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EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY VOLUME 40, NO 2, April 2016

# Evangelical Review of Theology

A Global Forum



Volume 40 No. 2 April 2016



0144-8153(201604)40:2;1-F

## ABSTRACTS/INDEXING

This journal is abstracted in Religious and Theological Abstracts, 121 South College Street (P.O. Box 215), Myerstown, PA 17067, USA, and in the Christian Periodical Index, P.O. Box 4, Cedarville, OH 45314, USA.

It is also indexed in the ATLA Religion Database, published by the American Theological Library Association, 300 S. Wacker Dr., Suite 2100, Chicago, IL 60606 USA, E-mail: atla@atla.com, Web: www.atla.com/

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# Evangelical Review of Theology

A Global Forum

GENERAL EDITOR: THOMAS SCHIRRMACHER

Volume 40 · Number 2 · April 2016

Published by



for  
WORLD EVANGELICAL  
ALLIANCE  
Theological Commission

ISSN: 0144-8153  
Volume 40 No. 2 April 2016

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Dr Thomas Schirmacher, Friedrichstrasse 38, 53111 Bonn, Germany.

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Typeset by Toucan Design, 25 Southernhay East, Exeter EX1 1NS  
and Printed and bound in Great Britain for Paternoster Periodicals  
by AlphaGraphics, 8-9 Vanguard Court, Preston Farm, Stockton-on-Tees, TS18 3TR

# Editorial: Renewal Theology

This is a special issue of *Evangelical Review of Theology* featuring a panel discussion of a new systematic theology for beginning students. It is by the prolific author, Amos Yong (Fuller Theological Seminary), whose work has appeared in this journal before, both in the form of articles by him and reviews of his books. This book is titled, *Renewing Christian Theology: Systematics for a Global Christianity*, a paperback (477 pages) published by Baylor University Press in 2014. Unusually for a book of this type, it includes 56 colour images which form an essential part of the presentation; there are other interesting features of the book brought out by the panel, not least of which is the way it starts its theological vision with eschatology!

Our feature consists of a group of papers which arise from a symposium held at Lee University in Cleveland TN in November 2015. They are introduced by Christopher A. Stephenson who sets the scene for the book and the comments. Then follow four reviews, which are rounded off by a response from Yong himself who reflects on some of the points raised by the articles, helping to explain his vision of a renewal theology. A review of another of Yong's recent books follows the panel presentation in our regular review section.

The articles which lead this issue cover some different topics. The first is by Jim Harries (Kenya) who returns to our pages discussing secularism in Africa and its impact on Christian mission and witness. Beginning with the proposal that secularist interventions

presuppose certain moral standards to be extant and their rationality to be convincing and superior, he argues that the valuation of all people as fundamentally equal that is necessary for aid distribution that does not result in corruption, is peculiarly Christian. He concludes that because rationality is a product of Christian faith, evangelism and discipleship can build sustainable development.

Then we welcome Keith Ferdinando with an article which discusses a pastoral approach to illness, also in an African context, focusing on understanding suffering in biblical terms. In particular, he sets out four 'transforming perspectives' about the cause of disease which helps our understanding of illness theologically. He concludes by showing how these principles, which are applicable in any situation, can be useful in handling the situation of HIV/AIDS. As he says, 'underlying it all there must be an explicit recognition . . . of the unlimited and transforming grace of God as it is displayed on the cross. The violation of God's law will may often be the cause of "evil and AIDS", but it is his grace in Christ that provides the ultimate and uniquely complete response, as it does for all human sin and pain.'

Then we turn to a classic article by Ian S. Kemp reprinted from our issue of April 1982 (Vol 6:1); this is a helpful study of Matthew 16:17-19 which reminds us of some of the key characteristics of the church, important still three decades after it first appeared.

**Thomas Schirmacher, General Editor**  
**David Parker, Executive Editor**

# Does Faith in Secularism Undermine Mission and Development in Africa?

Jim Harries

'Secularisms differ from one another, particularly those that arose ... out of ... other religious traditions'.<sup>1</sup>

## I Introduction

This re-evaluation of the practice of aid to the majority world poor points to differences in basic understandings of values and morals as the cause of frequent corruption and 'misappropriation' of funds. Contrary to a widespread apparent assumption by secularists, this article points out that much of the majority world does not hold it as a given that all people are born of essentially equal value. To the contrary, some people are considered inherently much more valuable than others. Those

people whose value is demonstrated to them through the prosperity they acquire through receiving attention from gods or spirits do not necessarily agree that they are obliged to redistribute what they get or what they possess to those who are less well off.

Contrary to some secularists' understandings, even the perception of a clear distinction between what is material or physical and that which is spiritual is largely peculiar to certain western Christian parts of the world. Without such a distinction, discernment of 'purely physical' processes and economic development that depends on science cannot be indigenously instigated. Secularism is itself considered, by some, to be a version of Christianity.

Equitable sharing of the benefits of socio-economic development requires

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, 'A Suspension of (Dis)Belief: the secular religious binary and the study of international relations', 166-184 in Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan Van Antwerpen (eds.), *Rethinking Secularism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 181.

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**Jim Harries** (PhD, University of Birmingham, UK), is a missionary to East Africa, Chairman of the AVM (Alliance for Vulnerable Mission) and Professor of Religion (global university). Dr Harries ministers in Bible and theological teaching in western Kenya and beyond with a focus on indigenous churches using East African languages Swahili and Dholuo. He has published four books and various missiologically related articles, and has presented lectures and seminars at numerous conferences, seminaries and universities in the USA, UK and Germany. His last article in this journal was *Sin v. Taboo Compatibility in Africa and the West* (ERT (2015) 39:2, 157-169).

people to be enabled and empowered. Empowering them is different from making them dependent on foreign charity. Because rationality is a product of a certain type of faith, amongst other reasons, Christian evangelism in hand with discipleship is a more effective initiations of long-term sustainable socio-economic development than are many alternative secular efforts.

## II Orientation to the Poor and Disadvantaged is neither Universal nor 'Natural'

Globally there are many types of and definitions for 'secularism'.<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise qualified, reference to secularism in this article should be understood as being the kind of secularism supposed by Taylor that sees 'belief in the transcendent as a kind of "optional extra"', and that incorporates the belief that social explanations 'are all this worldly'.<sup>3</sup>

Moral naturalism must be one of the bastions of secular thought. Those who like to deny the role of faith in God in human existence must believe that morals for good living arise from other than God. The same people are born into communities that already have

morals. They imbibe those morals from those who nurture them and those around them. Unless or until they come across morals that are different, they assume that what they have being 'natural', must be universal.

One presumption of western morals regards the basic equality of human beings. Ultimately westerners want to believe that all people are equal. They therefore set out to save, where possible, the lives of as many people as they can, regardless of their race or geographical location. This thinking underlies a lot of the aid that goes from western countries to different parts of the world. I want to ask this question: Is such an orientation towards human equality and saving all lives if at all possible as 'natural' and universal as some westerners might hold it to be?

Mangalwadi wants to deny the naturalism of western morals. His hefty tome tells the West: look, you are who you are because of the influence of the Bible on generations of your ancestors.<sup>4</sup> Mangalwadi illustrates this point with a story that tells of a situation in India, Mangalwadi's original homeland. In this (true) story a family had apparently decided that because they could not afford to keep their daughter, they would allow her to die. Mangalwadi, having been raised in the West, was ignorant of this situation. He knew that lives of people must be saved at all costs. On finding the family's emaciated sick baby girl, having resources at hand, he rushed her to hospital, thinking he was acting on behalf of the

2 Rajeev Bhargava, 'Rehabilitating Secularism', 92-113 in: Craig Calhoun, and Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, (eds.) *Rethinking Secularism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 105.

3 Charles Taylor, 'Western Secularity', 31-53 in Craig Calhoun, and Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (eds.), *Rethinking Secularism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 50; Calhoun, Juergensmeyer, VanAntwerpen, 'Introduction', 3-30 in Calhoun et al, *Rethinking Secularism*, 10.

4 Vishal Mangalwadi, *The Book that made your World: how the bible created the soul of western civilisation* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2011), xxi.

family. He had to overcome considerable resistance to his charitable act. The community did not support him, as they had already decided that their daughter needed to die. Mangalwadi took the girl to hospital and then returned her to her parents again fit and well. He was shocked a few months later to find her yet again in an emaciated state.<sup>5</sup>

I could tell similar stories about baby boys in Africa. Sometimes—and apparently increasingly so in modern times—girls get pregnant as a result of casual relationships. Should the baby be a girl, that may not be a major issue. This is for at least two reasons: First, many people appreciate rearing a girl for her helpfulness in the home, and second, once mature, a girl will not demand land from her own family but will get it from her husband's family.

Should the baby be a boy, the picture is different. Anyone who marries (i.e. agrees to set up house with) the mother will be 'burdened' with a boy who may not be very helpful in the home, but who may well demand land from his adoptive-father. Because a man is likely to think twice before marrying a woman with a baby boy, the baby has become a liability to her. He can stand between her and a potentially happy, prosperous, married future.

It is implicitly understood that the woman is likely to neglect her baby boy, and that the boy is likely to die. An outsider who wants to interfere with this process and to endeavour to rescue the boy should bear such context in mind. Merely helping a mother to better care for her child will be insuf-

ficient if, in a sense, the mother wants him dead.<sup>6</sup>

Another scenario can be used to illustrate another similar moral dilemma. Americans were managing a Bible school in East Africa. They wanted very much to hand over the school to indigenous management. As they considered how to do this, an incident occurred in which armed thieves were discovered by a school watchman. They were hiding in bushes waiting to steal from the school. Unfortunately, when the watchman approached them with his bow and arrow, he was shot. His injuries were life-threatening, but there was some hope his life could be saved, given medical treatment. Good medical treatment was expensive.

According to the person telling me this story, others in the Bible school community were not ready to take any responsibility for this man's injuries. The American with his deeply held morals regarding the sanctity of life, could not stand aside and leave a man, who had been injured 'in his watch', to die. Hundreds or thousands of dollars were raised in America to save the man's life. Is it any wonder that Americans struggle to hand over a Bible school to local management and ownership? When Americans can so quickly and easily raise thousands of dollars to save a life in a situation only indirectly of their own doing, who would want to refuse such generous American leadership?<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The above described scenario can, in the author's experience, arise amongst some communities in western Kenya.

<sup>7</sup> I appreciate that westerners are likely to consider that obviously the man's life had, at all costs, to be saved. That is my point. Local

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<sup>5</sup> Mangalwadi, *The Book*, 60-65.

We might be helped here by Graeme Smith's study of secularism.<sup>8</sup> Secularism is these days considered to be a dominant phenomenon in much of the world. I will ignore for the moment the tendency for secularism to transform and be transformed as it travels inter-culturally.<sup>9</sup> Secularism is widely valued amongst other reasons for offering an apparent neutrality to 'religions'. (I put 'religions' in quotes because, in a way that goes beyond this essay to articulate in detail, scholars of religion are questioning the validity of the category of 'religion at the very same moment when the discursive reality of religion is more widespread than ever'.<sup>10</sup> Thus it is hoped it can disarm inter-religious disputes.)

Secular people in western nations, the locus of the origin of secularism, tend to have a concern for the weak and the underling. Because they are secular, because they do not recognise the legitimacy of divine revelation or *religion*, secularists have to suppose

that such a concern for the weak is *natural* to human kind.<sup>11</sup> Yet, concern 'for the weakest is by no means obvious in all societies and cultures throughout human history' Smith tells us.<sup>12</sup> Whatever moral-naturalism may or may not be, it may not give us an ethic that favours the weaker, and poorer, and the less able.

### III Origins Of Secularism

If secularism is not a 'natural' state of affairs, we may need to ask: what are its origins? There seems to be a widespread implicit understanding amongst adherents to secularism in the West that it is rooted in reason and rationality. Hence reason and rationality are advocated as the way forward for non-westerners. Hence underdevelopment, ignorance and 'poor morals' where they are found outside of the West are blamed on people's failure to grasp reason.

The actuality of the origins of 'secular' moral standards seems to be different. Mangalwadi credits them to the Bible.<sup>13</sup> Mohr in his examination of legal systems draws especially on Berman and agrees with his conclusion that 'rational' western legal sys-

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African people's priorities may be different.

**8** Graeme Smith, *A Short History of Secularism* (London: I.B. Tauris and Co. Ltd., 2008).

**9** Jim Harries, 'Is Secularism a Mystical Religion? Questions of Translation in the context of Millennium Goals and mission in Africa', 2006, <<http://www.jim-mission.org.uk/articles/secularism-and-sekum.pdf>> (accessed 13 July 2015); Taylor, 'Western Secularity'; José Casanova, 'The Secular, Secularisations, Secularisms', 54-74 in Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan Van Antwerpen (eds.), *Rethinking Secularism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

**10** Casanova, 'The Secular', 62. See also, William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: secular ideology and the roots of modern conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

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**11** Some self-acclaimed secularists will acknowledge that their morality is rooted in religion, typically in Christianity. They will accept that historically Christianity has had a key role to play in the development of human society including secular society. More recently they have drawn a line to say that contemporary and future human society is no more in need of religion.

**12** Smith, *A Short*, 132.

**13** Mangalwadi, *The Book*, 254.

tems originated in the church.<sup>14</sup> Smith wonders why in secular societies 70% plus of people claim to believe in God.<sup>15</sup> He argues that 'we should think of secularism as the latest expression of the Christian religion ... secularism is Christian ethics shorn of its doctrine'.<sup>16</sup> Even liberal ideology is, according to Smith, an 'enculturation' of the church.<sup>17</sup> Although, 'if we remove belief in God then we lose the capacity to make ethical judgments', adds Smith.<sup>18</sup>

Renowned anthropologist Asad has his iron in the same fire. The category, 'religion', seems to have been widely supposed by anthropologists over many decades to be a natural category. Religion tends to be understood as that which secularism is not. Asad proposed an alternative theory, that the notion of religion is an invention of western Christianity—it is not a universal or natural category at all.<sup>19</sup> Thus Asad puts anthropological research up to question: have anthropological endeavours been no more than an extension of the research arm of the western church?<sup>20</sup> The relationship between

Christianity and secularism (on which anthropology is built) is, I suggest, indeed profound.

Charles Taylor, author of *A Secular Age*, considers that secularity makes a distinction between this world and the immanent (i.e. God). 'We [secularists] tend to apply it [this distinction] universally even though no distinction this hard and fast has existed in any other human culture in history.'<sup>21</sup> One can add that the same seems to apply contemporarily; outside of the West, such a sharp distinction is very hard to find today. As a result, when the term secular is used outside of the West, the way it is understood shifts.<sup>22</sup>

What to do about this, Taylor asks rhetorically? He does not have an easy answer at hand.<sup>23</sup> If the same term is understood very differently outside of the West from in the West, we might ask ourselves what happens when non-westerners use western languages and try to build their societies on western logic. One solution to this problem would seem to be not to use English outside of the realm of the secular West.

Taylor suggests that the West should cease to see its division between the secular and religious spheres as representing a 'universal

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14 Richard Mohr, 'The Christian Origins of Secularism and the Rule of Law', 34-51 in Nardisryah Hoden and Richard Mohr, (eds.), *Law and Religion in Public Life: the contemporary debate* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011); Harold Joseph Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition, Volume 1* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983).

15 Smith, *A Short*, 54.

16 Smith, *A Short*, 2.

17 Smith, *A Short*, 184.

18 Smith, *A Short*, 185.

19 Talal Asad, 'Response to Gil Anidjar', 394-399 in *Interventions: international journal of post-colonial studies*, 11(3), 2009, 398.

20 'What is involved when the secular is

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invoked' asks Asad. (Talal Asad, 'Thinking about the Secular Body, Pain, and Liberal Politics', *Cultural Anthropology*, 2011, 26(4), 657-675, 673.)

21 Taylor, 'Western Secularity', 32.

22 For example of such a shift, whereby the same term secularism is given a very different meaning to that in the West, see Bhargava. (Bhargava, 'Rehabilitating'.)

23 See my essay that addresses this issue. (Harries, 'Is Secularism'.)

road on which humanity as a whole is embarked'.<sup>24</sup> By considering secularism to have arisen out 'of a long ascending series of attempts to establish a Christian order' Taylor clearly agrees with those who see the origins of secularism in western Christianity.<sup>25</sup>

Many scholars have attempted to trace the influence of Christianity on the development of secularism through comparing reconstructed historical circumstances with the present. My own experience of having been born and raised in the West, then having lived in sub-Saharan Africa since 1988, gives me a contemporary basis for comparison with communities that have only recently been influenced by axial religions. (I borrow the term 'axial religions' from Taylor.<sup>26</sup> These include Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity.) Benefits that arise from what we now call secularism seem to be very religious in origin. This same point is made by Juergensmeyer<sup>27</sup> who tells us that the traditional view of religion incorporates exactly those 'values shared by most thoughtful and concerned citizens within [western] society'.<sup>28</sup> In other words, the value that western society has acquired that it now identifies with secularism, originated in Christianity.

Secularism is of course related to

*development*.<sup>29</sup> Drawing a distinction between the spiritual (i.e. religious) and material enables an understanding of the natural world and of science. Although a Christian believer at the time, I initially went to Africa thinking that my 'secular' knowledge of agriculture was what I had of value to offer in the interest of development. In the course of a few years, I became convinced that it was a profound acceptance of the Gospel of Christ that was the best hope towards taking African people (initially I was in Zambia, later Kenya) towards a dualistic understanding that might enable indigenously powered scientifically and technologically based advance. Hence between 1991 and 1993 I switched my ministry from agricultural teaching to Bible teaching.

#### IV A Moral Imperative To Illogicality?

I have in this essay already looked at the fact that the western ethic that requires outside material provision for the poorest and weakest, is not universal. Then I have drawn on various authors, plus personal experience, to show that the distinction between what is material and what is 'religious' is itself a product of a long history of western Christianity. I now want to apply the above insights to the situation of development intervention and poverty alienation in the majority world—with a focus on Africa.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Taylor, 'Western Secularity', 37.

<sup>25</sup> Taylor, 'Western Secularity', 48.

<sup>26</sup> Taylor, 'Western Secularity', 47-48.

<sup>27</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer, 'Rethinking the Secular and Religious Aspects of Violence', 185-203 in Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan Van Antwerpen (eds.), *Rethinking Secularism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.)

<sup>28</sup> Juergensmeyer, 'Rethinking', 193.

<sup>29</sup> I.e. socio-economic development of majority world communities.

<sup>30</sup> As mentioned above, my experience is mostly in Eastern and Southern Africa. I speak of the contexts that I know as I understand them. I am not familiar with all African contexts.

The scenario that I want to consider is where one part of the world has identified a moral imperative of material equality which obliges it to share its material wealth with another part of the world that neither recognises the imperative nor distinguishes the material from the religious. Much of Africa, for example, makes no clear distinction between religious or spiritual, or a person and one's 'physical' context.

This was well said by Senghor: 'in contrast to the classic European, the Negro African does not draw a line between himself and the object'.<sup>31</sup> There is certainly not a strong ethic of interpersonal equality in parts of Africa with which I am familiar. Instead, the existence of differences in levels of wealth and prosperity are largely taken for granted—those who have less may strive to have more, but those who 'have more' may be unconcerned with giving material assistance to those who have less.

From my experience amongst African people, I conclude that if material inequalities are to be shifted, this is not necessarily done by arranging for gifts or loans. Innately, many African people would rather enrich themselves through engaging in prayer, carefully thought out rituals, and animal sacrifice and so on. Such means are used to overcome evil spiritual powers that are holding people in bondage to poverty.

Having said the above, my reader should note that my use of English leads to many inaccuracies in my description of the African situation. For example, to say that evil powers are

spiritual as against physical, using English, implies the western distinction between material and religious, which presumption is not present in Africa. The better alternative probably would be to further this discussion using African languages with respect to their own world views. Then unfortunately westerners would not understand at all.

With that caveat, we can proceed to state that it is widely known that much of African society operates on the patron/client system. Maranz articulates ways in which this works in practice.<sup>32</sup> This system requires inequality. In this system, patrons who have resources are served by clients who would like to benefit from those resources. If all were equal, there would be no need for patrons and clients. In the interests of the maintenance of the patron-client system, inequality is not so much a problem, as a necessity.

Because of its understanding of the need for equality, the West sees itself as being morally obliged to give and give and give (materially) to the 'poor'. We have discovered that those amongst the poor who become the conduits of this shared wealth may not share this ethic of equality. Instead, they are likely to self-aggrandise and to enrich their own families. The 'poor' should then approach them as the new patrons.

The reason why poor people in Africa may appear to wealthier African people to be undeserving of 'handouts' is related to our same core issue—that African people do not clearly distin-

**31** Leopold Sedar Senghor, *On African Socialism* (New York, London: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964), 72.

**32** David Maranz, *African Friends and Money Matters: observations from Africa* (Dallas: SIL International, 2001).

guish between the material and the spiritual. This means that when someone is in a state of poverty, they are lacking blessing or fortune. The gods or spirits are evidently against them—or why else would they be poor?

This means that the solution to poverty is in prayer and in improving relations to gods or spirits. If a westerner comes and gives someone a lot of money, then their fortune can change. (In this sense, westerners are akin to gods and are considered to have power over evil spirits, whether they know it or not.) Beneficiaries seek to take maximum advantage of such change in their personal fortune.

Taking maximum advantage of your improved fortune may be seriously at odds with the redistribution of wealth that you are supposed, according to the West, to engage in. In my experience, westerners do not always appreciate how difficult distribution of wealth can be. Approaching a community of people, whoever they are, so as to distribute wealth to them is very likely to be a fraught activity. It may be especially fraught where the spiritual and material are not clearly distinguished. (Does one give materially or spiritually? In practice, because these two are not clearly distinguished; always both.)

It is extremely difficult to distribute evenly and amicably. It is very likely that distribution will create tension which will come back to the person responsible for distribution in the form of accusations of all kinds of foul play. Unlike the western donor sitting high and dry from all this in an elevated office often in faraway Europe, the local African will not easily escape such flack.

The contemporary reaction of west-

ern donors to scenarios such as those of corruption and misappropriation of funds, nepotism, etc. is to put in *accountability*. Requirements for accountability often translate into control from the West. By such means the West attempts to force African communities to use donated funds (blessings?)<sup>33</sup> in ways understood by the donors, even if locally they make little or no sense.

In the meantime, not having distinguished the material from the spiritual, the non-West spends money they have on pleasing gods of prosperity and/or appeasing untoward gods and spirits. This becomes evident in many ways in Africa. Typically in western Kenya, it means spending a lot of money on lavish funerals. 'Memorial' events aimed at ensuring that spirits of the dead do not become adverse, are similarly heavily subsidised. Apart from not being the intended use of funds by western donors, it is also clear to westerners that investments into quality coffins or funeral-feasts are not going to provide a powerhouse for economic advance. Hence it seems that the West is determined to engage endlessly in filling an increasingly leaky ever growing African prosperity-bucket!

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**33** One constant issue I meet here is that the English language I am using is far from adequate to articulate the issue that I am addressing. I have here put 'blessings' in brackets simply to point to this. In so far as 'funds' are understood in a western secular society as things that do not carry spiritual content there are no funds in Africa. (See Parker Shipton, *Bitter Money: cultural economy and some African meanings of forbidden commodities*, American Ethnological Society Monograph Series, Number 1, [Washington: American Anthropological Association, 1989]).

## V Problem Created by Linguistics

Before going on to look in more detail at the derivation of morals, I want to make a brief diversion into linguistics. A reason the above described 'illogical' scenarios are so little recognised is due to use of a global language. The same 'global language', English, is of course, western. Recipients of western funds are not fools. They appreciate that a lot of the demands being made by donors are for purposes of accountability. They have also typically spent years if not decades of their lives in full-time study learning how to communicate as if they are western.

