in world history. Few generations have had the opportunity, as has ours, to experience such radical changes. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 symbolized not only the fall of communism and the end to a cold war which determined most of the course of 20th century history, but it also opened up a Pandora's Box of hopes, aspirations and determination of the Two-thirds world ethnic groups for freedom, justice and equality.

Denton Lotz (ThD, Hamburg) has recently retired from the position of General Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance which he has held since 1988. Previously he served in Eastern and Central Europe as a missionary with the American Baptist Churches USA, and taught for 11 years as an Associate Professor of Missions at the Baptist Theological Seminary, Rüschnikon. This is an adapted version of a paper presented to BWA Global Summit on Baptist Mission in the 21st Century, May 5-9, 2003 at Swanwick, England.

1 The clash of civilizations

The end of the cold war was indeed the beginning of what Samuel Huntington calls 'the clash of civilizations'. This can be seen very clearly in what happened with the break-up of the Soviet Union. Suddenly tribal and ethnic peoples, accompanied by dreams of nationhood which had been suppressed by Soviet armed force, began to assert themselves with fierce and violent wars. This may be clearly seen in the many ethnic conflicts of former Soviet states: Azerbaijan against Armenia, Chechnya against Russia, Bosnia against Serbia, and Serbia against Croatia.

Tribal conflicts have also been the order of the day in Africa and Asia. How can one forget the holocaust of Rwanda where one million people were slaughtered in the terrible war between Hutus and Tutsis? Such conflicts are also part of the recent history of Asia as seen in the conflict of Pakistan and India over Kashmir, and the conflict between the Nagas in India and their government, as well as the tragic conflict between tribal groups in Indonesia. We must take Huntington seriously, even though we might not agree with many of his conclusions, that this conflict of civilizations is basically a conflict of religions. Although the US government maintains that the recent war in Iraq was not about Islam, the people of the Middle East maintain that it was. The fact is that religious conflicts, as never before, have already determined to a certain extent the conflicts of the 21st century. The wars mentioned above were basically religious in nature: Azerbaijan and Armenia, Muslim against Christian; Serbia

against Bosnia, Christian against Muslim; India against Pakistan, Hindu against Muslim, etc. The list goes on and on. For example, the destruction of the Baptist seminary in Kaduna, Nigeria and the consequent destruction of nineteen churches and the death of more than one thousand people was decidedly a conflict between Muslims and Christian. The conflict in Indonesia on the island of Ambon is a conflict of Muslims and Christians.

One cannot escape the fact that the context of Christian mission in the world today will be one where religions meet. The question is: Will it be a meeting where tolerance, understanding and dialogue take place or will it be settled by war and destruction?

The context of mission in the 21st century is not only determined by religious conflicts but, as we shall later discuss, also one that includes a massive list of problems: the rich North against the poor South, human rights violations by totalitarian governments, religious persecution, lack of education, poverty, hunger and the injustice that follows from crime and corruption, health problems, including the pandemic of HIV/AIDS and SARS. The question confronting mission in the 21st century is: 'Does the Church of Jesus Christ have a word of hope and redemption in the very context and struggles of daily life of millions of people suffering from the evil forces that are tearing them down?'

2 The state of world Christianity

We are indebted to David Barrett for the most extensive annual statistics not only of world Christianity, but all major religions. The total population of

the world is about 6.3 billion. Rounding off Barrett's figures, of the 6.3 billion people in the world 33.1% are Christians, whereas 20.2% are Muslims. If the present trend continues, by 2025 the percentages will be about the same with about a .2% increase of Christians and a .5% increase of Muslims. What is astounding about these figures, however, is that in 1900, at the end of the Great Century of missions, 34.5% of the world was Christian and 12.3% Muslims. In other words Islam has increased its total percentage of the world population by 10% during the past 100 years whereas Christianity has actually decreased. Of course we can attribute this to many factors, including the low birthrate of European Christians compared to the high birthrate of Middle Eastern and Asian Muslims. But it does give us pause to consider that in spite of all our talk of mission, all of our strategies and methods for world evangelization, the percentage of Christians in the world has been rather static.

Another more positive way of looking at these statistics is that in 1900 about 85% of Christians in the world were in Europe and North America. Today 55% of Christians in the world are in the so-called Two-thirds world of Africa, Asia and Latin America! Thus one could point to these figures as the sign of the 'success' of the world missionary movement.

This success of the world Christian missionary movement has been popularized recently for us by Professor Philip Jenkins's book, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*. Jenkins popularizes what missiologists have been saying for the past fifty years: Christianity is moving south-

ward to the continents of Africa, Asia and Latin America: 'The era of Western Christianity has passed within our lifetime, and the day of Southern Christianity is dawning'.¹ The fact is, the next Christendom will not be white or European, but it will be African, Asian and Hispanic. This one can already see again in the statistics. Although Europe is nominally Christian and numbers 560 million, already Latin American totals are 480 million, Africa 360 million, and Asia 313 million Christians... and a greater percentage of these go to church!!

The conclusion of the book is a warning to western Christians. Jenkins maintains that 'Southern Christianity, the Third Church, is not just a transplanted version of the familiar religion of the older Christian states: the New Christendom is no mirror image of the old. It is a truly new and developing entity.'² The consequences of this new Christendom for the so-called older Christendom are immense. If it is true that 'Christianity is flourishing wonderfully among the poor and persecuted, while it atrophies among the rich and secure',³ what does this mean for the former sending churches, for European and North American Christianity? It is to this context of the 'old Christendom' that we must briefly direct our attention!

3 The state of old Christendom The Catholic Professor of Dogmatics at

1 Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 3.

2 Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, p. 214.

3 Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, p. 220.

Tuebingen University, Peter Huenermann, states several theses that apply to the situation of the Christian Church in Europe: 1.) The European church as an institution is in a process of dissolution, 2.) The current crisis of the European church is linked to the crisis of the transformation of European society in modernity, in which the basic characteristics of the emerging society are in discontinuity with the institutional structure of the church.⁴ Statistics for France show that although 45 million of the 57 million French consider themselves baptized Catholics, 47% of the French population consider themselves areligious or atheistic! In Germany 70% of the East Germans are without any religion. On the other hand, in cities such as Berlin and Frankfurt 20 to 30% of school age children are Muslims, numbering 3.3 million in all of Germany.

In Britain, home of William Carey and the main force of the modern missionary movement of the 19th century, the figures are similar. Simon Barrow, secretary of the Churches' Commission on Mission of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland paints a very bleak picture of the state of Christianity in the UK. He maintains that out of a total population of 50 million only around 900,000 attend an Anglican Church on Sunday morning. In the parish where he used to work, only 40,000 of 1.3 mil-

lion attended church on Sunday.⁵ The British Cardinal O'Connor caused quite an uproar when he stated that the public influence of Christianity in Britain has 'almost been vanquished'.⁶ Alastair McIntyre made the rude comment that 'the religion of the English is that there is no God, and it is wise to pray to him from time to time'.⁷

Barrows puts a positive twist to this decline by stating, '... the reality of traditional church decline in the West is perhaps the judgment we need in order to discover what is lacking...'⁸ In addition, the good news for Britain and Europe is that the fastest growing churches here are mainly made up of immigrants from Africa. The former sending country is now a receiving country. There are 1500 missionaries from 50 countries in the UK today. The largest Baptist Church in Britain is an African Baptist Church in London made up mainly of Ghanaians and Nigerians!

The state of the church in North America gives no cause for arrogance about the state of the church in Europe. The fact is there has been a steady decline in church attendance. But more than this, secularism has eroded the church's influence on society. In the media, academy, and intellectual life the Christian faith is continually mar-

⁴ Peter Huenermann, 'Evangelization of Europe: Observations of a Church in Peril', *Mission in the Third Millennium*, Robert J. Schreier, ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001), pp. 58, 65.

⁵ Simon Barrow, 'From management to vision: issues for British churches negotiating decline and change', *International Review of Mission*, XCII:364 (Jan 2003), p. 8.

⁶ Barrow, 'From management to vision', p. 7.

⁷ Barrow, 'From management to vision', p. 10.

⁸ Barrow, 'From management to vision', p. 16.

ginalized and has less and less influence.

Obviously the above facts concerning the new Christianity of the Two-thirds world and the decline of the Church in the West is in itself a paradigm shift which we need to consciously consider when detailing the next thrust of this paper, that is, the paradigm shifts throughout history of missionary theology, methods and work.

II Paradigm Shifts

It is a fact that the world has changed greatly since the birth of Christ. Also, our comprehension of the Christian faith has grown and changed with time. Christ is timeless but humans are fallible and finite. Christ is infinite and does not change. He is the same yesterday, today and forever! But you and I are very different from our grandparents' generation. When my maternal grandparents left Florence, Italy in 1900 and sailed for New York, they never intended going back to the old country. They had immigrated and left a way of life. The same was true for my paternal grandparents from Bremen, Germany. The airplane had not yet been invented. Today we think nothing of flying to Rome, or Paris, or Tokyo. As a result our way of thinking about travel has changed immensely. The concept of immigration has also changed greatly. The annual pilgrimage of Algerians leaving France for Algiers, travelling through Spain and then to Gibraltar and North Africa is an example of the new way of thinking about immigration.

In a much larger way, science today is very different from science yester-

day. The way we think about reality is changed by our scientific understanding of technology and time. Thomas Kuhn made a significant breakthrough in our understanding of this changed way of thinking. In analysing the way scientific discoveries are made, he realized that science does not just grow cumulatively but rather by revolutions. A group of scientists begin to understand that the old way of thinking about science was wrong and they begin to search for a new model of theoretical structure, or what Kuhn calls a new 'paradigm'.⁹ In recent years this phrase 'paradigm shift' has entered our vocabulary and is used constantly to explain the need for the church to understand that the old way of doing things, that our old way of doing mission is no longer appropriate. We need a new paradigm, a new way of thinking!

Of course the new paradigm is not immediately accepted, and thus there is usually a conflict between the old way of thinking and the new. Misunderstandings take place because the 'proponents of the old paradigm often just cannot understand the arguments of the proponents of the new'.¹⁰ However, as Bosch explains, 'the existing (or old) paradigm increasingly blurs, and the new one begins to attract more and more scholars, until eventually the

⁹ I am indebted to David J. Bosch's *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991) for this discussion of Kuhn, as well as our future discussion of paradigm shifts in mission theology.

¹⁰ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 184.

original problem-ridden paradigm is abandoned'.¹¹

Jesus Christ does not change! Our theology changes, but it can never deny God's revelation in Scripture, his work through the people of Israel and his final revelation and redemption in Jesus Christ. But our understanding of reality and the implications of revelation for a particular time and culture may change. Therefore, with the advent of world Christianity we need to listen to one another. As Hiebert states, the Christian church should function as an 'international hermeneutical community'. That means that 'Christians and theologians from different contexts challenge one another's cultural, social and ideological biases'.¹²

III Six Historical Paradigms of Mission

Probably the book on the Theology of Mission of the last century was that of David J. Bosch who was formerly head of the Department of Mission of the University of South Africa. He was tragically killed in an auto accident in 1993. His book, quoted above, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, presents a sweeping historical and theological review of the different paradigms in mission from the early church until today.

Before analysing Bosch's six paradigms we need to remind ourselves that this is not the first or last time that theologians will look back on Christian

history and discover various paradigms. Another generation may have spoken of 'periods of history'. Others may have spoken of different typologies, e.g. H. R. Niebuhr's *Christ and History* outlines five different types of ways in which the church related to the world throughout history. J.C. Hoekendijk often spoke of the four heroes of Christian faith throughout history and showed them as different paradigms or models for mission. He spoke of the four 'Ms': martyr, monk, milites (knights), and missionary. K. S. Latourette, the great Baptist historian of missions, has his own periodization: 1.) The First Five Centuries (to 500 A.D.), 2.) The Thousand Years of Uncertainty (500-1500 A.D.), 3.) Three Centuries of Advance (1500-1800 A.D.), 4.) The Great Century (1800-1914 A.D.), 5.) Advance Through Storm (1914 A.D.- Present).

However, Bosch's analysis of the history of missions is different. He analyses the six periods, not merely historically, but sees that there was an actual shift in the view of reality and comprehension of the faith which changed the way the church did mission. Bosch bases his six paradigms on Hans Kueng's six major paradigms: the apocalyptic paradigm of primitive Christianity; the Hellenistic paradigm of the patristic period; the medieval Roman Catholic paradigm; the Protestant (Reformation) paradigm; the modern Enlightenment paradigm; and the emerging ecumenical paradigm.

Bosch's analysis of these six historical paradigms is a brilliant tour de force of the way mission theology has changed throughout the years. What is most instructive, I believe, is to understand how each paradigm greatly influ-

11 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 184.

12 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 187.

enced the adherents to act in a particular way, often without reflection or thought as to the consequences. It is very helpful for us to review these to see how they could influence our Baptist understanding of mission in the 21st century!

1 The apocalyptic paradigm of primitive Christianity

For centuries the Christian Church had lost the sense of the apocalyptic and eschatological nature of the message of Jesus and the New Testament. In 1918 Karl Barth in his commentary on Romans stated very clearly: 'Christianity that is not entirely and altogether eschatology has entirely and altogether nothing to do with Christ.'¹³

The early Church understood that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was the paradigm shift of all history and all humanity. Jesus' incarnation was the beginning of the end. Therefore, we must view the early Church's paradigm in the light of Christ being the victor over the devil, over the evil powers of this world. It is not our responsibility to give a review of the apocalyptic nature of Jesus' message and the New Testament but merely to indicate that if we lost this emphasis we have lost the heart of the gospel message of Jesus! The New Testament was a missionary book. No wonder that Martin Kaehler many years ago could say that mission was the Mother of Theology. Hahn sum-

marises this view of New Testament understanding of mission: Mission is 'the Church's service, made possible by the coming of Christ and the dawning of the eschatological event of salvation... The Church goes in confidence and hope to meet the future of its Lord, with the duty of testifying before the whole world to God's love and redemptive deed.'¹⁴ Every book of the New Testament to a certain extent is attempting to proclaim the crucified and risen Christ as the Saviour of all the nations. Jesus is victor and that gave life to the early community of faithful and continues to do so today!

2 The Hellenistic paradigm of the patristic period

The early Church in the first three centuries had to grow and live in an alien culture. As it grew it had to relate to that culture and the philosophies of that culture. We owe much to this period of history. Its definitions of the trinity, its defence of the divinity of Christ, its triumph over the decaying philosophies helped make the Christian message acceptable to the people and the empire. But beyond the philosophers the real triumph was that of the love of Christ in the life of the believer! Rosenkranz states: 'In this macabre world, submerged in despair, perversity and superstition, something new existed and grew: Christianity, bastion of love for God and brother, of the Holy Spirit, and of hope for God's coming reign.'¹⁵

¹³ Cited in *The Last Things: Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Eschatology*, edited by Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jensen, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), p. vii.

¹⁴ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 54.

¹⁵ Rosenkranz, in Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 192.

However, in defending the faith, 'the message became doctrine, the doctrine dogma, and this dogma was expounded in precepts which were expertly strung together'.¹⁶ Eventually, however, eschatology and pneumatology were replaced by ecclesiology. It is sad to hear these words of Bosch, 'What began in primitive Christianity as a bold confession in the face of the emperor cult that Jesus was Lord, ended in a compromise where the emperor was to rule in "time" and Christ in "eternity"'.¹⁷ Nevertheless, we owe a great debt to the Eastern Church for grounding the message and mission of Jesus in the love of God, a revolutionary message in the face of unmoved gods of Greece and Rome!

3 The medieval Roman Catholic paradigm

For the next thousand years the centre of Christianity moved from a Greek interpretation to that of a Roman understanding. Whereas Greek theology emphasized the incarnation, Rome emphasized the cross. Whereas Greek theology emphasized John 3:16 and God's love, Roman theology in mission emphasized Luke 14:23: 'compel them to come in...' As Bosch emphasizes, Christianity moved from being an oppressed sect to an oppressor of sects. Christendom became the unity of church and state. Boerwinkel concludes that the apocalyptic missionary movement of the primitive church gave

way to the expansion of Christendom!¹⁸

Is it any wonder that many Christians in Latin America objected in 1992 to the 500th celebration of Christopher Columbus 'discovering the new world'? It was said by some that he was not Christopher (bearer of Christ), but Cultopher (bearer of culture). To a certain extent one could say that the colonial expansion of the church during this period was a triumph of culture over the tribal and indigenous peoples who were 'compelled' to come in to the church!

4 The Protestant (Reformation) paradigm

Cardinal Bellarmine included missionary activity as one of the marks of the true church. In condemning Protestantism he emphasized its heresy by its lack of mission: 'Heretics are never said to have converted either pagans or Jews to the faith, but only to have perverted Christians.'¹⁹ This may have been true at the beginning of the Reformation, but certainly within Reformation life, and particularly the continual reformation as expressed by Pietism, there was a great movement of missionary activity.

Romans 1:16, which emphasizes that the just shall live by faith, became the missionary text for the Reformers. Thus faith was emphasized which viewed man in light of the fall and his personal sinfulness and thus the individual need for salvation; Scripture and

16 Van de Aalst cited in Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 195.

17 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 202.

18 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 237.

19 S. Neill, *History of Christian Missions*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975), p. 221.

preaching were thus emphasized. Because of this belief in the priesthood of all believers and the personal interpretation of scripture schisms occurred and still haunt Protestantism with its more than three hundred different denominations!

Whereas the Reformers wanted a reformation, the Anabaptists wanted a replacement of the church. Voetius, influenced by Calvinism, emphasized a threefold aspect of mission: conversion, church planting, and the glory and manifestation of grace. The Reformers did not believe in separation of church and state and this affected their view of mission. Pietists and Baptists often had to fight the colonial authoritarianism which was a hindrance to mission.²⁰ The Anabaptists considered all of Christianity apostate and thus saw Europe as a mission field. It was the Anabaptists who made the Great Commission mandatory for all believers.²¹

5 The modern Enlightenment paradigm

It is this paradigm with which we are most familiar. Of course the scriptural basis for this became The Great Commission (Matthew 28:20f.) 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel...' This still remains the leading scriptural basis for mission among most Baptists and evangelicals to this day. The Enlightenment paradigm has been the basis of most of our education and

most of our thinking. Characteristics of the Enlightenment had a great effect on mission, whether liberal, evangelical or conservative. The Enlightenment emphasized reason, the subject-object scheme, the elimination of purpose, the belief in inevitable progress, knowledge was factual and value-free, all problems were solvable and finally that people were emancipated, autonomous individuals.

The motives of missionary enterprise based upon Enlightenment thinking were as follows: The glory of God; Jesus' love; the gospel and cultural superiority; mission and 'Manifest Destiny'; mission and colonialism; mission and the millennium; Pre-Postmillennialism and Millennialism; voluntarism and mission societies; missionary fervour; optimism, and pragmatism.

We respect with awe and reverence the many accomplishments and saintly missionaries who gave their lives to the 'Great Century' of missions during the past century. However, we would be foolish not to listen to the critique of this period which had its failings due to Enlightenment thinking often contrary to the gospel. Bosch concludes his survey of this paradigm with these words:

The entire Western missionary movement of the past three centuries merged from the matrix of the Enlightenment. On the one hand, it spawned an attitude of tolerance to all people and a relativistic attitude toward belief of any kind; on the other, it gave birth to Western superiority feelings and prejudice. It is not always possible to divide these sentiments neatly between 'liberals' and 'evangelicals'. Moreover, and only seeming-

²⁰ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 261, gives an excellent analysis of the ambivalences of the reformation paradigm.

²¹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 246.

ly incongruously, tolerance as well as intolerance, relativism as well as bigotry could often be found side by side in the same person or group.²²

Of course it is easy, one hundred years later, to be so critical of the mistakes of earlier missionaries, but must we not also commend them for their courage, their faith, their deep spirituality and commitment to evangelize the world in this generation? Should we not commend them and respect them for sacrificing all, leaving family, friends and giving their lives on foreign soil to proclaim God's love in Christ!?

Where do we go from here then in the 21st century? One of the leading missiologists of the 20th century was Keith Bridston who commented on the latter half of the century's events 'to be as radical in its implications for the missionary outlook of the Christian church as the Copernican revolution was for the scientific cosmology of its day'.²³ He concludes with these jarring words: 'The only ultimately effective solution to the widespread missionary malaise of today, which is sometimes hidden from our eyes because of our apparent missionary successes, is a "radical transformation of the whole life of the church"'.²⁴

6 The emerging ecumenical paradigm

Bosch concludes his study of the para-

digim shifts by analysing what he believes will be the paradigm for the 21st century which he calls 'The emerging ecumenical paradigm'. The fact is we have to learn to live and witness together as Christians. The following factors have forced upon the whole church the necessity in this post modern period to seek a new paradigm:

- i) The West has lost its dominance in the world. In fact the world is seeking liberation from the 'stranglehold of the West'.
- ii) Unjust structures of oppression and exploitation are today challenged as never before in human history.
- iii) Western technology, development and the idea of progress is suspect. They have proven to be false gods of the Enlightenment.
- iv) We live in a shrinking world with finite resources. Environment and people are interdependent.
- v) We must work for peace and justice in light of the fact that for the first time in human history we are capable of wiping out humankind.
- vi) European theologies can no longer claim superiority over other parts of the world: 'Culture shapes the human voice that answers the voice of Christ.'
- vii) Freedom of religion is considered a basic human right. In light of this Christians are forced to reevaluate their attitude toward and understanding of other faiths.²⁵

Professor Helmut Thielecke spoke of the necessity for a theology which emphasized personal salvation and

²² Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 344.

²³ Bridston, in Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 345.

²⁴ Bridston, in Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 345.

²⁵ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, pp. 188f.

also held it in creative tension with social salvation. He spoke of the need for simultaneity. In re-emphasizing the need for a recovery of a biblical eschatology in mission Bosch reminds us of the problem of over-emphasizing either a fixation on the parousia or a neglect of the transcendent: 'In its fixation on the parousia, the first has neglected the problems of the world and thereby crippled Christian mission. In its pre-occupation with this world to the exclusion of the transcendent dimension, the second has robbed people of ultimate meaning and of a teleological dimension without which nobody can survive.'²⁶ Must we not, however, rejoice that because of the sacrifice of the missionary movement there is indeed a church all over the world?

IV A New Paradigm for the 21st Century

Each of us here today has our own understandings and ideas of where we need to go if we are to be a missionary people in the 21st century. The question confronting us, however, is whether or not we have glimpses of a new paradigm and are led in faith to affirm that new paradigm as the divine imperative, or whether or not we still feel the present paradigm in which we operate, the Enlightenment model, is valid.

Emilio Castro concluded the Bangkok Conference of World Mission and Evangelism in 1973 by saying that the end of the missionary era was the beginning of the era of world mission. What will be the new paradigm for the

21st century of world mission? What will be the new paradigm of mission in the post modern world which is beginning to emerge? What will be our response to the evil and violent world in which we live...a world without hope, without judgment, without Christ and thus doomed and on its way to hell? How can we as Baptists recover the primitive Christian apocalyptic and be faithful to the call of Christ in our personal and social lives for the church of tomorrow? I feel that the new paradigm must be faithful to some of the following inklings and characteristics if it is to be faithful to Christ and his coming kingdom!

1 The judgment of God and repentance

We could soothe ourselves by being boastful of the great success of modern missions as summarized by Jenkins in his book *The Next Christendom*. On the other hand, it is a judgment that Baptists are rarely mentioned. We could speak of the great success of Baptist mission in Congo and Nigeria, in Brazil, Myanmar and India. We could soothe ourselves that the true church is a little flock and thus we are called to be faithful and not successful.

On the other hand, if we take Africa, Asia and Latin America seriously, Baptists, with some exceptions, have not fared well. The Pentecostal or Charismatic Movement is the main driving force of Christian mission in the Two-thirds world. Have we taken seriously the social and economic problems under which so much of humanity lives? Have our mission policies encouraged and empowered national and young leaders? Have western

²⁶ Bosch, *Transforming Mission* p. 508.

Christians tried to make the Two-thirds world church like the church back home? Have we given freedom and funding to the suffering believers? Have we modelled the church for the future or the church of the past?

Following the debacle of Christian missions in China in 1949, David Paton wrote a book entitled *Christian Missions and the Judgment of God* that has significance even today. The failure of the church in China experienced judgment because it was God's will, even though the Chinese communists did not understand it this way. Paton maintained that 'the entire structure and ethos of the church in China was, with minor much-paraded exceptions, Western'.²⁷ Roland Allen's stinging rebuke of western missions still hurts:

We have allowed racial and religious pride to direct our attitude towards those whom we have been wont to call "poor heathen." We have approached them as superior beings, moved by charity to impart of our wealth to destitute and perishing souls.... We have trained them, and ordained some of them. We have done everything for them, but very little with them. We have done everything for them except give place to them. We have treated them as "dear children", but not as "brethren."²⁸

This judgment comes from more than fifty years ago, but in some places and among some mission agencies this

is still true. It is always difficult to take such criticism. We want to lift our voices in the West and say, 'But, there is another side to the story! You don't know how we tried, etc.' True repentance must stop making excuses and accept God's judgment. Then there will be healing and redemption for both the sending and receiving church. However, in the face of the non-believing world we must confess that they view much of Christian mission as western colonialism, associated with dominance and superiority. They have not seen the suffering Christ on the cross judging and forgiving all of us. They have not seen the sacrifice of the lamb but only the superiority of western civilization. Of this we must repent, even for the non-believing West!

John R. Mott, in his defence of the watchword for world evangelization, '*The evangelization of the world in this generation*', gave as one of the reasons repenting for the sins of western capitalism and colonialism. Indeed if we are to move to a new paradigm we, in the West need a prophetic repentance! And, let me add, the church in the Two-thirds world which has failed to follow Christ must also repent.

2 World Mission: international and global, sending and receiving

The biblical record makes it quite clear that mission belongs to the whole church. It is for this reason that Emil Brunner encapsulated this truth by saying, 'What fire is to burning, mission is to the church'. The command to world mission is not a western or NATO command. It is given to the whole people of God. Bishop Stephen

²⁷ David M. Paton, *Christian Missions and the Judgment of God*, edited with short biography by David M.M. Paton, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 67.

²⁸ Paton, *Christian Missions*, pp. 71f.

Neill once said that one of the tragedies of 19th century missions was that unfortunately missionaries gave the impression that they were the evangelists and the nationals were to be pastors of local churches. In so doing nationals lost or never gained a sense of world evangelization.

If every church everywhere is called to be involved in world mission then we have to give up the idea of sending and receiving churches. We need to realize that every church must send and every church must receive. This is the globalization of mission which the new paradigm must possess. Just think of what would happen if every sending church were to become a receiving church, supporting initially an evangelist from another part of the world to help in their local evangelism? This is what is happening in Europe! The largest Baptist churches in Paris, Brussels and London are African churches!

3 True partnership, biblical *koinonia* and sharing of resources

Partnership implies equality. It is difficult to have partnership in an endeavour when one person has nothing and the other everything. For too long western missions have been driven by money. Some missionary executives have even admitted, 'More missionaries, more money'. The whole appeal for funding the world mission is the appeal for supporting 'our missionaries'. A new paradigm of mission will require an equal sharing of resources. This will require a whole new orientation and mission education in so-called sending churches. How can sending churches be educated to becoming receiving and

sharing churches?