It should be noted that educational systems in Africa tend to presuppose the dualistic distinction between the religious and the secular, even though many African people rarely if ever grasp this and certainly do not live by it. This makes honest straightforward intercultural communication (westerners with Africans) very difficult.

African recipients of western donor funds and projects easily appear to be 'deceiving' in the feedback they give; such feedback aims at perpetuating the incoming flow of funds. Yet it seems often that the donor and their agents are wanting to be deceived. They may well have designated money that has to be spent. They are also likely to be reluctant to acknowledge the massive cultural gap that separates them from Africans; in so far as the West is secular it will not acknowledge that a cultural gap has arisen as a result of Christian influence. Related to this is the reluctance to point to differences between westerners and Africans through fear

of being accused of being racist.<sup>34</sup>

## VI Morals Are Derivative

Realisation that morals are derivative from cultures and from beliefs ought to be enough motivation to change the above game plan. If one 'believes' in certain values and those values are not grounded in some kind of natural logic then it makes sense (surely) that to pass on the values requires convincing people about the foundational system that produces them. The foundational inputs that are required to bring a shift to non-western peoples cannot be rooted entirely in secular rationality and reason because such rationality and reason themselves originate in religion, specifically in faith in God and Jesus Christ.

To start from what is known to take someone to what might be unknown, as is required of good educational systems, means to start from a worldview that is holistic and that does not distinguish the material from the spiritual, and to take people towards such a distinction. On the contrary, secular educational systems in Africa tend to presuppose what the students should actually be learning.

A problem with this is that secular western people are likely to condemn worldviews that are not strictly secular. They will not advocate for what is 'religious'. Fortunately, Smith discovered that many people in secular countries such as in Europe and North America claim to believe in God. This

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<sup>34</sup> Jim Harries, 'Anti-Racist Strategies in the West Perpetuate Global Poverty: A Critique from Africa', *Cultural Encounters: a journal for the theology of culture*, In Press.

seems very ironic—a point that Smith makes: supposedly secular countries have believing Christian populations. A much smaller percentage of Europeans claim to be atheistic than those who claim to be Christian or ‘religious’.<sup>35</sup>

So then, Europeans themselves in their own lives contradict the secularism that they seem professionally to condone. The populations of European countries such as the UK live with the constant contradiction that they supposedly operate on the basis of secularism, at the same time as the predominant proportion of their population in various ways draw on their Christian faith.

Because it can be understood that secularism *is* a kind of Christianity, what exactly is implied by the above scenario?<sup>36</sup> In order to understand and communicate clearly with the non-West, including Africa, one must put aside the assumption of the difference between the material and the spiritual or religious. If indeed it is a desirable distinction,<sup>37</sup> then a dualistic distinction is something that in communication between the West and Africa is to be achieved and not to be presupposed.

To be understandable, intercultural communication between the West and Africa should be holistic. The text that the West possesses which is of this nature is the Bible. The ‘way of life’ (I use the term ‘way of life’ because of current confusion regarding the term

‘religion’) that the West knows which makes sense to holistic people and can take people towards healthy dualism, is Christianity.<sup>38</sup> Hence, at least in so far as ‘development’ for the poor is rooted in dualistic (i.e. secular) rationality, the preferred means to development ought to be Christian evangelism and discipleship.

For western societies such as those in Africa, I suggest that evangelism and discipleship should, where possible, be carried out in non-secular ways. That is—on the basis that the spiritual and material are not distinct entities. That is to say that Christian mission should be holistic.

However, it is important to qualify this term ‘holistic’. It should be holistic as understood by non-dualists. That is, it should be holistic in a way in which God’s blessing brings prosperity, and not a way in which resources from the West are used to provide the ‘material’ side of ‘holistic’ ministry. The missionary who is serious about being holistic should, even if he is from the West, engage in ministry on the back of locally available resources, and not on the back of privileged access to western wealth. So the holism of the ministry of Jesus himself as depicted in the Bible did not arise from raising foreign funds to help people or start projects. It was often as a result of the amazing acts, sometimes known as miracles, that he performed as a result of prayer and the power of God.

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35 Smith, *A Short*, 14.

36 Smith, *A Short*, 2.

37 Maranz, African, xiii. I have discussed its desirability elsewhere. I believe that a degree of dualism is desirable but probably not the extent of dualism formally held by the secular West.

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38 I show ways in which the Bible takes people towards secularism (i.e. dualism) in my book, Jim Harries, *Secularism and Africa: in the light of the Intercultural Christ* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2015), 102-135.

## VII Conclusion

The morality that many western secularists suppose to be 'natural' seems to arise from their Christian history. A close analysis of secularism reveals that as well as being diversely defined, it cannot be understood apart from religions that have been formative to it. Hence it can never be truly secular. Western 'secularism' presupposes an ethic of equality that underlies global efforts at provision of aid and development.

Because such an ethic is normally absent amongst many of the global poor themselves, who anyway under-

stand the source of their prosperity as being from spiritual rather than material origins, efforts at re-balancing global inequalities by sharing resources from the West are compared to filling of a leaking bucket. Because people are never entirely 'secular', development intervention needs to be recognised for what it is; an innately 'religious' activity.

This means, for Christians, that promoting development is inseparable from sharing the gospel of Jesus. The latter should be done from a 'holistic' foundation that is not based on a sharp distinction between the material and the spiritual.

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# Towards a biblical and pastoral approach to illness in an African context with particular reference to HIV AIDS

Keith Ferdinando

## I Traditional Perceptions

*'He died of AIDS, obviously,' Moleboheng told her mother after the cousin left. She was far too polite and sensible to say this in front of the relative, for then the relative would report to others that her family were starting vicious rumours. Mama Khanyile conceded the possibility of AIDS, although that didn't necessarily rule out isidliso. Her view was that the AIDS, if indeed it was AIDS, must have been sent by someone. Someone had wanted to see the young man dead and had used witchcraft to send this AIDS or isidliso to kill him. Moleboheng still insisted that was nonsense, as she does whenever her mother talks about witchcraft. In this, as in most things pertaining to witchcraft, the daughter and her family agree to disagree. She knows that within African society at*

*large her way of looking at things is in a distinct minority.<sup>1</sup>*

The brief story told by Adam Ashforth underlines the equivocation surrounding the understanding of AIDS in the African context. It articulates a particular culturally acquired perception of its origin, and in so doing draws attention to the role of culture in human life and its near total impact on thought and behaviour. We are creatures of culture and respond to events in accordance with beliefs assimilated from our cultures. As human beings are bearers of God's image, even though that image has been distorted as a result of

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<sup>1</sup> A. Ashforth, 'AIDS, Witchcraft, and the Problem of Power in Post-Apartheid South Africa', *African Studies* 61.1 (2002), 121. *Isidliso* 'otherwise called "Black poison"', is 'an evil work of the people they call witches'.

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**Keith Ferdinando** (PhD London Bible College CNA) served in different parts of Africa in theological education for many years including as lecturer and principal of *Faculté de Théologie Évangélique au Rwanda* and as theological education consultant with Africa Inland Mission International, as well as teaching at his alma mater. Currently associate pastor of Woodford Evangelical Church, London, he is the author of *The Triumph of Christ in African Perspective: a Study of Demonology and Redemption in the African Context* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999). The article was originally published in the *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 31.2 (2012) and is used with permission.

the fall, there is much in culture that is good. However, sin profoundly affects human intelligence and understanding, which means that culture is also and in all cases deeply flawed by falsehood, which needs to be unmasked and replaced by truth.

The Bible indicates that whole cultures can be penetrated by error, with inevitable consequences for all those who are shaped by them. And it is of course as true of western cultures as it is of African. The problem is that people cling tenaciously to the most fundamental beliefs and attitudes that underlie a culture, such that substantial change is very difficult to bring about. We may indeed more easily identify the problems confronting people of another culture than those of our own.

In this case the issue is that of African conceptions of misfortune. The experience of suffering is a universal one, with which every human being without exception is confronted. However, responses are culture-specific, and in consequence they are often very different. The approach common in African tradition has been termed an 'interpersonal causal ontology',<sup>2</sup> the meaning of which is expressed more simply in a Zulu proverb, 'There is always somebody'.<sup>3</sup>

This means that when suffering comes in almost any form, it may be attributed, for example, to the malice of a spirit, the punishment of an ancestor, or the aggression of a witch or sorcerer.

This need not imply an ignorance of the empirical reason for the affliction. The empirical approach explains *how* an event happened; but the pursuit of a spirit or sorcerer responds to the deeper, more unsettling question of *why* it happened—why to this person and at this time?

Traditional approaches are concerned with the pursuit of the meaning of an illness or an accident, and they locate it in primarily personal terms. Accordingly, they do not deny the fact that snake venom and lightning kill, or that germs and microbes make people sick. Rather, in the words of one informant, 'it may be quite true that typhus is carried by lice, but who sent the infected louse? Why did it bite one man and not another?'<sup>4</sup> In contrast, secular western approaches focus exclusively on the empirical factors responsible for the suffering, and do not pursue the question, 'why?', at all. Not unreasonably African peoples are not satisfied with this, which would leave them, as it leaves westerners, in a meaningless and inexplicable cosmos.

In African contexts AIDS will therefore very frequently be understood in culturally defined terms as the result of personal causation. This situates it in the cultural universe of the sufferers, their families and of course the society in general. The approach is powerful because it provides explanation that is familiar and that has deep roots in traditional thinking. It enables comprehension of the phenomenon, gives it meaning and, perhaps most important of all, offers a strategy for

2 See T. D. Stabell, "'The Modernity of Witchcraft'" and the Gospel in Africa', in *Missiology* 38.4 (October 2010), 461.

3 A.-I. Berglund, *Zulu Thought-Patterns and Symbolism* (London: C. Hurst, 1989 [1976]), 270.

4 Quoted by M. Gluckman, *Custom and Conflict in Africa* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955), 85.

dealing with the problem, although one that is essentially ineffective in terms of its curative potential.

Recent research therefore shows that, for example, in Cameroon AIDS deaths are likely to be blamed on witchcraft; in Botswana too people attribute AIDS to witchcraft, especially because of the length of the illness; in Chiawa, south of Lusaka in Zambia, a witch finder was hired in 1994-1995 due to the high number of deaths from AIDS and accidents, and 15 people then died as a result of the imposition of a poison ordeal to flush out the witches; and research conducted in two villages of the Abakwaya of Tanzania, a region where there is the highest incidence of AIDS, showed that 80% of the population visit diviners and traditional healers before seeking other treatment, occasioning a consequently high mortality rate.<sup>5</sup>

The belief that witchcraft is the cause of HIV-AIDS may also lead to carelessness about its spread, because emphasis is placed on the occult factors involved rather than the physical.

## II An Evangelical Theological Response

Theology, and more specifically evangelical theology, is concerned with making the connexions between the unchanging word of the living God, and the shifting worlds of human beings. It is about bringing truth to bear on ourselves, and on the reality we inhabit. In this case, therefore, a theological

response must begin by addressing the culturally defined world of the sick, their families and their societies in the light of revealed truth.

If the culture is offering responses to AIDS that do nothing of any substance in terms of real prevention and cure, then what is required is the pursuit of cultural transformation, which can emerge only from a profound renewal of belief structures. In the African context, as in many others, Christian teaching very often fails to address this level, resulting in a superficial, and indeed syncretistic, Christian discipleship. What is required is a biblical and counter-cultural response of some depth.

Before proceeding it must be emphasised that a theological response to AIDS in the African context does not mean simply moving towards a western, secularised view of reality. The problem of illness, including AIDS, needs to be understood in biblical and not in western terms. A western secular approach may be effective in purely clinical terms but, as we have noted, it leaves the sufferer in an empty and meaningless universe. African understandings of illness may be deficient in many respects, but their great positive value is a retention of the pursuit of meaning. There is a deep sense that suffering ought to make sense, that there must be a reason, that we do not inhabit a meaningless universe.

A western perspective which abandons the pursuit of meaning will not do, which is why even in modern African cities people continue to go to diviners and traditional healers, often before seeking other more empirical forms of treatment. Moreover, from a biblical perspective the pursuit of

<sup>5</sup> The examples in this paragraph are all drawn from G. Ter Haar (ed.), *Imagining Evil: Witchcraft Beliefs and Accusations in Contemporary Africa* (Trenton, NJ and Asmara, Ethiopia: Africa World Press, 2007), 123, 221, 234, 262.

meaning is not invalid, but rather the contrary. When the disciples encountered 'a man blind from birth' they asked Jesus, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' (Jn 9:2). Jesus did not criticise their attempt to understand the reason for the man's suffering, but he enlarged the range of possibilities which they should consider: "Neither this man nor his parents sinned", said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life" (Jn 9:3).

The pursuit of meaning, the elementary desire to understand, that is evident in African thought, is legitimate. AIDS does indeed take place in the context of a universe which has meaning, because a sovereign God made and rules it. The issue is that of ensuring that we look for meaning in the right places, which for Christians involves submitting our thinking to the evaluation of Scripture.

Therefore, the goal must be a reconstruction of the understanding of suffering in biblical terms. At root this means a deeper awareness of both creation and redemption, with all their rich and multiple implications, through which belief structures, and so lives, will be transformed (Rom 12:2). This is the challenge for Christian health workers in Africa, who are themselves products of their various cultures—western or African—all of which distort truth to some degree and in one way or another.

It is also, and especially, the task of the church, and a particular challenge to its approaches to catechesis and discipling, which can all too often be superficial or even non-existent, in striking contrast with the radical and life-changing approaches to the forma-

tion of new believers which characterised some of the earliest churches.<sup>6</sup>

### III Transforming Perspectives

The vital issue is that of the causation of disease. This leads in turn to the question of response, for necessarily the way in which men and women attribute cause will determine the range of therapies which they are prepared to consider. In biblical terms the identification of causation is not simple, and in any single event various causes may be operative at different levels of reality. Applied to the particular case of illness, four different levels may in principle be relevant at any one time.

#### 1. Physical causation

The Bible affirms the reality of physical causes, which corresponds to the empirical approach of modern medicine. Central to the biblical revelation is the doctrine of creation which has rich and multiple implications. Especially important for present purposes is the fact that the God who created is rational, consistent and faithful, one who speaks and reasons, and whose works reflect his own rational and consistent nature.

Accordingly, the cosmos he has made and which he continues to uphold, is one of order and regularity, whose structures and rhythms may be observed, identified, understood and, to some degree, harnessed to human ends. It is not arbitrary and capricious,

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, C. E. Arnold, 'Early Church Catechesis and New Christians' Classes in Contemporary Evangelicalism', in *JETS* 47.1 (March 2004), 39.

just as God is not arbitrary and capricious. It is not subject to the control of fickle and unpredictable spirits and spiritual forces, as it is in animistic thought and cultures, for which nature is 'a supreme mystery, inconsistent, unpredictable, and arbitrary'.<sup>7</sup>

There is indeed a strong demythologising polemic in the Old Testament, found especially, although not exclusively, in the early chapters of Genesis, which identifies the sun and other celestial bodies, the sea and the great fish as part of God's good physical creation, and subject to his rule.<sup>8</sup> They are not spiritual powers and forces, as they were for many of the peoples of the ancient Near East. Moreover, such an approach also sharply distinguishes the biblical understanding of nature from animistic perceptions.

At the same time, God made human beings in his own image. The exact meaning of the *imago Dei* is not explicitly developed in the Bible and remains a subject of discussion, but the flow of the text in Genesis 1 is suggestive. Both the initial divine deliberation, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness' (Gen 1:26), and its fulfilment shortly afterwards, 'So God created man in his own image' (Gen 1:27), are each followed by very similar statements of the role which humanity is to play on earth: 'and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground' (Gen 1:26),

and again, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground' (Gen 1:28).

The implication is that at least one aspect of the divine image lies in the fact that men and women are endowed with reason, along with the ability to order and rule that which God has made. They are able to study the world: to observe, identify and understand the regularities of natural processes, and to do so to an ever increasing degree. Human beings are knowing beings (*homo sapiens*). Moreover, not only are they *able* to do so, but it is their *calling*. They are mandated by the creator to pursue understanding of what he has made—to rethink his thoughts after him. This is expressed in the words attributed to the astronomer Johannes Kepler (1571-1630):

I was merely thinking God's thoughts after him. Since we astronomers are priests of the highest God in regard to the book of nature, it befits us to be thoughtful, not of the glory of our minds, but rather, above all else, of the glory of God.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, they are responsible beings, stewards of creation who are summoned to exercise rule over God's world as his image bearers, and to use and adapt their growing knowledge

7 R. Stark, *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success* (New York: Random House, 2006), 15.

8 G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Dallas: Word, 2002), 9.

9 These words, allegedly of Johannes Kepler, are much quoted but not so easy to locate. They are cited by H. M. Morris, *Men of science, men of God: great scientists who believed the Bible* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 1982), 11-12, and widely referred to on the web but without identification of their location in Kepler's works.

both to care for the world and in the pursuit of beneficent human ends.

All of this means that a seriously scientific comprehension of the physical realm becomes possible, precisely because the Bible recognises the reality, regularity and orderliness of natural, physical causes, and the consequent possibility of understanding them. It is largely for this reason that the rise of science took place almost exclusively in societies whose cultures were significantly permeated by a Christian view of reality: 'Christian theology was essential for the rise of science in the West, just as surely as non-Christian theologies had stifled the scientific quest everywhere else.'<sup>10</sup> By contrast, given the animistic understanding of the world, the very notion of an animistic scientist is 'an oxymoron, like a square circle'.<sup>11</sup>

In particular, the biblical perspective means that human beings are able to study and increasingly to understand themselves, and specifically the incarnate—physical and bodily—dimension of their nature as human beings, with immense potential for both preventive and curative medicine. The empirical pursuit of medical knowledge, including knowledge of the human body and its functioning, of health and disease and the factors that contribute to both, arises therefore out of a specifically biblical conception of reality. To engage in medical research and to apply its findings to the pursuit of human well-being is, therefore, a profoundly Christian calling, rooted in what the Bible

has to say about the nature of God, of creation, and of the mandate addressed to Adam and Eve at the very outset of history.

Moreover, such an approach reflects the biblical notion of wisdom, whose central concern is that men and women live in conformity with the way in which God has designed the world he made, rather than in defiance of it. They should, therefore, seek to understand the patterns of creation and life that the creator has established, and actively allow their thoughts and lives to be shaped by them.

Accordingly, as God has made a world that is orderly, with natural causes and consequences, true biblical wisdom lies in identifying them, and then working with them to promote health and respond to disease. In contrast, folly means ignoring the discernible structures of physical reality and so, for example, accepting exclusively mystical explanations of illness and relying on correspondingly esoteric therapies.

Israel's sages believed that both nature and the world of human beings were determined by a fundamental order. To act in harmony with the universal order which sustained creation was their supreme goal: human behaviour either strengthened the existing order or contributed to the forces of chaos which threatened life.<sup>12</sup>

Accordingly, while the Bible may not have much to say about them, the

<sup>10</sup> Stark, *The Victory of Reason*, 15.

<sup>11</sup> D. L. Miller, *Discipling Nations: The Power of Truth to Transform Cultures* (Seattle, WA: YWAM Publishing, 2001), 111.

<sup>12</sup> E. J. Schnabel, 'Wisdom' in T. D. Alexander, & B. S. Rosner (eds.), *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (electronic ed.) (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

few references that exist assume without debate the use of medicine and of physicians, because their development and use are an inevitable consequence of the biblical understanding of the way in which the world and its human inhabitants have been made. Thus, for example, Hebrew dietary and hygienic rules found in the Old Testament were more developed than those of other Ancient Near Eastern nations, and soundly based on the observed facts of contagion and infection. Albright writes, 'No part of the Hebrew Bible is more clearly empirico-logical in its background than the rules of purity', and he contrasts them with the taboos of other Ancient Near Eastern peoples in which the influence of sympathetic magic is evident.<sup>13</sup>

The book of Proverbs shows an awareness of the relationship between mental state and physical health (Prov 14:30; 17:22; 18:14). Jeremiah 8:22 assumes the existence of balm and physicians, although clearly the text has a primarily spiritual reference: 'Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people?' Exodus 21:18-19 implies the use, and expense, of medical care:

If men quarrel and one hits the other with a stone or with his fist and he does not die but is confined to bed, the one who struck the blow will not be held responsible if the other gets up and walks around outside with his staff; however, he must pay

the injured man for the loss of his time and see that he is completely healed.

Even Paul's encouragement to Timothy displays an awareness of the medicinal value of 'a little wine': 'Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses' (1 Tim 4:23). Meanwhile, the denunciation of Asa's use of physicians (2 Chron 16:12) needs not imply condemnation of physicians as such but perhaps of Asa's dependence on them to the exclusion of God, or of his use of the contemporary medico-religious practices of neighbouring peoples.

Accordingly, the Bible does not suggest that illness is normally dealt with simply by prayer, although prayer is certainly a major part of the response, as we will see. There is a strong and consistent biblical emphasis on the use of *means* as human beings live out their daily lives and pursue the fulfilment of God's will. In terms of evangelism this quite foundational point is expressed in the title of William Carey's momentous work, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (1792).

Similarly, just as the fact that God gives food and expects his children to ask him for their daily bread, does not remove the necessity of working for it, so also the fact that health is ultimately in his hands, does not remove human responsibility to be active in its promotion and restoration. This obviously includes abstinence from behaviour—very frequently sinful behaviour—that has a known link to illness, including forms of sexual activity which are associated with the spread of HIV-AIDS. And where illness occurs, it also in-

13 W. F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (London: The Athlone Press, University of London, 1968), 152-153. See also R. K. Harrison, 'Disease', in G. W. Bromiley (ed.), *ISBE*, vol. I (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 955.

cludes the use of medication whose efficacy has been established by those natural sciences whose origins are deeply embedded in the biblical worldview.

## 2. Moral causation

The impact of human sin on the physical creation is very obvious at various levels. Pollution and environmental degradation are frequently linked to human irresponsibility, greed and selfishness. However, at a more profound level the rebellion of men and women at the beginning of history has brought about a fundamental and pervasive dislocation and alienation in the cosmos as a whole. The Bible indicates that there is a profound relationship between the human race and its habitat which goes beyond purely empirical connections, such that when Adam and Eve rebelled, the world they inhabited experienced a 'fall' with them.

The verdict pronounced on Adam following his disobedience indicates that such a fall came about as the result of a divine word of judgement:

Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it', cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return' (Gen 3:17-19).

The relationship between the spiritual state of human beings and the condition of the world they inhabit is

again expressed when Paul looks back to the moment of the fall, the point at which the natural order was 'subjected to frustration' and 'bondage to decay', and ahead to the final redemption of God's people when it will be 'liberated' and 'brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God':

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time (Rom 8:19-22).

And so the book of Revelation looks forward to a new creation from which all evil of every sort will be forever banished—'a new heaven and a new earth' (Rev 21:1), in which 'there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away' (Rev 21:4). In brief, human rebellion has had devastating consequences for the whole cosmos, while the consummation of God's work of salvation at the return of Christ will bring about a dramatic reversal.

In the light of this, all human suffering, including illness, should be understood as a consequence of the fall. Sin entails devastating physical as well as spiritual consequences for all human beings, of which the ultimate is death itself. Human pain is, therefore, in the words of D. A. Carson, 'the effluent of

the fall, the result of a fallen world'.<sup>14</sup>

However, this does not mean that particular cases of suffering are necessarily due to particular individual sins. In the Old Testament a substantial body of literature and reflexion, including Job 1-2, Psalms 37 and 73, and the prophecy of Habakuk, wrestles with the ambiguities of human suffering. The 'wicked' seem frequently to escape justice and judgement, while the righteous suffer, and often experience no apparent resolution of their trials.

Meanwhile, the righteous may suffer innocently because of the sin of the wicked, as when Jonathan, son of king Saul, fell in battle on Mount Gilboa along with his father. Similarly, Jesus rejected the idea that the affliction of the 'man blind from birth' was due to sin (Jn 9:1-3), or that those who died in an atrocity committed by Pilate at the Temple or from the collapse of 'the tower in Siloam', did so because they were greater sinners than everybody else (Lk 13:1-5).

Nevertheless, throughout the Old Testament there is also a persistent and unavoidable emphasis on the retribution that sin brings. It is seen on a national scale when the kingdoms of Israel and then Judah are destroyed by Assyria and Babylon respectively, or at a personal level when King Uzziah is struck down with leprosy due to his sacrilegious presumption in assuming the role of a priest (2 Chron 26:16-21), and examples could be multiplied. On occasion Jesus suggested that particular sin had caused specific sufferings. He counselled the man healed

at the pool of Bethesda, 'See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you' (Jn 5:14).

Paul and the author of Revelation attributed some particular cases of illness in local churches to specific preceding sin (1 Cor 11:30; Rev 2:21-23), while James exhorted his readers, 'confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed' (Jas 5:16). And Luke, a physician, attributed the sudden death of Herod Agrippa to the fact that he 'did not give praise to God' when he was hailed as a god by the people of Tyre (Acts 12:20-23).

In brief, sickness is in the world because sin is in the world: in a general sense, all sickness without exception is the result of sin, and there are no 'innocent' sufferers for none is without sin. Sometimes there is a direct and even obvious relationship between specific sin and consequent illness. However, one cannot simply, and naively, reason back from every individual case of illness and pain to a specifically identifiable sin that has brought it about.

### 3. Occult causation

Human rebellion not only brought about massive disruption to the natural realm, but has also resulted in the subjection and oppression of human beings by Satan and the forces of darkness that he controls. Sin means that 'man attempts to live independently of his Creator, treating himself as his own god, and thereby not only ceases to be truly himself but also loses control of what should have been under his dominion and falls under the control of

<sup>14</sup> D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord: Reflections on Suffering and Evil* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 48.

*demonic powers* [my italics].<sup>15</sup>

The primary manifestation of this is spiritual and moral: Satan holds lost men and women captive in spiritual blindness and death, unable and disinclined to pursue their own redemption (Rom 8:6-8; 2 Cor 4:4; Eph 2:2; 1 Jn 5:19). He is a murderer and destroyer (Jn 8:44), and his purpose is to bring about the eternal alienation of human beings from the creator in whom alone life is found.

However, it is also clear in the Bible that Satan has a role in physical suffering including illness. Insofar as it was his temptation of the first human couple that brought about the fall, from which all disease ultimately flows, he may indeed be seen as implicated in a general way in all human illness, suffering and death. This would explain Peter's statement that Jesus 'went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil' (Acts 10:38).

However, the Bible suggests that he may also on occasion be directly involved in particular cases of suffering. This is manifestly true of demonic 'possession' (which the synoptic gospels refer to as being 'demonised', 'having a demon' or being 'in an evil spirit'),<sup>16</sup> but it may also be true of some who do not present the classic symptoms of 'possession' but suffer simply physical afflictions.

The woman whom Jesus cured of

curvature of the spine (possibly 'spondylitis ankylopoietica')<sup>17</sup> had been 'crippled by a spirit' and 'kept bound' by Satan (Lk 13:10-17). Job's trials, including his own physical illness which may have been a very acute form of dermatitis,<sup>18</sup> were brought about by Satan, while Paul's 'thorn in the flesh', probably an illness, was caused by 'a messenger of Satan' which would almost certainly have been understood to be a demon (2 Cor 12:7).

The Bible makes it clear, however, that the sufferings of both Job and Paul took place only in the context of God's sovereign rule, as we shall see. Further, it would be very far from the truth to suppose that the biblical witness identifies Satan or demons as the invariable explanation of every particular, individual case of illness: 'for the New Testament writers there was no simple equation between infirmity and the demonic.'<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, the biblical testimony repudiates any 'simple equation' between infirmity and witchcraft. Belief in witchcraft has certainly been extremely widespread, if not universal, in human societies across the globe and throughout history.<sup>20</sup> Although the precise content of witchcraft beliefs is

<sup>17</sup> The diagnosis proposed by J. Wilkinson, 'The Case of the Bent Women in Luke 13v10-17', *EvQ* 49 (1977), 196-200.

<sup>18</sup> F. I. Andersen, *Job: An Introduction and Commentary* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), 96.

<sup>19</sup> J. C. Thomas, *The Devil, Disease and Deliverance: Origins of Illness in New Testament Thought* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 302.

<sup>20</sup> See M. Marwick (ed.), *Witchcraft and Sorcery* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982 [1947]), 14.

<sup>15</sup> C. K. Barrett, 1962, *From First Adam to Last: A Study in Pauline Theology* (London: A. & C. Black, 1962), 92-3.

<sup>16</sup> See K. Ferdinando, *The Triumph of Christ in African Perspective: a Study of Demonology and Redemption in the African Context* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999), 190-191.

highly culture specific, at its heart lies the belief that some human beings are able to harm and even kill others by non-physical, occult means.

While it is an issue of some dispute, the Bible also refers to witchcraft as a potential factor in human suffering, but references are few and there is scarcely any explicit, sustained discussion of the matter. However, Balaam was clearly a pagan sorcerer with an established reputation for the power of his magic, which is why Balak, king of Moab, sent for him: 'Come and put a curse on these people, because they are too powerful for me. Perhaps then I will be able to defeat them and drive them out of the country. For I know that those you bless are blessed, and those you curse are cursed' (Num 22:6).

What is striking in the story is that God intervened in such a way that Balaam was compelled to bless rather than curse his people. The projected occult aggression was smothered as God reversed the evil intention of Balak and Balaam. 'The only force that shapes the destiny of Israel is God's plan, and no magical practices can thwart that divine intention.'<sup>21</sup> Sorcery may therefore exist but, like Satan and his demonic agents, it is subject to God's sovereign will.

Much later, in a quite enigmatic passage, Ezekiel seems to have had the activities of female sorcerers in view:

Woe to the women who sew magic charms on all their wrists and make veils of various lengths for their heads in order to ensnare people

... I am against your magic charms with which you ensnare people like birds and I will tear them from your arms; I will set free the people that you ensnare like birds (Ezek 13:17-23).

As the prophecy is addressed to the exiles their sorcery may well testify to the influence of Babylonian culture. The bands of cloth and veils were apparently part of the ritual that they followed, magic amulets perhaps 'intended to bring about untimely deaths'.<sup>22</sup>

References are equally few in the New Testament, but Paul identifies witchcraft as one of the acts of the sinful nature in Galatians (5:19-21). The Greek word he uses, *pharmakeia*, which is translated as 'witchcraft', is related to *pharmakon* which initially denoted a drug often used in erotic magic. 'For the most part, however, the cognates of φάρμακον [*pharmakon*] refer more often to magical material used for purposes of hate rather than love.'<sup>23</sup> In the culture which the Galatians shared, therefore, one of the forms that sin took was sorcery, the attempt to use occult means to harm another person. Paul recognised the reality of the act and its hostile intent, although he does not discuss its exact nature nor comment on its efficacy.

Although Paul's letter to the Ephesians contains no explicit reference to witchcraft, the city of Ephesus was

<sup>21</sup> H. C. Kee, *Medicine, Miracle and Magic in New Testament Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 18.

<sup>22</sup> D. E. Aune, 'Magic', in G. W. Bromiley (ed.), *ISBE*, vol. III (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 215. See too R. H. Alexander, 'Ezekiel' in F. E. Gaebelin (ed.) *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* vol 6 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986).

<sup>23</sup> E. M. Yamauchi, 'Magic in the Biblical World' in *Tyndale Bulletin* 34 (1983), 181.

well known as a centre of magic, which was somewhat focused around the temple of Diana. An awareness of that background illuminates the meaning of parts of the apostle's argument as he addresses Christian believers concerned, perhaps, about their exposure to occult aggression, including witchcraft and demonic attack.

Especially significant in this context is his emphasis on Christ's absolute superiority over every conceivable source of power in the invisible world of spirits and occult activity. Christ's is the name which is above every name, for God has 'seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given' (Eph 1:20-21). For Paul's readers the words, 'rule and authority, power and dominion' explicitly identified the spirits which stood behind pagan magic and of which they may have been afraid, but Paul insists that every such power, whether known by name or not—'every title that can be given'—was subject to Christ the Lord.

Moreover, it is significant that he neither affirms nor denies the efficacy of witchcraft or sorcery, although he apparently assumes that if it exists the power behind it must be demonic and not merely human.<sup>24</sup> Nor does he

discuss the details of the Ephesians' beliefs in witchcraft, whatever they may have been, and they were certainly varied and complex as is the case also in African tradition. In short, he does not mock or minimise their fears, but he does not confirm them either.

What he does is to declare that, whatever hostile powers there might be, whatever they might do, whatever they might be called, however they might be conceived, Christ is infinitely greater and is able to guard his people who, as he goes on to say, are indeed already seated 'with him in the heavenly realms' (2:6), and therefore also 'far above all rule and authority, power and dominion'. His purpose is so to plant in their minds the truth of Christ raised and reigning, and of their own position in and with Christ, that their fears, whether well-founded or not, will be relieved.<sup>25</sup>

What is striking is the relative lack of reference to witchcraft in both Old and New Testaments, even though it was well-known, and often much feared, among neighbouring peoples. The Bible recognises that there are practitioners of the occult arts, and on quite rare occasions seems to confirm that they may indeed be instrumental in inflicting harm on their intended victims.

However, it stops very far short of seeing witchcraft as a total explanation of pain or illness. Nowhere do the Scriptures suggest that witches and sorcerers are *major* or *pervasive* causes

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**24** H. Hill, 'Witchcraft and the Gospel: Insights from Africa', *Missiology* 24.3 (July 1996), argues that witchcraft may come from the unconscious power of human beings. However, there are biblical grounds for supposing that the power behind all supernatural activity, other than that effected by the Holy Spirit or angels, is demonic. Accordingly, in Matthew 12:24-28, when Jesus and the Jerusalem rabbis debated the source of the power by which he expelled demons, both parties recognized

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only two possibilities—it was either Beelzebub (Satan) or the Holy Spirit.

**25** See the brief discussion in P. G. Hiebert, R. D. Shaw, T. Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 173.

of human suffering, and the rarity with which the issue comes up is decisive evidence against such a conception. The emphasis falls on the moral dimension mentioned above, far more than on occult causation. Human beings are not primarily victims of occult forces that they cannot control; they are responsible sinners who, in their sufferings, live out the consequences of their own rebellion.

Rather than endorsing witch discourses featuring a world of normally virtuous people being attacked by others who represent evil incarnate, the Bible presents everyone as sinners, with terribly flawed understandings of the nature of evil.<sup>26</sup>

If one seeks a biblical *explanation* of suffering, it is not to be found in witchcraft.

#### 4. The sovereign God

In Scripture God is the sovereign Creator of all that exists, and an ever-present, living and dynamic reality, who is Lord of health, illness and death. His agency in bringing suffering and death on communities or individuals is evident throughout the Bible, and has already been discussed.

However, he is also sovereign in the incidence of suffering in *every* case, for there is no corner of the cosmos in which he is not Lord. So, it is he who allowed Job and Paul to suffer demonic affliction, while limiting both the extent and duration of their trials. The

biblical text makes it clear that Satan could do nothing to harm Job without divine authorisation, and when he did act he could not go beyond the limits that God had set (Job 1-2). Paul uses the so-called 'divine passive' to refer to his own affliction by a demon: 'there *was given* me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me'. Furthermore, he stresses the way in which the affliction, even though it came through demonic agency, served to accomplish God's own good purposes—'to keep me from becoming conceited' (2 Cor 12:7-10).

In Revelation even the beast that rises from the sea under Satan's inspiration, and then goes on to attack and subdue the people of God, can do so only within limits imposed by God. This is again indicated by the repeated use of the passive voice: 'the beast *was given* a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months ... He *was given power* to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he *was given authority* over every tribe, people, language and nation' (Rev 13:5,7).

The use of magic was widespread among Israel's neighbours: 'There can be no doubt that both the Old Testament and the New Testament were born in environments permeated with magical beliefs and practices.'<sup>27</sup> However, the relative neglect of the whole issue in Scripture is significant, and suggests that an overwhelming awareness of God's sovereign and omnipresent power on the part of the authors of

<sup>26</sup> R. J. Priest, 'Witches and the Problem of Evil: Looking behind accusations of witchcraft', in *Books and Culture: A Christian Review* 15.6 (2009), 30-32.

<sup>27</sup> Yamauchi, 'Magic in the Biblical World', 169.

Scripture put the feeble performances of magic practitioners in the shade.

We have already noted the way in which Balaam's aggressive sorcery was turned into the blessing of God's people. In dealing with Egyptian magic, whether at the time of Joseph or Moses, or of Babylonian divination in the book of Daniel, the Bible does not deny that the practitioners were able to produce supernatural effects, but it points to the weakness and inadequacy of their efforts in comparison with the acts of the living God.

Consequently, throughout Scripture godly sufferers turn to God for relief. This does not remove their responsibility to pursue health and healing through empirical means. This is indeed the normal way in which he brings healing, although on occasion he may act directly—or miraculously—to heal without the use of any means at all. However, whatever the mode of God's operation, afflicted believers do not pursue witches or sorcerers, nor seek to appease or accommodate demons.

Faced with suffering Paul and Job both prayed. Job indeed was not aware of the immediate, Satanic, cause of his suffering, but in a world where occult explanations were rife he relentlessly sought relief from God alone. The same is true of the many individual psalms of lament, in which the sufferer turns to God alone in his pain. And of course Paul prayed repeatedly for the removal of his affliction, until he became convinced that it was God's will for him. If the varied purposes of God constitute the ultimate explanatory framework in which suffering takes place, then for the believer prayer must inevitably be vital to any response. 'Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the

church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord' (Jas 5:14, and note also 5:16).

### 5. Multiple levels

Finally, the Bible has a holistic vision in which the different levels of causation may be operative simultaneously. Perhaps the most obvious example is the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ himself, which was caused by Judas' betrayal, by the conspiracy of the Jewish religious leadership of the time, by the approval of the Roman authorities, by Satan himself, and ultimately 'by God's set purpose and foreknowledge' (Acts 2:23). Similarly the sufferings of Job involved physical factors, including in his case hostile political activity and climatic events, as well as Satanic involvement and ultimate control by God of all that was taking place.

In the case of physical illness, the involvement of natural factors will invariably be assumed as it is consistent with the way the world has been created. However, in terms of explanation illness occurs in the context of a physical creation which is fallen. It is for that reason that harmful germs, bacteria, viruses and so on have become a part of the whole process of cause and effect. Moreover, there may be a particular moral element and, in exceptional cases, perhaps even some occult involvement, although the latter would be very difficult to identify. However, whatever the factors involved, God is always the one who remains Lord of health, illness and death.

## IV Responding to HIV-AIDS

The final issue is that of considering

how this brief analysis might apply to the understanding and treatment of HIV-AIDS in the African context.

### 1. Renewed minds

The first and most critical issue is the way in which HIV-AIDS is understood and explained. Minds shape lives; we live out our beliefs. In the case of HIV-AIDS the total explanatory structure at the heart of many traditional African cultures is rooted in an essentially erroneous perception of the causes of suffering. Its consequence will invariably be the adoption of futile therapies, which in some cases lead to a worsening of the patient's condition, and possibly its transmission to other persons. It is also likely to contribute to a fatalism which perseveres in the sort of destructive sexual behaviour in which HIV-AIDS flourishes, believing that nothing at all can make any difference.

The errors involved come ultimately from Satan, who is 'a liar and the father of lies' and whose purpose is destruction (Jn 8:44); the answer to lies is truth, which liberates from error and its consequences. Accordingly, as Paul exhorts his readers: 'Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind' (Rom 12:2). The lies that have been assimilated from the specifically African cultural 'pattern of this world' must be effaced, as minds are renewed in the light of truth, thereby producing a transformation of life.

The issue is at heart a profoundly spiritual one, concerned with the noetic, or intellectual, consequences of sin. The response lies in the ministry of God's Spirit, who alone can bring about the penetrating and transformative ap-

propriation of biblical truth which is required. It challenges the church to a much deeper grasp of God's word, and a correspondingly earnest effort to communicate it in its richness.

### 2. Medicine, witches and community

The vital concern must therefore be to promote the replacement of an occult explanatory framework (the traditional African 'interpersonal causal ontology') with one rooted in the uniquely biblical notion of a physical creation, imbued by its creator with order, regularity and comprehensible natural causes, but fallen as a result of human sin. This may seem to represent the promotion of western cultural values as opposed to African ones, but the reality is more complex.

Modern western cultures have in fact strayed from the biblical approach, in which God constantly upholds and is sovereign over the operation of physical causes, which are therefore totally open to him, and has moved to a closed materialistic system which entirely excludes him. This leads inevitably to purely secular medical approaches with no place for prayer, the confession of sin, or simple faith in God.

A faithfully biblical approach would entail a number of things. First, it would mean the pursuit and application of empirical medical responses to prevention and cure, rooted as they are in a biblical understanding of creation. Second, this necessarily implies a vigorous and biblical response to the traditional explanatory framework. On the one hand, this means an insistence that identifying the witch as the generalised source of human suffer-

ing is a false and unbiblical approach which actually multiplies human pain through the persecution of suspected witches, as well as the neglect of real causes and cures.

On the other hand, it means constantly underlining two critical biblical truths: that the creator God is sovereign over all that he has made, including every occult power; and that the victory Christ has gained over Satan and all the powers of evil through his death and resurrection, has secured the liberation of his people from their grip. 'For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins' (Col 1:13-14). Third, it means stressing the absolutely primary role of human rebellion and sin in bringing disease and suffering into the world.

There is, however, another dimension to be considered, which goes beyond the teaching of truth and seeks to address the common life of God's people. Witchcraft accusations reflect tensions and relational breakdowns in human communities; they breed and multiply in the noxious atmosphere of interpersonal suspicion, animosity, resentment and hatred. For that reason anthropological approaches to witchcraft have often tended to see witchcraft accusation as a major way of articulating and dealing with human conflicts.<sup>28</sup>

However, while there may be some validity in that argument, such accusations do nothing to heal divided communities but tend rather to make division permanent. They sustain a climate of suspicion, fear and hostility, and all too often lead to violence and even murder. Consequently, a major element of any Christian response to witchcraft belief and accusation must be the pursuit of harmony, forgiveness and reconciliation. 'The church must develop methods to deal with the suppressed hostility that spawns and sustains witchcraft.'<sup>29</sup>

God's people need to live out the reality of the gospel, and so to be communities of reconciliation themselves that they are able to function without hypocrisy as light and salt in the wider society. The role of leadership within the church will therefore be not only that of more profoundly communicating truth, vital though that is, but also of so fostering a climate and practice of love, forbearance and reconciliation among the people of God that the discourse of witchcraft will simply become redundant.

### 3. HIV-AIDs and sin

All illness is 'the effluent of the fall, the result of a fallen world'.<sup>30</sup> In the case of HIV-AIDS there is often a direct and obvious causal link between moral failure and the onset of disease. This means that a major element of the Christian response lies in communicating how

<sup>28</sup> M. Marwick, 'The Social Context of Cewa Witch Beliefs', *Africa* 22 (1952), 120-35 and 215-33, is a major exponent of this approach. See also M. Marwick, *Sorcery in its Social Setting: a Study of the Northern Rhodesian Cewa* (Manchester: Manchester University Press,

1965).

<sup>29</sup> Hiebert et al., *Understanding Folk Religion*, 174.

<sup>30</sup> Carson, *How Long, O Lord*, 48, quoted above.

God intends that the good gift of human sexuality should be employed. It is surely true that if sexual promiscuity were eliminated, HIV-AIDS would progressively, and perhaps quite rapidly, disappear. Once again the biblical notion of wisdom is central, the pursuit of a style of life which moves with the flow of God's creation, rather than behaving in self-destructive defiance of it.

However, HIV-AIDS still shares in the ambiguity that characterises human suffering in general. Thus, faithful spouses or newborn babies may suffer as the result of the wrongdoing of others, while unwitting transfer of the virus may take place through careless use of unsterile needles or the transfusion of infected blood, and so on. Simply and invariably to attribute HIV-AIDS to particular preceding moral sin will, therefore, in many cases be inappropriate, as well as pastorally disastrous.

In pastoral terms this means that sufferers and their families need care at both the medical and spiritual levels. Counsel is vital, including the sensitive probing of the circumstances which have brought the patient to his or her present condition. In all cases, pastoral support will include prayer, and encouragement that is rooted in the truth of the liberating gospel of

hope. In some cases it may mean forgiveness on the part of those who have been terribly wronged by the faithlessness of a partner in the most intimate of human relationships; in other cases it will mean confession of sin and repentance.

However, underlying it all there must be an explicit recognition, communication and understanding of the unlimited and transforming grace of God as it is displayed on the cross. The violation of God's law may often be the cause of 'evil and AIDS', but it is his grace in Christ that provides the ultimate and uniquely complete response, as it does for all human sin and pain. In this area as in all others the children of God need faithfully to reflect the heart of their Father 'who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all' (Rom 8:32). It is the 'reckless grace' of the prodigal God which alone offers true hope.<sup>31</sup> 'But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him' (Lk 15:20).

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31 T. Keller, *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith* (New York, NY: Dutton, 2008), xv.

# The Blessing, Power and Authority of the Church

## A study in Matthew 16:17-19

Ian S. Kemp

*This paper attempts an exegesis of a passage of Scripture which has been the subject of vast scholarship and conflicting interpretation. We seek to look at it afresh and to find some relevance to current issues in the Church.*

The Church is confused about her own constitution. Why she exists, who she belongs to, and even who belongs to her are questions that receive the most diverse answers though they concern the very heart of the Church's being. The Church has her back to the wall. Usually a tiny minority in a pluralistic society which either ignores her, despises her, opposes her or threatens her very existence, the Church questions her inferior position and is painfully conscious of her weakness. The Church also has lost her nerve. What can she say in the world when she is rent asunder by inner division, doctrinal confusion and moral failure?

What the Church of our day needs is deep conviction on those very points where she is most confused. Jesus laid those convictions like foundation stones when he first spoke to Peter about the Church in Matthew 16:17-

19. 'You are mine,' he said. 'You are a power structure. You have enormous authority.' Our purpose in this study is to try to establish the correct meaning of this crucial statement of our Lord's. Clarity of thought here should help the Church towards a much needed conviction.

Jesus' teaching about the Church came in direct response to *Peter's confession*. Some understanding of the content of that confession will thus help us to see the issues to which Jesus responds.

The confession was the first considered affirmation by any of the disciples of Jesus' Messiahship. It is true that the Gospel writers refer to Jesus as Christ before this scene at Caesarea Philippi (Mt 1:1, 16, 18, 11:2) and that he had been so acknowledged by devils (Mt 8:29) and by followers of Jesus (Jn 1:41, Mt 9:28, 12:23, 14:33, 15:22). But these acknowledgements were spontaneous and tentative rather than considered statements. Now with Peter's confession in Matthew 16:16, we have a deliberate conscious expression rejecting other popular possibilities

that Jesus was John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. So far as Peter was concerned he had come to the conclusion that Jesus was the Christ and Son of the living God.

The confession involves several significant insights on Peter's behalf.

1) It showed that Peter saw *Jesus as the promised Messiah*. Current popular hopes for the Messiah were for a political leader, at best an ideal human king. But Peter's observations of Jesus the wandering teacher, miracle worker, prophet and friend led him to see in this non-political figure, one who fulfilled the Scriptural hope of Messiah. Further, Peter even went beyond the Scriptural pre-figuration of a human king in the line of David when he said that this clearly human Jesus Messiah was the Son of the living God. Peter had an insight into Jesus that was unequalled among his contemporaries.