The African Independent Church movement to a certain extent has been a reaction to missionary control of resources. There are approximately 140,000 Baptists in Angola. Yet, there is a Church of Jesus Christ and Simon Toku His Prophet which has more than two million members. Simon Toku was a Baptist who asked for a ride in a missionary car. The missionary replied, 'This is our car'. Simon replied, 'But, I thought that in the Kingdom of God we were all equals and that we shared our possessions.' Toku left the Baptists and started his own independent movement. The same could be said for the Kimbwanga movement in the Congo, numbering millions! The fact is that in many cases, because of mission agency control of finances, our Baptist movement has suffered great loss of leadership and growth.

4 Cooperative and united—evangelical and ecumenical

The word 'ecumenical' means simply, 'the whole inhabited world'. However, because of doctrinal concerns, conflict with liberalism, etc., that word has been anathema for many Baptists, and has become associated exclusively with the World Council of Churches. There is, however, an ecumenicity of the right and the left, of liberal and of conservative persuasion. Not only is there a WCC, but there is a World Evangelical Alliance (WEA). Whatever the word, Baptists need to realize that in the coming world mission paradigm we cannot go it alone. We need one another not only as Baptists but as Christians, whatever the denomination!

The evangelism conferences sponsored by Billy Graham, whether in Amsterdam or Lausanne, have been perhaps the most ecumenical of all missionary meetings! All of Dr. Graham's missions have been ecumenical, involving all the churches in a city or country! When we get to heaven the Lord is not going to ask our denomination! An American missionary traveling home from India by way of Japan arrived in Tokyo. The visa control asked him his religion. The missionary replied, 'Christian.' Whereupon the officer said, 'No! What damnation do you belong to?'

I am proud to be a Baptist and am proud of our Baptist heritage, but for sure I believe we all know that heaven will be for all believers of all denominations. The hour is too late for us to separate from one another and only work with those with whom we agree ecclesiologically or otherwise. Christ calls us to unity. The great prayer of Jesus in John 17 is a missiological prayer: 'I pray that they may be one!' Why? 'So that the world may believe!' Our lack of unity is a hindrance to the Spirit and to world evangelization! The ecumenical movement began basically as an evangelical movement, going back to 1845 with the formation of the Evangelical Alliance and then in 1910 at the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh.

5 The Kingdom of God and social justice

We have seen from the paradigm of the Enlightenment period that too often the kingdom of God was associated with western scientific and technological superiority. While one side emphasized heaven, the other side empha-

sized earth. There needs to be a tension between both of these extremes. The Gospel of Mark makes clear that the message of Jesus was indeed the preaching of the kingdom (Mark 1:15). Recent evangelical New Testament scholarship has helped us understand that the church is not the kingdom, but that the rule of God is also not to be identified with any earthly movement. The rule of God for the Christian is seen in none other than Jesus Christ. Too often the liberal emphasized the kingdom without the King, while the conservative emphasized the King without the kingdom!

The kingdom of Christ must never be identified with any political system. This is the Marxist heresy, as well as Islam's—which identifies the earthly government with Allah's will, particularly in Shiite Islam. The same could be said of Christian fundamentalism which emphasizes a Restoration type of theocracy!

Individuals, redeemed by Christ, must be salt and leaven in the world in which they live. Our political actions must be drawn from Christ and not from a secular agenda. Rather, the Christian draws his inspiration from the crucified Messiah, the Lamb of God. In being faithful to Christ and his cross we do not seek suffering, but in the midst of suffering we experience redemption. Yoder says, 'But the kind of faithfulness that is willing to accept evident defeat rather than complicity with evil is, by virtue of its conformity with what happens to God when he works among us, aligned with the ultimate triumph of the Lamb.'²⁹

²⁹ John Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), p. 238.

As a minority in the world, the Christian must work for the kingdom, knowing at the same time that they will not bring it in by political or economic force. Again Yoder:

Perhaps Christians in our age are being made ready for a new awareness of the continuing relevance of the message of the Apocalypse. There is a widespread recognition that Western society is moving toward the collapse of the mentality that has been identified with Christendom. Christians must recognize that they are not only a minority on the globe but also at home in the midst of the followers of non-Christian and post-Christian faiths. Perhaps this will prepare us to see how inappropriate and preposterous was the prevailing assumption, from the time of Constantine until yesterday that the fundamental responsibility of the church for society is to manage it.³⁰

Missions and kingdom theology must therefore be seen as under the cross! 'Not by might or by power, but by my Spirit!' (Zech. 4:6). Such is the kingdom theology which will make us effective witnesses to those suffering from lack of human rights, persecution, alienation, hardship, poverty and suffering. The Christ we preach has a word of comfort, but more than that, Christ is indeed a presence among the suffering. Among these he is building his kingdom. And mission that avoids these the least of Christ's people, avoids Christ!

6 Servanthood, community and inculturation

Traditionally missiologists have spoken of progress from accommodation to indigenization to contextualization. Accommodation generally referred to making the messenger acceptable to the other culture. For example, Robert de Nobili in India tried to reach Brahmins dressed as a sannyassi. In China, Matteo Ricci dressed as a Confucian scholar. Indigenization went a step farther and primarily refers to the leadership of those who had received the message. National leadership and local seminary education was provided for pastors. William Carey was most progressive in this respect. He worked for the immediate training of converts and their installation as pastors and the translations of scriptures into Bengali. The Church became a Bengali church, not an English church! Contextualization, on the other hand, refers to insuring that the message was proclaimed in the life and world (context) where people were.

The people to whom the missionary hoped to preach the gospel were not only individuals but members of a society and a community. To speak to that person so that he understood the gospel one had to be aware of the language as well as the culture and way of thinking. *The Peace Child*³¹ is a good example of evangelical contextualization! Roman Catholic missiology uses more often today the word 'inculturation' to explain this process of communicating the gospel in another culture effectively.

30 Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, p. 240.

31 Don Richardson, *Peace Child* (Glendale: Regal Books, 1974).

Christian mission needs to take culture more seriously as one of the primary hindrances as well as instruments of communicating the gospel. We must allow theologians of every nation to develop their own theology that is appropriate to their culture. John Mbiti said basically that 'you in the West have made a mess of theology for two thousand years, now give us a chance!' Catholicism has been perhaps more successful at enculturation, but also the greatest offender as mentioned earlier with 'Cultopher' Columbus and imposing Christian mission on another culture without respect for that culture, or just allowing the culture to subsume Christ!

All of this has significance for our understanding of the incarnation and an incarnational way of missionary life, which must be servanthood. It will have great effect upon language, art, and written expressions of the Christian faith. I have always been somewhat shocked to worship in the Baptist Church in Abeokuta, Nigeria and to see right at the front of the church a huge picture of Jesus with blond hair and blue eyes!

7 Conversations with other religions

This is difficult for many Baptists. In the BWA we have found it difficult at times to propose conversations with other Christian denominations. Brazilian Baptists were very upset with the theological conversations we had sponsored with the Vatican. In fact a memorandum was sent indicating their withdrawal from the BWA if such conversations were held again. Much progress has been made since then. In

fact Dr. Fanini recently preached at the funeral service of one of the archbishops!

But what about conversations with non-Christians? We have indicated from Professor Huntington that we live in a period of 'the clash of civilizations'. Should Christians not engage in some type of conversation with their neighbours? Nigerian Baptists who have experienced tragic destruction of churches and a seminary understand that there needs to be some type of conversation with their Muslim neighbours. Their church members live in daily contact with people of other faiths. Indeed within the same families very often there are Muslims and Christians who have learned to talk with one another.

I do not know the procedure or how the Lord will move amongst us, but it seems that in the 21st century we need to speak with every group of people, not to compromise the Christian message, but to make the message more acceptable and to give it a hearing! Timothy George's recent book, *Is the Father of Jesus the God of Mohammad?*³² is a good example of written dialogue. Are we now prepared to sit face to face and discuss our common humanity and in this way also to confess our faith in Jesus Christ!?

8 Theological education: the cradle, the cross, the crown

In order for Baptists to make signifi-

³² Timothy George, *Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad? Understanding the differences between Christianity and Islam* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

cant progress in the 21st century we will need a new type of leader and new type of missionary. Is our theological education worldwide sufficiently oriented towards the new paradigm that it will open students' hearts, minds and souls to the new realities which demand new solutions for world mission in the 21st century? Or, is the Enlightenment model of rationalism still the basis of our theological endeavours?

One Christmas Billy Graham preached a sermon entitled *'The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown'*. This trinitarian sermon emphasizes the incarnation, the cross, and the resurrection—all Christological themes which must be at the heart of any theology of mission. But, how do we make it real for the various cultures in which we must work? A rationalistic understanding of theology, history and Biblical studies without a spiritual dynamic will turn out students incapable of reaching their society.

Is Baptist theological education suffering from the same malaise as Lutheran scholasticism in the 16th century? Spener was appalled at the rationalism of theological education and wrote an essay, *Pia Desiderata*, which led to a reformation of theological education. Having been one of the influential leaders of Pietism, Spener knew that a head knowledge without a heart knowledge led to emptiness, and vice versa. Perhaps we need to begin to recruit students for Christian ministry. We need the best minds and the most committed to consider again the call of Christ to Christian ministry. At the end of the 19th century the best and brightest went out to do mission work. The Student Volunteer Movement for For-

eign Missions included men such as Nathan Soderblom of Sweden, William Temple of Britain, Karl Heim of Germany, Robert E. Speer of the USA, etc.

Theological education and Christian education in the Two-thirds world will be key ingredients in the new paradigm for the 21st century. Unfortunately, theological and Christian education has not been of high value to many mission agencies today. But, who will lead and be pastors in the 21st century? What kind of training will they receive? How will they be able to live and mature in the new paradigm when they have not been taught? The new paradigm requires sound minds and warm hearts!

9 The Charismatic movement

There is probably no issue more divisive in Baptist life than that of the charismatic movement. The term 'charismatic' means different things to different people. For example, in most of the former Soviet states the Charismatic Movement is anathema, and usually refers to extreme forms of ecstatic utterance or behaviour imported from Finland or Sweden, such as being slain in the spirit, etc. Baptists generally have not looked upon glossalalia with a positive mind. In other parts of the world, the term 'charismatic movement' refers to church renewal, a rediscovery of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. It is this aspect of the charismatic movement which I would like to emphasize. The fact that by 2025 missiologists are predicting one billion Pentecostals or charismatics should get our attention!

Whatever one's view on the charismatic movement, the fact is the 21st

century will see a paradigm shift in our understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in mission. In fact one is already seeing this happen. Perhaps one of the reasons that the charismatic movement has been so successful in Two-thirds world countries is that it mirrors more closely the New Testament understanding of empowerment by the Holy Spirit: 'You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses...' (Acts 1:8).

Several years ago an editorial of mine entitled, 'Are Baptists Afraid of the Holy Spirit?' caused quite a stir in some places. Just because we fear the excesses of the Pentecostal movement, we should not be prevented from learning from its strength, namely that all our mission work is not successful because of methodology, the homogenous unit principle, or plans, but rather it is the Holy Spirit who leads on in mission! The question therefore becomes, 'Am I prepared to open my life to God's powerful movement of the Spirit available at all times and all places to all peoples?'

Conclusion

Baptists were leaders in the rediscovery of the New Testament command to evangelize the world. Our basic ecclesiology of a believers' church always left room for the Spirit. Our commitment to the separation of church and state, or separation of religion from the government, is still a prophetic voice in these days of clashes of civilizations. We could be a prophetic voice for peace and justice. Our affirmation of a public witness to Christ through believers' baptism enables us as a counter-culture to confront the powers and principalities. Our emphasis on Scripture alone, faith alone, grace alone in the lives of the laity could enable us to be a mighty force for evangelization.

I believe our Baptist people are ready for new servant leadership, for a new in-breaking of the Holy Spirit, for another opportunity to serve Christ wherever he is leading us! May God grant us the courage to move outside the confining boxes of our comfortable thoughts and cultural prejudices to the new thing that God is doing in the world!

Baptists and Mission International Studies

Ian M. Randall & Anthony R. Cross (editors)

This book contains papers delivered at the fourth International Conference on Baptist Studies held at Acadia University, Canada. The studies are by authors from several countries and they investigate aspects of Baptists and mission from the seventeenth century to the present. The studies provide fresh insights into how mission has been undertaken across the world.

Ian M. Randall is a Senior Research Fellow, International Baptist Theological Seminary, Prague; **Anthony R. Cross** is a Fellow of the Centre for Baptist History and Heritage, Regent's Park College, Oxford.

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Whither Asian American Evangelical Theology? What Asian, Which American, Whose *Evangelion*?

Amos Yong

KEYWORDS: *Contextualization, culture, history, evangelicalism, liberalism, syncretism, missiology, Enlightenment, Pentecostalism, monism, transcendence, spirit, migration*

THIS PAPER ATTEMPTS to respond to four interrelated questions. First, what is Asian American evangelical (AAE) theology? Second, what are some of the pre-existing resources which can be mined for resources in developing an AAE theology? Third, what are the challenges and opportunities existing for AAE theologians? And finally, what might a programmatic sketch of an AAE theology look like? We take up each of these questions in order.

I What is Asian American Evangelical Theology?

By its very label, AAE theology presents itself as a complex nexus of ideas derived from three severely contested sets of Asian, American, and evangelical theological discourses. To begin, we must speak not of Asian theology, but of Asian theologies. This is the case both when we look at the various theological traditions that have developed over time and when we survey the present socio-cultural, religio-political, and geographic configuration of Asia.¹ Historically, for example, the

1 See, e.g., John C. England, et al., eds., *Asian Christian Theologies: A Research Guide to Authors, Movements, Sources*, 3 vols. (Delhi: ISPCK and Clarentian Publishers, and Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002-2004).

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Indian Orthodox Church claims a lineage extending back to St. Thomas the apostle on the one hand, while the church in North Korea is still in its very early stages of growing pains under the Communist government on the other hand. In between are various Christian theological traditions that have flourished for a time but then disappeared (like Nestorian Christianity during the T'ang dynasty) or that have emerged at various stages over the last millennium (e.g., along the 'Silk Road' during the medieval period, then from Roman Catholic missionaries, and later from the missionary ventures of the many Protestant denominations). Minimally, then, we have Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant theological traditions with histories of different length in different parts of Asia, each impacted perennially by indigenous expressions and, more recently, by the arrival and growth of Pentecostal-type churches.

This diversity is accentuated when we look at contemporary Christianity in Asia. Certainly there are vast socio-cultural differences ranging from east Asia to south Asia to southeast Asia to Australasia, with each of these regions being constituted by innumerable ethnicities, languages, and cultural groups. There are also pluralities of religio-political contexts which constrain theological reflection. Theologies produced by the Three-Self Church under the Maoist regime have a character very different from those produced by the indigenous churches of rural China, even as theologies developed in Muslim countries like Pakistan, Malaysia, and Indonesia are shaped variously from those developed in the missionary situation of an exiled

people like that of Tibet or those developed in a religiously plural context like that of India. Finally, we should not discount the impact of very different topographies, climates, and environments on theological reflection. Living amidst rice paddies, on mountains or islands, along rivers, or in or at the edges of deserts—each produces a distinctive ethos that in turn informs theological developments.

Of course, none of these variables—the historical, the socio-cultural, the religious, the national-political, and the environmental—operates in isolation from others. Hence it is the convergence of each of these aspects in particular places and times which accounts in large part for the transformation of Asian Christian theology (singular) into Asian Christian *theologies*: Indian theologies, Chinese theologies, south Asian theologies, Australasian theologies, and the like. And so far, of course, we have said nothing about how women's perspectives are informed by these various contextual configurations and how such in turn shapes theological reflection. In short, we cannot speak of the 'Asian' in Asian theology as a monolithic whole.²

The same can be said, certainly, of the 'American' in AAE theology. Note, however, that to even say the words *American theology* begs for elucidation

² See also Nam-soon Kang, 'Who/What Is Asian? A Postcolonial Theological Reading of Orientalism and Neo-orientalism', in Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner, and Mayra Rivera, eds., *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), pp. 100-17.

at least along three lines. First, from one side may come the counter-assumption that all theology written by Americans has been universally applicable rather than just limited to the American experience. For these persons, there is no need to qualify *theology* with the word *American*. While this presumption may have gone unacknowledged and unchallenged a generation ago, it may no longer be given serious consideration today. But this leads to the second issue: that of the proliferation of American perspectives which leads us to ask, 'which American?' North American? Central American? Latin American? Caribbean American? South American? Native American? Each of these categories begs for even further clarification. But what if we limited ourselves to the dominant trajectories in the North American theological academy?

This third approach is of little help either. A recent textbook identifies six streams of North American theology: evangelical, postliberal, liberal, liberation, feminist, and deconstruction.³ These are neither self-evident in terms of their scope, nor helpful in defining what either American or North American theology is supposed to be. Of major theologians, to my knowledge only Douglas John Hall and Donald L. Gelpi, S.J., have attempted theological reflection with the North American historical and cultural context consciously in mind, and both of these pro-

jects are quite different.⁴

Could we perhaps avoid the problem of defining Asian and American theology if we focused on evangelical theology? Unfortunately no. Not only are there the geographically related matters we have already observed, but there are also historical and theological issues under negotiation. Historically, how do we define evangelical theology—according to the usage of some of the Protestant Reformers, or the pietists of the seventeenth century, or the revivalists of the eighteenth century, or the holiness Methodists of the nineteenth century, or the Reformed or Wesleyan or Pentecostal/charismatic churches of the twentieth century? Obviously we will never be able to agree on what is authentically evangelical theology if we go by what groups and movements and churches have claimed that evangelical label.⁵

³ Roger A. Badham, ed., *Introduction to Christian Theology: Contemporary North American Perspectives* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998).

⁴ Hall has just published some autobiographical reflections on his project: Douglas John Hall, *Bound and Free: A Theologian's Journey* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005). For an overview of Gelpi's attempt to develop an inculturated North American theology in dialogue with the North American philosophical tradition, see Yong, 'In Search of Foundations: The Oeuvre of Donald L. Gelpi, S.J., and Its Significance for Pentecostal Theology and Philosophy', *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 11:1 (2002):3-26.

⁵ Part of the story about the disputes over who can claim the label evangelical is told by Jon R. Stone, *On the Boundaries of American Evangelicalism: The Postwar Evangelical Coalition* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997). See also Yong, 'The Word and the Spirit, or the Spirit and the Word? Exploring the Boundaries of Evangelicalism in Relationship to Modern Pentecostalism', *Trinity Journal* 23NS:2 (2002):235-52.

Can we then identify the nature of the *evangelion* theologically? Asking this question gets us to the heart of the problem, of course. But this begs all the questions already in play since it is arguably precisely the attempt to be theologically evangelical which has led to the various historical and contextual expressions of the good news in the first place. In short, I suggest that the biblical, theological, and situational factors cannot be isolated from each other, and that there is no access to a pure *evangelion* that sits above the flux of history.

If this is indeed the case, perhaps the quest for an AAE theology is also the attempt of those who find themselves in the AAE community to articulate theological views of this particular community. But the foregoing discussion suggests that there is no single AAE community. Rather, there are many different AAE communities which consist of people with diverse histories, cultures, languages, and experiences. Innumerable combinations are theoretically conceivable, although in reality, we are content to simplify matters using categories such as Asian, American, and evangelical. The fact of the matter remains, however, that the emergence of various types of Asian American communities which are evangelical is in some respects rather new.

So while we may be able to identify a limited range of Asian evangelical theologies (developed by Asians for Asians), or a wider spectrum of Asian American theologies (developed by Asian Americans in mainline Protestant denominations or in the Roman

Catholic Church),⁶ there is still a dearth of theological reflection by those who identify themselves as Asian-American-evangelical. Given the theological task, the road to an AAE theology can neglect neither Asian evangelical theologies nor Asian American theologies. Due to space constraints, however, we will focus only on the former, to which we now turn.

II Anticipating AAE Theology: Resources from Asian Evangelical Theology

Because of the relative youth of Asian American evangelicalism, it seems natural that aspiring AAE theologians mine the resources of existing Asian evangelical theologies for their own work. While Asian evangelical theology is still far from having come of age, it is much farther along the road than is AAE theology. Asian evangelicals have published on mission theology (e.g., Vinoth Ramachandra), social justice (e.g., Vinay Samuel), theology of the environment (e.g., Ken Gnanakan), religious pluralism (e.g., Ajith Fernando), ancestor veneration and worship (e.g., Bong Rin Ro), Pentecostal-

6 For examples of Asian American theology, see Peter C. Phan and Jung Young Lee, eds., *Journey at the Margin: Toward an Autobiographical Theology in Asian-American Perspective* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1999), and Fumitaka Matsuoka and Eleazer S. Fernandez, eds., *Realizing the America of Our Hearts: Theological Voices of Asian Americans* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2003). For the definitive overview, see Jonathan Y. Tan, *Introducing Asian American Theologies* (Maryknoll: Orbis, forthcoming).

ism (e.g., Wonsuk Ma), and alternative spiritualities (Philip Johnson), among other topics. In what follows, we will look a little closer at the work of three individuals rather than skim the surface of too wide a range of theologians. Our goal is to ask about the promise and challenge of Asian evangelical theology from those who have thought about the matter.

Donald Leroy Stults is a missionary, educator and theologian in the Nazarene Church. His book, *Developing an Asian Evangelical Theology*, was one of the first to approach the topic in a comprehensive manner.⁷ The three parts of the book discuss the work of theology (including its necessity, the urgency of an authentically Asian theology, the work of the theologian, and the need for a theological and evangelical system), overview the cultural and contextual factors (including the relationship between gospel and culture, which includes religions, philosophies, and ideologies), and present a programmatic sketch of an Asian evangelical theology. We will briefly focus on Stults' discussion of contextualizing the gospel in Asia.

For Stults as an evangelical theologian the parameters for inculturation are strictly established by the primacy of Scripture. However, scripture's authority is not just an abstract norm, but one which is rich in the content of evangelical theology. Evangelical doctrines such as total depravity, salva-

tion by grace alone, the Great Commission, and the return of Christ are non-negotiable, and evangelical theologians cannot go beyond these traditional formulations without betraying the evangelical label.⁸ It is on this basis that Stults proceeds to criticize the general trend of Asian theology—seen in the work of Klaus Klostermaier, M. M. Thomas, Kitamori Kazoh, Brahma-bandhav Upadhyaya, A. J. Appasamy, and Choan-seng Song, among others—as politically oriented, syncretistic, and normed by social analysis rather than by Scripture. Continuing this same line of thought, while the various Asian religious traditions have some degree of truth and any Asian Christian theology has to use some concepts and terms from these religions, still all non-Christian religions are human and cultural creations and do not lead to salvation.⁹

It is within this framework that Stults proceeds to sketch the central features of an Asian evangelical theology. Surprisingly, however, Stults' rendition of an authentically Asian evangelical theology retains the same loci as that developed by post-Reformation dogmatic systematians. It begins with the doctrine of a trinitarian God, proceeds through christology, theological anthropology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and pneumatology, and concludes with eschatology.¹⁰ Along the way, whatever may have been dis-

⁷ Donald Leroy Stults, *Developing an Asian Evangelical Theology* (Manila: OMF Literature Inc., 1989; reprint, Denver, Colo.: Academic Books, 2001). References to the reprinted version.

⁸ Stults, *Developing an Asian Evangelical Theology*, pp. 164-71.

⁹ Stults, *Developing an Asian Evangelical Theology*, pp. 128-29.

¹⁰ Stults, *Developing an Asian Evangelical Theology*, pp. 195-99.

tinctively Asian recedes into the background, or if not, fades away completely. Stults is clear that, 'The [sic] biblical message is constant and unchangeable while the method or systematic approach may differ according to the situation and mode of communication'.¹¹ Of course this assumes that evangelicals have understood this message correctly, that the kernel and the husks can be easily distinguished, and that the modes of communication used by evangelical missionaries have not affected the content of the biblical gospel.

Hwa Yung's *Mangoes or Bananas?* is a revision of his Asbury Seminary DMiss dissertation.¹² Unlike Stults, Hwa Yung recognizes that a truly indigenous Asian Christian theology has yet to emerge precisely because Asian evangelical Christian theological contributions have been held captive by western presuppositions, concerns and methods. Thus, for example, he concurs with missiologists like Charles Kraft and anthropologists like Paul Hiebert that Enlightenment rationality has bequeathed to the contemporary evangelical theological mind what Hiebert calls the 'flaw of the excluded middle': the arbitrary reduction of reality to two tiers that erroneously dismisses or purposefully ignores the middle realm of spiritual, angelic, and demonic beings.¹³ This has

resulted in less than fully contextualized theologies that have only superficially engaged Asian cultures and thought forms which include ancestors and complex layers of cosmological spirits.¹⁴ Asian Christian theologies have therefore to date been more akin to bananas (Asian-yellow on the outside, but Western-white on the inside) than mangoes (the quintessential Asian fruit representing an authentic homegrown theological product).

More adequate contextual Asian Christian theologies, Hwa Yung suggests, must therefore be theologies of mission or missiological theologies. With this in mind, he develops four criteria by which to assess Asian evangelical theologies: (1) their ability to address the diverse socio-political Asian contexts in which the churches find themselves; (2) the empowerment they bring to the evangelistic and pastoral tasks of the churches; (3) the means by which they facilitate the inculturation of the gospel; and (4) their faithfulness to the Christian tradition.¹⁵ Theologies are defective if they fail any one of these criteria—e.g., if they are overly accommodative to Asian cultures and religions, or if they are unconcerned with either social justice or evangelistic proclamation.

To be sure, Hwa Yung's criteria are much more expansive than Stults'. At the same time, while he exposes the inadequacy of the western theological

11 Stults, *Developing an Asian Evangelical Theology*, p. 193.

12 Hwa Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas? The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 1997).

13 Hwa Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas?*, pp. 72-74.

14 For a spectrum of Asian evangelical views on ancestors, see Bong Rin Ro, ed., *Christian Alternatives to Ancestor Practices* (Taiwan: Asia Theological Association, 1985).

15 Hwa Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas?*, pp. 57-58 and passim.

paradigm (based as it is on Enlightenment dualistic categories), and successfully argues that Asian evangelical theology has yet to achieve emancipation from the west, he does not in turn suggest what kind of worldview is needed for an authentically Asian Christian theology. If 'dualism' is to be discarded, is 'monism' now favoured? Hwa Yung never comes out and says that an eastern worldview (which eastern?) is to be preferred to that of the Enlightenment West. On the one hand, this may be what is implied by his suggestion that a fully contextualized Asian Christian theology must be presented and comprehensible in Asian categories. On the other hand, his treatment of theologians like M. M. Thomas, C. S. Song, and Kosuke Koyama would seem to suggest that the Asian worldview is the object toward which inculturation is directed rather than the framework within which theologizing occurs.

Alternatively, Hwa Yung could have engaged more with Asian Pentecostals, given that Asian Pentecostalism has ignored the dualism bequeathed by the Enlightenment. Cho Yong-gi, the pastor of the Pentecostal megachurch in Seoul who Hwa Yung discusses, is unabashedly evangelistic without neglecting social justice issues.¹⁶ Does Cho successfully negotiate the tension between inculturation and faithfulness to the Christian tradition? Does Pentecostalism's emphasis on the experiential and bodily aspect of spirituality provide common ground for an evangelical dialogue with and cri-

tique of Asian religions and spiritualities that could contribute to the kind of missiological theology envisioned by Hwa Yung?