2) It showed that Peter saw *Jesus in terms of the Kingdom of God*. 'Son of God' in pre-Christian Judaism was a term understood as 'God's adopted vice-regent in His Kingdom.' 'Son of man' the term which Jesus used in questioning his disciples about who people thought he was, is also a term implying the Kingdom of God. The well-known passage in Daniel 7 from which the Son of man terminology comes, sees him 'given dominion and glory and kingdom ... His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his Kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.' (Dan 7:14). Moreover Daniel saw that the Kingdom shall be received by 'the saints of the Most High' (Dan 7:13) implying that somehow these 'saints' are associated with the Son of man who receives the Kingdom. Peter's confession thus im-

plies that Jesus is the King exercising authority with his saints in the Kingdom of God.

3) The confession also shows that Peter saw *Jesus as unique*. Of all the Gospel accounts of this confession at Caesarea Philippi, it is only Matthew who records the words 'Son of the living God.' Biblical thought about the living God is that God has life originally in himself, his life is indestructible and he therefore lives eternally. It also refers to the transcendence of God's existence over men and of his action and intervention in the affairs of men. Peter, in saying that Jesus is the Son of the living God, is thus affirming that Jesus is in a unique relationship to Him who is the transcendent and indestructible God, that he knows the mind and purposes of the living God as only a son may know the mind of his father. When the disciples said that men were identifying Jesus with John the Baptist, Elijah and Jeremiah, they meant that these men saw Jesus as similar to men of the past, or as possessing some characteristics of those men in history. But when Peter confessed, he saw Jesus as transcending all such characters of the past, unique in all history, alone of his own kind. That Peter, a devout monotheist, could in this his first considered opinion of Jesus nearly ascribe to this man Jesus characteristics of deity which were later openly affirmed by the Church ('Jesus is Lord') shows how radical his thinking was.

Peter's confession of Jesus thus reveals that he saw the Person of Jesus as God's agent, fulfilling Scriptural prophecy as an anointed King reigning with his saints, and as one who was in a unique relationship to the living God. It is to this confession that Jesus

responds with his teaching about the Church.

The crucial verses 17–19 of our study are set in the context of further teaching about Jesus' Messiahship and the true meaning of discipleship. The Messiah is to be a suffering King (21) and his followers too must tread the path of suffering (24–26). The Messiah however is to rise from the dead (27) and the disciples are to share in the eternal kingdom of the Son of man (28). The 'saints of the Most High' in sharing the Kingdom are also to share the glory with the King. Thus Jesus' teaching about the church in vv 17–19 must be seen in the context of suffering, self-denial and ultimate victory. This is what it means to be living in the Kingdom.

The three verses, in themselves unique to Matthew's Gospel, form a triad each of three lines, the second and third line explaining the first line in each triad, in antithetical parallelism.<sup>1</sup> Thus Jesus says in the first triad 'Blessed are you Simon bar Jona'; then the following two statements ('for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you; but my Father who is in heaven') explain why Peter is blessed. Similarly in v.18 the statements about building the Church and the powers of death explain 'you are Peter' and in v.19 the explanation of the keys is found in the two following statements about the binding and loosing. We shall now look at each triad in turn.

## I The Blessing

(a) The word of blessing with which

Jesus begins his response to Peter is the common word 'makarios' used frequently in the New Testament of the distinctive joy which comes to a man when he shares in the salvation of the Kingdom of God. Thus Mary is called blessed by all generations, for she is the mother of the Messiah who brings this salvation (Lk 1:48), and believers are pronounced blessed because they have received the message of salvation (Gal 4:15) and have been reckoned as righteous before God (Rom 4:6, 9). Blessing in the New Testament is usually in the context of the eschatological proclamation of the Kingdom. It expresses the tense emotion of a soul that is now set in the dawn of the new age of salvation (Mt 13:16, Rev 19:9), as it also expresses the joy of the one who has found in the Kingdom of God spiritual realities infinitely more valuable than any material possessions (e.g. the beatitudes Mt 5:3ff, 1 Pet 3:14). The blessed person is in fact the one who has discovered in the Kingdom the reversal of all human values. What he now possesses be it purity of heart, meekness, pity or faith counts before God. These are the possessions that last forever. Indeed the New Testament beatitudes are intimations of future glory. Or, to put it the other way, the future glory guaranteed to the man of faith sheds light on his present sorrows. Being blessed means that he sees his present in the light of the glorious future.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus thus begins by highly commending Peter for his faith. He assures him that he has what really counts

<sup>1</sup> Jeremias in TNTW 1:327, article *Pute*.

<sup>2</sup> See F. Hauck in TNTW IV:369, article *makarios*.

with God, and that the future glory of the Kingdom of God now perceived by Peter enables him with joy to see his present earthly life in a new light. The fact that Jesus addresses Peter here in his original family name Simon bar Jona enhances the thought that the joy and reality, the hope and assurance of an entirely new dimension of life had now come to this very ordinary human being. Life's *summum bonum* had been found.

(b) The first explanation of this new blessedness of the Kingdom Jesus now gives in the negative statement that it was not flesh and blood that had revealed the truth about Jesus to Peter. There was nothing in Simon *per se*, nothing in the human nature that was his in common with all other human beings that could have given him the insights he had expressed. 'Flesh and blood' is man in his entirety, man in his weakness, and is a solemn reminder to us that by means of all his noble achievements, his flights of philosophy and his moral endeavours, the smile of God's approval, the pearl of great price, can never be obtained by man. The discovery of the truth, membership in the Kingdom, is a divine gift.

(c) The divine gift is the positive part of Jesus' explanation of the blessedness of the Kingdom, the third line in this first triad. The heavenly Father had revealed it to Peter. So Peter's confession was more than insight. His understanding of Scripture, of the Kingdom and of Jesus himself was the result of revelation. God had shown it to him personally. Here in a moment God's eternal light focussed on one man. Here in this one man the work of the Father had taken place bringing Peter into possession of the Kingdom,

causing him to see life in the light of eternity and effecting a radical shift in the centre of his own being.

It has been suggested<sup>3</sup> that the key for interpreting verses 17–19 is this personal revelation of the Father to Peter. Each of the three statements that begin each triad 'Blessed are you ... You are Peter ... I will give you the keys' are to be seen not as three different ways of saying that Peter is to be the principal person in the Church, but three different results of the revelation which the Father has made to Peter. This is a helpful key to interpreting the passage, and to our understanding of the Church. The underlying primacy here is not that of Peter as many have suggested from Jesus' words in the next triad. The underlying primacy is that of the Father and his will. Jesus virtually says here that Peter himself is of no significance: left to his own intelligence he would have come to his own conclusions and they would be wrong. But what *is* of significance is the will of God the Father who guided Peter to the truth. The basis is not Peter, nor the rock, but the Father, the Father's will and the Father's personal revelation to an ordinary human being.

Such, then, is the blessing. It is characterised by a faith in Jesus that transcends natural human understanding, by a joy that exults in receiving what transcends every earthly possession, and a hope that bears present tensions in view of eternal guarantees. It is the result of the heavenly Father's initiative, the gift of his personal revelation.

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3 R. Newton Flew, *Jesus and His Church* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1938), 92.

## II The Power

Verse 18 begins with the emphatic *Kago do soi* 'But I again say to you ...' indicating that the revelation which the Father had given to Peter in the confession he had made, is now being followed by a further revelation which Jesus makes in this and the next verse. 'Light received brings more light.' 'To him who has shall more be given.' Peter, once open to the revelation of God, is now given more. A principle of all spiritual growth, indeed, of all church growth, lies here.

The revelation now given to Peter concerns the church, specifically mentioned as *ekklesia* only in this verse and in Matthew 18:18 and nowhere else in the Gospels. We start with the opening statement 'You are Peter' and the two explanatory statements following it. We shall therefore look for the significance of Simon's name Peter, given to him by Jesus some time earlier (Jn 1:42).

1) *Peter's name*. There is an obvious word play on *petros* the name of Peter, and *petra*, the rock on which Jesus will build his church.

Many have thought that in the subtle distinctions of these two words Jesus was saying that Peter himself was of little significance (*petros* = stone), but what counts for the Church is the rock (*petra*) on which it stands. The rock is then variously interpreted as Jesus, God the Father, or Peter's confession, any of these being of greater significance than Peter himself just as a rock is greater than a stone.

But we should be cautious about the subtleties of such word play.<sup>4</sup> The word

which Jesus most probably used in Aramaic is *Keḅa(s)* meaning a rock. Being a feminine word in Aramaic, *Keḅa* would rightly be translated into Greek as *petra*. But if a man is to be given a Greek name meaning rock, the feminine form *petra* could not be used: it would have to be the masculine form *petros*. Seen in this light the distinctions in our text must not be pressed and we shall settle for the basic idea that Jesus said to Simon 'You are Rock, and on this rock I will build my Church.'

But in what way precisely is Peter the rock on which Jesus will build his Church?

The Roman Catholic interpretation is that in these words Jesus conferred on Peter 'the primacy of jurisdiction over the entire Church' and that 'the primacy principle and foundation of the structure are to endure as long as it (the Church) does and that Peter is to transmit his authority to his successors.'<sup>5</sup> The whole argument of the papacy is built on the interpretation of this verse.

The argument is not so convincing however when we consider that in the two other New Testament responses where the apostles are said to be the foundation of the Church, Peter's name is not even mentioned (Eph 2:20, Rev 21:14). Add to this Paul's own confrontation when he 'withstood Peter to his face' (Gal 2:11–14) and Peter's own self-effacement when he does not think of himself as invested with special privileges (Acts 10:26, 1 Peter 1:1)

Hill, *Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 261.

<sup>5</sup> Canon Boulenger, *Apologetique*, 335–39, quoted by A. F. Kuen, *I will build my church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 109.

<sup>4</sup> See R. N. Flew, *Jesus and His Church*, 93. D.

but stands equally with others as a 'fellow elder' (1 Peter 4:1).

Undoubtedly Peter did have primacy of a sort in the early church. He was the first to lead Jews into the Kingdom on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), and Gentiles not long afterward (Acts 10). He was singled out by Christ for strategic pastoral ministry (Lk 22:31ff) and confirmed in this after the resurrection (Jn 21:15ff). His leadership in the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), and in the churches of Asia Minor (1 Peter) is clear. But any primacy for the Roman Church and its bishop as successors to Peter cannot be found in our passage. Jesus is speaking here about the foundation of the Church, and in the nature of things that cannot be repeated.

The common Protestant reaction to this view appealing to the distinction between *petros* and *petra* is that the Rock is not Peter but the confession which Peter made or the truth revealed to him.

While this satisfies the Protestant desire to refute the Roman Catholic claim and to have a propositional basis for the Church it depends too heavily on the linguistic subtleties and seems motivated by dogmatic presuppositions. Both Catholics and Protestants alike have been able to find in this passage what each wanted to find.

We cannot but admit that Jesus was referring to the person of Peter himself. Jesus builds his Church on a man, not on stones or dogmas, but on human beings. Indeed he builds his Church on a new man, a Simon, who on an earlier occasion had been renamed with a name designed to fill him with hope as he followed his new Master. Further, Jesus builds his Church on the man who as a result of following

Jesus is open to the revelation of God in Christ, who now confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, and whose life is now integrated to God through Christ. This is the kind of man who very soon becomes a person to be reckoned with, to whom others naturally turn, a man who though by nature impetuous and unstable, is now as good as his new name. On such a man the next stones in the Church can now be placed.

A Rabbinic parable throws further light on Peter as the Rock. It likens God to a king who wanted to build a house but could find no sure foundation, so he dug down deeply till he found rock. 'So' says the parable, 'when God saw Abraham who was to arise, He said, "Now I have found a rock on which to build and establish the world."<sup>6</sup> Thus Isaiah 51:1 calls on Israel to look to the rock (Abraham) whence they were hewn. It is more than likely that Jesus had some such thought of Israel's foundation rock in mind when he spoke to Peter, and said to him in effect 'Just as Abraham was the foundation rock of the Old Israel, so you Peter, the man to whom my Father has revealed the truth, will be the foundation of the new Israel'.

But why this one man Peter? In what way is he different from other like confessors? We have already seen that the argument for the primacy of Peter cannot be sustained on Biblical grounds. Peter is not here being given status in the Church. It is rather a question of priority. In order of time Peter is the first stone of the new church structure; other similar stones will be placed on him as the church in time

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6 G. F. Moore, *Judaism*, 1:538.

rises and grows. Spokesman here, as often for the twelve disciples, Peter appears as the representative disciple on which Christ builds his Church. Thus Paul can speak of all the apostles including Peter as the foundation of the Church (Eph 2:20) and, with a change of metaphor, of James and John along with Peter as pillars of the Church (Gal 2:9). Peter the Rock then is the kind of man on whom Jesus builds his Church. There are other rocks on which the Church is built, impetuous, vacillating, denying like Peter maybe, but men with hearts open to God, men confessing the Christ, men whose characters become like their names because their lives are integrated in Christ. In such men God is at work. In such men the power of the Church is to be found. Power in the Church begins here. The great need of today is for men and women of this order. The Church of Jesus Christ cannot have power unless it is built on rocks and supported by pillars like this.

2) *The ecclesia*. Our explanation of Peter the rock has already led us into the second line of this triad—'on this rock I will build my Church' (v.18). But there is more to notice.

The term *ecclesia*, as already noted, occurs only here and in Matthew 18:18 in all four Gospels. This has caused some to see it in these passages as a reading back into the teaching of Jesus the ecclesiology of the later institutional Church.<sup>7</sup> But to treat Jesus' words here in this way as unauthentic is not necessary once we grasp the significance of the word *ecclesia* for Matthew's readers.

A. H. McNeile has pointed out that

whether Jesus had used either of the Aramaic words *Qahal* meaning the body of Israel assembled as a congregation or *kenishta* meaning a synagogue, 'for Matthew's Greek readers *ecclesia* was the only possible word to express the Christian body as distinct from Jews'.<sup>8</sup> That Jesus intended it to be distinct from Israel is seen in his calling it '*My Church*.' Though the Church is co-terminous with the Old Testament body of Israel whom God had called to himself, it was nevertheless to be a *new body*, called by Christ, and *his* possession. This particular point in Jesus' life just at the end of his Galilean ministry and on the point of his going to Jerusalem to be killed, he chose as the fitting time to prepare his disciples to become that new body. The teaching that immediately followed concerning the suffering Messiah and the cost of discipleship begins to outline that newness.

The *intimate bond* between Jesus and his Church is also bound up in this term *ecclesia*. Because Jesus had asked the initial question about the Son of man (see Mt 16:13), the Daniel 7 association of the Son of Man with the saints of the Most High must have been in his mind. There the Son of Man is no mere individual but the representative of the Saints of the Most High who share rule in the Kingdom with Him. 'Just as the poimen (shepherd) is no real shepherd, without the poimnion (flock), so the Christos is no true Christ without the *ecclesia*.'<sup>9</sup> Here surely is the germ of Jesus' later teaching about the Vine and the branches (Jn 15) and Paul's

<sup>8</sup> A. H. McNeile *Gospel according to St. Matthew* (London: Macmillan, 1915), 241.

<sup>9</sup> Gloege, cited in K. P. Schmidt, TNTW, 3:518ff.

<sup>7</sup> S. David Hill, *Gospel of Matthew*, 259.

teaching about the Church as the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12ff, Eph 5:27ff). Jesus' Messiahship implies the Church. They belong together.

The *security of the Church* is found in the fact that it is Jesus who will build his Church. 'I will build *my* Church.' Built on the rock of people who confess like Peter gives it one kind of security. But its ultimate security is in the will of Christ himself. Because he wills to build his Church, the Church is not any kind of human institution, but a divine creation, rooted in the will of God, growing up under the direction of Christ himself.

Thus in explaining what is to be built on the rock Jesus speaks of the Church as a powerful community. The Church is to be the new people of God grouped around the Messiah who suffers, dies, and rises again. It is to share with Him his rule in the everlasting Kingdom of God, and it is to grow up at the will of and under the direction of Christ, the Son of God.

3) *Powers of death*. In the third line of this triad (v.18), Jesus says 'the powers of death shall not prevail against it.' Here is more about power.

'Powers of death' is the R.S.V. translation of *pulai hadou* or 'gates of Hades.' Hades was the common term in the ancient world for the place of departed spirits, the underworld, similar to the *Sheol* of the Old Testament. In terms of ancient oriental and biblical cosmology the underworld was viewed as a place in the hollow earth, a land, a city, a fortress or a prison with strong gates which prevented the escape of its occupants or barred access to any invaders. The gates of Hades came to be a synonym for Hades itself or more particularly as in later Judaism a vivid

term to describe the strength and security of the underworld.<sup>10</sup> R.S.V. 'powers of death' conveys that idea. But since Hades in New Testament times often meant the realm of the ungodly dead<sup>11</sup> 'powers of evil' is also a possible translation.

*Katischuo* (R.S.V. 'shall not prevail against') can be used in a passive sense meaning 'be a match for', so that Jesus' meaning is that the powers of death shall not be able to stand up against the Church. This presents the Church as an attacking force against death or evil, a picture not unknown in the New Testament<sup>12</sup> and in Christian hymnology.<sup>13</sup> But if we hold to Jeremias' contention that *katischuo* followed by the genitive in Jewish Greek is always used in an active sense meaning 'to vanquish, overpower' then the gates of Hades in Jesus' words are the aggressors against the Church.<sup>14</sup> Death in its attack against the Church shall have no power over it.

This view is strengthened when we understand the significance in ancient cosmology of the sacred rock which topped the hollow mountain inside the earth. The double function of this rock was to support the sanctuary built on it and to close off to the world the underworld with its dead in the inside of the mountain. This mountain is also the source of the primal flood which threatens to burst in upon the world, but which is sealed off only by the rock

<sup>10</sup> O.T. has several such references: Job 17:16, 28:17, Ps 9:13, 107:18, Is 38:10.

<sup>11</sup> See J. Jeremias TNTW 1:147, article *Hades* and Vol. VI:926, article *Pute*.

<sup>12</sup> See 2 Cor 10:4, Eph 6:10ff.

<sup>13</sup> 'Onward Christian soldiers ...'

<sup>14</sup> J. Jeremias, TNTW, 1:927, article *Pute*.

securely placed on top with the sanctuary above it.<sup>15</sup> The powers of death therefore are seen to be the attackers against the rock and the Church built upon it. But the Church, possessed and built by Christ who, so he now reveals to his disciples, will soon go to the realm of the dead and return victorious (v.21), is equipped with all the power it needs to resist such an attack.<sup>16</sup> The promise of Jesus to Peter therefore means that the community that trusts in Him is secure from the powers of death and from the evil which those powers exert.

A little reflection on current social injustices, religious persecutions and ruthless oppression leads us inevitably back to the powers of death. For the threat of death is constantly used by the oppressor against the oppressed. 'Give us what we demand or we will kill you' is his weapon of attack. And the poor man yields, because death has the last most powerful word. But linked to a risen victorious Lord, a new power structure has arisen in the community, the Church over which the powers of death have no power. This small community, powerless in the eyes of the world, suddenly stands up against death with a new confidence. Death no longer cowers them into fear and submission. Should some of their number die in the conflict, their death is to the community but a victory and others are quick to take their place. The oppressor is unnerved for he does not know how to deal with a people who have conquered his ultimate weapon. He desists from evil, and justice and right-

eousness begin to appear. So long as the Church maintains its faith in Christ the Son of the living God, the life of its deathless Lord makes it a power structure against which man's last most terrifying weapon has no effect.<sup>17</sup>

### III The Authority

Handing over the keys was in Biblical and later Jewish usage, as in our own, a sign of full authorisation. We are thus presented in this verse with the authority of the keys put into the hands of the man on whom the Church is being built. Again we look for the meaning of the first line of the triad and then its explanation in the two lines following.

1) *The keys*. Revelation 1:18 speaks of Jesus having the keys of Death and Hades, meaning most probably, not the keys TO the place of the dead (objective genitive) but the keys OF death (subjective genitive), that is the keys which the personified Death and Hades carry as lords of the underworld. By virtue of his death and resurrection in which the decisive battle between Jesus and these lords has now taken place, these keys are now in the hands of Jesus himself. It is attractive to think that these are the keys which Jesus gives to Peter for in the previous verse Jesus has been speaking of the gates of Hades. And tradition has firmly allowed the keys to be in Peter's hands in the age-old image of him as the porter at the gates of heaven. But we must note that Jesus spoke here not of the keys of heaven, but of the keys

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<sup>17</sup> See V. Mangalwadi TRACI Journal, 17:19ff; 18:60, 61; 19:32 for examples of this in U.P., India, and a helpful discussion of this theme in relation to social justice.

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<sup>15</sup> J. Jeremias, TNTW, article *petra*.

<sup>16</sup> See also 1 Peter 3:19.

of the *Kingdom* of heaven. So if we see Peter as the porter we imply an identity between heaven and the Kingdom of heaven which we find nowhere in the Gospels.

A second line of interpretation sees the keys as the key of David which according to Revelation 3:7 the risen Christ possesses. The imagery of this verse goes back to Isaiah 22:22 where 'the key of the house of David', that is, King David's palace in Jerusalem, is given to Eliakim with unlimited authority over the royal household. Christ, the representative of the Davidic line (Rev 22:16) is thus seen to possess the key to God's eternal palace opening and shutting where no man has any authority. If this is the kind of authority given to Peter alone so that like a Grand Vizier, he opens and shuts the kingdom of heaven, then the history of the early church denies it. For in the early church Peter's leadership is shared. But this kind of authority is indeed given to the apostles as the following two lines of the triad will explain.

A third line of interpretation is also worth considering. While there is no known non-Christian instance of the term 'keys of the Kingdom of heaven',<sup>18</sup> nor does the term appear anywhere else in the New Testament, there is in Matthew 23:13 a presupposition of the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. For in this passage Jesus accuses the scribes and Pharisees of shutting the Kingdom of heaven against men neither going in themselves, nor allowing others to enter. And in what appears to be a parallel passage in Luke 11:52, Jesus accuses lawyers of taking away the key

of knowledge, not entering themselves, and hindering others who would enter. There was a Rabbinic saying: 'He who has knowledge of the law without reverence to God, is like a treasurer who has been given the inner key, but not the outer key. How can he enter?' So knowledge of the Torah was considered to be possession of the key. The teaching of the scribes was the exercise of the key, and since it was said of the scribe 'When he has opened, no one shuts,' the decisions of the scribes were of absolute validity.<sup>19</sup>

It appears therefore that Jesus has in mind the claim of the theologians of the day to have the power of the keys by virtue of their knowledge of Scripture. Jesus accuses them of not using this power and of so debarring people from the Kingdom of God. If this were the background to Jesus' thought in giving the keys to Peter, then Peter is being entrusted with the authority to declare the will of God as it is revealed in Scripture, through his teaching, preaching and judging. If we bear in mind Bultmann's observation that knowledge in the Septuagint is 'a spiritual possess on resting on revelation'<sup>20</sup> then the key now given to Peter is the authority to proclaim the Word of God on the basis of the revelation about Christ which he has received for the purpose of admitting people into the Kingdom of heaven. Not long after this, Peter was exercising this authority among Jews (Acts 2) and Gentiles (Acts 10). Peter was the first to use this key, but not the only one. The authority for ministry in the new household of God lies here and

18 J. Jeremias TNTW, III:744ff, article *Kleis*.

19 J. Jeremias, TNTW, III:747, footnote 42.

20 Bultmann, TNTW, 1:699, article *ginosko*.

is used whenever enlightened believers by proclaiming the Biblical truth about Christ open to others the door of revelation through with they themselves have passed.

2) *Binding and loosing* (19b, c) The change from 'Kingdom of heaven' to 'heaven' in these two lines is noteworthy because 'heaven' meaning God's dwelling place here stands, as it often does, for God himself. Binding and loosing in Rabbinic language meant forbidding and allowing practical matters of conduct. It would appear therefore that Jesus tells Peter that he will exercise a legislative authority adjudicating on matters of conduct with such absolute authority as God will recognise in heaven. Roman Catholic interpretation has followed this line of thought.

Yet in Matthew 18:18 the identical words are spoken by Jesus to all the disciples and in John 20:23 similar words to all the disciples, so any thought of Peter's primacy must be ruled out. In these two verses all the apostles shared Peter's authority, and we may infer as we have seen in every line of these triads so far that what is said to Peter is true of all the members of the new community. The authority is given to the Church.

It is true that in Matthew 18:18 the application of this authority concerns discipline within the Church. But the issue in John 20:23 is broader, concerning the forgiveness and retention of sins. If we keep in mind the analogy of the scribes who on the basis of their expert knowledge of the oral tradition declared some things forbidden (bound) and other things permitted (loosed), Peter is now being told that in the coming Kingdom he would be like a scribe.

If we also keep in mind that these two lines in this triad explain the first line, this binding and loosing concerns not juridical decisions on fine matters of the law in the manner of the scribes, but the weightier matters of grace, mercy and judgment that affect people's admission into and exclusion from the Kingdom of God. This is what it means to use the keys.

On the basis of his knowledge of the Scriptures, of Jesus and of his teaching, Peter was to proclaim the Gospel. In doing so he would have authority to forgive or retain sins and to pronounce on the admission or exclusion of people from the Kingdom of God. Such authority was to be not Peter's alone, but that of the whole Church (Mt 18:18, Jn 20:23), a church that acts in the Spirit (Jn 20:23) and through the Word. Peter exercised this authority through preaching in Acts 2 and 10 and through legislative decision along with the Church at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). Such authority has continued to be exercised wherever men of Peter's faith have characterized the Church ever since.

In this study we have looked at three basic factors of the Church. Each has great relevance to the church in India today.

1) The Church of Jesus Christ is made up of men and women who have the same faith as Peter's faith. Wherever there are people to whom God has personally revealed Jesus Christ as the Son of the living God and who integrate their lives around Him, there is the Church. Apart from this reality the Church has no foundation. Any superstructure not built on this foundation is a facade. We should not be afraid therefore if some of the current super-

structures fall, nor should we waste our efforts seeking to prop them up—administrative programmes, forms of worship, properties, institutions and the like. What is of paramount importance is people who believe and confess Jesus the King. For the emergence and upbuilding of such a people our energies are to be directed.

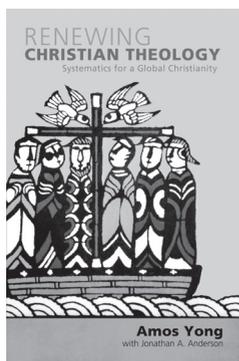
2) The Church is a power structure against which the ultimate weapon of men and the devil has no power. In days when the Church is increasingly being told to prepare for persecution, she needs to learn *now* that because she is the Church of the risen deathless Lord, she has nothing to fear. She can stand up against all the powers of evil. She will suffer and pour out his (her) soul unto death, 'yet will still stand up with boldness that will 'startle many nations, and kings shall shut their mouths because of him (her)' (Is 52:15). There is talk today of a theol-

ogy of persecution. Surely this is it. Because the Church is the community of the risen Lord, she is invincible before men's greatest power. We must preach more on these lines.

3) The Church so constituted and so emboldened has the keys of the Kingdom. With these she proclaims the Gospel of God's truth and admits into the Kingdom of God those who will believe and receive the message of the Kingdom. Not to be identified wholly with the Kingdom, the Church is nevertheless part of the Kingdom, the sign of its presence in the world and the instrument of its increase. The divine order is first the Kingdom, then the Church, then the world—not the kingdom-world-Church. The Kingdom comes with Christ, into the world. Those who enter the Kingdom constitute the Church. The Kingdom creates the Church and the Church preaches the Kingdom to the world.

# Students, Scholars, and Systematics: A Panel Discussion of Amos Yong: *Renewing Christian Theology: Systematics for a Global Christianity*

Christopher A. Stephenson



It is my distinct privilege to introduce the following critical reviews of Amos Yong's *Renewing Christian Theology: Systematics for a Global Christianity*, an introduction to systematic theology in pneumatological perspective for beginning students.<sup>1</sup> Yong is not a stranger to the readers of *Evangelical Review of Theology*. In addition to book reviews, he has published several articles on

topics including philosophy of religion, pentecostal theology, ecclesiology, and disability studies.<sup>2</sup> Among Evangelicals more broadly, it is probably Yong's theology of religions that has attracted the most attention, and as the most prolific academic theologian in the history of pentecostalism, he has also written on theological method, hermeneutical theory, missiology, political theology, and science and religion.

In light of Yong's prior achievements in these numerous areas of religious studies, a few words are in order about how they provide the context for *Renewing Christian Theology*.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See in *ERT*: 26:1 (2002): 45-67; 26:3 (2002): 240-64; 30:1 (2006): 60-85; 32:1 (2008): 22-37; 33:2 (2009): 179-83; 35:2 (2011): 160-76; 39:3 (2015): 204-17.

<sup>3</sup> For an extensive evaluation of Yong's theology, see Christopher A. Stephenson, *Types of Pentecostal Theology: Method, System, Spirit* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 82-110.

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<sup>1</sup> Waco: BUP, 2014.

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**Christopher A. Stephenson** is Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology at Lee University (Cleveland, TN) and the author of *Types of Pentecostal Theology: Method, System, Spirit* (Oxford: OUP, 2013). His current research is devoted to completing *The Work of Jesus Christ* (Eerdmans; *Guides to Theology*) and a book on constructive theology that combines ritual and pneumatological perspectives on baptism and Lord's supper (OUP). He is the editor of *Peter Lang's Ecumenical Studies monograph series* and a book review editor in *theology for Religious Studies Review*. Cover graphic used with permission.

In Yong's first monograph, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, he not only begins to develop his theology of religions, but also provides the first glimpse of a methodology that receives its most explicit articulation in *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective*.<sup>4</sup> In the latter, Yong develops a pneumatological theological method and hermeneutic. Pneumatological theology is not simply a theology of the Holy Spirit, but an account of all of Christian theology in pneumatological perspective, a privileging of pneumatology as the best entry point into a robustly trinitarian theology and hermeneutic.

Pneumatological theology requires us to speak not only to those within ecclesial contexts, but also to any interlocutor in the public square over the validity of our truth claims, whether theological or any other kind. Yong sees coherence, correspondence, and pragmatism as compatible criteria for truth claims. Thus, engagement with any and all interlocutors in multiple different communities of discourse allows us to bear witness to what we believe to be true while remaining open to correction when such engagement suggests that our beliefs may not be internally consistent, may be less satisfactory than others' competing attempts to square their own beliefs with a reality that exists independently of human minds, or may come up short at the level of lived experience—coherence, correspondence, and pragmatism, respectively.

According to Yong, such a process of engagement and discernment is pneu-

matological because the Holy Spirit is operative at the ontological level by playing a role in instantiating created realities as the realities that they are and at the epistemological level by making created realities intelligible to human minds. The realms of being and knowing are related, and the Holy Spirit enables human minds to span the gap between the two. Although human knowledge is fallible, we do not have to withdraw to utter scepticism, because, in Yong's words, 'we do engage reality, our engagement is more or less truthful, and it is normed by reality itself'.<sup>5</sup>

However, human knowledge of reality is hermeneutically construed, for we are situated within various interpretive communities that have established traditions, practices, and ways of viewing the world. Indeed, for Yong, theological interpreters are situated within multiple communities of discourse whose borders are not hermetically sealed and at times are not even clearly delineated. Besides engaging interlocutors outside ecclesial contexts in various communities of discourse in the public square, theologians must also acknowledge that they themselves operate and interpret from within multiple communities of discourse.

Thus, not only should they engage persons in other interpretive communities to test truth claims, they should also realize that their own truth claims are already informed by more than one interpretive community before they ever get around to engaging directly members of other interpretive communities.

This is less than even a sketch of

4 Burlington: Ashgate, 2002.

5 *Spirit-Word-Community*, 184.

Yong's elaborate theological method, but it is enough to illuminate what motivates his forays into so many different areas of religious studies. Put simply, Yong is on a quest for truth of all kinds wherever it may be understood and elucidated most clearly. In some respects, it may be among pentecostal systematic theologians.<sup>6</sup> In others, it may be among adherents to more popular Evangelical or pentecostal practices.<sup>7</sup>

In others, it may be among persons with disabilities.<sup>8</sup> In yet other respects, it may be among practitioners of religions other than Christianity.<sup>9</sup> In still others, it may be among natural scientists.<sup>10</sup> Some find themselves participating directly in more than one of these or similar interpretive communities;<sup>11</sup> most if not all are influenced by more than one of these or similar interpretive communities.

In sum, it is Yong's determination to attend to both particular communal interpretations and the possibility of universal discourse that most fundamentally characterizes his theology

and describes at the most basic level what it means for theology to be pneumatological.

Where does *Renewing Christian Theology* fit within this broader context of Yong's work? First, Yong offers the fruits of his most direct engagement to date with pentecostal denominationalism as an interpretive community. Of course, this is not to say that this is his first engagement with pentecostal theology per se—far from it.<sup>12</sup> Rather, it is the first engagement of this length with Christian beliefs as articulated by a single pentecostal denomination.

The Statement of Faith propagated by World Assemblies of God Fellowship provides the book's structure, although certainly not all of its content, and each chapter begins with the article from the Statement of Faith that corresponds to that chapter's primary topic. This is truly noteworthy, for while there is no shortage of academic introductions to systematic theology or of popular explanations of pentecostal beliefs, *Renewing Christian Theology* combines extensive research and academic rigour with the treatment of a pentecostal denominational faith statement in a format that non-specialists will find readable.

It is all the more noteworthy that Yong does this precisely at a time in which academic pentecostal theology is maturing and entertaining questions about its relationships with the ethos that gave rise to this Statement of Faith and others like it and in which global pentecostalism is simultaneously entertaining questions about its

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6 *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005).

7 *In the Days of Caesar* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

8 *Theology and Down Syndrome* (Waco: BUP, 2007); *Bible, Disability, and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

9 *Discerning the Spirit(s)* (Sheffield: SAP, 2000); *Beyond the Impasse* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003); *Hospitality and the Other* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008); *Pneumatology and the Buddhist-Christian Dialogue* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

10 *The Spirit of Creation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

11 *The Cosmic Breath* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); *The Future of Evangelical Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2014).

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12 Especially *Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh; Who is the Holy Spirit?* (Brewster: Paraclete, 2011); *Spirit of Love* (Waco: BUP, 2012).

relationships to denominationalism generally. Instead of jettisoning this imperfect denominational statement, much of which broadly and unofficially represents the beliefs of many pentecostals beyond the boundaries of the World Assemblies of God Fellowship, Yong gives it a place at the theological table in his search for truth.

And yet, Yong does not offer merely an exposition of the Statement of Faith's articles themselves. Instead, he, second, brings to bear his earlier scholarly investigations on his introductory explanations of traditional systematic *loci*. For example, emergence theory informs theological anthropology; questions about the unintentional marginalization of persons with disabilities informs divine healing; and theology of religions informs the doctrine of the Trinity. In these and other discussions, one finds the arguments of Yong's scholarly monographs and countless peer-reviewed articles distilled for consumption by beginning students and woven into the fabric of more traditional major themes and figures commonly associated with introductions to systematic theology.

Yong critically appropriates a facet of pentecostal denominationalism so that a single denomination's faith statement is stretched to address all of the areas of religious studies in which he has already laboured and so that those prior areas of labour find their way into a text whose structure is a faith statement. One of the most important results of this endeavour is that his ideas now have an avenue into academic institutions that might not have previously exposed their beginning students to Yong's theological

programme. *Renewing Christian Theology* is at once sophisticated and accessible, at once particular and global.

The following reviews—presented according to the alignment of their emphases with the book's order of topics—evaluate matters of both substance and style. While all of them are generally positive appraisals, they do not stop short of challenging Yong on several fronts. Lisa Stephenson focuses on reading *Renewing Christian Theology* precisely as a textbook and raises questions related to the structure of the individual chapters and of the book as a whole. Before taking up both sacraments and divinization, Chris Green asks if Yong too quickly speaks of global pentecostalism as if it were singular instead of an 'extended family'.

Mark Mann also raises concerns about the book's structure and disputes Yong's account of sanctification and his interpretation of Wesley. Thomas Oord wonders about the extent to which Yong's views represent the theology of global pentecostals and then turns his criticisms to creation, evil, and providence.

These reviews and Yong's response originated as a panel discussion sponsored by the Theology Club at Lee University in Cleveland, TN (19 November 2015). I extend my hearty appreciation to everyone who made that event and this published forum possible. Special thanks goes to Amos Yong, who suggested the topic and participants of the panel discussion in response to my invitation for him alone to give a public lecture at Lee University. This initiative to bring others also 'into the spotlight' is indicative of his entire professional disposition.

# A Renewalist Primer

Lisa P. Stephenson

## I Introduction

I would like to begin by highlighting the picture that graces the cover of *Renewing Christian Theology*. This is, perhaps, a curious way to start, but, then again, so is starting a systematic theology with eschatology! The image is a modified design of Sadao Watanabe's print entitled *Oikoumene*. This print focuses on the ecumenical nature of the church (as depicted with the single boat), as well as its global scope (as depicted by six uniquely dressed persons, each representative of the six inhabited continents). The red cruciform mast extends over the heads of the six figures—visibly unifying them—and is flanked on either side by two doves—a symbolism of both peace and of the Spirit.

That Yong chose this work of art to introduce the text is no coincidence. In one snapshot it communicates the driving focus and hope of the next 300+ pages of the book, wherein Yong believes that within a global context renewal Christianity offers a theological framework that can maintain doctrinal unity without demanding a uniformity of thinking. He contends that it is

precisely by starting with the Spirit of Christ that the many ecclesial tongues and languages heard throughout the globalizing world of the twenty-first century can be held together in the common ship of the church; harmonized but not homogenized.

In the following review, I will evaluate *Renewing Christian Theology* specifically as it is intended to be: a textbook for second-year undergraduate or graduate level theology students. This approach is not meant to discount the value that the book has on other levels or for those who do not fit the description of the proposed audience. Everyone should read this work regardless of where they are on their educational journey. Nonetheless, since this is Yong's stated objective, it seems fitting to consider the text's contents in this light.

There is much to praise in *Renewing Christian Theology*, but the comments below will focus on various aspects of the method Yong employs throughout the book more than the particulars of the content. As a textbook for students, Yong's work models how to construct theology as much as it does what that theology should look like.

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*Lisa P. Stephenson* (MA, Lee University, PhD, Marquette University) is Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Lee University, Cleveland, TN. She is the author of *Dismantling the Dualisms for American Pentecostal Women in Ministry: A Feminist-Pneumatological Approach* (Brill 2012), which won the 2013 *Pneuma* Book Award. She has also published various essays in other edited volumes, as well as numerous journal articles. Her interests include feminist theology, theological anthropology, and ecclesiology.

## II Commendations

First and foremost, someone has finally written a theological textbook that not only takes renewalist theology seriously, but prioritizes it within the larger project of systematic theology! This is no small feat and is a welcome addition amongst other theological textbooks that not only largely ignore renewalist theology, but even fail to present a robust pneumatology (e.g., in Alister McGrath's *Christian Theology* pneumatology is relegated to one subsection within a chapter on the doctrine of God, despite three entire chapters devoted to Christology).<sup>1</sup>

This is no longer excusable, given the growth and influence of the renewalist movement globally in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and Yong's work goes a long way toward rectifying this dearth. Yong allows renewalist concerns to inform both his content and method, but does so in such a way as to invite other voices into the conversation rather than exclude them.

Consequently, renewalist students should find themselves at home amongst the theological content covered, while also being sufficiently challenged to expand the ways in which they have traditionally conceived certain tenets of the faith. Moreover, renewalist students will be forced to consider the ways in which renewalist distinctives can serve as a lens through which to view other theological loci that are not explicitly 'renewalist' in nature. For those students that do not

identify with the renewalist movement, *Renewing Christian Theology* encourages them to move past the stereotypical or parochial ways in which renewalist theology and spirituality is sometimes presented, and expand their horizons beyond their own personal experiences.

A feature of the text that can assist in both groups of students processing the book's material is the discussion questions that are found at the end of each chapter. The questions are sufficiently open-ended so as not to exclude those who do not come from a renewalist background, but directed enough so as to press everyone to engage with the various renewalist aspects of the text.

Even though *Renewing Christian Theology* is renewalist in nature, it still models for students the importance of engaging a broad range of voices on a given issue in order to avoid producing either a 'navel gazing' theology or a 'head in the sand' approach that has been characteristic of evangelical theology at times in the past. Throughout the book, Yong effortlessly incorporates biblical texts, historical theology, contextual theologies, ecumenical perspectives, world religions, and modern science to assist him in his constructive task. One might think that this sounds like a recipe for disaster, but Yong is able to demonstrate the significance of these various interlocutors without overwhelming the conversation with too many dialogue partners.

Students not exposed to some of these diverse perspectives (especially the interreligious ones) may feel uneasy in the waters Yong sometimes treads in throughout the book. But, ultimately, students would do well to learn from this multi-faceted approach,

<sup>1</sup> Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 5th ed. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

even if they quibble with the details. The fact that Yong has set the theological table so broadly and invited these 'strangers' to the meal is a noteworthy gesture for students to observe, especially in this global age.

Another commendable feature of the book is Yong's commitment to engaging consistently with scripture throughout the work. Although Yong moves beyond early renewalist attempts at systematic theology via a biblically inductive methodology, he nonetheless remains faithful to the concerns of his predecessors by tethering his theology to scripture. This is significant for renewalist and nonrenewalist students alike because for many of them a biblically inductive methodology is all they have known with respect to the way one utilizes scripture when constructing theology. Thus, even though Yong is utilizing the biblical texts differently than students may be used to, his prioritization of biblical theology as a source for theological construction will still resonate with students' commitment to scripture in matters of faith. What is gained, then, is a better way to incorporate the biblical texts within theology without dispensing of their significance altogether.

Throughout the book, Yong demonstrates for students two ways to move beyond a biblically inductive methodology. The first is through the vignettes that Yong uses to introduce each chapter wherein he presents a life narrative of a biblical character. These reflections are thought-provoking in and of themselves, while also proving useful to informing dogmatic themes later in the same chapter. This aspect of the text should resonate especially well with the narrative aspect of renewalist

students' spirituality, while countering for all students the tendency in theology at large to privilege propositional texts when it comes to constructing doctrine.

The second way Yong connects biblical theology with systematic theology is through the scriptural considerations presented in each chapter that precede the constructive components. Here one finds a diverse representation from the New Testament that goes beyond mere proof-texting. Because Yong opts to explore whole books or letters rather than isolated scriptures in this portion of his text, by the end of the book the student is offered theological commentaries on eleven different New Testament writings.

While renewalists have been known to operate from an approach that favours a canon within a canon (i.e., Luke-Acts), Yong avoids this method (at least in this work!) and thus models an approach that has greater ecumenical value and can resonate with all types of students, regardless of their denominational background. Moreover, this aspect of the text serves to demonstrate for students the importance of interpreting scripture within its broader narrative, literary, and canonical context, as well as utilizing the whole of scripture to inform one's doctrine.

A unique element of the book that also deserves praise is the way in which *Renewing Christian Theology* not only connects with the students' cognitive faculties (i.e., orthodoxy), but recognizes and engages their affective faculties as well (i.e., orthopathy). This occurs by means of the fifty-four colour pictures appearing throughout the text that focus on various forms of art. Each chapter contains multiple images that

appear in strategic places and coordinate with the content of the text. These pictures represent diverse mediums and global perspectives, serving to illustrate and illuminate the material in further ways. Because of this added component students will not only read through the book, but experience it as well.

On the one hand, this aspect of the text will serve to challenge those students who prioritize orthodoxy over orthopathy by validating the theological significance of the latter and demonstrating that theology is not just intellectual but embodied. On the other hand, it will also serve to challenge those students who might prioritize orthopathy over orthodoxy by proving that orthodoxy is not inimical to orthopraxy and can even enrich it. The two can exist in a meaningful and reciprocal relationship.

### III Concerns

#### 1. Gender bias

Despite the strengths of *Renewing Christian Theology*, let me offer three concerns. First, as noted above, part of Yong's method is to present biblical vignettes as forays into the various theological loci. However, one cannot help but observe that the number of female vignettes (2) are notably disproportionate to the number of male vignettes (9). While it is recognized that the biblical texts themselves limit one's options in this respect, there is still room for a more equitable distribution.

For example, in the chapter on divine healing, Yong highlights the story of the Gerasene demoniac from the Gospel of Mark (Mk 5:1-20) to intro-

duce the chapter's contents. Yong argues that the Markan characterization of this unnamed man invites consideration of a more multidimensional model of healing. Later on in this same chapter, Yong explores further the ideas of wholeness and salvation in the Gospel of Mark. Yet, would it not be equally fitting to highlight the narrative of the woman with the issue of blood instead—which immediately follows in the Markan text (Mk 5:21-34)—as her story shares similar elements with the Gerasene demoniac? The woman with the issue of blood is also healed and her restoration includes more than just the physical aspects.

The concern here is more than just equality for equality's sake. As part of Yong's method, the biblical vignettes serve not only to model for students how to use narrative to inform theology, but whose narrative to use. Consequently, the implicit message offered is problematic. And, ironically, the disparity within the book on this account is not representative of the narrational aspect of renewal spirituality globally, as it is the voice of women offering testimonies of God's good deeds as much (if not more) as it is that of the men's.

#### 2. Use of confessions

Second, one of the central aspects of Yong's methodology is to employ the World Assemblies of God Fellowship's (WAGF) Statement of Faith (SF) as a test case for using confessional statements to construct a template for systematic theology. The impetus for this move is Yong's concern that theology be connected and engaged with the living church. Thus, the individual Ar-

ticles of the WAGF SF not only order the structure of the book (though in reverse), but also provide a loose agenda for the content of each chapter. Yong maintains that the theological task becomes one of retrieving and reappropriating the tradition in ways that are faithful and creative.

There is no doubt that Yong has certainly been creative with the tradition as articulated in the WAGF SF (e.g., reversing the order and reinterpreting the content), but has he been faithful enough? That is, by the end of the book has Yong reappropriated the content of the SF to such an extent that those renewal churches a part of the WAGF would no longer recognize it?

On the one hand, I imagine Yong would say that part of the point of the book is to facilitate broadening the perspectives of these renewal churches so that they are better equipped to speak responsibly in a global context. On the other hand, if Yong's intent is to use the SF as a bridge between the living church and academic theology, then is this a bridge to nowhere?

Another way to put this is to consider that a statement of faith is usually employed as a standard for a group's membership. Consequently, to reinterpret that standard in broader categories may not be a welcome gesture by all. While using a confessional statement as a theological template is a creative move, I am not sure it is the best way forward in terms of method (at least if one is still concerned with keeping the lines of communication open with the original constituents).

If retrieving and reappropriating the tradition opens the door so wide that others who previously would not have identified with the renewalist state-

ments now do, while at the same time persons who previously would have identified with the renewalist statements now do not, then what is gained by tying one's theological template to a particular confessional statement? Yong's concern for the living church is admirable and a practice students should seek to emulate. Exhibiting this concern by means of adopting a particular confessional statement and then reversing and reinterpreting it in ways no longer recognizable to the original constituents is probably not.