It is with these thoughts in mind that I wish to look at the work of Pentecostal theologian, Simon Chan, long-time professor at Trinity Theological College in Singapore. While Chan has not published extensively on the topic of Asian evangelical theology, he has written two essays which are especially pertinent to us.¹⁷ In the first essay, Chan is concerned that Asian theologians have focused too much on history and historical processes, resulting in an over-emphasis on immanence to the neglect of transcendence in theology. Asian religiosity and poverty have framed the discourse of Asian theologians, leading to the domination of theological themes like the cosmic Christ, God's suffering, and the God of the poor.

Chan responds, however, that there is 'an irreducible transcendent reality in the Christian faith',¹⁸ and it is this transcendent reality to which the masses who are truly suffering turn. A viable Asian Christian theology must

¹⁷ Chan, 'The Problem of Transcendence and Immanence in Asian Contextual Theology', *Trinity Theological Journal* 8 (1999):5-18, and 'Problem and Possibility of an Asian Theological Hermeneutic', *Trinity Theological Journal* 9 (2000):47-59. Chan has published two books: *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), and *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

¹⁸ Chan, 'The Problem of Transcendence and Immanence in Asian Contextual Theology', p. 8.

¹⁶ See Hwa Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas?*, pp. 205-13.

therefore include both social reform and evangelistic proclamation, both political action and supernaturalistic charismatic empowerment. As examples of those at the vanguard of such a theological trajectory Chan points to the work of Vishal Mangalwadi who has worked among the Dalits in India, and Wang Ming Dao, an evangelist-reformer among the Chinese churches. Both recognized the indispensability of social action, but based such on the proclamation of the gospel (a counter-discourse to that of the world) and on church-planting and the ecclesial life of the church (a counter-culture to that of their societies). Chan concludes that 'those who are so concerned about making Christ immanent in Asia have ended up making the church powerless and irrelevant'.¹⁹

In his sequel, Chan takes on the question regarding the theological hermeneutic and methodology of a viable Asian Christian theology. The problem with Asian Christian theology has been an uncritical acceptance of a modernism which demands secularization in terms of worldview, and demythologization in terms of biblical interpretation. Such moves sit very uncomfortably, Chan suggests, with the Asian forms of thinking. The Taoist worldview, for example, locates human beings within a wider cosmological

context even while it does not separate human embodiment from that wider environment. Chan goes on to propose that the kind of 'body thinking' prevalent among cultures long informed by religious Taoism has a deep affinity with the Christian understanding of truth most clearly embodied in the life of Jesus and in the biblical narratives.²⁰

In short, 'liberal' Asian Christian theologies may provide astute social analyses of the pervasive poverty which characterizes the Asian situation, but they fail to offer religious and spiritual answers that concretely engage the masses of Asia. On the other hand, unexpectedly, a theological hermeneutic based on the good news of the incarnation remains plausible in the modern world since it can and does meet the spiritual needs of people whose lives are deeply religious to begin with.

III Toward an Asian American Evangelical Theology: Issues, Challenges, Opportunities

Where then are we at with regard to our attempt to work toward an AAE theology? In the following, we will assess the work of the Asian evangelical theologians discussed in the previous section, attempt to locate some of the situational issues confronting AAE theologians, and suggest one hermeneutical path forward for AAE theology.

Looking back over the work of Stults, Hwa Yung, and Chan, a few

¹⁹ Chan, 'The Problem of Transcendence and Immanence in Asian Contextual Theology', p. 17. Chan's salvo echoes that of Bruce J. Nicholls, 'Salvation and Humanisation in the Theology of Evangelism', in *Voice of the Church in Asia: Report of Proceedings Asia Theological Association Consultation* (Singapore: Asia Theological Association, 1975), 154-63.

²⁰ Chan, 'Problem and Possibility of an Asian Theological Hermeneutic,' pp. 52-56.

observations and related questions emerge. First, while Stults' attempt to develop an Asian evangelical theology without any recognizable Asian features may be questionable in Asia, is that necessarily the case for an AAE theology? In other words, might not Asian Americans who have been assimilated into the American evangelical mainstream adopt the evangelical theology of their churches without thinking specifically about what is Asian about such formulations? I would say that most Asian American evangelicals think about their theology in evangelical terms rather than in Asian or even American terms. This may be a leftover of the assumptions of previous generations of evangelicals that true evangelical theology is by definition universally applicable rather than parochially or contextually emergent. If this is right, of course, the whole project of developing an *Asian American evangelical theology* is misguided from the beginning, and there is no point to qualifying 'evangelical theology' in any way. That I am writing this paper in itself suggests that I think this line of thinking is mistaken.

But then, what is normative—i.e., universally applicable—in any distinctively AAE theology? Might this not refer to the biblical core of any AAE theology? Earlier with Hwa Yung we saw that any viable Asian evangelical theology would need to eschew the dualistic assumptions of Enlightenment rationalism. While Hwa Yung did not then go on to suggest that this be replaced with an Eastern monism, as an evangelical he would seem to advocate a 'biblical' worldview. But does this refer to a Hebraic-Semitic mind or is this synonymous with the under-

standing of his mentors at Asbury Theological Seminary (a Wesleyan-Holiness institution)? Further, how would it be possible to access the purely biblical worldview? Is it possible to read the Bible apart from any presuppositions that the reader may bring to the text? Even if it were, is there a biblical worldview that is not always already constituted and informed by ancient near eastern cultures and patterns of thought?

Simon Chan's work suggests that the way forward for evangelical theology is to negotiate the perennial tensions confronted by theology: between transcendence and immanence, between social action and individual piety, between gospel and culture, between biblical religion and other religious traditions. While Chan correctly re-emphasizes the motif of transcendence, he also realizes that any authentically Asian theology must connect with the sensibilities of Asian commoners whose framework is wholly informed by Asian cultures and religions. Two further questions need to be addressed to Chan. The first is whether or not the motif of transcendence can be accessed in any way other than historically. If Chan answers affirmatively that this is possible because of biblical revelation, then the same question posed to Hwa Yung resurfaces: is it possible to read Scripture on its own terms and what might those terms be? Second, if Chan is correct in formulating an Asian evangelical theology in dialogue with Asian religious and cultural ideas (in his case, in dialogue with Taoism)—and for the record, I believe that he is—then how can this be done in a way that is respectful toward eastern religious

traditions on the one hand while also being faithful to the Christian tradition on the other?

We will return to this question momentarily. But meanwhile, we need to turn our attention to the situation of Asian Americans in general and of Asian American evangelicals more specifically. Any Asian American theology and any AAE theology must take into account the various socio-historical contexts within which Asian Americans live, move, and have their being. Allow me to elaborate briefly on three interrelated issues of globalization, intergenerational dynamics, and cultural assimilation.²¹

Although Asians have lived in North America since the founding of the republic and even contributed to the building of the American empire during the nineteenth century, the 1965 Immigration Act repealed the Oriental Exclusion Act of 1924 and reopened the door to a new wave of Asian migration. During the last generation, Asian American life has been further transformed by the forces of globalization²²: diasporas created by modernization, industrialization, and urbanization; refugee populations displaced by war,

famine, and climate changes; movement enabled by the emergence of a worldwide market economy, advances in technology and mass communication, the cross-fertilization of ideologies, and shifts in international relations.²³

The result is the appearance of Asian American communities across North America. Life in such communities is fluid, impacted by migration patterns, socio-economic pressures, and the strength of relations with those 'back home'. The stronger the transnational ties between Asians immigrants in America and their families, organizations, and institutions (religious and otherwise) in their homeland, the more intense and longer-lasting the exchange of religious goods and ideas (in the form of books, periodicals, and various forms of telecommunications).²⁴

Unsurprisingly, then, first generation immigrants often deepen the religious commitments which they held or practised perhaps more nominally before moving. Sometimes immigrants convert to the more dominant religion of their new home. In either case, religious affiliation often serves to secure social networks, confer status otherwise difficult to come by for immi-

21 The following condenses what I cover at greater length in my 'Asian American Religion: A Review Essay', *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 9:3 (2006): forthcoming.

22 I discuss the implications of globalization for Christian theology further in Amos Yong and Peter Heltzel, 'Robert Cummings Neville and the Global Future of Theology', in Yong and Heltzel, eds., *Theology in Global Context: Essays in Honor of Robert Cummings Neville* (New York: T & T Clark, 2004), pp. 29-42, esp. pp. 30-34.

23 For a recent overview, see Wannu W. Anderson and Robert G. Lee, eds., *Displacements and Diasporas: Asians in the Americas* (New Brunswick, NJ, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

24 These aspects of Asian-American transnationalism are discussed in Helen Rose Ebaugh and Janet Saltzman Chafetz, eds., *Religion across Borders: Transnational Immigrant Networks* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: Altamira, 2002).

grants, and strengthen ethnic, cultural, and linguistic bonds and identities. But for the 1.5 generation (those born in Asia but who grew up at least in part in America) the process of assimilation is well under way. In these cases, the ethnic enclave will develop English-speaking sections, as will social organizations, school clubs, and Christian congregations.

For young adult Asian American evangelicals, however, there is often a keen sense that their own ethnically organized congregations or groups are somehow less religiously and theologically legitimate because they do not have the more 'universal' appeal that the white or multicultural evangelical churches or parachurch organizations enjoy.²⁵ The result is either the transition of ethnic congregations into pan-ethnic congregations or movement by Asian Americans from their 'home' congregation to other less ethnically defined church environments.²⁶ By the time the second generation arrives on

the scene, the remaining cultural or linguistic barriers to full assimilation into American society have been overcome, often to the dismay of their parents and grandparents.²⁷

What does such assimilation consist of? Certainly speaking English, participating in the market economy, and adapting to the options provided by American secularity and politics are minimal adjustments. But perhaps assimilation also requires abandoning the norms of the immigrant culture in favour of American norms for family and gender relations, and engaging with the public square on its own terms rather than on Asian terms. If this is the case, can this happen to Asian Americans without impacting their evangelical identity? Would this not lead to a kind of evangelical self-understanding deeply formed by American culture, politics, and even economics? As important, would this not result in a subordination and even deformation of all that is Asian except for the biological phenotype? It would appear, then, that becoming American would ease embrace of evangelical Christianity, but with the cost of losing one's Asianness. It is perhaps for these reasons that Asian Americans who have been drawn to and made evangelical commitments have minimized their Asian identity.

One could also make the reverse argument, however, that evangelicalism in America has already been

²⁵ See, e.g., Rebecca Y. Kim, 'Negotiation of Ethnic and Religious Boundaries by Asian American Campus Evangelicals', in Tony Carnes and Fenggang Yang, eds., *Asian American Religions: The Making and Remaking of Borders and Boundaries* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), pp. 141-59, and Rudy V. Busto, 'The Gospel according to the Model Minority? Hazardous an Interpretation of Asian American Evangelical College Students', in David K. Yoo, ed., *New Spiritual Homes: Religion and Asian Americans* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), pp. 169-87.

²⁶ See Russell Jeung, *Faithful Generations: Race and New Asian American Churches* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004).

²⁷ As can be discerned by reading between the lines of Tom Lin, *Losing Face and Finding Grace: 12 Bible Studies for Asian Americans* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996).

moulded by its social, cultural, and historical context to the extent that the very features that marked the latter—i.e., individualism, experientialism, pragmatism, even consumerism—have also come to characterize the former. Does this mean that full acceptance of evangelicalism includes ‘repentance’ from Asia and ‘conversion’ to Americanism?

How then do we retain and legitimate the *Asian* of any theology which is nevertheless fully evangelical? Asked another way, is it possible for a theology to be formulated which draws from Asian traditions and patterns of thought (i.e., as suggested by Simon Chan), speaks to the lives of contemporary Asians attempting to survive in America, and is resolutely evangelical? With other Pentecostal theologians,²⁸ I suggest that Luke’s narrative of the outpouring of the Spirit in the second chapter of Acts serves as a biblical image of divine blessing and reception of human diversity and pluralism. Building on this idea, I have gone on to suggest that the many tongues of Pentecost signify and anticipate not only the multi-lingual and multi-cultural character of the kingdom of God, but also the potential and possibility of the many religious traditions of the world being caught up in the redemptive

work of God in the eschatological long run.²⁹

Other Asian American theologians have made similar observations. Filipino American theologian Eleazer Fernandez reads the Pentecost narrative as an extension of the Babel story, itself a production of exilic Israel as a counter-discourse to the hegemony of the Babylonian empire.³⁰ In this reading, the diversity of tongues resists the imperial ideology and praxis which seeks to make a name for itself in ways which oppose the rule and reign of God. Pentecost then represents the construction of counter-projects aimed at undermining the totalitarian rule of the world (in Fernandez’s analysis, the Americanism of Manifest Destiny, *e pluribus unum*, and assimilation into the ‘melting pot’). The result is a plausible vision for Asian Americans that ‘does not homogenize but allows the flourishing of various colors and narratives’.³¹

From a Pentecostal and evangelical perspective, I would add two observations. First, I would caution us against an uncritical equation of Babel with any contemporary socio-political project in its totality. To be sure, there is

28 E.g., Samuel Solivan’s discussion of ‘cultural glossolalia’ in his *The Spirit, Pathos and Liberation: Toward an Hispanic Pentecostal Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), pp. 112-18, and Frank D. Macchia, ‘The Tongues of Pentecost: A Pentecostal Perspective on the Promise and Challenge of Pentecostal/Roman Catholic Dialogue’, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 35:1 (1998):1-18.

29 For development of the argument, see Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), esp. 4.3.1 and 4.3.3.

30 See Eleazer S. Fernandez, ‘From Babel to Pentecost: Finding a Home in the Belly of the Empire’, in Tat-siong Benny Liew and Gale A. Yee, eds., *The Bible in Asian America*, Semeia 90-91 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), pp. 29-50.

31 Fernandez, ‘From Babel to Pentecost’, p. 42.

no government that is fully righteous, no not one! At the same time, all governments carry out certain divinely ordained functions, some accomplished more and others less righteously. Similarly, all languages and cultures are similarly tainted by human sin, even if they represent and enable human well-being and flourishing in other respects. Discernment is needed to identify when cultures, societies, political structures, and even religious traditions are advancing the kingdom versus when they are hindering the coming of the Lord.

This, second, discernment leads to prophetic critique and resistance on the one hand, and to dialogical reconciliation and shalom on the other. In the Pentecost narrative, not only did the many tongues testify to God's wondrous deeds (Acts 2:11), but they also served to introduce the name of Jesus, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). The good news of Pentecost announces the reconciliation of all persons to God in Christ by the power of the Spirit. Such reconciliation includes the judgment of sin and the redemption of the world for the glory of God. Is it plausible to conceive of AAE theology as discerning and even participating in some way in the work of the Spirit to both judge and redeem 'Asia' and 'America'? If so, might AAE theology itself be a chorus of voices heralding the coming kingdom?

IV Whither Asian American Evangelical Theology? A Prophetic-Redemptive Trajectory

In these closing pages, allow me to

sketch very briefly some suggestions of how AAE theology can serve a prophetic and yet redemptive role. As the following is merely programmatic, it is general in the extreme. The details are already being filled in by others, whose work is documented only sporadically below, but to which I wish to return and collaborate with should time and opportunity present itself in the future.

First, AAE theology cannot be any less than Asian. But we have already seen how difficult it is to determine what this means. I suggest that one way to answer this question is to return to the wellsprings of Asia, and to draw from them in a critical manner. While some might be concerned that such a move may presume an essentialist view of Asia, I think such a risk is unavoidable for various reasons. Chief among them is that whatever Asia means cannot finally be negotiated in our globalizing context apart from Asia itself, nor apart from the immigrants who will continue to depart from Asia's shores for the foreseeable future. So be sure, 1.5 and later generations of Asian Americans who are interested in doing *Asian* American theology, evangelical or otherwise, will need to wrestle with the meaning of Asian in this new context, but they will not be able to do so in isolation from their contemporaries who remain closely tied to Asia in various ways.

Further, the prophetic-redemptive stance I am recommending assumes that the glory and honour of Asia will also be brought into the eschatological kingdom (Rev. 21:26). Might not the Asian American return to, retrieval from, and reappropriation of elements from the wellsprings of Asia not only

contribute toward this redemptive vision, but also serve as a springboard for the church to speak prophetically to the Asian world? It is in part for this reason that in the following I attempt to conduct a retrieval of Asian religious traditions since from an evangelical perspective the dialogue with the religions of Asia is the most challenging. At the same time, I am intentional in engaging Asian religions also because I am convinced that Christian theology in the twenty-first century cannot proceed by ignoring the religious traditions of the world.³² Yet having said all of this, I present the following, not as the only way to legitimize the Asian of AAE theology, but in order to press this question of the meaning of Asianness among all who are interested in developing an Asian American theology in general and an AAE theology more specifically.

Recall that Simon Chan has already helped us to see the possibility of drawing from Taoist modes of thought in ways that allow the gospel to be more deeply rooted in the Asian heart and mind. I would further add that religious Daoism's 'neo-naturalistic' cosmology can serve the kind of reenchantment of nature so desperately needed for a more robust environmental and ecological ethic. At the same time, as Chan argues, the rich Daoist cosmology

overlaid upon the indigenous beliefs and practices of the Asian masses over the last millennia cannot and should not be completely demythologized.

Evangelical theology, cosmology, and even demonology can be reinvigorated in dialogue with religious Daoism. On the other side, of course, rather than placating the spirits, Pentecostal theology would insist on exorcism, and, perhaps as important, evangelical theology would provide an alternative vision of eternal life in contrast to religious Daoism's historic quest for immortality. Still, in either case, evangelical theology can only be enriched if challenged to return to its own sources in dialogue with the broad spectrum of the Daoist tradition.

Similar approaches are recommended toward Confucianism and Buddhism. Neither of these labels is monolithic, yet each presents opportunities for evangelical theology to reconsider itself in dialogue with the beliefs and practices of the majority of Asians. To be sure, the sexism and authoritarianism of traditional Confucianism would need to be criticized, along with popular understandings of Buddhist atheism and nihilism. At the same time, evangelical theology has much to learn from the filial piety, relationality, and humanism characteristic of the main streams of Confucianism, as well as from the 'middle way,' nonviolence, meditative practices of historic Buddhism.

Again, these proposals do not require that we uncritically embrace all forms of Chinese religious traditions so as to produce a syncretistic hodge-podge of ideas and practices. Rather, I am suggesting that any contemporary AAE theology must respon-

32 I have argued elsewhere for the importance of doing Christian theology in the twenty-first century in dialogue with the world's religious traditions; see Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003).

sibly engage that which is distinctively Asian, prophetically judging what needs to be judged according to the gospel on the one hand, even while being reconciled to all things good as made possible by the redemptive power of the gospel on the other.³³

Second, any AAE theology must also engage the American context intentionally. There is much to be grateful for in America—which is precisely the reason why immigration continues at a torrid pace. Still, all evangelicals need to wrestle continuously with what it means to be a democratic nation vis-à-vis policies which underwrite violence; what it means to be a free society vis-à-vis the class, gender, and race stratifications and the materialistic consumerism which characterize our social, political, and economic lives; what it means to be ‘one nation under God’ vis-à-vis the linguistic, cultural, and religious diversity which constitutes the beliefs and practices of its citizens, etc. Each of these issues is complex, and replete with religious and theological presuppositions, implications, and applications.

From a Pentecostal and evangelical perspective, I suggest that Azusa Street, Los Angeles, symbolizes and encapsulates the promise and challenge of American life: the promise of reconciliation across ethnic, racial, class, and gender lines, and the chal-

lenge of how to live out this reconciliation in a world that remains fallen and in need of full redemption. Hence an AAE theology must serve as a catalyst for the AAE church, enabling her to be a reconciling community, speaking prophetically against injustice on the one hand, and yet bringing healing to the ‘nations’ within this land on the other.³⁴

Finally, of course, an AAE theology should also be resolutely and vigorously evangelical. Of course, if the foregoing is correct, there is no ahistorical *evangelion* disconnected from Asia or America. Rather, the *evangelion* in AAE theology is precisely the good news as encountered concretely by Asian Americans in history. Thus evangelical theology must be trinitarian, which I take to mean both incarnational and Pentecostal in terms of taking historicity, embodiment, and pneumatic empowerment seriously, and in terms of prophetically critiquing the accommodations of previous formulations of evangelical theology to any kind of ideological captivity. Further, evangelical theology must emphasize not only orthodoxy but also orthopraxis and orthopathy, by which I mean both embracing rightly oriented belief and confession and rightly oriented action and affection, and resisting any bifurcation of head and heart, mind and

33 I further defend the importance of a posture that is open to learning from the interreligious dialogue in my ‘The Spirit of Hospitality: Pentecostal Perspectives toward a Performative Theology of Interreligious Hospitality’, *Missiology* (forthcoming).

34 One example is Peter T. Cha and Greg Jao, ‘Reaching Out to Postmodern Asian-Americans’, in D. A. Carson, ed., *Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), pp. 224-41.

soul, spirit and body.³⁵

Finally, evangelical theology must underwrite the whole gospel for the whole person for the whole world, by which I mean not only proclaiming and living out a holistic soteriology in terms of being explicit about the personal, confessional, embodied, social, environmental, spiritual, and eschatological dimensions of the saving work of Christ by the Spirit, but also rejecting any attempt to reduce the redemptive work of the trinitarian God to any one of these aspects.³⁶

35 So, for example, any interpretation of the doctrine of justification solely in forensic terms will be inadequate from a Chinese perspective; see the various articles in the *Chinese Theological Review* 18 (2004), which address this issue. I thank Rich Mouw for this reference.

I am convinced that only the theological reflection of the entire oikumene can together formulate such a robust evangelical theology. In this scheme of things, insights from Asian American evangelicals will contribute an indispensable perspective, not only for the Asian Americans, but also for all Americans, all evangelicals, the whole church, and, in the eschatological long run, for the whole world.³⁷

36 I develop aspects of such a holistic soteriology in *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, ch. 2. Similarly, see also Lai Pan-chiu, 'Chinese Religions and the History of Salvation: A Theological Perspective', *Ching Feng* 40:1 (1997):15-40.

37 My thanks to Jonathan Tan and Tony Richie for their comments, and to my assistant, Christopher E. Emerick, for proofreading the penultimate draft.

Mangoes or Bananas?

The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology

Hwa Yung

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Hints from Heaven: Can C. S. Lewis Help Evangelicals Hear God in Other Religions?

Tony Richie

KEY WORDS: *Progressive revelation; religious pluralism; universality, apologetics, post-modernism, mission, atheism, secularism*

DOES GOD GIVE HINTS? And, if he does, can we take the hint? These are questions raised by Lewis for contemporary Evangelical Christians regarding theology of religions. For many Evangelicals, 'C. S. Lewis says so' is an end to (almost) any argument. His incredible ever-increasing influence is illustrated on the popular level by the spectacular success of the blockbuster hit movie, 'The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe', based on his faith-in-fantasy-form book by the same name.¹ However, Lewis crosses

over usual boundaries and is also well-liked by serious apologists and theologians around the world.² Hosts of Evangelicals are in the habit of turning to Lewis when wrestling with tough truth questions on the life of faith in contemporary times.³ His insights on Christian understanding and interaction regarding other religious traditions seem particularly apropos for a

¹ It was released in my neighbourhood December 9, 2005. The first weekend it easily beat out all the competition, and after four weeks it had grossed \$226 million, winning over 'King Kong' (\$175 million in three weeks) and almost catching 'Harry Potter and the

Goblet of Fire' (\$277 million in seven weeks). See <http://www.imdb.com/news/sb/2006-01-04/> (January 6, 2006).

² The 'C. S. Lewis Resources' compiled by Mike W. Perry in *The C. S. Lewis Readers' Encyclopedia (CSLRE)*, eds. Jeffrey D. Schultz and John G. West Jr. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), pp. 435-44, indicate an extensive international academic audience.

³ On Lewis' wide-ranging influence among Evangelicals and others see 'The Common Cultural Task: The Cultural War from a Protestant Perspective', in Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus (eds.), *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission* (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), pp. 34-37.

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post September 11, 2001 world engaging globalization and dealing with unprecedented pluralistic diversification.

No issue more urgently haunts Christians in the 'global village' community of the twenty-first century than relations with other religions.⁴ Whether wondering about how to relate (and witness) to a new neighbour who is Hindu or Buddhist, worrying about the war on terror involving radical religious extremists, or watching world-impacting events in the Middle East between Jews and Muslims, Christians cannot afford to miss the enormous magnitude of the religions situation today. Evangelicals need to respond reflectively with a carefully crafted Christian theology of religions providing appropriate parameters for relations with religious others. Once again C. S. Lewis supplies helpful suggestions that can be plumbed for adaptation to our contemporary situation.

Lewis believed that pre- and non-Christian religions sometimes contain 'hints' of divine presence and truth. In this way other religions set the stage for the redemptive drama played out in Christianity.⁵ Historically, these hints were designed to help people hear the gospel faith when it finally appeared more clearly. Contemporarily, hearing these 'hints from heaven' in other reli-

gions can also help Christians better understand and appreciate religious others. And, by a sort of religious reciprocity, we may hear God's voice even more clearly in our own Christian religion through learning to listen for God's whispers in non-Christian religions. This paper will overview Lewis' theology of religions before offering suggestions for appropriation of his ideas in a thoroughly Christian context of Evangelical commitment.

I An Overview of Lewis' Theology of Religions

Although Lewis was not a theologian in the formal, professional sense, his lucid, reverent thought provides enlightenment insights on pressing issues in theology of religions.

1. Personal

Years after his conversion to Christ from atheism Lewis explains that hints he saw as a literature professor of the divine in pagan mythology helped him to become a Christian. 'My conversion,' he said, 'very largely, depended on recognizing Christianity as the completion, the actualization, the entelechy, of something that had never been wholly absent from the mind of man.'⁶ Lewis learned to think of myth as 'good dreams' scattered throughout the imagination of heathen religions

4 Cf. Hans Kiing, *Theology for the Third Millennium: An Ecumenical View* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), p. 209.

5 Jerry Root, 'Tools Inadequate and Incomplete: C. S. Lewis and the Great Religions', in *The Pilgrim's Guide: C. S. Lewis and the Art of Witness* (Ed. David Mills. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 225. Cf., p. 223.