### 3. Pedagogical sequence

Third, another central aspect of Yong's methodology is his reversal of the WAGF SF order so that his book begins with eschatology. Yong anticipates that some will find the theological order disconcerting and acknowledges that it 'might be jarring for those who have read and approached systematic theological texts in their more traditional formats' (Yong, 23).<sup>2</sup> However, my concerns go beyond the mere unconventional nature of the order of the chapters and are related to issues of pedagogy and theology.

With respect to pedagogy, while Yong is right in that beginning with eschatology and then moving through the charismatic, pneumatological, ecclesiological, soteriological, and christological loci before the doctrines of creation, God, and scripture is more consistent with Christian life and experience, a benefit of the traditional order is that it logically builds upon itself.

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<sup>2</sup> Yong notes that it is possible to read the chapters in a different sequence from the one established.

Consequently, pedagogical moments that can arise from the traditional order get short-circuited when that order is reversed.

For example, in the second chapter on eschatology Yong discusses the doctrine of bodily resurrection. In order to do so, he differentiates between a theological anthropology informed by dualistic ideas of neoplatonism during the Patristic and medieval times and a contemporary theological anthropology that opts for more holistic accounts of the human person. This distinction is significant because it clearly affects how one understands and interprets the resurrection of the body, which is an appropriate topic to study in a chapter on eschatology. Yet, because of the reverse order, the subject of theological anthropology has not been raised at length in the text yet and thus the potential student-initiated connections between theological loci is weakened.

Certainly one could inform a class of the broader conversation in theological anthropology and anticipate a more extensive discussion at a later point. But, in doing this, a pedagogical moment is lost that would traditionally allow the students to gain a knowledge of these anthropological issues first and then think through the implications with respect to eschatology. This type of theological, and thus pedagogical, inversion occurs multiple times throughout the text.

While I do not discount that starting with eschatology brings benefits, especially from a renewalist perspective, I am not convinced those gains outweigh what is lost by doing so. The traditional order is not just about epistemic claims concerning scripture, but the internal logic of the scriptural narrative. And

this logic is helpful to follow when in the classroom, even if not identical to the order of one's faith experience.

#### 4. Theological sequence

My other concern related to the reverse order that is employed in the book is more theological in nature. Because of Yong's commitment to starting with the Spirit, he argues that this also necessitates starting with eschatology. This decision is affirmed for him because the pneumatological spirituality of the classical pentecostal movement in North America was thoroughly eschatological and because there is an intricate connection in the New Testament between the Holy Spirit and the coming reign of God. While both of these points are true and can thus lend legitimacy to starting with eschatology, they do not *necessitate* this entry point. And, in light of the pedagogical concern above, I am not convinced that they should.

If part of the renewalist contribution to theology at large is, as Yong says, to recognize theologies of the Holy Spirit *and* pneumatological theologies that are systematically considered from a third article perspective, is it not possible then for a systematic theology to start with creation while also being pneumatological/eschatological? That is, is the Spirit of creation in Genesis not also the Spirit of new creation in Revelation? What is protological can also be eschatological, and thus the doctrine of creation can provide a theological starting point without compromising renewalist distinctives. Adopting this approach might actually better exemplify to students Yong's concern to situate the renewalist perspectives

within the broader context of the Christian tradition so that it is both continuous with it in some respects (i.e., the order of theological loci) and novel in others (i.e., an all-encompassing third article approach).

#### IV Epilogue—a Gift

All things considered, *Renewing Christian Theology* is a gift to both renewalists and non-renewalists alike. In the Epilogue, Yong summarizes his work

by saying that it is, ‘no more than a modest and even preliminary contribution, one designed to introduce theology students to the richness of the biblical and Christian traditions and also to showcase the capacity of a Spirit-inspired Christian faith to empower life amid the complexities of our twenty-first-century global village’ (Yong, 358). As such, it has accomplished precisely these objectives and done so admirably.

ERT (2016) 40:2, 150-156

## The Big Picture, with Questions!

Chris E.W. Green

### I Introduction

Reading this systematics, which is as Yong says a ‘culmination’ of his thought to this point in time (xix), graced me with the same gifts I always receive from his works: first, a clear ‘big picture’ vision of what is at stake in particular theological conversations; and second, a storm of questions—some delightful, some terrifying—to struggle with and be troubled by. In this case, some of the questions are new to

me, directing my thought down lines of reflection I would never have known to take otherwise. Other questions, which I had believed were already answered, have been given new life with which to afflict me. Thanks to these gifts, my already significant debt to Amos Yong has only deepened and widened.

On its own terms, this work is preliminary and introductory (358), a summary of central Christian doctrines that have particular relevance for the

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*Chris Green* is Associate Professor of Theology at Pentecostal Theological Seminary and Teaching Pastor at Sanctuary Church in Tulsa OK. He and his wife, Julie, live in Cleveland TN with their three children. He is the author of *Sanctifying Interpretation: Vocation, Holiness, and Scripture, and Foretasting the Kingdom: Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Lord’s Supper*, published by CPT Press.

twenty-first century renewal movement, providing a 'showcase' (358) for the promise of renewal spirituality and theology. The questions I have to raise about the work, then, are not so much criticisms as prompts for myself and my students. I hope that as we engage the theological vision Yong has given us, these questions will goad our theological reflection and construction toward greater faithfulness.

With that in mind, I will reflect first on the book as a whole, raising questions about its aims and major themes, as well as its basic structure. Then, I will turn attention to the chapter on the ordinances/sacraments, assessing its central claims and arguments, as well as its key presuppositions and conclusions. In conclusion, I will explore the interrelatedness of this theology of the ordinances/sacraments with what is said in other chapters about the doctrines of the church and salvation.

## II The (Im)Possibility of a Global Renewalist Systematics

To begin with an obvious, but perhaps not a worthless question: is there in fact any such thing as 'the renewal movement' (14)? Or would it be better to talk about an extended (and in many ways, broken) 'renewal family' (300) that across the many lines of genuine difference nonetheless shares a few resemblances? To ask the same question another way, is it helpful to essentialise renewal spirituality and theology, to suggest that it has a singular 'heart' or 'taproot'? I, for one, would argue that renewalism is rhizomatic, not arborescent, so that it would be better, as a rule, to speak of it in non-essentialist terms.

But assuming for the moment that we *can* speak of renewal spirituality and theology in essentialist terms, it is still not clear how we might construct a truly *global systematics*. Arguably, no one theological/spiritual tradition can provide a theology adequate for all the churches in the various traditions. And given that renewalist theologians and practitioners operate mainly in responsive, corrective (that is, 'prophetic') modes, it would seem impossible to craft a renewal systematic theology. Would not such a work necessarily call its own claims and arguments into question, and in the end deconstruct itself? This seems particularly true of classical Pentecostals, at least in North America, who as a rule are now, or at least have been in the past, not so much *renewalist* as *restorationist* and *sectarian*.

This is why I am not sure what to make of the use of the World Assemblies of God Fellowship Statement of Faith (WAGF SF) in this work. For one thing, this Statement—like the Statements of other classical Pentecostal denominations and many pentecostal/charismatic communities as well—enfolds sectarian doctrines into the same creedal space as catholic doctrines, with declarations on the inerrancy of Scripture, entire sanctification, Spirit baptism and initial evidence set alongside affirmations of the doctrine of the Trinity and the divinity and humanity of Christ—as if they all belonged to the same order and carried the same weight.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Yong is aware of these concerns, obviously. As he says, 'the choice of adopting the WAGF SF as the basic structure for theological reflection brings with it the SF's fundamentally

I do not mean that such Statements are invalid or worthless, of course. But it does mean that such Statements need to justify their relationship to the faith of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. Robert Jenson insists that he is writing theology for the not-yet seen but nonetheless hoped-for visibly unified church.<sup>2</sup> Is that what Yong is doing? If so, do these Statements serve that purpose? If they do not serve that purpose, then why use them?

The reversal of the order of the SF is provocative, as Yong's thought typically is. But I am not quite satisfied or fully convinced by it. Certainly, I see the (Pentecostal) sense of beginning with eschatology, but why simply reverse the order of the statements? Why not create an alternative order and make a case for that reordering? For example, Yong holds that 'a fully trinitarian theology has to be pneumatological, christological, and eschatological'. Why not, then, move from this opening chapter on eschatology to one on Christology and then to one the Trinity? Why not at least begin and end each chapter

with some explanation of how it relates to what immediately precedes and succeeds it?

Again, this is not a critique of the work *per se*. By inciting these questions, the reordering obviously has served Yong's stated purpose. That said, I remain convinced that Christian dogmatics should begin with the doctrine of God (whether moving from Christology to Trinity or vice versa). Because Yong has reversed the order of the SF, his treatment of the doctrine of God comes as the penultimate chapter in the book, and much of it is devoted to conversation with Oneness Pentecostalism and inter-religious dialogue in a pluralistic world. We should be grateful for his attention to these concerns, and we do well to take his judgments and directions seriously. But I cannot help but wonder how this work would be different if this chapter had come first and had worked out a strong doctrine of God as the unity and ground of the systematics.

### III Manifestation as Transfiguration: The Theology of Ordinances/Sacraments

This chapter, like all of the rest, begins with one of the articles of the WAGF SF. It assumes, and perhaps *demand*s, belief in 'believer's baptism', a position that has always been dominant in the Pentecostal tradition, but is not representative of the renewal movement globally and ecumenically.<sup>3</sup> The

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evangelical theology-plus pattern—common to most conservative Protestant statements of faith, actually—and raises critical questions for this book" (12). But for good or ill he stops short of providing answers to these critical questions.

<sup>2</sup> Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology Vol. 1* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), viii: 'it is a great blessing specifically to theology that we need not wait for the church to be undivided to do theology for and even of the undivided church. For theology is itself a form of the waiting we must practice. The present work is deliberately done in such anticipation of the one church, and this will be throughout apparent, in its use of authorities and its modes of argument.'

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<sup>3</sup> However, as Dan Tomberlin ('Believer's Baptism in the Pentecostal Tradition', *The Ecumenical Review* 67.3 [Oct 2015], 423-435) contends, 'it is impossible to speak of the Pen-

description of the Eucharist is sheerly memorialist, and so is false not only to the catholic tradition and to many of the contemporary renewal movements, but also to classic Pentecostalism (as I have tried to show in my own work).<sup>4</sup> It leaves out altogether any reference to footwashing or the laying on of hands for ordination.<sup>5</sup>

### 1. History and/or theology

Yong acknowledges that Article 7 ‘already signals alignment on one side of an extremely contentious debate launched during the Reformation’ (135), but insists that he wants to reaffirm the ‘basic thrust of ordinance language’ even while he seeks a way to ‘preserve what is biblical about both discourses’ (136) in an idiom better suited to the contemporary global conversation. To that end, he offers a brief sketch of a few highlights in the history of Christian sacramental practice and theology, intending to set the philosophical, theological, and biblical issues in a historical profile.

Reading this sketch, I found myself asking if such a truncated description can really be helpful. Does it in effect

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tecotal perspective on water baptism’. He goes on to suggest that because ‘God’s act of knowing is efficacious’ and the ‘capacity for faith is intuitive and essential to human ontology (Rom. 1:19; 2:14-15),’ Pentecostals can and should practise infant baptism as a form of ‘prevenient grace.’

4 Chris E.W. Green, *Foretasting the Kingdom: Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Lord’s Supper* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2012).

5 The former is sure to trouble some ‘classical Pentecostals, and the latter is sure to trouble pentecostals/charismatics in the so-called ‘liturgical’ traditions.

only re-inscribe already-familiar (mis) understandings? Does framing the issue in such cursory historical terms in effect obscure the theological issues at stake? I wonder, too, what would be different about this chapter if it began not with the *history* of *John’s* baptismal practice but with a properly *theological* account of *Jesus’* experience of baptism. For example, what if it had explored at length the relationship of Christ’s baptism to the church’s rite of washing and our experience of Spirit baptism?

### 2. Flesh and spirit, sign and reality

Yong believes that talk about sacraments/ordinances emerges from and returns to a central question: ‘if, how, or to what degree spiritual realities can be manifest through material ones’ (147). But perhaps the language of ‘manifestation’ implies a kind of spiritual/material dualism? Peter Leithart argues against ‘means of grace’ language for just this reason.

To the extent that the idea of ‘means of grace’ emphasizes that believers receive real benefit from baptism and the Supper, it is a helpful corrective to feeble theologies that are widespread in the modern church. And, to the extent that the phrase is used to emphasize that God bestows life through water, bread, and wine, it is a useful reminder not to make idols of the elements. In several respects, however, describing sacraments as ‘means of grace’ can be misleading and adds unnecessary complication.<sup>6</sup>

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6 Peter J. Leithart, *The Baptized Body* (Moscow, ID: 2007), 14-15.

This language suggests that the sacraments are ‘machines that deliver grace’,<sup>7</sup> a kind of religious technology required for delivering spiritual benefits. In this way, ‘means’ language ‘obscures the personal dimension of the sacraments’—especially ‘when it is allied with a depersonalized misunderstanding of grace’.<sup>8</sup> Insofar as Leithart is right, then we would not want to say that ‘divine grace’ is ‘given and received sacramentally’, through ‘official’ (or unofficial) ‘channels’ (147). Instead, we would insist, as Yong would want us to do, that ‘sacraments are moments of personal encounter with the living God, “trusting places” between God and His people’.<sup>9</sup>

So, to return to the original question, what comes of describing sacraments as material means ‘manifesting’ spiritual realities? Only if we understand that ‘grace’ is shorthand for the Spirit of God, who shares with us the divine nature and character, and that ‘manifesting’ means the sacramental elements—the water, the bread, the wine, the oil—actually participate in the divine life they bring to bear.<sup>10</sup>

Sacraments, like icons, do not ‘facilitate access to [spiritual reality that] lies behind or beyond’ (155), but gracefully enfold us into personal communion with the Triune God whose presence transfigures these things for us and us with these things. As Leithart avows:

Sacraments are not ‘signs of an invisible relationship with Christ’ as if a relationship with Christ might occur without them. Rather, the intricate fabric of exchanged language, gesture, symbol, and action is our personal relationship with God.<sup>11</sup>

It follows, then, that baptism and the Supper are not merely ‘windows into the solidarity of ecclesial life’ (152), but forms of embodied and spirited solidarity with Christ and his divinely human life.

No doubt Amos disagrees with Leithart and with me at least in part. But if, as he says, ‘the ordinances or sacraments are signs of the presence of the Spirit and of the coming reign of God’ (159), then we have to ask how a *divine* sign can be *merely* a sign. As Kilian McDonnell explains, Calvin (following Augustine) insists that ‘because the eucharistic act is an act of the Holy Spirit in regard to the humanity of Christ, the eucharistic elements cannot be an empty sign, but must have realization and reality’.<sup>12</sup> It seems to me that if we assert the personal, eschatological, and trinitarian character of baptism, the Lord’s Supper—and perhaps footwashing and ordination as well—we are unavoidably affirming that they are truly *sacraments*, and not merely ordinances.

In spite of his avowal of ordinance language and his disavowal of any ‘magical’ or ‘automatic’ sacramentality, there are signs scattered here and there in this chapter that Yong wants

7 Leithart, *The Baptized Body*, 15.

8 Leithart, *The Baptized Body*, 15.

9 Leithart, *The Baptized Body*, 15.

10 Think, for example, of Jesus’ clothes, which mysteriously mediate his ‘virtue’ (Mt 9.20) and participate in the transfiguration of his body (Mt 17.2).

11 Leithart, *Baptized Body*, 21.

12 Kilian McDonnell, *John Calvin, the Church and the Eucharist* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), 269.

to reaffirm the ‘fully sacramental’ view he has articulated elsewhere, rather than distance himself from it.<sup>13</sup> For example, Yong avows that ‘the sign quality of these enactments is eschatological’, and therefore affords us ‘present glimpses of or portals into the reign of God that is yet to fully arrive’ (159). He understands this description as a way of getting beyond the sacrament-versus-ordinance debate and the conventional philosophical and metaphysical frameworks in which that debate has traditionally been carried out. But what he affirms is wholly consistent with the ecumenical consensus about the sacraments.

### 3. Participation and theosis

How does this theology of the ordinances/sacraments relate to the theologies of church and salvation considered elsewhere in the book (primarily in chapters 5 and 7-10)?<sup>14</sup> There is a strong theology of exorcism and healing at play in this work—in fact, those

may be the work’s most important constructive contributions. But there is not a clear description of how, if at all, the saving of diseased bodies and oppressed spirits relates to the church’s practice of baptism, footwashing, eucharist, and ordination. Salvation, as this work describes it, is ‘eschatological’, but there is not much exploration of how the ordinances/sacraments participate in and ‘manifest’ the ‘powers of the age to come’ (Heb 6.5).

All that to say, I am convinced that Yong’s treatment of the ordinances/sacraments—both what he says and what he does not say—calls for a robust theology of participation, one that stresses our personal share in the eschatological blessings gifted to us through the Word and the sacraments in the lively, enlivening presence of the Triune God. In his own words, ‘the how of salvation ... calls attention to human participation in Christ’s life and resurrection by the power of the Spirit’ (250). But what is the character, the dynamic of this participation? And what, if anything, does it have to do with the ordinances/sacraments?

Often, when Yong refers to participation, his emphasis falls on *human* agency and action, which means that his account of obedience is shot through with ambiguities. He holds that ‘what is redemptive is human participation in the creational work of God in Christ by the power of the Spirit’ (291), but it is not clear *how* that participation is redemptive. Consider this pair of statements: ‘practices of exorcism and renunciation of the devil thereby achieve the healing work of the Holy Spirit as *people turn away* from the conventions of the world’ (156), and ‘salvific grace emerges as people confess their sins,

<sup>13</sup> See especially Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out On All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 160-162.

<sup>14</sup> At least some of the statements of Article 6 of the WAGF SF, the Article that describes the doctrine of the church, fit awkwardly with the other Articles, and with much of what Yong says in his chapter devoted to the church and its mission (Chapter 7). For example, the Article refers to the church as ‘the body of Christ and the habitation of God through the Spirit’, which ‘witnesses to the presence of the kingdom of God in the present world’. But Yong’s ecclesiology tends to emphasize the ‘fallible and finite character’ of the church’s witness (184), and the radical freedom of the Spirit over against the church’s institutions and orders.

repent of their ways, seek cleansing (through exorcism) from their distorted values and commitments, renounce the father of lies and all that he represents, and embrace their membership among the people of God' (157). I am not quite sure how to make sense of that 'as,' but it is obviously crucial to his account of our salvation. In fact, I suspect that discovering what that 'as' means would be to put a finger on the pulse of this entire work.

Alan Rathe, drawing on a medieval schema, has proposed an evangelical theology of participation that attends to three horizons: participation in *human action*, participation in *divine-through-human action*, and participation in *the life of God*.<sup>15</sup> His reading of Pentecostal scholars (including Amos Yong) has convinced him that there is an emerging sacramentality in the Pentecostal tradition, which has always be-

lieved in '*divine-through-human action*'. Rathe believes Pentecostals are finally coming to realize how their experience of being 'between two worlds' leads inevitably toward sacramental practice and theology. We also note that leading Pentecostal scholars are discovering how to appreciate mediation—and in particular sacramental mediation—without losing a sense of 'God's intimate, immediate presence'.<sup>16</sup>

In this way, Pentecostal theology, long regarded as non-sacramental, promises to serve the larger ecumenical community, helping it to 're-envision its way to a richer and more vital grasp of sacrament'.<sup>17</sup> So, in the final analysis, we are given in Yong's systematics at least the broken fragments of a full-bodied sacramentality, and we do well to gather them up.

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<sup>15</sup> Alan Rathe, *Evangelicals, Worship and Participation: Taking a Twenty-First Century Reading* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 57.

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<sup>16</sup> Rathe, *Evangelicals, Worship and Participation*, 265.

<sup>17</sup> Rathe, *Evangelicals, Worship and Participation*, 266.

# The Good, the Bad, and the Beautiful

Mark H. Mann

It is a great honour to respond to Amos Yong's *Renewing Christian Theology: Systematics for a Global Christianity (RCT)*. I have known Dr Yong since we were graduate students together at Boston University in the late 1990s, and I consider him a valuable friend and conversation partner and, in many ways, a theological mentor. Because we both studied under and were greatly influenced by Robert Cummings Neville and possess overlapping theological and religious heritages and similar theological concerns and impulses, I typically find myself both in admiration for and in fundamental agreement with Yong when I encounter his work.

The same applies to Yong's *RCT*. It is a very fine theological text, energetically and satisfyingly presenting all that Yong promises to deliver. It very well may be his best and most important theological work to date, and anyone familiar with both the immensity and quality of the Yong *corpus* will know that this is no faint praise. As a whole I think that this is an absolutely wonderful book, and I will be sorely tempted to use it in future theology courses. Nevertheless, it is not without its problems (at both the macro and

micro level), which I will address after some personal remarks to frame my response.

## I Pentecostal Theology: Eschatological, Pneumatological and... Christological?

As a fourth generation Nazarene, I was raised with misgivings about and mistrust of Pentecostalism. In my youth, I was introduced to literature arguing a cessationist view of *charismata* (*glossolalia* especially) and I frequently heard suggestions that Pentecostalism was a misguided pursuit of ecstatic experience driven by shallow emotionalism that was, at best, a distraction from the true aims of the gospel—a heart and life of perfect love for God and neighbour. Although my friendship with some Pentecostal classmates in high school and their sincere love for Christ began to unravel some of my preconceptions, others only reinforced them.

One of the most troubling involved a visit by a Pentecostal woman to a college Bible study group I was leading. As I was providing some introductory

comments, she suddenly interrupted me and, on the basis of the ‘authority of the Holy Spirit’, took over the meeting. She then began prophesying, going around the room and telling us all one-by-one what stood between each of us and God. When she was finished, I thanked her and did my faltering best to refocus on the Bible study. I was certainly miffed, but given that she’d told me that my pride was one of my spiritual problems, I felt convicted to give her the benefit of the doubt and view her behaviour as mostly well-intentioned, even if inappropriate and misguided.

However, after the meeting other members of the group were pretty upset, one even expressing his concern that the woman’s behaviour indicated that she had been channelling a demonic spirit! In the end I came to see that he might be partially right. She knew none of us, and by completely hijacking the meeting under the self-proclaimed auspices of the ‘authority of the Holy Spirit’, she had succeeded only in bringing attention to herself, in the meantime freaking out and alienating a group of earnest young Christians and their attempt to explore God’s Word together.

I share this story not to discredit the Pentecostal movement as a whole. Far from it! An entire religious tradition (including mine!) should never be fully identified by its critics—whether external or internal—with its more extreme and/or problematic expressions, such as the one I believe I experienced at that Bible study. The temptation of the external critic is to tear down a straw ‘man’ [sic] while the temptation of the internal critic is to throw the proverbial baby out with the bathwater through overcorrection.

One of the strengths of *RTC* is the way that Yong deftly speaks to both internal and external audiences, the way in which he succeeds in being honest and self-critical about the pneumatological excesses and missteps of his tradition while also evangelistically championing the pneumatological heart of his tradition as a means of renewing the church catholic both theologically and spiritually. In this sense, I would suggest that Yong is the ideal internal critic: he is able to recognize and articulate the good, the bad, and especially the beautiful in his tradition.

I say ‘pneumatological excesses’ because, in my role as a kind of external critic, I would identify the particular pneumatological emphases of the Pentecostal movement as the fertile soil from which the kind of extreme cases like the one I experienced grow. The promise and experience of the imminent infilling, gifting, and empowering of the Holy Spirit certainly transformed the lives of the first Christians, giving them the courage and ability to proclaim the gospel to the nations.<sup>1</sup> That same Pentecostal promise and experience transforms people today and has empowered countless believers to lives of sacrificial service to Christ in countless beautiful ways.