6 'Religion without Dogma,' *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Ed. Walter Hooper. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), p. 132. When quoting C. S. Lewis' writings his authorship is assumed in the bibliographical data. Other authors are always identified.

but to see Christianity as a historically 'true myth'.⁷

Lewis, who had been raised nominally Christian but had become an atheist, 'was in part led back to Christianity as a result of his love for and knowledge of the great pagan myths. In Christianity, he concluded, the hints and suggestions in pagan thought were fulfilled'.⁸ Similarly, his own experience involved 'a sort of mini-religious evolution'.⁹ Paganism for Lewis, then, is 'pre-Christian foundation work'.¹⁰ In Christianity, consistent with the initiative of divine self-revelation in all the best of religious tradition, we have 'the consummation of all religion, the fullest message from the wholly other, the living creator'.¹¹

2. Rational

Love of logic and analytical argument is characteristic of the great apologist.¹² Lewis' intellectual approach to Christianity is evident in his attitude toward non-Christian religions. He

argues that monotheism is more rational than polytheism and therefore 'the best minds embrace monotheism'.¹³ Dualism just does not explain the problem of evil adequately.¹⁴ Only monotheism explains the existence of evil and ultimate reality satisfactorily. For Lewis, only the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ 'bring some sense to the riddle of human suffering'.¹⁵ All the little bits of religion that he thought came into Christianity from earlier religions made it more reasonable for Lewis to believe in Christianity. Logically, 'Christianity is primarily the fulfillment of the Jewish religion, but also the fulfillment of what was vaguely hinted in all the religions at their best'. He could see a rational progression moving toward its climax in the Incarnation because, 'What was vaguely seen in them all comes into focus in Christianity—just as God Himself comes into focus by becoming a Man'.¹⁶

Even primitive religion is capable of profound insights. In the first of his famous *Space Trilogy* Lewis illustrates the view that civilized religion is possible even to reasonable primitives. The hero, Ransom, is taught by the *hross*, whom he considers a primitive race, 'a first sketch of civilized religion—a sort of *hrossian* equivalent of the shorter catechism'.¹⁷ Consequently, Lewis

7 Wayne Martindale, 'Myth', *CSLRE*, pp. 287-88.

8 Mark McKim, 'C.S. Lewis and Emil Bruner: Two Mere Christians', *Premise*, (vol. V, No 3 July 1998), p. 15. Cf. *They Stand Together: The Letters of C.S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves (1914-1963)*, (Ed. Walter Hooper. New York: Macmillan, 1979), p. 427.

9 Richard A. Hill, 'Paganism', *CSLRE*, pp. 311-12.

10 Thomas C. Peters, *Simply C. S. Lewis: A Beginner's Guide to His Life and Works* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), p. 137.

11 'Religion Without Dogma', p. 144.

12 George Sayer, *Jack: A Life of C. S. Lewis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1988), p. 93. Cf. 'The Founding of the Socratic Club', *Dock*, pp. 126-28.

13 *The Allegory of Love* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 57.

14 'Evil and God', *Dock*, p. 21. See *Mere Christianity* (New York: Collier, 1960), p. 43, pp. 33-36; esp. 36.

15 Peters, *Simply*, pp. 166-67.

16 Peters, *Simply*, p. 54.

17 *Out of the Silent Planet* (New York: Macmillan, 1984 reprint), p. 70.

could be critical of missionaries harshly unaware of elements blessed by God in primitive peoples.¹⁸

Yet Lewis thinks 'an adult mind' should easily see the superiority of Christianity. Islam is a Christian heresy and Buddhism a Hindu heresy, while the best of Judaism and Platonism are fulfilled in Christianity and real paganism is dead. He suggests we 'divide religions, as we do soups, into "thick" and "clear"'. 'Thick' religions have the most primitive and elemental aspects while the 'Clear' religions have the most advanced and aesthetic aspects, both of which are necessary in real religion. Only Hinduism and Christianity combine both aspects and Hinduism only imperfectly—making Christianity the logical choice for 'real religion'.¹⁹

3. Theological

In perhaps his greatest non-fiction piece, *Mere Christianity*, Lewis makes one of his strongest theological statements on the religions.

If you are a Christian you do not have to believe that all the other religions are simply wrong through and through. If you are an atheist you do have to believe that the main point in all the religions of the whole world is simply one huge mistake. If you are a Christian, you

are free to think that all these religions, even the queerest ones, contain at least some hint of truth. When I was an atheist I had to try to persuade myself that most of the human race have always been wrong about the question that mattered to them most; when I became a Christian I was able to take a more liberal view. But, of course, being a Christian does mean thinking that where Christianity differs from other religions, Christianity is right and they are wrong. As in arithmetic—there is only one right answer to a sum, and all other answers are wrong: but some of the wrong answers are much nearer to being right than others.²⁰

For C. S. Lewis, in a sense, all religious faith stands or falls together. If no religious reality is behind the belief of all religions except one, then the possibility of that one being mistaken increases exponentially. Conversely, if all, or at least many, religions have some reality behind their belief, it still makes sense that it is expressed most completely in one particular religion. All religions are certainly not the same. Evidence of divine light given to every human being is apparent in the imagination of pagans but the historical reality of the incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth distinguishes Christianity from all other religions.²¹

For Lewis miracles are especially important in Christianity, and cannot be taken away without irreparable

18 'Life on Other Planets', *The Joyful Christian* (New York: Macmillan, 1977), pp. 4-5.

19 'Christian Apologetics', *Dock*, pp. 102-03. Cf. with Lewis' comments on culture and religion in 'Cross-Examination', pp. 265-66 and inferiority of secularism to all theism 'Is Theism Important?' p. 172 (Dock).

20 *Mere Christianity*, p. 29. Cf. Root, 'Tools', p. 221.

21 'Is Theology Poetry?' *They Asked For A Paper* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1962), p. 57.

harm. Buddhism and Islam can do without miracles but Christianity cannot 'because the Christian story is precisely the story of one grand miracle'.²² Lewis thinks the Incarnation ought not be rejected by identifying Jesus as merely a great moral teacher 'who was deified by his superstitious followers', as this is contrary to Jewish nature and identity and so different from what happened to Plato, Confucius, Buddha, and Mohammed.²³

Lewis advocated the concept of a universal natural law that has historically been a basis for ethical reflection and action across a wide-ranging spectrum in all world religions.²⁴ A universal and absolute morality, what Lewis designated 'the Tao', underlies the best in all major theologies and philosophies.²⁵ Lewis concluded that a surprising similarity exists throughout the moral codes of the world that amounts to a 'universal body of moral and spiritual truth'.²⁶ The universality

of morality, therefore, is an indicator of the universality of religious reality.

Lewis' belief in the universality of religious reality does not lead to relativism. He is completely committed to the deity and uniqueness of Jesus Christ. He says that, 'there is no parallel in other religions' with Jesus.²⁷ Buddha, Socrates, and Mohammed never even made such claims about themselves as Christ both makes and substantiates by his very moral force.²⁸ The Christian 'hypothesis is that God has come down into the created universe, down to manhood—and come up again, pulling it up with Him'.²⁹ Christian conviction is not lessened but rather enlarged in Lewis' view of the religions.

Suggestions of spiritual truth and power in non-Christian religions never overshadow the significance of the incomparable abundance of truth and life in Christ. Lewis describes the drama of the Trinity as 'perhaps the most important difference between Christianity and all other religions'.³⁰ An intra-personal relationship of Father, Son, and Spirit provides the pattern and the power for Christian relationship with God. Christians are drawn by the Holy Spirit, through union with Christ, into participation in

22 'The Grand Miracle', *Dock*, p. 80. Cf. 'Christian Apologetics', p. 99.

23 Cf. 'Christian Apologetics', p. 101.

24 James Patrick, 'The Heart's Desire and the Landlord's Rules: C. S. Lewis as a Moral Philosopher', *Pilgrim's Guide*, pp. 70-71 and 83. Cf. Sheridan Gilley, 'The Abolition of God: Relativism and the Center of Faith', pp. 162, 164 and Thomas C. Peters, 'The War of the Worldviews: H. G. Wells and Scientism versus C. S. Lewis and Christianity', p. 206 both in *Pilgrim's Guide*. Cf. also Sayer, *Jack*, p. 302.

25 *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), pp. 17-33. Cf. Sayer, *Jack*, pp. 300, 302 and M. D. Aeschliman, 'Tao', *CSLRE*, pp. 394-95.

26 Gilley, 'Abolition of God', *Pilgrim's Guide*, pp. 162-63.

27 'What Are We To Make Of Jesus Christ?' *Dock*, p. 157.

28 'What Are We To Make Of Jesus Christ?' *Dock*, p. 158.

29 'What Are We To Make Of Jesus Christ?' *Dock*, pp. 159-60. Cf. 'Rejoinder to Dr. Pit-tenger', *Dock*, Lewis footnotes John 1:12, p. 178.

30 *Mere Christianity*, p. 136.

the divine life of the Father.³¹ Christianity is not merely more intellectually advanced than other religions but provides experience of the inner life of God available only in Christ by the Spirit.

4. Experiential

For Lewis religious experience is a legitimate way of knowing God.³² Aware of and interacting with Freudian and Jungian religious psychology, Lewis agreed with Rudolf Otto that religious experience is essentially a mysterious encounter with the Numinous. At its core authentic religious experience is divine encounter characterized by ineffable awe in God's presence.³³ Otto argues that the 'numinous' experience underlies all religion. Three components, often designated with a Latin phrase, *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, are prominent. As *mysterium*, the numinous is 'wholly other'—entirely different from anything we experience in ordinary life, evoking a response of wondrous silence. But the numinous is also a *mysterium tremendum*, provoking terror because it presents itself as overwhelming power. Finally, the numi-

nous presents itself as *fascinans*, as merciful and gracious.³⁴

Lewis likewise regards the Numinous or Awe as 'the seed' of all religious experience.³⁵ He describes three 'strands or elements' that appear in all developed religion and a fourth in Christianity only. The first is the Numinous, then morality and the joining of morality and the Numinous, and finally, uniquely to Christianity, the historical event of the Incarnation. In Jesus Christ the Numinous was finally manifested visibly.³⁶ Awe of the Numinous is 'a special kind of fear' that might be called 'Dread' or 'wonder' or even 'a certain shrinking' or 'sense of inadequacy' in the Divine Presence. The Numinous is the object that excites this feeling of awe. Awe in the presence of the Divine or Numinous can be traced back to ancient, possibly prehistoric times.

As a literary scholar Lewis finds the Numinous not only in the Bible but also in a lot of the world's great literature. Awe is not a product of the mind or the growth of civilization or a logical inference from the existence of the universe. Awe is intrinsic to human nature. Accordingly, a sense of the Numinous can be only some strange and inexplicable quirk in the human mind serving no purpose, or a 'direct experience of the supernatural' or

31 *Mere Christianity*, pp. 136-38. Cf. pp. 167-169.

32 This section draws heavily from Tony Richie, 'Awe-Full Encounters: A Pentecostal Conversation with C. S. Lewis Concerning Spiritual Experience', *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 14:1 (2005), pp. 99-122.

33 See Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (London: 1923). Cf. *The Collected Works of C. S. Lewis (CWCSL)* (NY: Inspirational, 1996), p. 477.

34 Cf. Rudolf Otto homepage online by Gregory D. Alles under 'Who was Rudolf Otto?' (<http://www.netrax.net/~galles/index1.htm>) (November 19, 2004).

35 'Is Theism Important?' *CWCSL*, p. 418.

36 See *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (NY: Walker, 1955), p. 348.

'Revelation'.³⁷ Authentic religious experience, then, is not the exclusive domain of Christianity, though that is where it finds its most explicit and ultimate expression.

5. Critical

Lewis is not opaque concerning the faults of other religions.³⁸ He harangues none other than Augustine for 'a hangover from the high-minded Pagan philosophies in which he grew up'.³⁹ He criticizes Hinduism for being too pluralistic, arguing that, 'truth must surely involve exclusions'.⁴⁰ He finds Hinduism 'hospitable to all gods, naturally religious, ready to take any shape but able to retain none'.⁴¹ His main criticism of Islam is its rejection of the Incarnation.⁴² He also dislikes what he considers Islamic extremism.⁴³ Obviously, Lewis' tolerance

toward other religions is not one of indifference toward 'conflicting truth claims'.⁴⁴ He does not simply mix and match religious ideas and options; real differences exist with which we must deal decisively.

Lewis' forthright accent on the possible presence of the demonic in religions sounds an alarm for all people of faith. Chad Walsh says Lewis had a 'kindly attitude toward other religions' but admitted they have flashes of divine truth mingled with diabolical elements and human invention.⁴⁵ Religion indeed may be demonic rather than divine. As Lewis' diabolical character, Screwtape, says, the Devil sometimes uses religion in his own interests.⁴⁶ In Lewis 'the Devil and his sub-devils are the real rulers of the earth, and our poor planet is the scene of a cosmic struggle between the dominant forces of darkness and the struggling forces of good'.⁴⁷ Recognizing demonic deviance in religions is absolutely essential.

Understanding the relation of religion and the natural realm is requisite for all religious traditions. Lewis believed that nature can be 'a valuable and, for some people, an indispensable initiation' to religion, but argues that 'a nature religion' is inadequate on its

³⁷ See Richie, 'Awe-Full Encounters', *JPT*, pp. 105-06.

³⁸ Root, 'Tools', p. 235.

³⁹ *Four Loves* (London: Harcourt, 1960, reprint 1988), p. 121.

⁴⁰ *Letters of C. S. Lewis* (8 February 1956). (ed. W. H. Lewis; New York: Harcourt, 1966), p. 267.

⁴¹ *Letters of C. S. Lewis*, (30 April 1959), p. 285. Cf. Lewis' rebuttal of pantheism, *Miracles* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996 ed.), pp. 129-50.

⁴² *Taliessin through Logres: The region of the summer stars*, by Charles Williams (Charles Williams. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948; 1974 ed.), pp. 308-09.

⁴³ *Mere Christianity*, p. 61. Cf. *Letters To An American Lady*, ed. Clyde S. Kilby (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), pp. 11-12. Lewis also inveighs against humanly invented religions (*Mere Christianity*, pp. 33, 128-29; *The*

Four Loves, p. 69, and contemporary culture's religion of sexuality, pp. 98, 100-01 and 110-14).

⁴⁴ Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991 [1992 reprint]), 53-55.

⁴⁵ Chad Walsh, *C. S. Lewis: Apostle to the Skeptics* (New York: Macmillan, 1949), pp. 94, 95.

⁴⁶ *Screwtape Letters*, p. 47.

⁴⁷ Walsh, *Apostle to the Skeptics*, pp. 84-85.

own. The personal Creator of nature is the only appropriate object of religious affection and devotion.⁴⁸ To Lewis, all the religions of the world are either 'nature religions', like ancient paganism, or 'anti-nature religions', like Hinduism or Stoicism. Christianity is unique among the world religions in that it is both 'world-affirming' and 'world-denying'.⁴⁹ The Christian doctrines of Creation and Fall are especially relevant in this respect.⁵⁰ Christianity realizes that death and suffering are actually unnatural and that 'God really has dived down into the bottom of creation, and has come up bringing the whole redeemed nature on His shoulder'.⁵¹ In Christianity an impasse between the supernatural and the natural, the heavenly and the earthly, the divine and the human, is overcome and integrated in the person of Christ.

6. Controversial

Objections have been raised regarding aspects of Lewis' understanding of religions. Some fear an implicit universalism, the view that all souls will eventually be saved. Quite the contrary, for Lewis every person is confronted with the free will choice of fol-

lowing God's will—or not—and spends eternity accordingly.⁵² Lewis is refusing only to limit the availability of choice or the extent of Christ's redemptive reach, saying 'though all salvation is through Jesus, we need not conclude that He cannot save those who have not explicitly accepted Him in this life'. He makes it 'clear that we are not pronouncing all other religions to be totally false, but rather saying that in Christ whatever is true in all religions is consummated and perfected'. Contra pluralist universalism, he added that, 'we must attack wherever we meet it the nonsensical idea that mutually exclusive propositions about God can both be true'.⁵³ A scene from the final instalment of the Narnia series, *The Last Battle*, is illustrative. Emeth, a confused but conscientious pagan soldier, is shocked to learn at the judgment that Aslan (Christ) regards his worship as directed to himself. Aslan explains, 'For all find what they *truly* seek'.⁵⁴

Unfortunately, tragically, when the masses of humanity are considered, only a comparatively few will enter into the narrow gate of life (Mt. 7:13-14).

48 *The Four Loves*, pp. 21-22. Cf. *The Weight of Glory*, p. 13 and 'Theology', *The Joyful Christian*, p. 34. Lewis affirms God's self-communication through natural creation (*The Four Loves*, pp. 20-21. Cf. *The Weight of Glory*, p. 13 and 'Dogma and the Universe', *Dock*, pp. 46-47).

49 'Some Thoughts', *Dock*, pp. 147-48. Cf. Root, 'Tools', pp. 225-29.

50 'Some Thoughts', *Dock*, p. 149-50.

51 'The Grand Miracle', *Dock*, p. 87. Cf. Root, 'Tools', pp. 229-31.

52 Root, 'Tools', pp. 231-34 and Kendall Harmon, 'Nothingness and Human Destiny: Hell in the Thought of C. S. Lewis', p. 253, (*Pilgrim's Guide*). Cf. Walter Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: Companion & Guide* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), p. 287, and Richard Purtill, 'Grace', *CSLRE*, pp. 185-86 and Perry C. Bramlett, 'Theology', *CSLRE*, pp. 399-400.

53 'Christian Apologetics', p. 102.

54 *The Last Battle* (London: Penguin, 1956), p. 149; italics added. Cf. 'Religious Syncretism', *The Visionary Christian: 131 Readings From C. S. Lewis* (ed. Chad Walsh. New York: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 134-36.

But a final criterion for who does or does not enter in will be whether one made the hard choices for God and his goodness,⁵⁵ not whether one was born in a certain place or time or had a certain local church (synagogue, mosque, temple) on the corner to direct her in the way. Not universal salvation but rather universality of salvation in Christ is the hope of all humanity. Lewis believed, based on biblical passages such as Matthew 25:31-46, as Lynn Summer says, that 'all those who sincerely seek God will one day be a part of his kingdom'.⁵⁶

Lewis left room for those who might be in 'the process of conversion', that is, in a pre-Christian state but moving toward Christ according to the limits of their spiritual light, to be fully converted even if at some post-mortem point.⁵⁷ Doubtless this represents Lewis' efforts to integrate divine justice and mercy with human liberty and responsibility. He was open to salvation for adherents of other religions even if only in a post-mortem possibility. This provides for 'the hope of those who follow other religions' without having authentically heard the gospel prior to death.⁵⁸

Perhaps the suggestion that death is not quite a concrete dividing line is not as odd as might first appear. Lewis believed, in Glaspey's words, 'The process of dying begins now, by learning to die to ourselves, our desires, our self-centeredness, our sense of auton-

omy before God.'⁵⁹ Undoubtedly, however, Lewis accepted the finality of Hell (or Heaven) as the fruition of choices made against (or for) God and goodness in this life rather than after death.⁶⁰ That is what meant by the advice in *Till We Have Faces* to 'Die before you die. There is no chance after.'⁶¹ Heaven and Hell are human choices beginning during earthly life bearing fruit for eternity.

Lewis' view is definitely distinguishable from so-called 'second probationism'.⁶² According to second probation scenarios one who has wilfully rejected God and lived wickedly has a posthumous chance to convert.⁶³ Quite to the contrary, Lewis suggests that those already in the process of conversion, perhaps what Wesley called 'the living up to the light they had',⁶⁴ might complete that conversion subsequently. This is strikingly similar to what some Church Fathers thought about those living and dying prior to the Incarnation.⁶⁵ Eschatological

59 Glaspey, *Not a Tame Lion*, p. 225.

60 Harmon, 'Nothingness and Human Destiny', pp. 240-42 and 252.

61 Glaspey, *Not a Tame Lion*, p. 225.

62 See *The Great Divorce* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1945).

63 Geerhardus Vos, 'ESCHATOLOGY', *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, (Electronic Database Copyright, 1996 by Biblesoft).

64 Tony Richie, 'John Wesley and Mohammed: A Contemporary Inquiry Concerning Islam', *The Asbury Theological Journal* 58:2 (Fall 2003), pp. 79-99 (p. 84).

65 E. g., see Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies, Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 2 (PC Study Bible, Electronic Database Copyright, 1996 by Biblesoft), 6.6. Cf. 1 Pet. 3:18-22 and Eph 4:8-10.

55 Glaspey, *Not a Tame Lion*, pp. 218-22.

56 Lynn Summer, 'Non-Christian Religions', *CSLRE*, pp. 294-95.

57 Root, 'Tools', pp. 231-34.

58 Root, 'Tools', pp. 231-34.

issues are speculative and debatable, but we can posit that God has made proper allowances for such situations. All the difference in the world exists between completing conversion already begun and a post-mortem opportunity to belatedly begin conversion. As the chess masters say, 'Well begun is half done!'

Some suspect Lewis' theology of religions violates the First Commandment, but they misunderstand his message. He is not advocating the 'legitimacy of pagan gods' but suggesting there were hints toward the truth of Jesus long before his historical appearance among humanity.⁶⁶ Lewis' antagonism toward pluralism and syncretism is shown in his adamant assertion in *The Silver Chair* that 'There is no other stream' than Aslan (Christ) from which to drink the water of life.⁶⁷ All real religion is holy aspiration ultimately attainable only in Christ.⁶⁸ But for Lewis a battle rages between faith and its foes.

Lines should not be drawn too sharply between various Christian groups because the 'real fault line' is now Ethical Monotheism vs. Secular Relativism or Hedonism or Materialism. But though Lewis may see the battle primarily as Christianity vs. Unbelief,⁶⁹ we must take due notice of the more foundational battle of Belief vs.

Unbelief. This, I think, is why Lewis often affirms forms of theistic belief before preceding to argue his case for Christianity. Syncretism is not the initial issue at all but rather theism versus atheism. Empathetically understanding where he is coming from helps to go where he is going.

II An Evangelical Appropriation of Lewis' Theology of Religions

Several key components of a consistently Evangelical theology of religions congruous with Lewis's insights may be suggested; the following are especially applicable.

1. Uncompromisingly Christian

The fatal tendency of so much religiously pluralistic ideology in vogue today is to trim down (or cut up) Christianity until it somehow fits with other faith expressions in an effort to establish a generic version of religion. The personhood of the Triune God, incarnation of Christ, authority of Scripture, the nature of salvation and spirituality, and almost anything else distinctively Christian is sacrificed in synthesizing all the world religions into a homogeneous whole.⁷⁰ Understandably enough, many Evangelicals are reticent on theology of religions precisely because they perceive this propensity in action. Lewis would have none of it;

66 Peters, *Simply*, p. 138.

67 'Thirst and the Lion', *Visionary Christian*, pp. 149-51.

68 'Religion Without Dogma', pp. 130-31.

69 Michael H. MacDonald and Mark P. Shea, 'Saving Sinners and Reconciling Churches: An Ecumenical Meditation on *Mere Christianity*', *Pilgrim's Guide*, pp. 47-48.

70 Cf. Harold Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith & Mission* (Downer's Grove, ILL: InterVarsity, 2001), pp. 158-77.

neither should we. Evangelical theology of religions begins with an uncompromising commitment to Jesus Christ as the unique and absolute Lord and Saviour and to the continuing validity and applicability of historic Christian faith, truth, and life.

The a priori assumption of a Christian theology of religions ought not to be anything like, 'How do we change Christianity so it welds well with world religions?' but something more like, 'How does the unchanging reality and verity of Christianity inform and enhance our understanding of world religions and our relations with their adherents?' Now, this affirmation does not assume that Christians may not need to change our attitudes, especially if we have made incorrect and ultimately unchristian assumptions about what an authentically Christian understanding of religious others entails.

We may indeed need to make some drastic changes in our interpretation and application of Christianity to the realm of relations with other religions. Will anyone really argue that the religious prejudice and persecution that has sometimes characterized the history of Christianity is truly an accurate exemplar of how we ought to relate to religious others?⁷¹ Should we be calling fire down on Samaritans and religious others, or are we of a different spirit (Luke 9:52-56)? Some notable changes are necessary; but not changes in the nature of Christianity itself. Changes Evangelical Christians should seek to

address are rather more about how we may best apply the genuine reality and verity of Christianity to relations with religious others.

The first step here, of course, and the hardest step too to be sure, is to plumb the depths of our own *real* Christian religion, uncovering and removing our own presuppositions and prejudices, to thoroughly acquaint ourselves with its true teaching regarding other religions.⁷² As Lewis would have it, we need a healthy dose of 'mere Christianity'. Our biggest problem is not that Christianity needs to be changed but that it has already been changed and needs to be rather radically restored to its original estate! Early Christianity arose and existed in a religiously plural environment that probably exceeds our imagination. Yet its witness won the respect of many intense opponents. With conviction and without compromise, Christians can and should once again confront the world, religions and otherwise, in the strength of our own authentic testimony to our experience of the love of God in Christ and the power of the Spirit to transform lives accordingly.

2. Faithfully Evangelical

An Evangelical theology of religions is consistent with Scripture, continuous with its tradition, and confirmed in its community testimony. Evangelicals tend to start with Scripture. Whatever else we do, our theology must agree with and conform to Holy Scripture.

⁷¹ See Ergun Mehmet Caner and Emir Fethi Caner, *Christian Jihad* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004).

⁷² Jerry H. Gill, *Faith in Dialogue: A Christian Apologetic* (Waco, TX: Jarrell/Word Books, 1985), p. 105.

Lewis, who felt the beauty of and belief in Scripture more important than theories or dogmas about Scripture, still stoutly vouchsafed its status for carrying the Word of God and sought to sculpt his own life and writings according to its teaching and practice.⁷³ Evangelicals can and should discern what the Bible really says about religions. A careful consideration of the Bible suggests a more subtle and sophisticated stance toward so-called outsiders than some assume.⁷⁴ Indeed the first and foremost concern of a biblical theology of religions is actually for correct adoration of the justice and mercy of God's own holy character.⁷⁵

Taking all the statements of the Bible for what they are worth leaves ample room for dynamic possibilities concerning its revelation regarding relations with other religions. John 1:9 and 14:6, and Acts 4:12 and 17:27-28, for examples, should be understood along side, not against, each other. For another example, Romans 2:12-16 and 10:9 should be taken together. The obvious fact that the same writers make such strongly contrasting declarations certainly suggests they were more dynamic, less dogmatic and more relative, less rigid than we sometimes

tend to be today. Avoiding or attacking passages outside our pet paradigms will not work. The only theology of religions worthy of the label 'Evangelical' is one that truly takes God's whole revelation seriously.

Evangelicalism is more aware today of the need to know what has gone before in order to be ready for what may come after, and of its responsibility to continue the witness of the historic Christian tradition it represents.⁷⁶ Though many views have vied for supremacy during centuries of Christian development, several significant figures, even fathers in the faith, held views basically similar to that of C. S. Lewis. For examples, we might mention Justin Martyr (c. 110-65) and Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-216). Another extremely important precedent, the renowned revivalist-theologian John Wesley (1703-91), a founder of the modern Evangelical movement, affirmed God's gracious compassion beyond the borders of institutional Christianity.⁷⁷ The inclusion of such high calibre Christian thinkers and leaders in a class convinced that God's providential reach is borderless establishes that the position is not aberrational or exceptional and is not inimical to essential orthodox and Christianity. Even more lucrative, however, is the likelihood that these profound, pious Christians from the past can help effec-

73 Cf. Perry C. Bramlett, 'The Bible', *CSLRE*, pp. 98-99.

74 E. g., Frank Anthony Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider: Exclusion and Inclusion in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

75 See Tony Richie, 'God's Fairness to People of All Faiths: A Respectful Proposal to Pentecostals for Discussion Regarding World Religions', *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 28.1 (forthcoming Spring 2006).

76 E. g. Robert E. Weber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999).

77 In addition to an in depth analysis of Wesley, I also survey Justin, Clement, and others in Richie, 'John Wesley and Mohammed', *ATJ*, pp. 79-99.

tively lead Evangelicals today into the future in a world of religious faiths.

Prominent 'Evangelical friendly' theologians, such as Wolfhart Pannenberg for example, not formally Evangelical but amicably sharing some interests, espouse views essentially aligning with Lewis and others like him.⁷⁸ Along with Canadian Baptist Clark Pinnock a virtual host of Evangelical authors are rising up to articulate a more sensible and sensitive theology of religions in the same vein.⁷⁹ Given the enormous popularity of Lewis among many Evangelicals, and their frequent appeals to him, the application of Lewis' thought on religions by Evangelicals is evident.⁸⁰ Even Pentecostals and Charismatics are

joining the journey toward broader beliefs about other religions.⁸¹ Many disagree, of course, as is their right to do, and some label as un-Evangelical any opponents.⁸² But the view that only a narrow, pessimistic view toward the unevangelized or religious others is fully Evangelical is being strenuously challenged.

Accepting and embracing God's universal affection and activity are not sops to political correctness or liberal agendas. Rather, they are expressions of themes running throughout Scripture and Christian history that have come more to the fore in this generation because of the religious diversity of society today. Lewis was not a liberal! He did not pander to politics! A straightforward standard for discerning the Evangelical-ness of any theology of religions is the litmus test of its loyalty to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. No less and no more ought to be asked or expected.

78 Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, 'The Revelation of God in Jesus', in *Theology as History* (Ed. James M. Robison, NY: Harper & Row, 1967), pp. 101-09 and 118-25.

79 E. g., Clark Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); John Sanders in *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992); Gerald R. McDermott, *Can Evangelicals Learn From World Religions: Jesus, Revelation, & Religious Traditions* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000); John Stackhouse, Jr., ed., *No Other Gods Before Me? Evangelicals and the Challenge of World Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), and Timothy C. Tennent, *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable: Evangelicalism in Conversation with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002).

80 Cf. Gerald R. McDermott, 'What if Paul Had Been From China? Reflections on the Possibility of Revelation in Non-Christian Religions' and Miriam Adeney, 'Rajah Sulayman Was No Water Buffalo: Gospel, Anthropology, and Islam', in Stackhouse, *No Other Gods Before Me*, pp. 28, 32-33 and 70.

81 E. g., Amos Yong, 'On Envisioning a Pentecostal-Charismatic Theology of Religions', *JPT* 14 (1999): pp. 81-83, 'Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Theology of Religions', *Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series* (Sheffield: Sheffield, England; 2000), and *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).

82 E. g., Ramesh P. Richard, *The Population of Heaven: A Biblical Response to the Inclusivist Position on Who Will Be Saved* (Chicago: Moody, 1994). Diverse views are well laid out in *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, eds. Stanely N. Gundry, Dennis L. Okholm, and Timothy R. Phillips (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

3. Devotedly Truthful

Our quest for Evangelical identity and theological truth inevitably calls for involvement with other Christians and other religions.⁸³ The question regarding the reality of truth in other religions can be confronted in one of several ways. First, we might simply deny or ignore the suggestion that other religions have any truth at all. Second, we might admit they have some truth but downplay its significance. Thirdly, we might wrestle through the implications of the presence of truth in non-Christian religions from the perspective that Christian truth is uniquely revealed and authoritative. Fourthly, we might conclude that all religious truth is relative.

C. S. Lewis opted for the third approach. The first two do not deal with truth at all; they run from it like frightened children. The fourth destroys truth. Only the third approach works through tough questions raised by truth's presence in unexpected places. It also has the advantage of placing the religions within the scope of God's providential program instead of outside the bounds of God's power and purpose.⁸⁴ Jesus Christ the Son of God is fully and finally affirmed as the only absolute and universal Saviour and Lord whose gracious presence and influence reaches into the whole world by the Holy Spirit (see Acts 4:12; Ps. 139:7).

Self-disclosure is the nature of God. Sometimes God's self-revelation is obscure and preparatory.⁸⁵ That is not because of God's shortcomings but because of ours. The Christian Bible, consisting of the *Old* and *New Testaments*, is based upon the premise of progressive revelation. God accommodates himself to our present level of understanding and experience to help us know him as much as is possible while preparing us for further facets of more intimate and correct knowledge and love. Therefore, truth in non-Christian religions, dim or distorted though it may be from the Christian perspective, may be indicative of authentic divine presence and influence.⁸⁶ The Paraclete is certainly sent forth as the Spirit of Truth to testify to the truth (John 14-16). And as the Jewish apocryphal writer so surely said, 'the Spirit of the Lord fills the whole world' (Wisdom of Solomon 1:7).

I suppose some less cautious Christians may become smug, on the one hand, by an assumption of superiority. On the other hand, more careful Christians may have a very different reaction. Unless we are willing to assert (against apostle Paul) that we have attained unto final perfection in knowledge (Philp. 3:12; 1 Cor. 13:9), we must admit that we are also still on the journey of truth. That is not to say that we expect new revelations contrary to presently known truth or new religions to spring up everywhere throughout whatever succeeding centuries of time

83 See Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, pp. 215-19. Though Yong is specifically addressing Pentecostals, his point is relevant for all Evangelicals.

84 Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), pp. 268-75.

85 Cf. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), p. 178.

86 Cf. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, pp. 198-99 and 219-20.

may be left to humanity. That would, in fact, be quite counter to the revealed truth that has been already made perfectly plain (cf. John 14:6). That is not how *progressive* revelation works at all. It faithfully builds on what has gone before.

Rather, it is altogether possible to be convinced that final and ultimate truth has been made known not only through and by but in the Lord Jesus Christ and yet be contritely aware our own understanding of that truth and its tremendous implications has not been exhaustively perfected. If we are willing then to honestly acknowledge the somewhat provisional nature of truth, the obnoxious errors of imperialism or arrogance toward those we humbly believe have not yet understood the ultimate and absolute significance of 'the truth that is in Jesus' (Eph. 4:21) will not surface so readily as might at first be assumed by some. In fact, some challenging truths that stretch Christians might surface instead.⁸⁷

4. Honestly Experiential

The rationalistic reductionism of much of contemporary society and spirituality is caving in under a stringent post-modern critique.⁸⁸ The fact that human beings are complex entities characterized by vast epistemological subtlety and variety is becoming increasingly clear. We are not less than but more than rational creatures. We know by intuition and imagination, by experi-

ence, as well as by intellect.⁸⁹ As already shown, Lewis anticipated many of the concerns of postmodernism, arguing for a universal category of numinous religious experience. His carefully crafted arguments demonstrate the legitimacy and authenticity of religious experience as a way of knowing God.

An Evangelical theology should come to terms with the universality of religious experience. People of faith everywhere testify to ineffable encounters with the divine. Indeed these experiences are interpreted according to the prevailing theological worldview of the recipient. The Christian, the Jew, and the Muslim describe amazingly similar experiences but each tells the story in his or her own religious words. The Taoist, Hindu and the Buddhist do the same. Christians can discount these experiences as fraudulent manifestations of misguided faith. We can surmise that they may have a psychological or sensate origin or base.

We can take any of these or several other type tracks to invalidate the spiritual experiences of non-Christians if we so choose. The problem is these same arguments can be used against Christian claims of encountering God. But *surely* our own religious experiences are real. Therefore, unless we are willing to surrender the entire category of religious experience, a price too heavy to pay, we ought to approach the existence of religious experience in

⁸⁷ Gill, *Faith in Dialogue*, p. 104.

⁸⁸ See Henry H. Knight III, *A Future for Truth: Evangelical Theology in a Postmodern World* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), pp. 86-98.

⁸⁹ Cheryl Bridges Johns, 'Athens, Berlin, and Azusa: A Pentecostal Reflection on Scholarship and Christian Faith', *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* (2005), pp. 136-48, cuts to the heart of the postmodern condition.

other faiths from a somewhat different viewpoint.

God created human beings in the divine image (Gen. 1:26-27). Though distorted and twisted by sin, the *Imago Dei* has been damaged but not destroyed and remains the essential definition of what it means to be human.⁹⁰ (Classic doctrines of prevenient/common grace explain that universal preservation of the image of God in humans is not a merely natural process.) All humans share a spiritual nature enabling knowledge and, to some extent, actual relationship with God (Acts 17:27-28). Therefore, the Holy Spirit, universally present and active, vivifying all living beings (Ps. 104:30), is experienced in some measure or manner by all human beings (Num. 16:22; 27:16), even though not in the full Christian sense (Rom 8:2).

While religious others really encounter the presence of God, Christians uniquely participate in the very life of God by the Spirit through Christ (2 Cor. 13:14). Authentic spiritual experience, therefore, is a reliable but fallible indicator of God's presence and influence in people's lives. It is reliable because it is real. It is fallible because it can be and perhaps often is errant. Better than denying or discounting religious experience among the religions is spiritual discernment for authenticity and integrity.⁹¹ Jesus

taught us to know a tree by its fruit (Mt. 7:15-20). When the fruit of faith is good or bad, the religious root it springs from must be likewise. Simply put, only God is good and where good is, God is; where good is not, God's presence is not being affirmed (Mt. 19:17). Where there is evil we may safely say that diabolical or demonic possibilities are present (Jn. 10:10).

5. Openly Optimistic

Certain Evangelicals suggest the best position on the fate of the unevangelized or adherents of other religions is cautious agnosticism.⁹² We just do not and probably cannot know. Of course, that is true of the final fate of all souls, even Christians. None of us can say anything with certainty regarding the finality of someone's eternal destiny. That is definitely God's domain. Unfortunately, and I say this as a former agnostic (regarding ambivalence on the existence of God),⁹³ agnosticism is not usually plain and pure. Often it is unconsciously (or not) coloured either by pessimism, the usual, or optimism, the exceptional. Those who are really optimists often opt for open faith. Those who are full pessimists become fierce atheists. Agnosticism is a way out for those who may not want to take either of these options. But it is not really always the *via media* that it represents itself to be.

⁹⁰ Cf. Thomas C. Oden, *The Living God: Systematic Theology I* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2001), pp. 151-52.

⁹¹ Cf. Amos Yong, "Not Knowing Where the Wind Blows...": On Envisioning a Pentecostal-Charismatic Theology of Religions', *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 14 (1999): pp. 81-112 (pp. 81-83) and *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, pp. 29-30 and 243-55.

⁹² Cf. David L. Edwards and John Stott, *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (Downer's Grove, ILL: InterVarsity, 1991), p. 327.

⁹³ My history of a journey from agnosticism to faith is one of the reasons I am so attracted to the thought of C. S. Lewis.

In my own case, agnosticism was a way of being pessimistic about God's existence without exposing me to insurmountable logical fallacies latent in formal atheism. Agnosticism in such form is more a furtive unfaith. While I dare not presume to speak for anyone else, I cannot but suspect some 'agnostics' on this issue may have a similar mindset. Not wanting to come out and say the vast majority of humanity is doomed to be damned without so much as a shot at salvation they are 'agnostic'. If so, they are really pessimistic about such salvific possibilities. I believe this to be an unsatisfactory option. So did C. S. Lewis; his position on the question is quite openly optimistic.

Personally, I have found three moves helpful. First, is to accept the possibility that some of those who have not authentically heard the gospel are not automatically damned. This view does not assume anyone is automatically delivered either. We are not talking about universalism but universality. God in his wisdom, power, and goodness has made provision for all people to enter relationship with him according to their own context. A response of faith and obedience at the level of one's light is still essential. The emphasis here is on relation not religion; no religion, not even Christian religion, much less non-Christian religion, is finally really salvific.⁹⁴

Second, is to understand the process by which God deals with non-Christian peoples. God's grace and

power are made universally available to all through Jesus Christ. Some are directly and knowingly exposed to the gospel, others indirectly and unknowingly meet the Christ of the gospel, but all have some opportunity to graciously know God. Soteriology is perhaps much more dynamic and fluid than Evangelicals have traditionally perceived. Conversion, though a definite crisis experience, does not begin or end then. A positive process of becoming (or negatively of unbecoming!) a Christian is consistent with an Evangelical soteriology. Some have already entered the process of conversion though they are not yet converted.⁹⁵

Third, is to affirm the priority of Christian mission and evangelism.⁹⁶ Though some may know Christ after a manner without having explicitly heard the gospel, the temporal and eternal benefits of full knowledge and experience of Christ as revealed in the gospel are infinitely inestimable. Christians, therefore, in accordance with the Great Commission of Christ to the Church are charged with obedience to that divine mandate through reaching

⁹⁴ Cf. Barth in David L. Mueller, *Karl Barth: Makers of the Modern Theological Mind* (Waco: Word Books, 1976), pp. 91-93.

⁹⁵ Clark Pinnock calls them 'not-yet-Christians' in *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (InterVarsity Press: Downer's Grove, IL, 1994), pp. 213-14. Gerald McDermott's work on Jonathan Edwards's dispositional soteriology suggests similar directions. See his *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods: Christian Theology, Enlightenment Reason, and Non-Christian Faiths* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁹⁶ Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), pp. 244-47.

the world with its witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. No theology of religions that undermines the energy of evangelistic witness to the world should be acceptable to Evangelicals.

III Conclusion

My approach throughout this paper assumes modern Evangelicalism has matured enough to allow and embrace variety and diversity so long as essential commitment to the gospel is ardently affirmed.⁹⁷ I also expect approbation from those who affirm C. S. Lewis as a champion of Christian faith and life in a world increasingly characterized by widespread cultural anomy. Many of us have turned trustingly to Lewis for help against encroaching scientism, imposing pseudo-intellectualism, or increasing secularity. Can he also offer us guidance regarding the rampant ideology of religious pluralism by giving us a good alternative, a conscientiously Christ-

ian theology of religions that ably accounts for the reality of pluralism? I think so.

Lewis' theology of religions offers help to contemporary Evangelical Christians in key ways. First, it helps us see that faithfulness to biblical, historic Christianity and hospitable openness to religious others are not necessarily incompatible. Second, it helps provide a powerful apologetic against a serious and not altogether unfounded charge of religious elitism and exclusivity without compromising Christian teachings. Third, it helps to open up possibilities of dialogue with non-Christian traditions that can lead to heartfelt witness of the gospel's transforming power in our own lives. Fourth, it also helps contribute to our appreciation for God's glory through the all-encompassing wisdom, power, and goodness of God's providential affection toward and activity among all people everywhere at all times. And, yes, fifth, it helps us hear God's voice ever more clearly both in others and in ourselves. Evangelicals interested in addressing today's world with an authentic gospel word could do a lot worse.

⁹⁷ Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy, *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), pp. 178-92.

Shadows and Chivalry

Pain, Suffering, Evil and Goodness in the Works of George MacDonald and C.S. Lewis

Jeff McInnis

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Our Journey into the Truth, Beauty, and Holiness of the Gospel

James Danaher

KEYWORDS: *Enlightenment, proof, evidence, meaning, beauty, faith, love, holiness*

IS THE GOSPEL TRUE? That is the question that the modern non-believer asks. Of course, it is true, but the truth of the gospel is really revealed only as we enter into this faith journey which is the Christian life. Jesus says, follow me, and, as we do, the truth of the gospel is revealed. Likewise, as we begin to follow Jesus, the beauty and holiness of the gospel is revealed as well.

Of course, the concepts of truth, beauty, and holiness that are revealed in the Gospels are very different from our cultural concepts of such things. For one thing, our cultural ideas of truth, beauty, and holiness are static. They resemble Platonic forms or fixed dictionary definitions, rather than the dynamic and progressive concepts that emerge as we experience the revelations that are set forth in the Gospels. Sadly, many who profess to be follow-

ers of Jesus retain their static, cultural concepts and refuse to have them changed by what they find in the Gospels. That is because, for many of us, the conceptual understanding we received at our mother's knee is sacred and not to be questioned. As a consequence, our experience is always moulded by that cultural understanding, rather than our understanding being moulded by our experience.

It is possible, however, to have our experience mould our concepts if we treat our concepts with a certain suspicion and equally yield authority to what we experience. Teens often reject the conceptual understanding they acquired at their mother's knee and have their understanding changed by what they experience from their peers or the media. Such changes are not always good. Of course, neither is it good always to insist that our experience conform to our conceptual understanding rather than having our concepts changed by our experience. The question is to which experiences are

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we to give authority and power to change our conceptual understanding. Upon deciding to follow Jesus, Christians give that authority to the Gospels and the God that Jesus reveals. As we do, our experience of the gospel begins to change our concepts, especially our concepts of truth, beauty, and holiness.

I 'What Is Truth?'

'What is truth?'¹ So asks Pontus Pilate. Of course, Jesus says, 'I am the way, and the truth' (Jn. 14:6). The idea of Jesus being the truth is very different from the cultural notion of truth into which we have been educated. Our cultural concept of truth comes to us from the Enlightenment thinkers of the 17th and 18th centuries. Their concept was that truth should be objective, certain, and based upon evidence. In order to avoid error, they insisted that we believe only that for which we had evidence. This idea that we must have evidence or warrant to support the truth of our beliefs became so prevalent that modern thinkers came to believe that it was immoral to believe anything if it were not supported by the kind of evidence of which modern science would approve.

Such a moral position provided a solid ground for modern atheism. When the gospel is shared with people who have been taught to think in the way of modernity, their response often is, 'How do I know if it is true?' They want evidence before they will believe, but the idea that evidence must pre-

cede a belief is unreasonable. A century ago William James had pointed out that many times in order to acquire evidence, we must first hold a belief with very little or no evidence. That is because it is often the case that faith in a particular belief is the very thing that opens the possibility for evidence.

*Where faith in a fact can help create the fact, that would be an insane logic which should say that faith running ahead of scientific evidence is the 'lowest kind of immorality' into which a thinking being can fall. Yet such is the logic by which our scientific absolutists pretend to regulate our lives!*²

James seems correct in his criticism of a scientific mentality that says we must have warrant for the truth of our beliefs before we are entitled to hold those beliefs. Indeed, the very nature of a scientific hypothesis is that we accept a belief prior to evidence. Of course, the defenders of the modern, scientific mentality would argue that a scientific hypothesis is only loosely held and will be abandoned if evidence to support the belief does not immediately follow. But the history of science is full of examples of scientific hypotheses being held without evidence long past the point of being reasonable, only eventually to be proven true. Although we may romanticize such tenacity and see it as courage, it is frequently the case that such obsti-

¹ John 18:38. All references are to the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise specified.

² William James, 'The Will to Believe', *New World*, June (1896): Rpt. in *The Will to Believe/Human Immortality and Other Essays on Popular Philosophy* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1956), p. 25.

nacy is more a matter of ego. Often it is simply pride and an inability to admit one's error that supports a belief in the absence of evidence.

Religious beliefs can also be held in pure tenacity and pride, but with religious beliefs there is another possibility. Even in the absence of evidence to support its truth, a religious belief may find support in the beauty we find in the object of our faith. Often the object of one's faith creates a sense of the sublime that is capable of providing support for the belief. There may be no bell that rings to tell us that something is true, and thus the need for evidence, but there is such a bell when we recognize something as divinely beautiful. Furthermore, it is this divine beauty that is, in a very real way, at the base of the Christian faith. Indeed, the Christian faith is not ultimately founded upon the truth of the existence of some creator and ruler of the universe, but rather upon the beauty we find in the God that Jesus reveals. Beauty is primary, not only in the sense that it is often what first draws us to the God of the gospel, but also in the sense that it is the beauty of the gospel that overwhelms us, enchants us, fascinates us, and calls us.³

II Beauty

I know a man who, as a nominal Jew, had no interest in the gospel. One day in a taxi cab ride to the airport, the cab driver asked if he had ever read the New Testament. My friend said no but took a pocket edition of the New Tes-

tament when the cab driver offered it. He eventually read it out of curiosity. After having read the Gospel account, he thought to himself, 'I don't believe a word of this, but this is exactly who I would want God to be.' He began to weep uncontrollably. It was not the truth of the gospel that began his faith journey but the beauty of the gospel.

Of course, some of us do begin by believing in the truth of the gospel, but, even in those cases, it is the beauty of the gospel that must ultimately become the foundation for our faith. If we merely accept the truth of God's sovereignty over the universe, without any real love for who he is and how he does things, we are little different from the demons. The demons know the truth. They know that the God whom Jesus reveals is the sovereign ruler of the universe, but they wish he weren't. They know the truth, but they do not love it because they fail to see the beauty of who God is.

Since the Christian faith is, at its base, a love relationship with God, we must see God's love-worthiness. God's love-worthiness is found not in the truth of his existence but the beauty of that existence. The demons know the truth of God's existence, but they fail to recognize the beauty in how he does things through love and forgiveness. They see no beauty in his meekness and mercy. In their eyes, a God who is quick to forgive and slow to anger is a poor excuse for a god, and therein is the basis for their rebellion. Many human beings are very much like those demons. They accept the fact of God's existence and sovereignty, but they do not love the way he does things.

In creating his kingdom, God is looking for a people who, as the very

³ Andrew M. Greeley, 'The Apologetics of Beauty', *America*, Vol. 183, Issue 7 (2000), p. 3.

opposite of those demonic creatures, want the God of the Gospels to be the ruler of the universe, in spite of the fact that all of the evidence seems to the contrary. In order to create a kingdom of such people, God hides himself and offers very little evidence for his existence and power. Instead, he sends his Son to reveal to us the beauty of that existence. Those who see beauty in the God that the gospel reveals fall in love with that God.

God does not desire that we simply believe that he exists and obey his commands. If that were really what God wanted, he would have made his existence and power much more evident. What God desires is a people who would fall in love with him as they see great beauty in the fact that he is the father of the prodigal,⁴ that the banquet he has prepared is for all who have no better place to be,⁵ and that the person who comes to God in the last hour gets the same reward as the one who has laboured all day.⁶ It is all about seeing the beauty in the God that Jesus reveals.

III Truth

Of course, we also need the truth of the gospel, but not necessarily the factual truth that modernity had thought was so all-important. The belief of modernity was that propositions were truth bearers, and that a proposition was true if it corresponded to some factual state of affairs. The Gospels, however, do not, for the most part, present

propositions to be deemed true or false by their correspondence to factual states of affairs. The ultimate truth of the gospel is not found in the fact that Jesus did indeed say and do the things that are recorded in the scripture. Instead, the Gospels offer images that are capable of revealing eternal truths. The truth of the gospel, therefore, is found in the meaning of those images, rather than in the fact that its propositions correspond to states of affairs that actually took place.

Of course, the Gospel story is not fiction, but its truth does not rest in the facts of the story but rather the meaning of the story. Without understanding the true meaning of the gospel, the Klansman may imagine Jesus as a racist. He may believe the fact that Jesus died on a cross and rose from the dead, but the truth of the gospel escapes him, because the truth of the Gospel is found not in its facts but in its meaning.

The science of modernity had insisted that truth was all about facts and thus a story that was not factual could not be true. Because we have been so influenced by modernity, many of us may need to begin our faith journey with a belief in the factuality of the gospel. But although we may need to begin there, there is no necessary connection between what is factual and the truth of the gospel. Jesus tells us of parables that most likely never actually took place, but they are nevertheless true because they reveal eternal truths. Likewise, the story of the gospel is true because it reveals the ultimate truth of who God is. Whether God would reveal himself through a story or some actual facts is not important in comparison to what is revealed.

⁴ Luke 15:11-32.

⁵ Luke 14:16-24.

⁶ Matt. 20:1-16.

What is important—the truth of the gospel—is not found in some set of facts but in the unfolding of a meaning. Its truth, to use Heidegger's terms, is an 'unconcealment' rather than an 'already-thereness'.⁷ Modern science told us that it was about the facts (the already-thereness), but we now know that truth is not found in the facts but in their meaning. The unconcealment of the meaning is something that generally requires time.

In order to know the true meaning of the gospel, time and additional experiences are required. We can believe in the facts of the gospel in an instant, but the meaning requires further revelations that usually occur over time. Jesus tells us of God's faithfulness, but we cannot really know the truth of what that means until we have experienced numerous instances of God meeting us in our need.

Jesus may have told us who God is, but we really come to know who God is only by following Jesus and in time seeing that the God who is at work in my life is exactly who Jesus said he was. Any real meaningful knowledge of God is like our knowledge of anyone else with whom we are in relationship. Our knowledge of who that other person truly is comes only in time. At the beginning of a marriage we may think we know the other person but we really come to know them only over time. We may say we know that another person is trustworthy, but our knowledge of their faithfulness is more a hope within

us than something we really know about the other person. Real knowledge of another person's faithfulness comes only in time as the person demonstrates their faithfulness. The same is true of our knowledge of God and his faithfulness, and herein rests the true evidence for the gospel.

If I were to find out tomorrow that Jesus never really existed, that he never died on a cross, or never rose from the dead, I would still be a Christian. The reason I would still be a Christian is because the story of the Prodigal, the Sermon on the Mount, and the idea of God on a cross responding to torture and murder with forgiveness is exactly who I have come to know God to be. This is the evidence of the gospel. That is, Jesus said that if we follow him, we will find God to be just as he said. Those who truly follow Jesus find his predictions to be true—they find God to be exactly as Jesus described him. This is the evidence upon which the truth of the gospel rests.

Of course, many people never come to know the God whom Jesus reveals. They never come to know the faithfulness of the God of the gospel because either they have no personal relationship with God through which a personal knowledge of who he is could develop over time, or they never find themselves in those desperate places where they need God to reveal his faithfulness. This is the unfortunate position of the rich and famous, and it is the reason that Jesus tells us that the truly blessed ones are the poor. Poverty is essential to the development of a faith relationship with God, since without it we never get the evidence of God being our loving father

⁷ Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (Trans. Ralph Manheim) (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1959).

who repeatedly meets us in our need.

Without our ongoing needs being consistently and miraculously met, our talk of God and his faithfulness is just talk. This is the basis for the faith into which God is calling us. It is what gives substance to our hope.⁸ It is what substantiates the fact that God is 'our father'⁹ and nothing can separate us from his love.¹⁰ This is the faith that comes down from heaven as God consistently meets us in our need. This revelation of God's faithfulness toward us needs to be an ongoing revelation since our unbelieving minds find it easy to dismiss God's miraculous intervention in our lives as happenstance. Only as we recognize numerous instances of God meeting us in our need do we come to dwell in the fullness of life that only such awareness can provide. This is why faith is best understood as a journey.

IV Faith as Journey

The journey that is faith, however, is not merely a journey whereby we progressively get greater evidence for the truth of the gospel. It is equally a journey through which we get an ever greater revelation of God's beauty as well. As we have seen, beauty is as basic to the Christian life as is truth. Furthermore, just as the truth of the gospel comes through a progressive revelation, so too does the beauty of the gospel. The sense of beauty with which we begin our faith journey is a very human form of beauty and differ-

ent from the divine beauty which we eventually come to behold. At the beginning of our journey, we find beauty in those scriptures that promise to meet our desires. Those desires are initially very human in nature.

When I first became aware of God's presence in my life, I thought the most beautiful scripture was: 'For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior which is Christ the Lord' (Luke 2:11 KJV). I found that scripture so beautiful because it gave me what I desired. It was beautiful because it revealed to me a God who would save me from a meaningless existence. As I stayed in relationship with God, however, that relationship changed me and my sense of beauty. In time, the beauty I found in the scripture was no longer a beauty based upon the fact that it promised to satisfy some desire in me. Rather, what I eventually came to see as beautiful were those scriptures that revealed something of the holiness of God. Of course, like my concept of beauty, my concept of holiness was also being changed over time through my ongoing conversion. Change in our conceptual understanding is certainly part of the conversion process, and our idea of holiness is as critical to our understanding of who God is as are our concepts of truth and beauty.