It is no wonder that Pentecostals have been at the forefront of wonderfully affirming women in ministry (women, after all, can be and clearly often are filled with Spirit and therefore empowered to be full participants in the life and work of the church!), to engage in evangelism to the poor and marginalized, to embrace the present

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 2.

possibility of living empowered to be victorious over sin and filled to overflowing with love for God and neighbour, to champion Christian faith and worship as a vibrant and impassioned work rather than an empty formalism or dead intellectualism. But, as has been duly noted by Yong, it can be difficult to 'discern the spirits', to know when the experience is the authentic work of the Holy Spirit as opposed to empty emotionalism, experience for the sake of experience, something contrived and therefore self-seeking.<sup>2</sup> These are, in my opinion, the potential excesses that arise from an 'excessive' pneumatological focus.

The way that much of the historic church has sought to avoid such excess, and this goes back well before the time of the Montanist controversy to the letters of St. Ignatius of Antioch, has been to embrace a kind of Christo-centric ecclesiology that functions to rein in 'extreme' claims of those claiming the Holy Spirit's authority by essentially linking such authority and power of the Holy Spirit to the church—that is, the formal structures and practices of the church. So, it is the various officers of the church who can claim apostolic succession who are the 'vicars' of Christ and thus in possession of the gifts and authority of the Spirit.<sup>3</sup> In

the western church such an ecclesiology has been bolstered by the addition of the *filioque* to the Nicene Creed and an Augustinianism that serves to limit the work of the Holy Spirit to the constraints of the formal 'Body of Christ'.

One of the most important of Yong's contributions to contemporary theology has been to recover a more eastern model of the Trinity, drawing upon the theology of Irenaeus of Lyons who spoke of the Son and Spirit as the 'two hands' of the Father.<sup>4</sup> The earliest of fully 'orthodox' articulations of the Trinity, and therefore of tremendous value for ecumenical purposes,<sup>5</sup> the Irenaean model provides an effective *via media* between the potentially untethered pneumatological excesses of Pentecostalism and the Spirit-stifling excesses of a western Christo-centric ecclesiology, as the Son and Spirit always work in concert while never being subordinated to each other.

Although Yong never mentions Irenaeus in *RCT*, it is clear that he remains wary of a pneumatology loosened from christological moorings and one that subjects the Spirit to a subservient role in the economy of God's work and presence in the world. This serves as a key theme throughout *RCT* through Yong's preference for eastern perichoretic notions of the Trinity<sup>6</sup> and persistent refrain that renewalist the-

<sup>2</sup> Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000). Here, Yong is more concerned with the non-western Pentecostal appropriation of indigenous culture, beliefs, and spiritual practices.

<sup>3</sup> Gerald Bray, *God is Love: A Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Press, 2012), ch. 11. Yong briefly addresses this issue in *RCT*, 302ff.

<sup>4</sup> Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*.

<sup>5</sup> Mark H. Mann, 'Traditionalist or Reformist: Amos Yong, Pentecostalism, and the Future of Evangelical Theology', *Passion for the Spirit: The Theology of Amos Yong and the New Face of Pentecostal Scholarship*, ed. Wolfgang Vondey and Martin William Mittelstadt (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2013), 199-220.

<sup>6</sup> *RCT*, 304-306.

ology is (or, at least, ideally *should* be) pneumatological, christological and eschatological.

## II Organisation of the Argument

This brings me to my first (the macro) criticism of this book: it seems to me that the organization of the book undermines the kind of balanced approach that Yong aims to produce. First of all, it seems problematic to start 'at the end' with a discussion of eschatology. I do not mean to suggest that eschatology is an unimportant or superfluous topic for Christian theology given that 'the end of time', as Article 11 of the WAGF's SF puts it, deals with the culminating end of God's purposes in creation and the ultimate hope of Christian faith. Its importance is without question. But, again, is Yong not undermining his attempt to be both pneumatological and christological by starting with, and therefore giving precedent to, eschatology?

That is, are there not pivotal theological issues that are presumed, have implications for, and therefore should be addressed first before a proper discussion of the eschaton can take place? Specifically, how can 'the end' have any definition or meaning without first clarifying the beginning—that is, what kind of God is the one whose work and purposes will be culminated at the eschaton. Put another way, if we truly want to make any sense of the eschaton, we first need to address the doctrine of God, which Yong puts off until the penultimate chapter. Therefore, I would suggest, Yong lays out a renewalist theology that is pneumatological, christological and eschatologi-

cal, but in the wrong order.

Similarly, it seems problematic to me that Yong will follow his discussion of the end times with chapters on the 'gifts of' (Ch. 3) and 'baptism with' (Ch. 4) the Holy Spirit, and, as the chapter titles suggest, focuses on various ways of thinking about the Christian 'experience' of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, when Yong finally does address christological themes, it is not until chapter 8, and it is generally within the context of a discussion of soteriology. Likewise, when we are finally introduced to an extended treatment of the Trinity (Ch. 8) it is buried within a discussion of the redemption and renewal of the cosmos. In truth, it is not until the penultimate chapter (Ch. 11) that we get a focused discussion of the Trinity, but even here it's glossed over quickly (five pages!) as he presses forward to discuss feminist criticisms of patriarchal language and religious pluralism.

Almost hidden toward the close of this brief section is a curious claim that gets to the heart of my concern: 'A robust doctrine of the Trinity needs nothing less than an equally robust doctrine of the Holy Spirit; simultaneously, the development of pneumatology also pushes forward the discussion of Trinitarian theology' (305). Indeed, where is this discussion of the Trinity, and why is it not front and centre in a systematic theology that purports to be christological, pneumatological and eschatological?

This is not to say that I find Yong's chapters on eschatology, Spirit baptism, spiritual gifts, salvation or creation in themselves problematic. On the contrary, I consider the particular treatments of these topics to be tremendously helpful. In each case we

find Yong's reflections to be biblically grounded, historically aware, and winsomely irenic in his willingness to provide a thoughtfully critical account of the wide variety of contemporary Christian beliefs on all of these topics.

Take, for instance, Yong's deftly handled discussion of the 'disputed possibilities' of the 'final state' (Ch. 2). Here we find Yong willing to take the risk of critically assessing a doctrine that most members of his own tradition would simply assume—the eternity of suffering in hell. Indeed, even to address the possibility of universalistic tendencies in the Pauline letters would probably offend countless Pentecostal and evangelical readers. Likewise, we find Yong taking on the implications of contemporary science for how we understand miracles (Ch. 8); the implications of evolutionary theory for how we understand providence and evil (Ch. 10); the implications of the Christian encounter with various faith traditions for how we understand both salvation (Ch. 9) and the work and witness of the Triune God in the world (Ch. 11).

The beauty of Yong's work in each of these instances is that, in his willingness to step outside of what may be perceived to be the narrow constraints given to him by his tradition, Yong faithfully demonstrates the great resources renewal theology brings to addressing these 'challenges' in a way that calls Pentecostals to be more attentive to the implications of their own theology while also demonstrating to the larger church that the Pentecostal theology should be taken seriously.

### III Renewal Theology and Wesleyan Holiness Theology

Finally, moving from the macro to the micro, I wish to address Yong's discussion of sanctification in Chapter 5. Since I am a Nazarene, it almost goes without saying that I have a keen interest in this doctrine.<sup>7</sup> This is the case with all ecclesial communities that would identify themselves as part of the Wesleyan-holiness tradition—Nazarene, Wesleyan, Free Methodist, etc. Some within this tradition might find it strange that a Pentecostal theologian would dive into this conversation, but we should not.

While historically many within the so-called Wesleyan holiness tradition have taken great pains to distance themselves from Pentecostalism, the fact is that both grew out of the late-nineteenth century holiness movement.<sup>8</sup> While Nazarenes and their ilk have been quick to reject the charismata of Pentecostalism, most Pentecostals have remained fully committed to Christian holiness, some (including Yong's Assemblies of God) even identifying themselves formally with the Wesleyan-holiness movement.<sup>9</sup> Personally, I consider the return of our Pentecostal brothers and sisters to discussions about Christian holiness

<sup>7</sup> Mark H. Mann, *Perfecting Grace: Holiness and the Human Sciences* (NY: T&T Clark, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> See Vinson Synon, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> The recently formed Wesleyan Holiness Consortium includes not just the old standard bearers of the Wesleyan-holiness movement, but also notably 'Pentecostal' denominations, including the Assemblies of God, The Four Square Church and the Church of God (Cleveland TN), to name just the more prominent.

greatly welcome!

And, as Yong correctly points out, there has been a significant reappraisal of the doctrine of Christian holiness within Wesleyan-holiness circles in the past half-century.<sup>10</sup> Yong has clear sympathies with this move, as his treatment of the topic in chapter five indicates. According to Yong, this reappraisal has centred on discussions of whether sanctification, and especially entire sanctification, should be understood as a process of life-long growth in grace or the result of a particular crisis experience that culminates in the heart-cleansing baptism with the Holy Spirit.

Since all would recognize that there are both big steps (i.e., crises) and little steps (i.e., gradual growth) in the life of faith, I consider the so-called dichotomy between instantaneous versus gradual growth a distraction from the true heart of the debate: the definition of Christian perfection. That is, what kind or measure of sanctity can be found as a result of sanctification?

Those emphasizing the 'entirety' of sanctification have claimed that the perfection received includes complete purification of the heart from inbred sin and filled with perfect love for God and neighbour and therefore the possibility of a life without any sins 'properly so-called'—that is, wilful and conscious transgressions of known laws of God.<sup>11</sup>

Those emphasizing the 'gradualness' of sanctification, however, have preferred to think of perfect love as an ideal quality of life toward which, by grace, the believer is ever drawn by God through participation in the various means of grace.

Yong identifies the shift from the former to the latter as an outgrowth of larger cultural and philosophical shifts. I would suggest that this is only partly correct. Yong claims, for instance, that this shift has been propelled by a coinciding shift in philosophy, as nineteenth-century dualistic and substance-based notions of sin and sanctity (grounded in neoplatonic and Aristotelian metaphysics) have given way to more dynamic and relational notions of sin and sanctity. But, this is not quite right. Instead, I would suggest, that which is being rejected by contemporary Wesleyan-holiness theologians is instead a notion of 'sanctity as purity' (for which purity is an absolute concept—even one blemish marks one as entirely impure!) that instead is grounded in common-sense realism and the Cartesian distinction between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*.<sup>12</sup>

Far more significant than philosophical shifts, however, has been the mid to late twentieth century recovery of John Wesley, whose work had been misunderstood and misappropriated by many who called themselves 'Wesleyan' within the holiness tradition.

<sup>10</sup> This was sparked by the work of Albert C. Outler who coined the phrase, 'Wesleyan Quadrilateral', and served as the first editor of *The Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984ff).

<sup>11</sup> John Wesley notably articulated this distinction in his sermon, 'Christian Perfection', among other places.

<sup>12</sup> Jennifer L. Woodruff Tait, *The Poisoned Chalice: Eucharistic Grape Juice and Common-Sense Realism in Victorian Methodism* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2011). See also John Wesley's sermon, 'What is Man?', in which he explicates a Cartesian dualism.

Oddly, Yong seems to have appropriated some of these misunderstandings as, for instance, he notes that Wesley believed that entire sanctification results in the 'eradication' of the sinful nature (87).

This is exactly what the American holiness Wesleyans would affirm, though Wesley never used the language of eradication when talking about entire sanctification. He would on occasion use the language of the 'cleansing' from sin and, at least once that I am aware of, the 'mortification' of the flesh/inbred sin. Both categories *might* be construed in eradicationist ways, as they certainly would in later Wesleyan-holiness theologies, except that this is simply not the way that Wesley thinks about Christian perfection. Instead, the kind of language he typically employs indicates a more dynamic and relational notion of holiness: Christian perfection is 'renewal' in the image of Christ, the transformation of the 'tempers', a heart 'overflowing' with 'joy,' 'peace', and, especially, 'love' for God and neighbour.<sup>13</sup>

It is for this reason that Wesley's reflections on the life of holiness tend to be more nuanced than those of his holiness movement descendants. This is evident in his refusal to call the life of perfect love 'sinless perfection', his recognition that many of the effects of sin (what he calls 'infirmities') do carry over into and need to be further dealt with following the reception of entire sanctification,<sup>14</sup> and his recognition that true heart holiness is most often

received immediately before death and as a result of decades of committed attendance to the 'means of grace'.

I think it important to note also that, although Wesley never gave up believing that Christian perfection was available to all believers this side of glory, he never testified to it himself, and was only ever able to report that, out of the tens of thousands of Methodists under his charge, only a few hundred could truthfully testify to having received the grace.<sup>15</sup>

Wesley's understanding of Christian perfection is more nuanced because it rests fully upon the distinction that Wesley makes between sins 'improperly so-called' (i.e., mistakes in judgment or based in ignorance, infirmities, etc.) and sins 'properly so-called' (conscious and wilful transgressions of known laws of God). In light of our deeper understanding of the complexity of human decision-making and actions (drawn from advances in psychology, sociology, the neurosciences, etc.), many Wesleyan theologians have found that it is clearly not so cut-and-dry a matter for this distinction to make much sense except as some kind of ideal state.

Strangely, Yong will report favourably on recent studies of Wesleyan theologians who have made exactly this case (114),<sup>16</sup> but then just a few pages later seems to ignore completely the implications of affirming that 'the renewing work of the Spirit accomplish-

<sup>13</sup> Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism* (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press, 1972).

<sup>14</sup> John Wesley, 'Christian Perfection'.

<sup>15</sup> John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*.

<sup>16</sup> This includes my own *Perfecting Grace* as well as Paul N. Markham, *Rewired: Exploring Religious Conversion* (Eugene, Or.: Picwick, 2007).

es the *eradication* of [sinful] tendencies and proclivities *in* human hearts' [emphasis mine] (125). I find this vexing and can only imagine that Yong's renewalist commitment to the doctrine and experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit and its connection to the grace of entire sanctification—which Yong correctly notes Wesley never affirmed and most Wesleyans have cast aside—in some sense requires him to return eradicationism in through the back door.

Admittedly, while I would consider

this inconsistency especially problematic because it connects to the core of my own work and interests, in the grand scheme of things this is a rather small problem in an otherwise wonderful book by a theologian who, once again, has demonstrated why he stands out as one of the most important theologians in Pentecostalism and a major voice to the theology discussions of the church catholic. I am grateful for this book, and look forward to many like it to flow from the mind and heart of Amos Yong.

ERT (2016) 40:2, 164-169

## Trailblazer!

### Thomas Jay Oord

Amos Yong's book, *Renewing Christian Theology: Systematic for a Global Christianity*, is simply an excellent book. I have high praise for it! Yong is among the leading Pentecostal theologians at work today, if not *the* leading Pentecostal theologian. The breadth and depth of his theological work is, as far as I know, unparalleled. In this book, Yong uses a broader identity, however, to capture the diverse spiritual fervour

and theological reflection often associated with Pentecostalism: 'renewal theology'.

Yong begins this large tome by placing his work in a global context. He reminds/informs readers of the diversity of faith and thought expressions across the planet. What unites this diversity is the quest for Christian renewal, says Yong, but renewal that itself should be open to further renewal.

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*Thomas Jay Oord* (Ph.D. Claremont Graduate University) is Professor of Theology and Philosophy at Northwest Nazarene University, Nampa, Idaho. He has written or edited more than 20 books, including *The Uncontrolling Love of God: An Open and Relational Account of Providence* (IVP Academic), *Defining Love: A Philosophical, Scientific, and Theological Engagement* (Brazos), and *The Nature of Love: A Theology* (Chalice).

Although the book subtitle says it will be a 'systematics', the book does not offer a systematic theology in the sense of crafting a cohesive theology around a major theme. Rather, the book explores the major loci typical of systematic theology, without trying to tie neatly together the various ideas and show their mutual entailments.

Few theologians could pull off a book that seeks to identify scholarship across the globe. But Yong is so well connected with renewal-oriented scholars and so well read that he does an amazing job in this book. References to scholarship riddle the book's chapters, a tribute to Yong's diverse interests and stature as a leading renewal theologian of our day. These references also include scholarship far beyond renewalist thinkers. Several times while reading I found myself in awe of Yong's expansive interests.

A unique feature of the book is the collection of art photos sprinkled throughout. These artistic pieces are meant to illustrate or deepen reflection of the particular topic at hand. After looking at the first few art photos and reading the brief commentary associated with each, however, I found myself skipping the commentary associated with the photos in the remainder of the book. Perhaps I'm not as visually oriented as some readers will be, but I thought the photos and commentary sometimes interrupted the flow of Yong's argument. But it's a creative idea!

### I Descriptive or Prescriptive?

After reading the introductory chapter describing the global context of renewal theology, I had the sense that

the book would be primarily descriptive. Yong informs the reader that he would begin each chapter with a World Assemblies of God Fellowship doctrine of faith. After a brief reflection on a biblical passage or story to begin each chapter, Yong tells readers he plans to show how voices across the world interpret, expand, or are compatible with the doctrine addressed in the chapter.

In a move uncharacteristic of systematic theologies, Yong begins with eschatology. The chapter is titled 'The Last Days and the End of Time', and this caught my attention, not only for its reversal of typical ordering, but also for what it says theologically. I love even more the fact that Yong puts the doctrine of scripture last in the book, illustrating rightly the proper place of Scripture relative to the major doctrines of the church. Creative moves such as these should impel readers toward new insights and novel reflection. I applaud Yong for such moves!

As I read the Global Assemblies of God Fellowship statement on eschatology and then each Assemblies doctrine in the chapters thereafter, however, I discovered my expectations for Yong's project were misplaced. Perhaps I read too much into the introduction. Instead of an entirely descriptive account of renewalist reflection related to the Assemblies statements, I found Yong's theological commentary in each chapter considerably different from the wording and usual interpretation of the Assemblies of God statements.

The eschatological statement begins with statements about millennialism. It preaches purification in readiness for the return of Jesus. And it affirms everlasting conscious punishment for those not in the book of life. These claims are

not what I'd personally propose for a statement about eschatology, and I'm glad I'm not a member of the Assemblies of God Fellowship so that I would be expected to affirm them. And other Assemblies statements of faith would not be winsome to most contemporary theologians I know.

I'm not complaining that Yong doesn't simply follow the Assemblies doctrine and descriptively tell the reader what that entails in relation to other renewal thinking. Nor am I complaining that the views Yong proposes seem sometimes only loosely associated with the statements. I'm not complaining, because I do not find the Assemblies of God Fellowship statements attractively worded. The substance of some statements also strikes me as unhelpful. These statements have wording that may have been in vogue a half century ago or more. But the wording is stilted and unhelpful to many today.

If Yong's prescriptive views in these chapters are the heart of renewal theology, however, count me among the renewal theologian! I have no interest in affirming the Assemblies doctrines as they are worded, however.

## II Creation Theology

Although I found something in every chapter of *Renewing Christian Theology* that either inspired, informed, or intrigued me—again, this is an excellent book—I will focus my remaining thoughts on the longest chapter in the book, 'Creation and Fall: Natural History and the Redemptive Ends of God'.

Yong's primary focus of this chapter is soteriological. 'The bulk of this chapter will be focused on clarifying the doctrine of humanity in its fallen con-

dition', he says. But Yong knows that this raises questions pertaining to science. 'Any adequate understanding of the present global theological context', says Yong, 'cannot avoid engaging the most pressing of scientifically induced questions'. Consequently, providence, death, evil, and sin are best considered using both theologically and scientifically-informed lenses.

On the doctrine of initial creation and its accompanying issue of the age of the earth, Yong says renewalist Christians have among their numbers young-earth creationists, old-earth creationists, and evolutionary creationists. Yong believes the tide is gradually moving away from young-earth interpretations. The science is strongly on the side of evolutionary perspectives, although Yong believes these evolution theories must be theistic in orientation if they are to provide adequate Christian accounts of creation.

Yong notes that embracing evolutionary creation brings along with it a set of questions: Why is there natural evil prior to human sin? Why did there have to be *so much* death and suffering, far more than what a young-earth perspective would require?

In answering these questions, Yong lays out a variety of alternatives. From a 'renewal point of view', he says, 'the most promising theodicies are less those that attempt to account for the origins of evil (and pain, suffering, and death) than those that reinterpret existing evil in light of the Christian drama of redemption'. Yong mentions themes pertaining to the suffering God and eschatological redemption. He notes that positive elements can come from death, and both evolutionary theory and theological perspectives can

affirm such positive elements.

Yong says in response to his brief survey of renewalist responses to evolution and evil that 'If anything like the current evolutionary hypothesis holds forth going forward, any efforts to renew the Christian doctrine of creation in the third millennium will need to provide coherent, if not convincing, accounts of the prevalence of suffering and death before the appearance of human beings for the their resolution'. I agree entirely. I strongly appreciate Yong saying this so clearly, without seeing it as reason to embrace a young-earth perspective, which is so contrary to contemporary science.

As far as I can tell, Yong offers no coherent or convincing account of his own for the origin of suffering, death, and evil. He doesn't tell us why God would allow such evil, if God were able to prevent it. His purpose is to survey, not provide his own constructive answers. I will return to this point later in my review.

Moving from the issue of the age of creation and evil, Yong addresses Adam, sin, and the image of God. As is his usual method, Yong lays out various ways one might understand Adam and Eve. The ways range from them being literal, historical people to being literary devices that make theological points.

Although Yong claims all Christians think humans are unique from other animals, he notes that it is difficult to identify what makes humans unique. Later in the chapter, Yong says the 'intellectual, moral, and spiritual capacities of humans are far above and arguably qualitatively different from other animals' (283). While I agree with Yong's statements about the dif-

ferences in degree between humans and other animals, I would like to see a strong argument for how those differences become qualitatively so.

The question of human uniqueness moves to the issue of original sin. Again, Yong lays out options for why humans have a sin propensity. He does not offer his own proposal to explain how a creation originally created good could have creatures in it inclined toward evil. Instead, Yong looks to the redemption of sinful humans that can 'reorient human hopes and desires in anticipation of the immanent divine reign that is nevertheless yet to come' (274). Here we have not an explanation for the sin's origin but an emphasis upon the hope for our overcoming it.

Yong's purview of creation theology is not just limited to theories about humans. Taking Romans as his text, Yong says the fate of the entire cosmos is at stake. In this context, he returns to the issue of Adam. Here his own preferences seem to appear. Yong argues that Christological readings of Romans allow us to believe a historical Adam is not necessary to affirm our spiritual solidarity with Christ. St. Paul takes Adam as a representative figure, and Yong argues we need not think of Adam as the initial *homo sapiens*.

Pneumatology plays a key role in this chapter exploring creation. Those of us who know Yong's work would expect this, because he has been exploring the implications of pneumatology for decades. The Spirit is the primary actor in the Romans context, says Yong, and the Spirit delivers us from bondage and intercedes for saints. This Spirit is not just in humans; it is active in all creation. 'The creation and all its creatures, human beings includ-

ed,' says Yong, 'are thus caught up in this cosmic renewal of the triune God' (279).

### III Initial Creation, Evil, Future Redemption

The chapter on creation ends by exploring what Yong calls 'A Trinitarian Theology of Creation, Cross, and Culmination'. In this chapter's final section, Yong moves from mostly descriptive to more prescriptive accounts of how he thinks good theology should be done in relation to creation issues. No longer are multiple bibliographical references inserted generously into paragraphs. This section most reflects Yong's own views.

Yong begins this final section by saying the thrust of renewal theology is Trinitarian, by which he means Christological, pneumatological, and eschatological. Yong looks briefly at ways theology and science might be thought to relate. I must admit, I thought this methodological survey would have been earlier in the chapter. But perhaps Yong's decision to place last the methodological question of the relation of science and theology mirrors his move to place Scripture as the last chapter in the book. Perhaps Yong is making what is typically prolegomena into 'postlegomena'.

I was disappointed when Yong argues in the following way: 'God's two books—of Scripture and of nature—cannot be finally contradictory, so any appearances of conflict are the results of either mistaken scriptural interpretations, or incomplete scientific data or understanding, or both' (282).