V Holiness

Our initial concept of holiness is a cultural one passed on to us by our language community. As we come to know Jesus, however, we see that his idea of holiness is quite different from our cultural concept. Our initial concept of holiness is remarkably similar to the Pharisees' notion of holiness. It is a

⁸ Heb. 11:1.

⁹ Matt. 6:9.

¹⁰ Rom. 8:39.

very human notion and is tied to the religious idea that God hates sin and therefore loves people who avoid sin and remain pure or sinless. A holy person is a morally righteous person who obeys God's law. But that is a very human concept of holiness—a very Pharisaical notion of holiness. It is a notion of holiness very different from the one that Jesus presents. In fact, the concept of holiness that Jesus presents is in many ways the very opposite of such a human, Pharisaical notion. The Pharisees believed that God must be like them. That is, that, like them, God loves good people and does not love bad people. The God that Jesus reveals, however, is very different from anything human. What Jesus reveals is that God is able to love the unlovely that are neither good nor beautiful in our sight. This is the true holiness of God, and we are called to be holy, as he is holy.¹¹

The words, *holy* and *holiness* 'in their primitive meaning imply a separation or setting apart from the secular and profane'.¹² The Pharisees thought that meant to keep the law and thereby be set apart from most people who were not so devout concerning the law, but God's holiness seems much more radical. From what Jesus reveals in the gospel, God is not merely different or set apart from the vast sea of humanity because he is better at keeping his own law. Rather, God is set apart and different from human beings in that what

he values and sees as good is very different from what we human beings generally value and see as good. He loves the unlovely and 'is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked'.¹³ In spite of everything, they are his creation and he loves them with the love of a father for his child.

Jesus knew that God was able to love the unlovely sinners and that moral purity was not a condition for receiving God's love. Jesus tells us that we are to love sinners as God loves them. From the cross, Jesus responds to his torturers by praying for them to be restored to an awareness that the God of the universe was a loving father who longed for their return. How unlike anything human! In fact, it is so unlike anything human that at first we do not see how divinely beautiful it is. It is hard to recognize the true beauty of the gospel until we have experienced a good deal of transformation. Without being changed and made more into his likeness, we desire a God who is like us. That is, a God who rewards good people like ourselves and punishes evil people who are not like us. This is one of the things that need to be changed by the transformative journey that is the Christian life. We need to come to see that God loves his creation. He loves the people of Nineveh in a way that Jonah does not understand.¹⁴ This is why we, like Jonah, need to be changed, and as we are, we will begin to see a beauty that was not visible to our all-too-human eyes.

With our all-too-human eyes we see

¹¹ 1 Peter 1:16.

¹² Philip Schaff, *Dictionary of the Bible* (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, 1885), p. 388.

¹³ Luke 6:35.

¹⁴ Jonah 3:1-4:11.

nothing beautiful about the last coming first and the first coming last, or that the one who worked only one hour received the same as those who laboured all day.¹⁵ We must be changed in order to see the beauty in that. If we are not changed, and never come to see that as beautiful, Heaven will not be very heavenly.

I think most people imagine that Heaven will be what they think is beautiful, but the truth is that Heaven will be what God thinks is beautiful, and what God thinks is beautiful is often very different from what we think is beautiful. This is why transformation is at the base of the Christian life.

The fact that there was born a Saviour in the city of David¹⁶ is something that still strikes me as beautiful, but it is surpassed in beauty by the fact that the last thing Jesus did with his disciples was to wash their feet. He says, 'I am among you as one who serves.'¹⁷ Jesus, as the complete and ultimate revelation of who God is, is among us as a servant. He is a servant even to Judas—a servant to his enemy. If that is not the most beautiful thing you have ever heard, you are not yet fully converted, and not ready for heaven.

Other scriptures are also good indicators of just how far we have gone in this journey into the beauty of God's holiness, and how much further we still have to go. Jesus tells us that he is 'meek and lowly in heart' (Mt. 11:29 KJV). What a shocking revelation of the holiness of God. God as 'meek and

lowly in heart' is certainly not what we imagine as a characteristic of God's holiness. Our idea of God's holiness, or the fact that God is so utterly other than anything human, lies in the fact that God is all-powerful. We imagine that he is sovereign in a way that we wish we were. This is how we imagine the holiness of God, but Jesus reveals a God very different from what we imagine. Jesus reveals a God who is 'meek and lowly in heart'—whose response to evil is to suffer it rather than simply destroy it, as we would if we were God.

Unlike ourselves, God loves the evil-doer. God is holy and is always willing to seek the restoration of the sinner. While we would make sure that the guilty pay for their offence, God seeks to forgive and suffer the offence for the sake of restoration. Unlike us human beings who see power as beautiful because it enables us to realize the pleasures we desire, God's holiness is found in the fact that he chooses to work not through power but through forgiveness and suffering—he is 'meek and lowly in heart'.

This is very different from who I am and who I would be if I were God. If I were God, I would not be 'meek and lowly in heart'. Amazingly, however, if I were the God of the universe, I would be more 'meek and lowly in heart' than I would have been ten years ago. Hence, the real evidence for the truth of the gospel. Through some mysterious process, I am being changed and made ever more into the likeness of the God that Jesus reveals.

Of course, there is much more to God's holiness. The best we can do is to get glimpses from time to time of the beauty of his holiness and thereby have our concept of holiness changed. One

15 Matt. 20:1-16.

16 Luke 2:11.

17 Luke 22:27.

such glimpse recently came to me through the words of Jesus when he says, 'I am not alone' (Jn. 16:32) How unlike anything human! Most human beings are always alone and suffer the consequences of it. I heard a psychologist, who had been in practice for many years, say that he had come to believe that a vast amount of psychological disorders were the result of loneliness. Even when we are in the company of others, we often feel alone since no one really knows us and we are not free to be ourselves with anyone. Of course, Jesus was never alone. The God that Jesus reveals is a triune God. The Christian Godhead is a relationship between three divine persons who are eternally in one another's presence—three persons who eternally know, and are known by, one another. We are invited to enter into that relationship and thus never be alone again.

Jesus knew that nothing could separate him from his Father's love. He was never alone, and he tells us that we need not ever be alone. 'He has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you"' (Heb. 13:5). Isn't that the most beautiful thing you ever heard? Even in the hour of our death, when many peo-

ple feel most alone, we need not be alone.

A doctor recently told me a story about a hospice patient of his who was dying of cancer. He had seen the patient a few days before and thought the patient had a few months to live. He was a bit surprised when the hospice nurse called and told him that the patient had died. He was especially surprised because the nurse seemed extremely shocked about the death. When the doctor questioned why she was so surprised, she told him that she wasn't telling him the entire story. It seems that she had been with the patient that morning and he looked quite healthy. While she was tending to him, however, he told her that he was going home that day. She asked if his family was coming for him? He told her, no. He then went on to explain that his captain had just come and told him that he would be going home that day. She left the room only momentarily to get something, but when she returned he was dead. Even in the hour of our death, we need not be alone. Isn't that the most beautiful thing you have ever heard?

Leadership Expectations

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Gene Early

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The Work of a Dean

Robert W. Ferris

KEYWORDS: *Institutional ethos, institutional mission, pastoral care, professional development, shared governance.*

To be named dean of a theological college or seminary is both a great privilege and an immense responsibility. Most come to that position from faculty appointment and find themselves more comfortable in the classroom than in the dean's office. The situation is not eased by access to literature. A recent study suggests 'the academic deanship is the least studied and most misunderstood position in the academy'.¹ While a 1995 study of chief academic officers, sponsored by the Association of Theological Schools, generated both quantitative and qualitative data,² most articles are autobiographical

reflections on deanship. As such, they offer wisdom but little specific guidance.

One quickly learns that the dean is expected to fulfil a host of discrete and sometimes conflicting responsibilities. Whether included in the official position description or not, a dean typically functions as manager of instructional programs, budgets and finance, marketing and recruitment, legal compliance, institutional assessment and accreditation, and institutional crises. She or he must be advocate of instructional support, mediator of competing constituencies, arbitrator of student complaints and appeals, and builder of faculty consensus, as well as entrepreneur, politician, teacher, scholar, mentor, and sage!³ One descriptive study identified fourteen 'primary responsibilities' of academic deans⁴ while

1 Clint E. Bruess, James E. McLean, and Feng Sun, 'Determining Education Deans' Priorities', ERIC ED 482 513 (2003), p. 2.

2 Jeanne P. McLean, Jeanne P. (Ed.), 'The Study of Chief Academic Officers in Theological Schools: Reflections on Academic Leadership', *Theological Education*, 33 Supplement (Autumn, 1996), pp. 1-76.

3 Ann S. Ferren, Ann S. and Wilbur W. Stanton, *Leadership through Collaboration: The role of the chief academic officer* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2004).

4 Jeanne P. McLean, Jeanne P. (Ed.), *Academic Leadership: A study of chief academic officers in theological schools* (St. Paul, Minn.: Saint Paul Seminary, 1998).

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another includes twenty responsibilities drawn from the literature.⁵

Faced with this plethora of expectations and demands, deans must establish priorities in order to provide leadership and preserve sanity. I want to suggest that a dean has four tasks which, if assigned priority, can provide focus in the midst of seeming chaos and can lead to fruitfulness and fulfillment in ministry.

Task 1: Recruiting and Developing Faculty

The first task of the Academic Dean is to *recruit and develop faculty who embrace and embody the ethos of the institution*. The faculty is the essence of any educational institution; it is the lives of faculty members that mark the lives of students and graduates. Long after students have forgotten the content of our lectures, for better or worse, they carry the imprint of our lives.

In that sense, the faculty *is* the curriculum. It is common to think that the curriculum of an institution is the list of courses offered. In fact, that is a misperception. The true curriculum is the faculty itself—the way faculty members pursue their scholarship, the way they handle the scriptures, the way they relate to God, the way they relate to one another, the way they relate to students, the way they relate to Christ's church, the way they relate to the lost world—this is the true curriculum of the theological school. The list of courses offered is simply a vehi-

cle through which the values and commitments of the faculty are conveyed to students. That is not to imply the content we teach is unimportant, but to acknowledge that transformation occurs life-on-life.

In such a context, it is essential that the values and commitments of each member of the faculty be aligned with the institution's ethos. Ethos refers to the vocation, the heritage, and the core values of the theological school. Ethos is the sum of those ideals and commitments which distinguish an institution and set it apart. The president is guardian of the institutional ethos, but the dean's hands hold the levers by which ethos is conveyed to the next generation, magnified or diminished.

Alignment with ethos is the most important consideration when building or winnowing the faculty. Academic, scholarly, and ministerial qualifications for appointment to the faculty must be honoured, but never at the expense of alignment with the institution's ethos. Faculty members who do not share the institution's core values and commitments communicate a conflicting message to students and thereby undermine the institutional mission. Collins⁶ has alerted us to the importance of 'getting the right people on the bus and getting the wrong people off the bus'. Nowhere is this more important than with a theological faculty, a responsibility that rests squarely with the dean.

The observation that 'the faculty is the curriculum' has a corollary: when

5 Bruess, McLean, and Sun, 'Determining Education Deans' Priorities'.

6 Jim Collins. *Good to Great: Why some companies make the leap...and others don't* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001).

anyone leaves the faculty or joins the faculty, the curriculum changes. Assuring alignment with the institution's ethos means the contribution of individual faculty members is enriching, rather than essential, but each one's part is important, nonetheless. The wise dean will take stock whenever there is a change in the faculty, recognizing the transition effected in the school's curriculum.

Identifying and recruiting faculty who embrace and embody the ethos of the institution is a perpetual responsibility. The goal is a stable faculty; rapid faculty turnover indicates deep problems which must be resolved. Because faculty changes cannot always be anticipated and because institutional growth generally is considered healthy, however, the dean must constantly be on the lookout for potential additions to the faculty. Broad reading and networking at professional meetings or ministry conventions may afford contacts with attractive candidates for faculty appointment, but personal interaction is needed to assure the ethos alignment that is so necessary. By emphasizing, measuring, and guarding ethos commitments early in the contact, a dean will protect oneself and the institution from unpleasant decisions later.

Each new faculty member is an investment in the future of the institution, but current faculty members comprise the curriculum of the college today. A second aspect of the dean's responsibility for strengthening the ethos of the institution, therefore, is development of the current faculty. As noted by Bright and Richards, 'It is important for the dean to work with the faculty so that they will be able to stay,

will want to stay, and will make the dean glad they did.'⁷

Faculty development can and should be approached as a group endeavour, guided by the dean. If scheduled faculty meetings and annual retreats are devoted only to business, a great opportunity will be missed. A member of the faculty or a guest may be scheduled to present a topic of common interest, followed by dialogue. Alternatively, a faculty may undertake reading and discussing a book. The topic may be theological, missiological, pedagogical, or relate to the use of technology in instruction. Whatever the topic, it is important that members of the faculty recognize its relationship to their professional interests and leave with a clear sense of how the issue discussed relates to their role as scholar and teacher. The dean who includes half an hour for professional development in each faculty meeting agenda, or who allocates one day of a two-day retreat to professional development, sends a powerful message to members of the faculty about the importance of continuing professional growth.

In addition to corporate professional development programs, focused efforts with individual members of the faculty also are important. There are two areas in which faculty members typically need guidance. First, each college or seminary works with unique rhythms and expectations. Even those who have taught at other institutions

⁷ David F. Bright and Mary P. Richards, *The Academic Deanship: Individual careers and institutional roles* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), p 154.

need to be oriented to this college and this faculty. Pairing each new faculty member with a seasoned and caring colleague can ease this transition process.

It is a sad reality that biblical, theological, and missiological scholars are not taught to teach. Indeed, in most cases the ‘masters’ from whom they learned have modelled very ineffective pedagogies. To insure the success of new faculty members—and to enhance the effectiveness and fulfillment of mid-career faculty members—a pedagogical mentor is often needed. While the dean may want to undertake this, that rarely works best. The dean’s role as supervisor and ‘employer’ easily overwhelms her or his attempt to serve as helper and guide. This is a second area in which a skilled and caring senior colleague may best be able to provide constructive guidance. It is the dean’s responsibility, however, to assure that timely assistance is provided.

Finally, an important aspect of faculty development is the performance appraisal process. An annual appointment at which the dean meets individually with each member of the faculty to review the achievements and shortcomings of the previous year can provide a powerful context for affirming and encouraging personal and professional growth. To be most helpful, the performance appraisal interview should be informed by multiple streams of data. A self-assessment and report by the faculty member is essential, but student course evaluations, peer reviews, and the dean’s own observations are also useful.

Occasionally the performance appraisal interview may be the context

for informing a failing faculty member that he or she will not be with the college following the current year. In most cases, however, the focus of the interview will be on using the data collected to design a personal and professional development plan for the coming year. The dean’s willingness to underwrite the plan with institutional resources can be very affirming for the faculty member and at the same time it establishes expectations for which the faculty member knows he or she will be held accountable.

Building and nurturing a faculty which embraces and embodies the ethos of the institution is the dean’s highest priority because the faculty is the present and future curriculum of the school. By recruiting and developing a faculty of character and competence, the dean fulfills his or her first responsibility to the institution and its constituencies.

Task 2: Pursuing the Institution’s Mission

The Academic Dean’s second important task is to *lead the faculty in pursuit of the institution’s mission*. Closely related to institutional ethos is the institution’s mission, its sense of vocation and particular service to the global church. Definition of mission is a collaborative task that should engage all of the school’s major stakeholders—board, faculty, administration, students, alumni, and primary constituencies (e.g., ecclesial communions and parachurch agencies). A mission statement should be succinct enough to be easily remembered and specific enough to be accountably pursued.

Although formally endorsed by the board, the institutional mission must be owned by the faculty and administration as their shared vocation.

Rewriting a mission statement is a political exercise in the best sense. It entails negotiating a shared understanding of the institution's charter, heritage, and calling, as well as its present and potential contribution to the cause of Christ. It is a project which is profitably undertaken periodically. Clarity regarding the institution's mission fosters unity in a faculty and provides direction for its work.

The programs of the school, both formal and informal, must be oriented to the institutional mission. In addition, program curricula should be assessed and adapted to the school's mission. When curricular review is scheduled, it is natural to assume the current curriculum while searching for any incremental adjustments that may be indicated. Periodically, however, it is helpful to take a fresh look, to lay aside the current curriculum, to engage anew the institutional mission, and to ask how best to pursue this mission with this generation of students. We resist asking that question since well-worn paths are comfortable and new curricula typically require developing new courses. Nevertheless, our calling is not to convenience but to pursuit of mission. Leading the faculty in this pursuit is the dean's responsibility.

Task 3: Creating a Conducive Institutional Environment

One might assume that the school campus is an environment ideally suited to

the work of education, but this is not the experience of most teachers. The realities of institutional life have a way of intruding on a faculty. It is the task of the dean to assure that instructors are insulated, as much as possible, from these demands and that communication between the faculty and administrators is filtered as necessary for the benefit of each. So the third important task of the Dean is to *create an institutional environment in which the faculty is free to do its work.*

The work of a theological faculty is the formation of students for ministry. This is achieved, first of all, through modelling a life of ministry and scholarship. It is modelling which touches the lives of students most profoundly and provides credibility for instruction. Thus, institutional demands which distract members of the faculty from ministry, scholarship, and instruction must be weighed to determine their relative importance.

Nevertheless, total isolation of the faculty from the mechanisms that guide the theological school is not desirable either. Within the academy there is an expectation of shared governance which is both appropriate and wholesome. Faculty members are not just day labourers. As ministers and scholars committed to the institutional mission and values, they are major stakeholders in the life and future development of the school. In decisions that shape the institution, their voices need to be heard. Perversely, however, many faculty members are not satisfied with shared governance but crave shared administration. Thus, the dean must protect members of his or her faculty not only from unnecessary demands from administrators but also

from their own propensities toward administrative intrusion and entanglement.

Although shared governance generally is assumed, its nature is not widely understood. Governance is the exercise of prerogatives and responsibilities which pertain to delegated authority. Most public and private institutions are directed by a board, empowered by a legal authority to act on behalf of the institution's constituency and the public good. As such, governance is invested legally in the board. Thus, a board is responsible (1) to articulate the institution's core values, (2) to define its mission, (3) to make policy, (4) to appoint and hold accountable a chief executive officer, and (5) to guard stakeholders' and the public's interests.⁸ A board is not legally inhibited from delegating its powers, and therein lies the opportunity for shared governance. It is important to recognize, however, that the powers pertaining to governance belong legally to the board; any delegation of those powers is a privilege extended at the pleasure of the board. Shared governance is always a privilege, never a right.

Some board powers are more amenable to delegation than others. College and university boards commonly invite their faculties to participate in identifying the school's core values and in defining the school's mission. Although major work in these areas may be delegated to a faculty, board ratification is required, acknowledging the board's legal responsibility.

Policy making, a board's third

responsibility, typically is distributed between the board and the faculty. Faculty usually are delegated to frame academic policy, subject to review and adoption by the board. Thus, within the context of the institution's charter and mission, a faculty may identify which degrees should be offered and the standards for admission to and completion of those degrees. Other aspects of policy, however, must be retained entirely by the board. A faculty should not be involved in setting financial or personnel policy, for example, since this would entail conflicts of interest. These policy areas belong uniquely to the board.

If the first two areas of governance can be delegated and the third is shared, it is important to note that the last two must be retained by the board. A board cannot delegate its responsibility to appoint and hold accountable a chief executive officer, nor its duty to guard the interests of the institution's stakeholders and the larger public. In the first case, it must be clear that the executive, whether president, principal, or rector, answers to one authority, not two. The executive appoints a staff and administers the institution on behalf of the board; he or she reports to the board, not to the faculty. In the second case, only a board comprised of constituent and public representatives can be trusted to guide the institution in ways that protect both internal and external interests.

Shared governance means, therefore, that faculty members may be encouraged to debate an institution's values, mission, and academic policies, but should resist every temptation to involve themselves with the functions of executive leadership or institutional

⁸ John Carver, *Boards that make a Difference* (2nd ed.) (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997).

policy and administration. It is natural for faculty members to be interested in these things, since they are directly affected by them. Furthermore, faculties of theological schools are expected to have well honed moral sensitivities, which often touch on institutional and public life. Natural interest, however, is different from legal obligation. While faculty voices must be heard, faculty members cannot afford to become occupied with issues outside their responsibility.

While clarifying the roles of faculty and administrators is essential, negotiating the dynamics of institutional relationships can be challenging. Yates⁹ observes that ‘the dean is engaged in a dialectical dance between two power centers, the faculty and the president’. Wolverton and her colleagues note,

...deans run up against an inherent conflict in the system. On the one hand, professors form a community of self-regulated scholars. On the other, presidents seek to exert institutional control directed at social change. Deans become mediators in this conflict with no clear guidelines to govern their conduct.¹⁰

Richey points to the importance of this dynamic. ‘Your effectiveness as academic dean depends, I believe, on the success that you have in living

credibly betwixt and between faculty and administration.’¹¹ For these reasons, deanships may be ‘the most precarious positions on the seminary job chart’.¹²

That’s the downside. The upside is that the dean is positioned at the fulcrum of the institutional structure. More than anyone else, she or he is able to guard the faculty from bureaucratic entanglements and translate office-speak to the faculty and academic-speak to administrators.

Weak administrators make rules; strong administrators deal with issues. That is an overstatement, to be sure; every society needs rules, whether it is a homeowners’ association, a high-tech corporation, or a college campus. Since strong leaders are rare, however, regulatory policy tends to proliferate like rabbits. The knee-jerk response to every situation becomes, make a new rule. Without a strong hand on the rein, bureaucratic policy consumes everything and everyone in its path—including a faculty. The dean must be vigilant to assure that needed policies are in place but that the faculty’s attention is not distracted or its work thwarted by bureaucratic demands.

In addition to his or her role as faculty guardian, the dean also functions as translator. That the worlds of academic administrators and scholar-

9 Wilson Yates, ‘The art and politics of deaning’, *Theological Education*, 34: 1 (Autumn, 1997), p. 88.

10 Mimi Wolverton, Walter H. Gmelch, Joni Montez, and Charles T. Nies, *The Changing Nature of the Academic Deanship* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001).

11 Russell E. Richey, Russell E., ‘To a Candidate for Academic Leadership: A Letter’, *Theological Education*, 33 Supplement (Autumn, 1996), p. 39.

12 Elizabeth C. Nordbeck, ‘The once and future dean: Reflections on being a chief academic officer’, *Theological Education*, 33 Supplement (Autumn, 1996), p. 30.

teachers are intertwined masks the divergent systems operative in each. Many issues which develop in the school's institutional life stem from the gap between the faculty's and the administrators' perspectives. It falls to the dean, therefore, to interpret the concerns, commitments, and fundamental good will of each to the other.

The dean is continually playing the role of one involved in determining the flow of information. The dean provides information and interprets information as well as remaining silent, at times, regarding information that people seek...

In this process the dean becomes a vital gatekeeper for the flow of information about the faculty to the president and the flow of information about the president and board to the faculty. It needs to be judicious interpretation given with fairness and deliberation.¹³

By helping members of the faculty accept and respect the boundaries inherent in shared governance, by guarding the faculty from undue demands from the school's administrative staff, and by interpreting the concerns and commitments of each to the other, the dean creates an institutional environment in which the faculty is free to do its work. This is one of the greatest services a dean can render to a faculty and to the institution at large.

Task 4: Pastoring the Faculty

Finally, a dean is privileged to *extend*

pastoral care to members of the theological faculty. The culture of the western academy is not a natural medium for cultivating the qualities required for Christian ministry. The academy assumes and imposes an individualism which is very western but very non-Christian. Rather than each isolate doing his or her own work, the Bible (like most non-western societies) focuses the communal nature of human life. Christ's body is one and we are members one of another. It is the oneness of the church which testifies to Jesus as sent from the Father. The academy also assumes a competitive structure and promotes competition as motivation toward excellence. Rather than competition with one's neighbour, Christ identified loving collaboration—compassionate care, acts of kindness, and helpful deeds—as the mark of the Christian. In its most common expression, western schooling does not provide a natural context for fostering a communal and collaborative mindset.

The dean can mitigate these negative aspects of western schooling by creating an alternative culture within the faculty that fosters environments of grace and relationships of trust. Thrall and his colleagues¹⁴ (1999) have written helpfully on the nature of Christian leadership. Acting with integrity, building trust relationships with and among members of the faculty, and extending grace to colleagues and students—living and relating 'in

¹³ Yates, 'The art and politics of deaning', pp. 92-93.

¹⁴ Bill Thrall, Bruce McNicol, and Ken McElrath, *The Ascent of a Leader: How ordinary relationships develop extraordinary character and influence* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999).

the Name of Jesus¹⁵—are pastoral acts which nourish the spiritual life of a community.

Pastoral care also means ministering to faculty members in more direct and concrete ways. While ministerial and professorial professionalism, as well as the pressures of academic life, may inhibit close relationships among members of a faculty, a dean so inclined can touch the lives of those she or he serves. Birthdays, anniversaries, and special celebrations of faculty members and their families should find a place on the dean's calendar. The dean should be the first to know when illness, death, or crisis strikes a family within the faculty. A hospital or home visit which includes expressions of care, offers of help, an appropriate portion of scripture, and prayer will be deeply appreciated and long remembered. Such care is not a strategy toward some political end—any lack of integrity will be quickly recognized!—but a sacrifice offered first to the Lord and then to one's brother or sister.

Faculty life can be lonesome; highly competent professionals also experience times of personal need. Smith¹⁶ has written thoughtfully about the deanship as an inner journey, but the deanship also can be a spiritual journey with others. A dean who takes seriously the pastoral care of his or her fac-

ulty will release members of the faculty to care for one another and for their students.

Conclusion

It is common for members of a faculty to express condolences to a newly appointed dean, but I see the deanship as a spiritual vocation and an institutional trust. No member of the faculty has the potential to shape the theological school's present and future ministry as does a dean. Neither the president nor any other member of the administration has the opportunity to guide, protect, and pastor the faculty as does a dean. This, above all else, is the privilege and the work of the dean.

Hudnut-Beumler speaks well when he writes,

I would like to see other colleagues who conceived of the deanship as a means to fulfill their vocations as educators. Teaching is, after all, a privilege and so too is academic leadership. We all know that we shape minds in the classroom. What we need to remember is that with academic leadership we form the environment for that transformative educational moment. Whether good education happens or not is the product of what the teacher does and a panoply of other factors with which the dean is often much more closely involved than the professor.¹⁷

15 Henri J.M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian leadership* (New York: Crossroads, 1989).

16 Gordon T. Smith, 'Academic administration as an inner journey', *Theological Education*, 33 Supplement (Autumn, 1996), pp. 61-70.

17 James Hudnut-Beumler, 'A new dean meets a new day in theological education', *Theological Education*, 33 Supplement (Autumn, 1996), pp. 19-20.

Encouragement to Persevere: An Exposition of 1 Corinthians 15:58

H. H. Drake Williams, III

KEYWORDS: *Despair, salvation, eschatology, gospel, work, evangelism, mission*

THERE ARE MANY things that can discourage a Christian worker. Low financial support, struggling family members, and conflicts between team members have disheartened many. Others become dispirited by a seeming lack of effectiveness or few visible results. Then, sometimes personal crises such as emotional, health, or spiritual issues lead God's servants to give up.

The apostle Paul, the great missionary to the Gentiles, was one who experienced these pressures. He was short on his funding at times.¹ He had conflict with team members such as John Mark and Barnabas in Acts 15:37-40. He was driven out of cities, placed in prison, stoned and left for dead, shipwrecked, and faced other challenges

(cf. 2 Cor. 11:16-33).² Then, there were times where he writes of how he despaired of life (2 Cor. 1:8-11) and felt great anguish from his 'thorn in the flesh' (2 Cor. 12:1-10).³ Clearly, he was a person who faced pressures that would have caused most to quit.

At the end of his letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 15:58 which reads,

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.⁴

¹ 2 Cor. 11:8-9; Philp. 4:17-18.

² See also Acts 13:51; 14:19-20; 16:16-24; 27:39-44.

³ For further detail on Paul's distress in 2 Corinthians 1:8-11, see M. J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), pp. 164-182. For a detailed survey of the potential options for Paul's thorn in the flesh see M. E. Thrall, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians II* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), pp. 809-818.

⁴ All citations are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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This verse has been of great encouragement to Christians from the times of the church fathers.⁵ In our modern times, it has been adapted for singing in worship to encourage believers. A further exploration of this verse further magnifies how hopeful this verse actually is.

I Be characterized by steadfastness and immovability

The first part of 1 Corinthians 15:58 provides two characteristics that Paul would like the Corinthians to have—being steadfast and immovable. The verse provides us with two predicate adjectives *herdraios* and *ametakinētos*. As predicate adjectives they supply the qualities that Paul is encouraging in believers. It is worth considering the meaning of these two qualities for a moment. The word steadfast means: being unwavering, resolute, or unswerving. The word immovable also implies similar things: being firmly fixed, permanent, and resolute, almost in a stubborn way. Together, these provide the sense of ‘hold the line, don’t give in’.

In our day these are not the types of qualities that many encourage. Parents do not usually encourage children to be immovable, unwavering, inflexible, or stubborn. In general, children are encouraged to be just the opposite, namely, compliant and submissive. Teachers and coaches, likewise, do not

generally encourage these things either. Yet, this is what Paul encourages the Corinthians to be in what are some of his final commands in this letter.

What makes this text even more striking is that Paul commands the Corinthians to be steadfast and immovable! With the exception of the severe problems with the Galatians,⁶ the Corinthian congregation probably had the most problems of any church mentioned in the New Testament. These problems included the following: the desire to divide, fascination with secular wisdom, an incestuous relationship, an inability to discipline, and civil litigation within the church. Then, the Corinthians were confused about many things such as: strong and weak brothers, women’s roles, spiritual gifts, and the resurrection. To top it off, they were even resistant to Paul’s role amongst them.

Paul has taken fifteen chapters to address these problems and correct them, using some very strong wording (e.g., 1 Cor. 4:8-16; 5:1-13). To conclude by encouraging the Corinthians who have so many problems and challenges to be steadfast and immovable seems very out of place. One could make sense of encouraging the Philippians, a congregation that supported him in many ways, to be steadfast. It could also be sensible to encourage the Thessalonians who became faithful to the gospel after just a short period of

⁵ See G. Bray, *1-2 Corinthians* (Ancient Christian Commentary Series 7; Downers Grove: IVP, 1999), p. 184.

⁶ While the problems are less numerous, Galatians is the only letter where Paul skips the customary thanksgiving section and warns his hearer that they are leaving the gospel (Gal. 1:6-10).

time to be immovable. To encourage the Corinthians who had so many problems and so much confusion, to be steadfast and immovable, seems to contradict much of the letter. It seems that the Corinthians would be one of the last groups of Christians in the New Testament who ought to be encouraged in this way.

The immediate context of 1 Corinthians, however, comes to the rescue, helping to place Paul's command to be steadfast and immovable in proper perspective. Paul gives this command, following his explanation of the future. In 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 Paul writes,

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

As the passage continues, Paul pronounces that death will also be swallowed up in victory (1 Cor. 15:54-57). It is in the light of these certainties that Paul can thus encourage the Corinthians to be steadfast and immovable.

It is likely that a broader context for this verse is in mind, too, as commentators have noticed.⁷ From the begin-

ning of 1 Corinthians 15, Paul reminds the Corinthians of the gospel that he preached. In 1 Corinthians 15:1-2 he says,

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

The tone of these verses, also, encourages the Corinthians to remain steadfast and immovable. (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1-2). Thus, seen in proper context, these commandments to be steadfast and immovable do make sense. That is, the impression Paul gives in 1 Corinthians 15:58 read in context is that the proper steadfastness, the proper immovability, and yes, perhaps even the proper stubbornness and obstinacy is worth excelling in. Since this commandment is found following his explanation of the gospel, the death of Christ, and the resurrection of Christ and future believers, it implies that perseverance in the right matters will ultimately win out over even the greatest of problems.

The power of appropriate perseverance is amazing. Paul is not alone in noting its power. For example, Johan Wolfgang von Goethe also believed in its importance. Goethe was a poet, novelist, dramatist, scientist, theorist, painter, and for ten years minister of state for the duchy of Weimar. He was one of the key figures of German literature in the late 18th and 19th centuries for works such as the classical drama *Faust*. His ideas became a primary source of inspiration in music, drama, poetry, and philosophy. About

⁷ Cf. A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK/Carlisle: Eerdmanns/Paternoster, 2000), p. 1305; G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 808; D. Watson, 'Paul's Rhetorical Strategy in 1 Cor 15' in S. E. Porter and T. H. Olbricht (eds.), *Rhetoric and the New Testament* (JSNTSS 90; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), pp. 231-49.

perseverance Goethe has this to say,

There are but two roads that lead to an important goal and to the doing of great things: strength and perseverance. Strength is the lot of but a few privileged men; but austere perseverance, harsh and continuous, may be employed by the smallest of us and rarely fails of its purpose, for its silent power grows irresistibly greater with time.⁸

Goethe's ideas here seem very similar to Paul's—steadfastness and immovability in the right things indeed allow one to overcome.

Perseverance even in the midst of apparent failure can be very powerful. Thomas Alva Edison was an American inventor and businessman who greatly influenced life in the twentieth century. Indeed, he is considered one of the most prolific inventors in all of history, holding 1,097 US patents as well as patents in the UK, France, and Germany. His inventions include improvements upon printing telegraph apparatus, relay magnets, chemical telegraphy, phonographs, dynamo-magnetic electric machines, and the telephone.

Of course, he will most be remembered for the invention of the first commercially practical, electric light bulb. This was a device that he worked on for many years. In the midst of his work to produce a practical light bulb, Edison's attempts failed to come to fruition many times. Yet, despite the setbacks Thomas Edison had this to say, 'We haven't failed. We now know a thou-

sand things that won't work, so we're that much closer to finding what will.' His perseverance, immovability, and stubbornness in right things saw him through these difficulties. Indeed, he believed in steadfastness so much that he left us with this very noteworthy quote. 'Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration.' True genius comes from the characteristics of steadfastness and immovability.

Indeed, steadfastness and immovability in the right things is very worthwhile. If this is the case for inventions and brilliant literature, then how much more is it true for those serving in the ministry. With the certainty of Christ's death and resurrection as well as the certainty of the future resurrection, it is worth being characterized by steadfastness and immovability. Persevering in the right way and the right things does result in blessing (cf. 1 Tim. 4:16).⁹

II Be abounding in God's work

Following his encouragement to the Corinthians to be characterized by steadfastness and immovability, he then proceeds in our verse to encourage an activity—to be continually doing the Lord's work.

The aspect of frequency can be seen from the Greek text. Continuous activity in God's service is indicated by the present participle form of the verb

⁸ The quotations from Goethe and Edison are taken from M. Water (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Christian Quotations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).

⁹ Cf. 1 Timothy 4:16 which says, 'Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.'

perisseuō, the word for ‘abounding.’ Since this participle is found in the present tense, it indicates continuous activity. This frequent activity is furthered by Paul’s use of the adverb *pan-tote*,—‘always’. Together these nuances from the Greek text encourage the repeated activity of being involved in God’s work.

In other places of his writing, Paul also encourages Christians to be constantly involved in God’s work. For example he says,

Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to live and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more (I Thess. 4:1).

To the Colossians, Paul encourages frequency in doing God’s work—‘And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him’ (Col. 3:17). Then again, in Romans 14:8, Paul writes, ‘If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s.’ Thus, this encouragement to be abounding in God’s work is one that is found throughout Paul’s letters as an activity in which Christians are to busy themselves continually.

While Paul does not state it directly in our verse, there is blessing to be found in hard work. Throughout the ages, great men and women have known this. For example, the Greek comic dramatist Menander (342 BC–292 BC) wrote, ‘He who labors diligently need never despair; for all things are accomplished by diligence and labor.’ Many hundreds of years

later, Samuel Johnson, the English author, critic, and lexicographer said, ‘Few things are impossible to diligence and skill. Great works are performed not by strength, but perseverance.’ Even more recently, Colin Powell, former United States general and Secretary of State said, ‘There are no secrets to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work, and learning from failure.’

Paul probably would have noticed the benefits that emerge from diligence as a result of his Jewish background. As one well versed in the Old Testament Scriptures with a mind saturated with Jewish Scripture that influenced his writing consciously or unconsciously, he would have been familiar with texts that promoted diligence.¹⁰ For example, Proverbs 10:4 states, ‘A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.’ Proverbs 13:4 says something similar, ‘The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied.’ These are a few of numerous verses within the Proverbs that speak of the benefits to come to the one who is industrious (e.g., Prov. 6:9–11; 12:24; 21:5).

Of course, there is much work for the Lord in which Christians can be busy. Within the church there are many needs. When I served as a pastor, there

¹⁰ For other studies where Paul’s Jewish background influences his writing consciously or subconsciously in 1 Corinthians, see B. S. Rosner, *Paul, Scripture, and Ethics* (AGJU 22; Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 15–17; H. H. D. Williams, *The Wisdom of the Wise: the presence and function of Scripture within 1 Cor. 1:18–3:23* (AGJU 49; Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 21–34.

were always more visits to homebound and shut-in members of the church to make. There were always more events to attend for youth to encourage them. Visitors and sporadically attending members needed to be contacted. Then, more time needed to be invested to help parishioners understand the Bible. There always seemed as if there was more work to do than could be accomplished.

Outside of the church, there is work to be done as well, including the great task of world evangelization. The world's population is over 6 billion people, and over two-thirds are not professing Christians. Many have not even had the opportunity to hear of Jesus Christ as Saviour. There are still nearly 3,500 people groups that have few if any Christians amongst them. While every country has a Christian witness, there are ten countries without a visible congregation. Eighteen countries have a resident Christian population of less than 1%, and a further 22 countries have a resident Christian population of less than 5%.¹¹

Then, there is the need to positively influence social problems. Over 1 billion people, approximately 1 out of every 6 people in the world, live in poverty.¹² Approximately 852 million

people in the world are hungry.¹³ There are 200 million Christians, too, who are persecuted for the faith who need support as well.¹⁴ Other issues such as the mistreatment of women and children, lack of education, the epidemic of HIV/AIDS, as well as other social issues deserve Christian influence.

Indeed, the needs are plentiful but the labourers are few (cf. Matt. 9:37). There is much good work in which to abound in this hour. Certainly, the benefits of being diligent in this type of labour will be rewarded.

III Christian labour will be rewarded at the end of time

We come now to the final part of Paul's exhortation in 1 Corinthians 15:58. The first part contained two attitudes to have—steadfastness and immovability. The second part encouraged an action—'always abounding in the work of the Lord'. The third part of this verse encourages something for Christians to believe—'knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain'.

This belief provides a basis for the two attitudes and one action Paul wants the Corinthians to enjoy. Paul uses the Greek participle *eidotes* to introduce this matter of believing. It is most likely that Paul is using this participle causatively, providing a reason

¹¹ The statistics are from *Operation World*, a well-known resource for evangelism. P. Johnstone and J. Mandryk, *Operation World* (6th edition; Carlisle: Paternoster/WEC International, 2001), pp. 15-16.

¹² Statistics are taken from the organization World Bank and Netaid. See http://devdata.worldbank.org/wdi2005/Table2_5.html. See http://www.netaid.org/global_poverty/global-poverty.html.

¹³ Statistics are taken from the organization Bread for the World and Bread for the World Institute. <http://www.bread.org/learn/hunger-basics/hunger-facts-international.html>.

¹⁴ The statistic is from Lausanne and <http://www.lausanneworldpulse.com/worldreports/540>.

for the attitudes and the actions that he wants the Corinthians to have and to perform. Some versions, such as the New Revised Standard, translate this participle more causatively, saying, 'Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, *because* you know that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.'¹⁵

This belief that God will reward people at the end of time is an idea that has been found throughout the context of 1 Corinthians. For example, in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 Paul writes,

Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

In the following chapter, Paul writes again about the certainty that the future will bring reward and judgment for Christians. In 1 Corinthians 4:5 he writes,

Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will

receive his commendation from God.

This is a significant motivation for Paul in this letter as well as in other portions of his writing (cf. Rom. 2:1-10; 2 Thess. 1:5-12). It is this belief that provides the basis for steadfast and immovable attitudes as well as constant activity in the Lord's work.

At some points in history, Christians have especially valued this belief. Such an expectation was particularly influential on a group of Christians living in the nineteenth century called the Clapham Sect. This small group of Christians influenced the life of Victorian Britain immensely. Amongst its members were William Wilberforce who was devoted to the abolition of slavery and the reformation of morals in Britain.¹⁶ For forty-five years he struggled against this evil in British society, finally achieving the passage of the Abolition of Slavery Bill in 1833.¹⁷ His dogged determination and constant activity to abolish the slave trade can be traced to the influence of this group.

John Venn who was the Rector of the Clapham Sect, laid much stress in his sermons on moral accountability to God. His emphasis on moral account-

¹⁶ Other influential leaders in the Clapham Sect included: Edward James Elliot (Parliamentarian), Charles Grant (Chairman of the directors of the British East India Company), Hannah Moore (writer and philanthropist), and Lord Teignmouth (Governor-General of India).

¹⁷ For a presentation of his views on these see W. Wilberforce, *A Practical View of Christianity: Personal Faith as a call to Political Responsibility* (K. Belmonte, ed.; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996).

¹⁵ When Paul uses *eidotes* on other occasions, the ESV translates it causatively in places. Note how the ESV translates this participle causatively in 2 Cor. 1:7; 1 Thess. 1:4.

ability led R.C.K. Ensor, a journalist of his times, to write about Evangelical Christianity in nineteenth century Britain in the following way:

[A characteristic of Evangelicalism is]... its certainty about the existence of an after-life of rewards and punishments. If one asks how nineteenth-century English merchants earned the reputation of being the most honest in the world... the answer is: because hell and heaven seemed as certain to them as tomorrow's sunrise, and the Last Judgment as real as the week's balance-sheet.¹⁸

This viewpoint affected members of Clapham radically. Henry Thornton, a Member of Parliament, explained at one time the reason for his vote, 'I voted today so that if my Master had come again at that moment I might have been able to give an account of my stewardship.'¹⁹ William Wilberforce and other members of Clapham could have said the same thing. An awareness of the kingdom that will come at the end of time was a driving motivation for these influential Christians of the nineteenth century. It influenced them to be steadfast and immovable in the face of great opposition and constant in their work for the Lord.

IV Conclusion

The message from 1 Corinthians 15:58

is an encouraging one. Paul urges Christians then and now to have steadfast and immovable attitudes—stubborn for the Lord. He also encourages us to be busy for God, excelling in the great work that needs to be done in his name. Finally, he encourages Christians to remember the Lord who will reward us, for he will reward the faithfulness of Christians at the end of time.

In the fourth century A.D., an anonymous author that Erasmus later named Ambrosiaster lived at a time when it would be natural to be discouraged. He wrote following the apostasy of Emperor Julian, who fell away from the Christian faith and embraced a religion called Theurgy, a pagan religion concerned with magic and ritual. Naturally, the apostasy of a high official could lead others to do the same. In the face of this, Ambrosiaster could still write this concerning our verse, 1 Corinthians 15:58,

Those who persevere in a life of faith and good works have the assurance that they will be accepted by God and receive their reward and that they will not be led astray by wicked arguments.²⁰

In a time when many Christians can be discouraged, may the truths of 1 Corinthians 15:58 motivate us to serve the Lord with more persistent attitudes and more abundant service in the light of the certain future judgment and reward that will be found in Jesus Christ.

¹⁸ R. C. K. Ensor, *England 1870-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), pp. 137-138.

¹⁹ M. Hennell, *John Venn and the Clapham Sect* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1958), p. 207.

²⁰ Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on Paul's Epistles in Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (Academia Scientiarum Austriaca: Vienna, 1866), 81:187. Translation provided by G. Bray, *1-2 Corinthians*, p. 184.

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Book Reviews

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The Scripture Principle: Reclaiming the Full Authority of the Bible

Clark H. Pinnock with Barry L.
Callen

Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker
Academic, 2006 (2nd ed.)
ISBN 9780801031557
Pb, pp 288, Bibliog., Indices

Reviewed by Carlos R. Bovell, Burlington,
NJ, USA

Evangelicalism has been greatly helped by the appearance of a second edition of Clark Pinnock's *Scripture Principle*—a work that certainly bears reading again. The main contribution of the new edition is an appended essay, 'The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible: Thoughts since 1984', in which Pinnock recounts his journey from 'philosophical biblicism' to 'simple biblicism', confessing that '[b]ecause religion appeals to the need for security in life, it is easy [for an evangelical believer like Pinnock] to fall into foundationalism'. 'Both early and late in my personal journey', he explains, 'I have believed the Bible to be inerrant in all that it intentionally affirms. What changed in my view is the identification of exactly what the Bible affirms.' Affirming a 'progressiveness of revelation', Pinnock relates how he 'had come to recognize that Jesus and the apostles, while holding a high view of biblical inspiration and authority, used the text in more practical and flexible ways than inerrantists typically have allowed' and how he is 'now more open to a more inductive approach to the text that avoids the tendency to strained exegesis forced

by a presuppositional theory.' Pinnock is not the only one existentially moved by such considerations.

Thanks to, among other things, Pete Enns' *Inspiration and Incarnation* (Baker, 2005) there is renewed conversation among conservatives in the U.S. and elsewhere over whether dominical and apostolic hermeneutical practices ramify anything with regard to the inspiration and authority of the Bible. In *Inerrancy and the Spiritual Formation of Younger Evangelicals* (Wipf and Stock, 2007), I incorporate thoughts on these exegetical practices into a larger critical discussion regarding how evangelicals should understand and use the notion of a biblical canon. Regrettably, Pinnock leaves off in his chapter, 'The Biblical Witness' at precisely where he could provide readers seasoned pearls of wisdom as they wrestle with these topics.

Perhaps Pinnock has backed himself into a corner on account of his insistence on a *via media*. He muses: 'religious liberals need to explain why they take a lower view of the Old Testament than Jesus and the apostles' while conservatives need to 'explain how they handle the messianic qualification of the Old Testament'. Yet one wonders whether Pinnock fully appreciates just how contrary the liberal and conservative tendencies are. For his part, Pinnock urges that the way forward lies in following the Christological thrust of the NT—that is, of course, with two important exceptions: 'First rabbinic exegetical methods per se are not normative but are historically relative... Second, and most important, Jesus and the apostles enjoyed an authority and position in divine revelation... Their exegesis depended on a revelatory stance that was unique

to them.' At the same time, Pinnock claims that Paul's 'modest attitude allows us, his readers, to argue controversial matters with him and not feel guilty'.

Since what is controversial to Pinnock will not be to others, a host of questions are raised in the reviewer's mind: Can one argue with Paul over justification by faith and not feel guilty? Can evangelicals argue with the author of Genesis over a macroevolutionary account of the universe (including the Christian religion) or with Luke over Jesus' virgin birth and his ascension? There are several instances where a scriptural manner of reasoning (e.g., rabbinic exegesis, 'interpreted Bibles', and the like) is not operative today: How can evangelicals accept such scriptural conclusions with integrity? Pinnock invokes the Spirit when he addresses concerns as these, but the way evangelicals will respond in each case seems to depend (as I suggest in my book) heavily upon pragmatic considerations. One's ability to negotiate between conservative and liberal impulses, foundationalism or not, ultimately depends on one's God-given personality and other related psychological traits and its ability to interact with critical scholarship, a stunningly arbitrary determinant in a cultural milieu obsessed with religious and cultural pluralism.

In fact, Pinnock himself suggests as much when, in an unguarded moment, he wonders why he did not forswear evangelicalism for liberalism. His response is remarkably candid: 'Why not me? It might have been my temperament, maybe my ability to make changes without throwing out the baby with the bathwater.' He mentions, too, a liberal upbringing and a judgment from experience that liberal churches have little to offer. Yet Pinnock famously defected to free-will

theism from theological determinism and acknowledges a connection in the book between this shift in thinking and his change of mind regarding inerrancy, but a psychological determinant would point the other way. If the main consideration that kept Pinnock from becoming a liberal was personality, then there does not seem to be much room for personal decision. Either one inherits a personality that can stomach criticism and yet remain evangelical or one does not.

By reconceiving the Bible as the instrument of the Spirit, Pinnock no longer has to 'secure its place as the foundation stone of a dogmatic belief system' for 'now we have a better cornerstone, Jesus Christ'. Pinnock's *Scripture Principle* is to be applauded for reclaiming the absolute authority of *Christ* (vis-à-vis the Bible).

ERT (2008) 32:1, 84-86

The Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon and Moody David W. Bebbington

Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2005
ISBN 978-1-844740-70-0
284 pp., Index

Reviewed by Richard V. Pierard, Gordon
College, Wenham, MA. U.S.A.

A decade ago British Inter-Varsity Press commissioned the five-volume series 'A History of Evangelicalism: People, Movements and Ideas in the English-Speaking World' and recruited for the ambitious project several highly-competent, mid-career historians who consciously identify with evangelical Protestantism. This book, authored by David W. Bebbington of the University of Stirling, Scotland, is the third in the series and covers the period of the 1850s

to the beginning of the twentieth century. As readers of this journal well know, defining evangelicalism is extraordinarily difficult and oceans of ink have been spilled in the endeavour. The series editors chose as their operative definition Bebbington's four-fold characterization of the movement—*biblicism* (reliance on the Holy Scriptures as the final authority in all matters of doctrine and practice), *crucicentrism* (the centrality of the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary), *conversionism* (the necessity of turning from one's old way of life to a new life in Christ), and *activism* (concentrating on spreading the gospel through evangelism, missionary work, and social action). I have no problem with this formulation, which was popularized through his valuable study *Evangelicalism and Modern Britain* (1989), and I have adopted it largely as my own. Some will undoubtedly have concerns with the chronological limitations of the project—from the 1730s to the 1990s—but historians do have to start and end somewhere. This clearly written book is designed for the informed general reader. It effectively steers a middle course between the superficial inanity that is the hallmark of popular literature on the topic and the intensely detailed and carefully argued works aimed at scholars in the field. Bebbington draws upon an impressive array of primary sources—denominational and independent religious periodicals, published sermons, memoirs, and biographies produced in all the English-speaking countries—to tell the story of evangelicalism in its nineteenth-century heyday. He also demonstrates a prodigious command of the scholarly literature dealing with various aspects of evangelicalism. The book's prologue sketches out the political, economic, and social context, and in the first chapter Bebbington sets the topic in the definitional frame-

work mentioned above and briefly surveys the life and work of two landmark personalities who exemplify the evangelical movement of the era—Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-92) and Dwight Lyman Moody (1837-99).

The book then proceeds thematically. In the 'practice of faith' he shows how the defining characteristics provided the framework for evangelical spirituality, worship, and outreach, both in the Anglo-Saxon heartland and abroad. In an extremely important chapter, Bebbington shows that the ideas of the evangelicals were deeply moulded by the Enlightenment. They appealed to reason, emphasized the scientific technique of induction from the facts, drew heavily from common-sense philosophy, and based their apologetic on appeal to evidences in the natural world and the argument from design. They were convinced that they could obtain firm knowledge and that they could explain the work of Christ through the eternal principles of justice. The confidence that everybody could be saved was connected to the spirit of the Enlightenment, while postmillennial optimism was a direct outgrowth of it. Both the association of the spread of the faith with economic development (civilization must follow conversion) and the pragmatic temper of evangelical organization reflected the Enlightenment paradigm. His conclusions as well as those of Brian Stanley in *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment* (2001) are an important corrective to the wrong-heading view of the Enlightenment perpetuated by current evangelical 'worldview' thinking.

At the same time, romanticism gradually modified this intellectual inheritance, a transformation seen in literary tastes, aesthetic preferences, the allure of High Church liturgical practices, and sermonic grandiloquence. Romanticism also led to

doctrinal changes, the infiltration of evolutionary thinking, and the beginnings of theological liberalism. Even as evangelical theology tended to become broader in tone and content, a countertrend toward more conservative doctrinal convictions occurred. This was reflected in the emphasis on the faith principle in missions, premillennialism, and Keswick holiness. The evangelical impact on society was seen in an enhanced role for women, race relations and the rise of the black church, Christianizing of entertainment, and militant opposition to forces that they felt were harmful—Sabbath-breaking, Catholicism, sexual exploitation of women and children, and alcoholic beverages. Bebbington concludes that evangelicalism continued to display the vigour inherited from the earlier revivals, exercised considerable dominance over culture and social life, and possessed a self-conscious global unity, but the fissures over the social gospel and theological conservatism were beginning to show.

I have only one quarrel with this extraordinarily fine book, and I suspect that could be extended to the entire series. I believe it is too narrowly focused on the English-speaking world. The European dimension of evangelicalism, as reflected in the Evangelical Alliance (see Nicholas M. Railton, *No North Sea: The Anglo-German Evangelical Network in the Middle of the Nineteenth Century* [1999]) and indigenous movements on the continent like the *Reveil* in French-speaking Europe and the Netherlands and the influential *Erweckungsbewegung* in Germany, is simply overlooked. The massive account of the nineteenth-century holiness and evangelical movement in Germany by Stephan Holthaus *Heil—Heilung—Heiligung* (2005) reveals just how widespread it was there. Also indigenous evangelical movements in Asia and Africa need to be treated.

Evangelicalism must be seen as a global movement. Perhaps IVP might want to consider expanding its project in that direction.

ERT (2008) 32:1, 86-88

The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology

Kevin J. Vanhoozer

Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005.

ISBN: 978-0-664223-27-4

Pb., pp 488, Bibliog., Index

Reviewed by Terry A. Larm, Singapore.

The Drama of Doctrine is really two books in one: the first book is a development of the dramaturgical metaphor for theology; the second book is a proposal for a canonical-linguistic approach to theology. In a sense, this book is like a rope of two strands. Although Vanhoozer intertwines them, they are separable.

While the use of drama as a metaphor in the theological literature and beyond has been expanding recently, with the release of *The Drama of Doctrine* Vanhoozer has set the stage for a new approach for post-conservative evangelical theologians. The dramatic metaphor from which he works, and has been working for some time, helps us to understand that theology is mostly about *truthful living*, and not just about the truth of certain propositions. He re-imagines the hermeneutical circle as a dramaturgical circle: 'We understand in order to perform, and we perform in order to understand' (p. 248). Obviously, he uses unfamiliar metaphors: theology is dramaturgy, Scripture becomes the script, theological understanding is performance, the church is the company, and the pastor is the director (xii).

He is in agreement with Nicholas Wolterstorff's understanding of scripture (*Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks*, 1995), but manages to evade Wolterstorff's critique of performance by making a critical distinction between two kinds of performance interpretation. He places the work of Lindbeck and others in what he calls Performance II, while labelling his own approach Performance I. The difference is that, while Performance II is grounded in the community's actions, Performance I is 'embedded and enacted in use of language in the canon, not the present community' (p. 167). This distinction has helped me to overcome some of my initial scepticism of the dramaturgical approach. Even more persuasive than his dramaturgical vision is his compelling development of the canonical-linguistic approach and critique of the socio-linguistic approach of George Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine*, (1984). At a number of points throughout his book, Vanhoozer points out the fine—but decisive—line between himself and Lindbeck.

At one level, Vanhoozer appeals to J. L. Austin's and John Searle's 'speech-acts' while Lindbeck is on the side of Wittgenstein's 'language games', 'forms of life' and 'meaning is use'. Although, Vanhoozer is not afraid to use Wittgenstein, my feeling is that he understands speech-act theory much better than he understands Wittgenstein. However, it is Vanhoozer's insistence that the canon takes precedence over the community that really distinguishes his approach from postliberalism.

Another important distinction that Vanhoozer makes is between two types of postfoundationalism. He rejects the more traditional postfoundational epistemology of Quine's web of beliefs. This is because, in Vanhoozer's opinion, in a web 'no one

belief is more important than any other' (p. 293). Instead, he proposes a *map* as his preferred interpretive framework. A map, like the canon, has 'a certain textual fixidness' (p. 297). This means followers of 'the Way' can refer to the canonical maps for orientation and direction. While I remain sceptical of the cartographic metaphor, I agree with his search for a postfoundationalism that is canonically grounded. I would probably adopt Wittgenstein's tour-guide metaphor instead. The canon can act as the tour-guide showing us how to get around this new city in which we find ourselves.

Ultimately, Vanhoozer wants canonical-linguistic theology 'to achieve fittingness—cross-cultural modal similarity—between Scripture and the contemporary situation' (p. 260). In order to do this we need to do proper exegesis of the text (*scientia*), but we also need to recognize that theology involves 'living out the biblical text in new situations' (p. 310). He calls this, appropriately, *sapientia*. I find this the most appealing part of the book. We need to remain faithful to the canonical script, but not by simply repeating exactly what it says—which he calls *idem*-identity. Instead, he points out that we often have to say and do things differently in order to be faithful to the original text when we find ourselves in a new context—this is what he calls *ipse*-identity. Theology needs to help us develop a *sapiential* judgment that allows the church to live out its reading of Scripture in ever new social, cultural, and ethical situations.

With his proclivity for old Latin phrases and neologisms, his detailed discussions of dramaturgy, and his sophisticated theological analysis, not to mention over four hundred and fifty pages of text, *The Drama of Doctrine* is not a book for the faint of heart. I do, however, highly rec-

commend it for all serious students of theology. It is an excellent proposal for a canonical-linguistic approach to Christian theology. Only time will tell if *The Drama of Doctrine* will become the postconservative equivalent to *The Nature of Doctrine*, but I think it has a good chance.

ERT (2008) 32:1, 88-89

Interpreting The New Testament in Africa

Mary N. Getui, Tinyiko Maluleke
and Justin Ukpogong (Editors)

Nairobi, Acton 2001
ISBN 978-9916-888-02-0
Pp 311, Bibliog., index

*Reviewed by Wesonga Olando, Nairobi,
Kenya.*

This book is as a result of a conference of African hermeneutics and theology organized by Professor Ulrich Luz Bern of Switzerland when he served as president of *Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas* (SNTS) in 1997-98. The conference brought together first-rate African scholars who met at Hammanskraal, South Africa, and the book outlines and discusses the writers' thoughts on African biblical hermeneutics and the place of Africa in the New Testament. The writers battle with the question of how Africa fits in the New Testament. One of the writers, Professor Jesse Mugambi, sheds more light on African hermeneutics by explaining that God is seen as both immanent and transcendent when the Bible becomes accessible to African converts to Christianity. It becomes a complete text in their daily lives because they can identify themselves and resonate with the biblical rhythm of life, especially in the Old Testament and the synoptic gospels. This statement by Mugambi clarifies the difference between

culture and the context of the African. He refuses to accept the term contextualization and rather prefers to use the word encounters. This is because whatever is recorded in the gospels can be encountered in the African culture and setting. It becomes reality to an African when he or she comes face to face with their culture in the gospels.

The book introduces the reader to the history of biblical hermeneutics, thus helping in understanding the place of hermeneutics in relation to the African perspective. The writers go a step further to bring a picture of how Africa has a culturally conditioned Christian faith. Professor Kwame Bediako says that perennial areas of Christian theology remain relevant, though context may change over time. This continues to bring into the limelight what is referred to throughout the book as reconstruction of African theology. Reconstruction theology presupposes the movement from the contemporary context to the biblical text. It is an interaction between the text and context that proceeds from the contemporary experience of faith.

The book outlines at length how Africa is located in the New Testament by citing specific geographical locations. A story about Abraham migrating to Egypt is recorded. Simon of Cyrene, which is modern day Libya, who was compelled to carry the cross of Christ is mentioned with a label of being a true disciple. This brings a feel of Africa in the New Testament map. This book paints Africans as people who will always turn to the Bible to identify their own teachings. One of the writers, Nahashon Ndungu, gives a vivid example of the Akorino Church in Kenya, which he singles out among many others. African biblical scholars use many of the critical methods that constitute historical-criti-

cal, literary and reader response methods. This encourages the already existing queues of scholarly readers to engage in reading with ordinary readers.

Africans are an oral community. The book expands on this fact when one of the writers says that story-telling in the sermons is very important. This involves retelling the story by putting into your own words a story you read or heard. This book points out that story telling is important in interpreting the Bible in African sermons. The sermon will be appealing if the linkage of ideas is logical, showing temporal sequence and refers to non-verbal ritualized action. All this should be able to touch the congregation powerfully.

The book discusses development of African Christianity, showing how it has been owned by Africans. This makes clear that the availability of the Bible to the African peoples was crucial to this development. African theology has taken shape in various forms. The book explains this in terms of a two-tier division of African Christian theology. For a keen reader the divisions are Inculturation theologies, Shift of gravity theologies, Translation theologies, Reconstruction theologies, Women theologies, Reading with theologies, Independent church theologies, South African black theologies and Faith gospel theology.

The writers also present the challenges of hermeneutics in Africa. The main issues are that Christianity is young and it is struggling for recognition. This situation makes African an easy prey for any new theology or principle of hermeneutics.

The book deals with a very important subject that affects the African life everyday. There is much hunger in the continent for spiritual nourishment. This helps to focus the attention of the readers on the question: Is Africa in the Bible? The

writers who assembled at Hammaskraal, South Africa have tried to give some guidance on contemporary problems. For example, there is a solution to the debt problem in Africa when the year of jubilee is mentioned, bringing the hope that some of Africa's debt can be cancelled. The place of a woman in Africa in relation to the scriptures is raised, which is good for a continent where women have been marginalized. However, the writers should not battle with how Africa fits in the Bible or the Bible fits in Africa, but rather how Jesus fits in an African heart. This can help an African know where he or she fits in the Bible.

ERT (2008) 32:1, 89-91

Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia

Edited by Allan Anderson and Edmond Tang

Regnum Studies in Mission;
Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies
Series 3

Oxford: Regnum Books
International, 2005; Baguio City,
Philippines: APTS Press, 2005.

ISBN: 978-1-870345-43-9
Pb, xiv + 596 pp., Bibliog.

Reviewed by George W. Harper, Osijek, Croatia.

According to Peter Brierley (*Future Church: A Global Analysis of the Christian Community to the Year 2010* [1998], pp. 37-38), the church is growing faster in Asia than anywhere else on earth. According to David Barrett, ('The Twentieth Century Pentecostal/Charismatic Renewal in the Holy Spirit, with Its Goal of World Evangelization', *International Bulletin of Missionary*

Research 12:3 [July 1988], p. 122), roughly eighty percent of Christians in East Asia, one of the focal points of that growth, are Pentecostals or Charismatics. Taken together, these observations make *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*, edited by Allan Anderson and Edmond Tang, especially timely. This volume brings together twenty-five papers, some thematic and others with a regional focus, most of which were presented at a conference on Asian Pentecostalism convened in September of 2001 by the Graduate Institute for Theology and Religion of the University of Birmingham.

Though not all of the papers point in the same direction, several of the strongest are concerned to 'de-centre' our understanding of Pentecostalism. This de-centring has two dimensions, historical and theological, the one addressing Pentecostal origins and the other dealing with watershed Pentecostal principles.

In regard to the former, Hwa Yung rejects the traditional presentation of Pentecostal and Charismatic renewal's spread in terms of 'three waves of revival flowing out of America' (p. 45), with the Azusa Street Revival that began in 1906 occupying a privileged position. Instead, he insists that 'indigenous Christianity in Asia... [has] invariably borne the marks of Pentecostalism' (p. 49) and that 'post-Azusa Street happenings throughout Asia... owe little or nothing to western Pentecostalism' (p. 45). Allan Anderson concurs, even echoing Hwa's somewhat hyperbolic language with his claim that description of Azusa Street as 'the "Jerusalem" from which the "full gospel" reaches out to the nations of earth... smacks of cultural imperialism' (p. 153).

In regard to the latter dimension, that of theological definition, Hwa contests

Western Pentecostals' claim that the movement's defining characteristic is acceptance of the doctrine of tongues-speaking as initial evidence of Holy Spirit baptism. He notes that in the Asian Pentecostal community the importance of tongues is often minimized while that of miraculous healing is emphasized. Again, Anderson, Wonsuk Ma, and several other contributors take much the same position. Who then is a Pentecostal? Hwa (p. 41), Ma (p. 74), Anderson (p. 153), and Michael Bergunder (pp. 188-191) offer broader definitions, focusing on behaviour rather than belief, though Simon Chan (pp. 577-580) raises serious questions about these alternatives.

Some of the regional studies are quite good. Among the best are articles on Chinese Pentecostalism by Gotthard Oblau and Deng Zhaoming. Oblau describes contemporary Christianity in that country as generically Pentecostal, at least in the broader sense of the term. For example, he notes that 'in rural areas generally at least half of all conversions are motivated by healing experiences', and '[i]n many local places, church people claim a ratio as high as 90%' (pp. 418-419).

Deng offers fine studies of two indigenous Chinese Pentecostal denominations, the True Jesus Church and the Jesus Family. Like Oblau, he sees 'faith healing [as] the most dominant [sic] factor in the spread of Protestant Christianity in China today' (p. 437). As he makes clear, it has certainly been a factor in the spread of these two groups. Though each of them has its own unique characteristics, they share certain attributes as well: both are authoritarian, primitivist, and (therefore?) exclusivist. I was surprised, though, that he says nothing about the True Jesus Church's commitment to Oneness Pentecostalism.

Unfortunately, several of the regional studies are badly argued, poorly written, or both. The worst of these are the three articles dealing with aspects of Korean Pentecostalism, by Lee Young-Hoon, Bae Hyeon Sung, and Jeong Chong Hee. Lee, an associate pastor of David Yonggi Cho's Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, gives a triumphalistic account of the rise of Cho and Yoido to national and global prominence without once mentioning the prosperity teachings that have made them controversial.

Bae, an administrator of Hansei University's graduate theological program, writes almost sycophantically of Cho, Hansei's founder and currently its chancellor. Perhaps attempting to establish his academic credentials, he uses the phrase 'sitz im leben' nineteen times in just nineteen pages, yet he destroys his credibility as an exegete by citing 3 John 2 (quoted in the King James Version, of course) as 'the biblical foundation of the Threefold Blessing' (p. 340), Cho's teaching on prosperity.

One of the glaring weaknesses of this volume is that aside from this single reference, the prosperity gospel is the 'elephant in the room' whose presence passes largely without comment. Other weaknesses are the shoddy editing of several of the articles and the lack of an index. Nevertheless, this is an important book. It should be widely read, and its arguments must be taken seriously by any scholar who hopes to come to terms with the nature of contemporary Asian Christianity.

ERT (2008) 32:1, 91-93

1 and 2 Thessalonians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary

Ben Witherington III

Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 2006

ISBN 978-0-8028-2836-1

Pb xxxi + 286 pp., Bibliog., Indices

Reviewed by David R. Denton, Brisbane, Australia

Withington has added another to his list of socio-rhetorical commentaries. With a couple of others in the pipeline he is not far from completing commentaries on every book of the NT. He is a prolific writer, with thirty or so books, including NT history, various biblical theological ones on Jesus and Paul, not to mention his contributions to the current Jesus debate.

Following a detailed bibliography, this work contains 44 pages of introduction, most of which is devoted to the rhetorical situation of the Thessalonian correspondence and the social situation of the church in Thessalonike (*sic*). Paul is author of both epistles, which were written between A.D. 51 and 53, the second epistle shortly after the first.

Although the commentary is verse by verse, the flow of the argument is more striking than prominent verse divisions. It can be read through very freely. Interspersed with the exegetical remarks are two features: 'Bridging the Horizons' and 'A Closer Look.' The former, coming at the end of major divisions, attempts to bridge the gap between 1st and 21st centuries. It deals with such topics as Paul's pastoral approach, prophecy in today's church, and Paul's prayers. 'A Closer Look', which is marked off from the exposition, considers issues like election and perseverance, the fate of the dead, the

parousia, apocalyptic, and letter writing, all of which are thought to warrant further investigation in a more detailed study.

There is no Greek text, but the author's own translation begins each section. This is very literal, resulting in unnatural English at times. Significant Greek expressions (transliterated) are often explained, sometimes by way of clarifying the author's translation, while the whole study is replete with evidence from Greek literature to demonstrate the meaning of particular words or phrases. The Greco-Roman background is effectively illuminated by judicious quotations from Greek and Latin authors.

The footnotes are full of cross references to previous commentators, on whom there is often considerable dependence, especially Malherbe and Wanamaker, and, to a lesser extent, Marshall and Rigaux. The earlier Greek-based works of Frame and Milligan are never mentioned. Surprisingly large use is made of Lightfoot's incomplete *Notes*, particularly in the area of rhetoric, while apt comments are occasionally drawn from Chrysostom's *Homilies*.

In accordance with the sub-title, special interest is paid to rhetorical aspects, Quintilian and Aristotle being the major sources for Witherington's understanding of classical rhetoric. 1 Thessalonians is considered an example of epideictic rhetoric, whereas the later epistle is an example of deliberative rhetoric. Twenty pages are devoted to an explanation and defence of this understanding (rather than an epistolary approach).

Witherington's outline of 1 Thessalonians is in line with his rhetorical approach. The initial greeting is followed by the exordium (1:2,3), narratio (1:4-3:10), transitus (3:11-13), exhortatio (4:1-5:15), peroratio (5:16-21), closing prayer, greet-

ings and benediction (5:23-8). 2 Thessalonians is structured rhetorically: prescript (1:1,2), exordium (1:3-10), propositio (1:11,12), refutatio (2:1-12), thanksgiving (2:13-15), transitus (2:16,17), final request (3:1-5), probatio (3:6-12), peroratio (3:13-15), and prayer, autograph, benediction (3:16-18).

Of interest is his perception on some debated issues in Thessalonians. In 1 Thess. 4:4 'vessel' is the man's wife, not his own body. 'Holy ones' are angels in 3:13, but saints in 2 Thess. 1:10. In the second epistle 1:9 signifies eternal destruction or separation from God, not annihilation. The temple in 2:4 is the temple in Jerusalem, not the church. The man of lawlessness (2:3,8) is a rival saviour figure, a future pagan ruler, empowered by Satan. The restrainer (2:7) is probably the archangel Michael (against the background of Dan 11,12). The 'idle' are not awaiting the parousia but are those in a client-patron relationship (3:6-12).

I wonder how much this rhetorical approach assists us today to grasp better the message of these two epistles. Much as I appreciate and have benefited from Witherington's writings, including this book, I am not at all sure that this emphasis enhances our understanding more than commentaries such as those of Best, Bruce, Marshall, Morris, which make no use of a rhetorical analysis. I find myself more in agreement with the hesitation about Paul's use of rhetoric as expressed, for example, by Murray Harris (*Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 109f.). As Witherington acknowledges, some scholars have opted for deliberative rhetoric in 1 Thessalonians (not epideictic like him). This illustrates the lack of unanimity, objectivity, and certainty involved in such an enterprise.

In conclusion, it is a very helpful commentary. It contains an adequately

detailed study of the Greek, and incorporates much helpful extra-biblical material and many literary parallels for consideration. The exegetical comments are clear and thought-provoking, while the historical and social circumstances and the classical references are enlightening. Pastors and students will find it readily comprehensible, and substantial without being exhaustive.

ERT (2008) 32:1, 93-95

A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew

Craig S. Keener

Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1999

ISBN 0-8028-3821-9

Hb xxi + 1040 pp. Bibliog., Indexes

The Gospel of John: A Commentary

Craig S. Keener

Peabody, MA: Hendrickson

Publishers, 2003

ISBN 1-56563-378-4

2 volumes Hb xlvi + 1636 pp.,

Bibliog., Indexes

*Reviewed by David R Denton, Brisbane
Australia*

The author of these two commentaries is Professor of New Testament at Eastern (now Palmer) Seminary. He did his doctoral studies at Duke University under D. Moody Smith, a noted Johannine scholar, on the function of Johannine pneumatology in the context of Late First-Century Judaism. He wrote an earlier, briefer commentary on Matthew for The IVP Commentary series.

On the first page of the Matthew commentary, Keener states that he 'focuses especially on two aspects of interpretation' analysis of the social-historical con-

texts of Matthew and his traditions on one hand, and pericope-by-pericope suggestions concerning the nature of Matthew's exhortations to his Christian audience on the other'. It is essential to grasp this emphasis, with its limitations, in order to appreciate the commentary, and to assess it on the author's terms. He seeks to illuminate the text and the general milieu of the eastern Mediterranean in the first century by drawing on a wide range of ancient sources, including much non-canonical literature.

The commentary contains no detailed outline of the Gospel. There is no biblical text and no reference to Greek. Seventy pages of introduction are followed by 650 pages of commentary and 310 pages of bibliography and indexes. A number of excursuses dot the commentary, frequently presenting extra-biblical material. From the perspective of genre the Gospel is classified as 'ancient biography'. It was written after A.D.70, and contains a significant deposit of Matthean tradition with some later editing. Although, according to Keener, one cannot locate Matthew's community with certainty, it is a Jewish-Christian community engaged in the Gentile mission, and in polemic with local synagogue communities.

In light of the stated approach by means of pericopes the commentary does not contain detailed exegesis. Some verses are not covered, and studies of key words are not to be found. Keener's general approach can be illustrated from 13:1-23. After discussing 'what is a parable?' he expounds the passage under the sub-divisions 'First, Jesus used commonplace images to illustrate kingdom principles (13:3-9),' 'second, Jesus reveals special truth to his disciples through parables (13:10-17),' 'third, the only conversions that count in the kingdom are those confirmed by a life of discipleship (13:18-

23). These are in bold face, thus revealing at a glance his outline. Each pericope receives about three pages of commentary. Such an approach readily provides ideas for sermons. Scholars' views are presented irenically, and alternative positions are set out clearly and weighed up carefully (for example, five possible interpretations of the significance of the temple incident in 21:12-17). All in all, I believe Keener fulfills his aims.

Although the commentary on John was not published until 2003 the author states that the manuscript was submitted for publication in 1997; some material was added subsequently. This commentary is massive. There are 330 pages of introduction, 400 pages of bibliography and indexes, leaving 900 pages of commentary. Even so, often half a page is taken up with footnotes. The index of literature (biblical and other ancient sources) covers 190 pages whereas subjects takes only four and a half pages, and there is no index of Greek words. This gives an idea of the emphasis of the book.

In what ways is it different in approach from the commentary on Matthew? First, we are struck by the very long and detailed outline of John, which covers 14 pages (pp. xi-xxiv). The author himself indicates that this commentary is 'not a meditative tool', unlike his work on Matthew. This is a more scholarly commentary. It is more detailed. There is an occasional Greek word or phrase, along with an explanation of its significance.

Keener chose to concentrate on the area where he thought he could make the greatest contribution, viz, an exposition of the Gospel in light of its social-historical context. This is understood as 'the eastern Mediterranean cultural, social, political, religious, and ancient literary contexts in which the Gospel would have

originally been read'. Thus Keener's commentary is complementary to other literary approaches currently in vogue. He claims to pay less attention to documentation of secondary modern Johannine scholarship, but he certainly has not ignored other scholars or literature on John, as the footnotes will attest. Minimal use is made of lexicons, *TDNT*, and the like, and there is no focus on the history of interpretation or text-critical questions.

The author's erudition and vast knowledge of the era and region is even more obvious in this commentary. Evidence for this is the mass of references to extra-biblical, ancient literature, especially in the footnotes. These are drawn from primary and secondary sources, and illuminate the social and cultural background of the Gospel.

The introduction discusses genre and historical considerations, the Gospel's discourses, authorship, social contexts, a Jewish context, revelatory motifs (knowledge, visions, signs) and theology. Keener concludes that the Gospel fits the general category of biography, but a different kind from that of the Synoptics. Its author, the apostle John, uses historical tradition but presents his Gospel in a distinctive way. It preserves genuine historical reminiscences of Jesus and an accurate picture of events and his teaching. The primary religious context is early Jewish Christianity. John confirms his community's continuity with its Jewish heritage while focusing on Christ as of first priority.

As he expounds each portion of the Gospel Keener regularly uses clear, numbered headings. This draws attention to the main points, so that the reader is not lost in a host of detail. I found this pleasing to the eye and helpful in alerting me to his major emphases.

On the whole he proceeds through the Gospel passage by passage. In vol. 2,

however, he more frequently intersperses explanation of the text with background information and other comments. For example, his consideration of 15:1-7 includes discussion of the background of the imagery, an understanding of a vine-dresser's role, and the meaning of 'abiding' as well as an exposition of the passage. 15:12-17 is headed 'The Love of Friends'. This is expounded under six sub-headings about aspects of friendship, sometimes as a heading for a verse under discussion, sometimes covering aspects of friendship in the ancient world. Not unreasonably the longest chapters are those on John 1 (160 pages, including a 30 page introduction), the Passion and

the resurrection. By contrast, Jesus' prayer in ch. 17 takes only 14 pages.

This commentary is a vast source from which one can mine. However, due to the abundance of background information and footnotes there is the risk of missing the wood for the trees. The reader will have to sift through it all, discarding what is considered irrelevant to an understanding of the biblical text. From an exegetical point of view I found these volumes wanting by comparison with several other commentaries on John. However, it must be said that these are beautifully presented books. They are accompanied by recommendations on the covers by seven top scholars.

Jonathan R Wilson: *Why church matters: worship, ministry and mission in practice* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006); ISBN 978-1-58743-037-4 Pb pp 158 indices

The author, who teaches theology at Carey Theological College, Vancouver, focuses his discussion of the topic in terms of the concept of 'practice', which he draws from the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, and ultimately, Aristotle. Although not always clear, it revolves around the idea that the church has a certain intrinsic purpose or 'telos' given to it by God in its creation. The key characteristic of the church is 'its participation in (the) work of God', through which it witnesses to God's grace. This means that all its life, structures and activity need to conform to, and be an outworking of, that telos for it to have integrity.

Four of the ten chapters are devoted to the way worship can actualize this 'practice'. But the ideas and values of the 'practising church' are seen more readily in the last three chapters on the sacraments (including a stimulating section on footwashing), the marks of the church and, interestingly, suffering. The chapter on evangelism and social action also powerfully illustrates these concepts. In these cases it is clear that the idea of the telos-defined nature of the church is capable of overcoming problems which have typically plagued these topics, both in systematic theology and in practical church life.

This book is wide-ranging and suggestive, and should be particularly helpful for its target audience, the western context where there are serious questions about the church, its life and witness and its relation to culture. However, its insights are applicable anywhere, even if the concept of 'practice' is not quite as useful as anticipated (it is perhaps more easily understood in terms of the 'Kingdom of God'). The author addresses the perception that his work may be considered to be excessively focused on the inner life of the church, making a good case to show that it is necessary to begin at the centre if the church's witness to and participation in God's grace and his kingdom are integral and foundational to its being.

Michael Nazir-Ali: *Conviction and Conflict: Islam, Christianity and World Order* (London: Continuum, 2006); ISBN 978-0-8264-8615-8; Pb., pp 186, ind.

In this book, Dr Michael Nazir-Ali, who holds Pakistani and British citizenship, presents his Scott Holland Lectures (delivered in 2005 at Oxford) and provides a wide-ranging discussion of some of the key factors involved in Christian, Muslim (and Jewish) attitudes towards vital national and global issues affecting the world today. The author, who is the first non-white diocesan Bishop in the Church of England, makes good use of his personal experience, learning and earlier writings in giving insight (increasingly from a Christian standpoint as the book progresses) on such important topics as religious dialogue; ethnic, religious and national conflict; peace-making; democracy; and terrorism and poverty. The background, origin and growth of the major world faiths and their basic beliefs are examined to clarify their own internal dynamics, to understand relationships between them and to explain their impact on their own societies and the world. More importantly, the author proposes lines of thought, policies and practical measures to promote harmony and mutual respect. The penultimate chapter in particular is quite explicit in offering advice on political action to resolve endemic problems such as those plaguing the Middle East. Based on authoritative sources (with plenty of leads for further study) the material is readily accessible to the non-specialist (chapter 4 excepted). As such this book is a worthwhile guide for any Christian who is grappling with contemporary developments in the world from a religious perspective.

Richard, Howard and John Morgan (comp. and eds.) *In the Shadow of Grace: The life and Meditations of G. Campbell Morgan* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007) ISBN 978-0-8010-6817-1 Hb, pp 144

Three grandsons of G. Campbell Morgan have used excerpts from sermons of this famous preacher to illustrate key aspects of his life, pastoral insights and spirituality. Well known for two significant ministries at London's Westminster Chapel (where he was succeeded by Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones), Bible schools in Britain, and a wide itinerant Bible teaching ministry in North America, Morgan was a household name for many during the first part of the last century. But it is the sermons dealing with personal matters such as sickness, depression, advancing age, and the deaths of family members and colleagues that feature most prominently in this book. Each of the eight chapters begins with a short introduction covering some aspects of Morgan's life, followed by carefully selected parts of sermons dealing directly or indirectly with the topic. Other important matters illustrated by the sermons are struggles in pastoral ministry, and national concerns such as world wars and the sinking of the *Titanic*.

All three grandsons are actively involved in their own ministries, Richard in the field of aging and spirituality, Howard as chairman of Chicago Theological Seminary which holds the collection of Morgan's sermons and other works, and John as a teacher of ethics and philosophy. They have succeeded in producing a tightly integrated and smooth flowing presentation which not only opens a window into the life of their grandfather but also offers rich insights for Christians living in today's world, thus making it a worthy tribute to their renowned ancestor.

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

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