I have grown highly suspicious of the view that it is only our interpreta-

tion of the Bible that is at odds with well-established theories in science, rather than the Bible itself. I wish Yong had said bluntly that the Bible is sometimes wrong about scientific matters. Claims of biblical error also rely upon interpretation, of course. But so do claims that the Bible is without error. Our views are inexorably tied to our interpretation, so why not say the Bible is wrong when it appears to be so? I wondered if Yong's failure to say the Bible has errors was caused by not wanting to offend some of the more conservative elements in the renewal-ist movement.

In this final section, Yong's theology becomes the primary lens for making sense of creation. Whereas previously Yong laid out possible ways to think about the image of God, for instance, here he says the image of God for humans is eschatologically revealed in Christ. Yong also plainly says the fall of humanity is a theological claim not a scientific one. A historical Adam is not necessary for such theological claims. Death is both physical and existential, because creation is cruciform. And death anticipates eternal life in God.

On the final pages, Yong briefly broaches the issue of the absolute beginnings of our universe. 'From the foundations' or 'the beginning of the world,' says Yong, God in his wisdom and foreknowledge anticipates fallen sinfulness. In this cleverly worded section, Yong does not tell readers conclusively his own views on foreknowledge or *creatio ex nihilo*.

Yong says creation is 'neither self-originating nor self-sustaining.' But this leaves unresolved many issues of original and ongoing creation. Whether there was something before

our world, Yong does not say. But according to Yong, God ‘actualizes this kind of world that allows for the fall, a world in which evolutionary predation and death are part of the ‘fine-tuning’ (286). It is God’s intention, says Yong, to ‘overcome the power of death through the renewing, redeeming, and resurrecting power of the Holy Spirit’ (287).

As I read Yong’s statements about initial creation, death, evil, and the Spirit overcoming work, questions kept arising in my mind. I wondered what Yong thought about the nature of God’s power both initially to create and finally to redeem. ‘How did this happen and how will God redeem it?’ I asked myself. Does creation have an essential role to play in this grand drama? If so, can God’s redemption be guaranteed? If not and God can control creatures entirely, why doesn’t God prevent far more death and all genuine evil?

My questions found a point of reference in these words from Yong: ‘Christian theodicy is most successful explicating not the whence of evil but the whither of evil, especially its eschatological redemption in Christ by the Spirit’ (289). I assume that this statement is more than merely a description of what renewal theologians think. The statement seems to represent Yong’s own view. However, it is here that I disagree with Yong, despite my agreement with the vast majority of the other proposals Yong makes in the wonderful book. In my view, the ‘whence’ of evil

is directly relevant to the ‘whither’. Without a plausible proposal for why there is evil in the first place, one cannot offer a plausible proposal for why God will someday overcome it.

To put my disagreement in the form of a question, ‘Why should we trust that God will, as Yong puts it, overcome death and evil by the renewing, redeeming, and resurrecting power of the Holy Spirit if God unilaterally set up a universe with genuine evil and/or fails to prevent genuine evil throughout the history of that universe?’ The ‘whence’ matters if the ‘whither’ is to be believable.

Although I don’t know the renewal literature in the way that Yong does, I suspect that few renewal theologians are seriously rethinking issues of God’s power in ways that make offering a plausible explanation of evil possible. In this sense, I don’t fault Yong. The issues are thorny and the work to rethink creation and providence is difficult. But doing this work seems to me important for offering the most plausible account we Christians can for the hope within us.

Amos Yong is a trailblazing theologian. This book is an amazing contribution to theology in general and renewal theology in particular. He is at the centre of much good and exciting work, as Christians today seek to answer well the puzzling questions of our time. Serious theologians must read this book!

# Renewed and Always Renewing? A Rejoinder 'after' *Renewing Christian Theology*

Amos Yong

I am grateful first to Christopher Stephenson for organizing the panel to discuss my new book (with Jonathan A. Anderson), *Renewing Christian Theology: Systematics for a Global Christianity* (Baylor University Press, 2014)—hereafter *RCT*—and then to Lee University for hosting the discussion. I am doubly indebted to the three panelists / four respondents—Mark Mann was unable to be present in Cleveland Tennessee for the discussion, but submitted his review after the event—for their hermeneutic of generosity and yet critical engagement with the book.

I will deal first with some overarching issues that are repeatedly mentioned, and then turn in the second part to some of their more specific concerns. The following cannot hope to comprehensively address all of the important questions that have been raised. Suffice to say that these considerations, along with the preceding essays, reflect specific trajectories of conversation and debate about renewal theology that, one might argue depending on how *renewal* is defined, are proliferating in many directions.

## I Overarching Considerations—the place of Eschatology

Almost to a person (Oord perhaps excepted) it was observed that my starting with eschatology is at least a challenge (pedagogically, minimally, said Lisa Stephenson), if not a major conceptual/structural (Green) or theological (Mann) problem. Exacerbating the issue is that the springboard was the eschatological claims of the World Assembly of God Fellowship 'statement of faith' (WAGF SFT) and its 'sectarian' rather than catholic accents (Green) along with its non-'winsome' and 'stilted' wording (Oord). Regarding the reversal, at a certain level, I wanted to be provocative and prompt rethinking, and this is achieved at least in part through the kind of dissonance that rearrangement of the loci precipitates (as my interlocutors note).

Yet the point is not just being novel for novelty's sake but to achieve three interrelated objectives: 1) engage deeply with the particularity of renewal traditions (in this case represented

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**Amos Yong** (PhD Boston) is Professor of Theology and Mission, School of Intercultural Studies, Fuller Theological Seminary, California. He was previously J. Rodman Williams Professor of Theology and dean at Regent University School of Divinity, Virginia. Yong's scholarship has been foundational in Pentecostal theology, interacting with both traditional theological traditions and contemporary contextual theologies.

by the WAGF) in order to provide guidance for theological thinking with the church in the twenty-first century; 2) provide a systematic theology against the contemporary world-Christianity horizon that is nevertheless both evangelical and ecumenical enough to be considered as a text beyond the renewal orbit; and 3) remain faithful to my vocation as a *constructive* theologian, hence charting a line of thinking that yet breaks new ground in some respects.

It may now be impossible for any one-volume systematic theological effort to achieve all three of these goals. For instance, to write a *textbook* is by definition to remain at a preliminary level in order that students can be provided maps of and orientations to the state of the discussions, but to do constructive theology is to presume levels of understanding usually absent from those consulting or using such introductions. Or, first or second year students in specific ecclesiastical contexts (renewalist, for example) need to be grounded first and foremost in their own theological traditions rather than being forced to grapple with ideas coming from sources in which presuppositions differ vastly from their own. Hence bringing these many voices together without the time or space to expand on how they may be fundamentally contrary at the level of assumptions is an injustice to those at the starting line.

Thus Lisa Stephenson worries that my efforts to work off the WAGF SFT may be 'a bridge to nowhere'—registering perhaps intimations of a dual concern: that the efforts to connect the specificities of a confessional statement of faith to the broader theological

academy underestimates the distinctive genres that are operative within these two domains, or, by extension, that those in Assemblies circles, or in renewalist movements in general, are being led into a wide-wide ecumenical and scholarly world that will set them adrift, without adequate moorings in an ecclesial home.

My response to at least the latter concern is that in a globalizing and information-rich electronic and shrinking world, it is better not only to introduce the diversity of voices up front—millennials are used to such anyway—but then to show how these many perspectives can be 'handled' in ways that do not compromise distinctive commitments, than to assume that our students either would not want the challenge or to think that they are oblivious to the challenges, even opportunities, of pluralism.

The challenge of how to do constructive theology while providing an introductory map to the theological tradition is a bit more difficult to respond to. I admitted even in *RCT* (18) that the trinitarian logic of Christian faith as expressed in the Nicene confession of Father-Son-Spirit, in that order, has served as foundational to the theological tradition for almost two millennia, and to start with the Spirit or begin with eschatology may be deeply problematic. The 'solutions' proffered by Lisa Stephenson and Chris Green move us in opposite directions. The former wonders why we do not stay with the classical ordering and simply reconfigure such pneumatologically; the latter suggests that, having inverted the WAGF SFT order, why not take additional and important steps to reconsider the logic of renewal theology

wholesale, rather than just proceed in reverse sequence through the WAGF statements?

I think—in conversation here with Lisa Stephenson—to stay with the historic sequence does not create enough space for the emergence of a renewal-ist pneumatologic. More precisely, the renewal-ist imagination resists being shoehorned into the modern-ist straightjacket that has prioritized epistemology in order to establish the foundations for theological knowing, with the result being foundationalist treatments of the doctrine of scripture at the beginning of the systematic theological enterprise. My turning the dogmatic loci upside-down in effect challenges such quests for epistemic warrants and certitudes, thereby ‘illustrating rightly the proper [and historic] place of Scripture relative to the major doctrines of the church’ (Oord).

For me, we know as much if not more so through feeling (orthopathos) and practice (orthopraxis) as we do via Cartesian processes of reasoning. Scripture is normative indeed, as the pages of *RCT* unveil, albeit not in any foundational modernist sense. Hence, I plead with Stephenson to be patient to see if, in the longer run, the gains made do offset the losses (she is clearly not at this point convinced that the payoff vindicates the inversion).

To Green, then, I would merely reiterate that the shift is already radical enough in *RCT* and that we may need to remain here at least for the moment even if we consider it as a stepping-stone toward the kind of rethinking he is proposing. A thorough reorganization of the loci in light of renewal-ist orthopathic and orthopraxic commitments would require justification

at every step to avoid the charge of the arbitrary re-ordering of the loci. It might be that such will indeed be the end of systematic theology as we know it, toward the articulation of a paradoxical *dynamic-systematic-glocal* Christian theological vision.

Perhaps Green will write that kind of book and if so he might thank *RCT* later for opening up possibilities for that work. To be sure the renewing of Christian theology is never done—first to bring church beliefs into conformity with the apostolic witness (like those in the Reformed tradition that is “reformed and always reforming”). Then also to enable faithful and creative practices to flourish, following the apostolic Christians who responded to their times by the power of the Holy Spirit (hence to be “renewed and always renewing”).

In the big scheme of things, let me defend the reversal along three lines: that *RCT* is intended: 1) to be read as complementary to the ongoing discussion rather than as an effort to displace the Nicene tradition (18); 2) to present the eschatological not in terms of concerns about ‘the end times’ but in substantively *theological*—meaning in ‘pneumatological and christological, and hence trinitarian’ (17)—terms; and 3) as no more than sketching a pneumatologically-oriented trinitarian theological vision for the present global conversation, rather than presenting any final word on what this might or ought to look like.

In regard to the second point, that Mark Mann thinks my beginning with eschatology undermines my pneumatological and christological starting point and suggests that chapters 2.3 and 2.4—the last two sections reflect-

ing my own response to the theological and doctrinal issues dealt within in each chapter—were not sufficiently clear about how my eschatological reconstruction is renewally, theologically, and trinitarianly funded. My hope remains that the pneumatological and christological eschatology gestured toward in *RCT* advances the discussion beyond where it currently is, although I grant that I could have worked harder to elucidate such eschatologically-defined arena beyond the paragraph, and handful of references, provided on page 15.

With regard to point 3, the present set of exchanges is in some respects a first-fruits of *RCT*'s reception, or lack thereof, that will determine its long-term fate and perhaps legacy. So even if I, like Tom Oord, feel hampered by the fact that the wording of the WAGF is from 'a half century ago or more'—a point that applies perhaps also to the 'Articles of Faith' of his own Church of the Nazarene—I have decided here not to ignore these relics from a previous era but to attempt their retrieval and reappropriation.

My wager is that if there is to be any future for the WAGF, or for any other Christian confession in the broader Protestant stream for that matter—an open question indeed given the *post-denominational* turn in contemporary world Christianity—something like what I have attempted in *RCT* will be needed, at least at the methodological level, even if the specific decision to reverse the sequence of the loci is not adopted. Whether and to what degree *RCT*, and the corpus of work it represents, is embraced as a valuable contribution to Christian thinking for a twenty-first century of third millen-

nium global context, or if it will be (eventually) forgotten because of implausibilities inherent in its fundamental intuitions, remains to be seen.

## II Specific Points of Discussion

I now proceed in order of the presentations and publication (in this issue of *Evangelical Review of Theology*), which are identical with the addition of the Mann written response inserted into the mix.

### 1. Lisa Stephenson

Lisa Stephenson rightly insists that today we ought to be even more intentionally focused on the gendered character of renewal theological thinking in particular, not to mention across the board of theological reflection. I have appreciated and encouraged her own work on this front,<sup>1</sup> and would welcome further developments, particularly among renewal theologians. Certainly there are still too few in this camp that are equipped to critically deploy feminist perspectives for the theological task, and we need to find ways to nurture their efforts in this regard.

Regarding her specific suggestion of foregrounding the Markan story

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., Lisa P. Stephenson, *Dismantling the Dualisms for American Pentecostal Women in Ministry: A Feminist-Pneumatological Approach*, Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies 11 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011); also Stephenson, 'Tillich's Sacramental Spirituality in a New Key: A Feminist Pentecostal Proposal', in Nimi Wariboko and Amos Yong, eds., *Paul Tillich and Pentecostal Theology: Spiritual Presence and Spiritual Power* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 115-25.

of the woman with the issue of blood in place of the narrative about the Gerasene demoniac, I recognize now that there are many ways to develop her proposal so as to engage the disability perspectives important for my purposes in *RCT* chapter 8. Clearly, the fact that this woman suffered with her condition for twelve years (Mark 5:25) suggests that her situation could be illumined considerably through the lenses of chronic illness, particularly given the correlations between chronic illness and the lives of women and also in light of the growing research at where chronic illness and disability studies nexus.<sup>2</sup> My previous focus on issues of mental illness and especially intellectual disability prevented me from making this connection. Ah, the theologian's work is never done.

Before I move on, I want to make one more comment, not on one of Lisa Stephenson's 'concerns', but on her commendation of the inclusion of images in the book. She rightly recognizes the central role these play in engaging the affective dimension of human feeling. We are barely beginning to consider how our theological endeavours are informed by affectivity and affective modes of being, knowing, and doing.<sup>3</sup> I am thankful to my co-author

Jonathan Anderson for ensuring that *RCT*'s emphasis on orthodoxy does not ignore or neglect the equally important spheres of orthopathy and orthopraxy. The book's images facilitate interaction with the former orthopathic scope while the final section of each chapter focuses on the latter orthopraxic pathways for faithful Christian responses to each doctrinal locus in the present time.

## 2. Chris Green

Chris Green raises a number of questions about my chapter 6 on ordinances and sacraments. I wish to respond to his observations at two levels: what we might call the *meta-sacramental*, and the *performative*.

With regard to the former, I link some of the more minor critical points to Green's scepticism about the '(im) possibility of a global renewal systematics'. For Green, the worries are about whether a global renewal perspective exists. But then his observations about the framing of the ordinance-sacrament topic suggest the other side of this coin: that each of the eleven articles of the WAGF SFT—or alternative structure if we had some other confessional starting point—begs the question about whether a systematic or synthetic approach is possible.

Green's expertise in this area (originally his very good PhD thesis, now published)<sup>4</sup> highlights for me how not

2 E.g., Darla Schumm and Michael Stoltzfus, 'Chronic Illness and Disability: Narratives of Suffering and Healing in Buddhism and Christianity', in Darla Schumm and Michael Stoltzfus, eds., *Disability and Religious Diversity: Cross-Cultural and Interreligious Perspectives Hardcover* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 159-76.

3 Some exploratory venues are charted in my *Spirit of Love: A Trinitarian Theology of Grace* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2012), part II; see also Dale Coulter and Amos Yong,

eds., *The Spirit, the Affections, and the Christian Tradition* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016).

4 Chris E. W. Green, *Foretasting the Kingdom: Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Lord's Supper* (Cleveland, Tenn.: CPT Press, 2012). Note

only this chapter but also each one in my book could have been fruitfully expanded into its own monograph, thus registering in retrospect what haunted me throughout the writing of *RCT*: that it is quite hubristic in our time to even imagine, much less (attempt to) produce, something like a systematic theology, particularly one on a global scale, and that to work toward such with any kind of plausibility requires something more like Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* than can be accomplished in something like a 450-page book, with pictures!<sup>5</sup> For instance I responded initially, 'Why yes!' to Green's suggestion that I begin this chapter instead with 'a properly *theological* account of *Jesus*' experience of baptism'—but then thought instead to include such in an expanded re-telling of John's baptism in order to preserve the Baptist's narrative as a ramp toward the Fourth Gospel and its implications for the topic at hand.

The point is that so much more could have been done, and in a real sense, even a full volume on any theological topic will invite further development along other tributaries that even

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that, if in this book Green's commitments are with the broader Nicene tradition which prioritizes the sacramental tradition in specific ways, my own renewalist matrix requires not a privileging of sacramentality but the hard work of envisioning its reappropriation vis-à-vis the global horizons of ecclesial communities and churches across the ordinance-sacrament spectrum.

5 I suppose that is in part why the current attempts toward a global systematics by my colleague here at Fuller Seminary, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, reaches to five-volumes: *A Constructive Christian Theology for a Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013-2017)!

then remain no more than 'broken fragments' of our understanding on this side of the eschaton.

There lurks, however, a worry that may be even larger than Green realizes. His reading of the second, historical, section of chapter 7 prompts the question about whether my 'truncated description ... in effect only re-inscribe[s] already-familiar (mis) understandings' about the ordinance-sacrament theme. This presses to the limits what I call the *meta-sacramental* concern: that historically, the shift to *ordinance* represents a transition to a wholly new discursive space that may be fundamentally incompatible, precisely because opposed to, that represented by heretofore dominant *sacramental* discourse, so that any attempts to bridge the two (like mine) seeks to inhabit some artificial site amidst binary conceptual universes (e.g., the 'spiritual/ material dualism' that Green notes).

The (cultural linguistic/Lindbeckian) purist in me invites our resignation then to the reality that these are effectively incommensurable dogmatic spaces, and that one can only thereby convert from one to the other but never synthesize them without violating or distorting something about their historic commitments. Yet the renewalist systematist in me urges that what we might not be able to resolve at the elaborated dogmatic level finds partial, if not ongoing encouragement toward, communion at the level of practice.

Here then I turn to briefly comment on the *performative* way forward for the renewal of Christian theology in global and pluralistic context. Green rightly discerns that it is *as* human creatures participate in the economy of the triune

God, that they are effective and transformative, so he pushes for a further accounting of this ‘as’ conjunction that is ‘obviously crucial’ to my soteriology. While a fair enough request, I am unsure this will be sufficient since any such explication will inevitably remain at the theoretical level and press further questions about the metaphysical accounts at stake.

So for instance, my philosophical theology of participation presumes a Peircean and pragmatist approach that bypasses the Kantian noumenon-phenomenon distinction so that the ‘as’ denotes engagements with extra-human realities, albeit always semiotically (interpretatively) through practice,<sup>6</sup> although this in turn will beg further discussion and consideration vis-à-vis other metaphysical horizons and their role in scriptural hermeneutics. While never one to shy away from philosophical and hermeneutical issues, for the moment let me say only that I believe focusing our energies on developing vocabulary that invites common practice is the best way forward in the long run (this is in chapter 6.4—consistent with the *practices* proposals in every fourth section of the eleven chapters) since the increasing sharing of communion and of the Lord’s Supper will in time generate new discursive possibilities for common dogmatic clarification.

No, I do not expect these dogmatic traditions to converge overnight, but I do believe that the current postdenom-

inational climate of the global church portends such possibilities and that renewal movements can play crucial roles in foretasting (as Green himself might put it) and gesturing toward new possibilities for a systematic reconfiguration of theologies of ordinances and sacraments for the third millennium. So while ‘a robust theology of participation’ is central to any dialogue between renewalists and others on this front, it will be through and *as* we practise (together) that we will discern the possibilities of bridging *ordinance* and *sacramental* universes.<sup>7</sup>

### 3. Mark Mann

I have fond memories of struggling with Mark Mann and others in Robert Cummings Neville’s seminars in the late 1990s as we attempted to comprehend how the latter’s *pragmaticist* semiotics unlocked the key to the universe; at the same time, I also puzzled over how such ‘pragmaticism’—Peirce’s own contorted neologism designed to be ‘ugly enough to be safe from kidnapers’ and to distinguish his ideas from that of his contemporary and one-time colleague William James—was similar to but yet also a long ways from the *pragmatism* of my own pentecostal tradition.<sup>8</sup> We have both found our ways

<sup>6</sup> As developed early on in my work: e.g., *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective*, New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology and Biblical Studies Series (Burlington, Vt., and Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2002).

<sup>7</sup> We spent some time at the panel event going back-and-forth over this matter, leading our good friend and mutual colleague Rickie Moore to come up to us after the session and comment that Chris Green will always remember this as the night that Amos Yong whipped his ‘as’—which sounds a lot funnier vocalized than read silently.

<sup>8</sup> On pentecostal pragmatism, see Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard

from New England to the West Coast, although I know the Manns have family back on the Eastern shore so I am not sure how long we will enjoy our neighbourly proximity. Two aspects of Mann's reflections are prompts for my rejoinder: that regarding 'pneumatological excesses' and that regarding the language of 'eradication' in relationship to our theologies of sanctification.

Mann begins his response, recounting in testimonial fashion his own encounter with one of the 'extreme cases' of pentecostal or pneumatological excess, less to slight the pentecostal tradition than to highlight how he thinks *RCT* might be helpful to steer a more ecumenical and attractive evangelical way forward for global renewal theology and practice. Needless to say, renewalist theologians like me have these always in the background even if we may not, in our publications at least, cite or refer to such. On my more pessimistic days I think that such pentecostal triumphalism ought to be curtailed, although then I muse that to undercut such expectancy might sever the vital organs that make pentecostal spirituality what it is as a gift to the church catholic.<sup>9</sup>

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University Press, 2001); on the Peirce reference, see Yong, *The Dialogical Spirit: Christian Reason and Theological Method for the Third Millennium* (Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2014), 72, which is part of the ch. 2, 'Pragmatist and Pragmaticist Trajectories for a Post-modern Theology.'

<sup>9</sup> On this point, see my review of the excellent book of David J. Courey, *What Has Wittenberg to Do with Azusa? Luther's Theology of the Cross and Pentecostal Triumphalism* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), in *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association*

Then the believing and more optimistic pentecostal side of my identity kicks in—the theologian of glory that is inevitably pentecostal (which is why I foregrounded the theology of the cross throughout *RCT*)—and says that even if our charism may also be our Achilles' heel, that can be used for God's purposes, and our responsibility as renewalist theologians is to simply persist in faithful diagnosis and constructive work and leave the rest in the Holy Spirit's hands. Similarly, I might suggest, the 'extremes' of the Holiness tradition, as with any other tradition, that informs also the Nazarene branch within which Mann serves, can continue to be catalytic for contemporary theological reflection.

And here I have touched upon a nerve for Mann as a Nazarene theologian. He resists *eradicationist* language as unfaithful to John Wesley's own 'more nuanced understanding of Christian perfection' and as out of sync with contemporary Wesleyan theologies of sanctification that understand the experience of perfect love as an ideal state rather than as one achieved in this life. In re-reading my chapter, it appears my training at Western Evangelical Seminary (now George Fox Evangelical Seminary) from back in the early 1990s has remained with me at least subconsciously.

At WES, we read Wesleyan authors, especially those engaging with the earlier Holiness theologians, who talked about the second work of grace in eradicationist terms and such has remained in my psyche (note that I

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35:2 (2015): 176-77, wherein I ruminate about whether Courey's prognosis might spell 'the end of Pentecostalism as we know it.'

did not reference my use of this specific term the four times it appears in my discussion).<sup>10</sup> Within the Nazarene camp more precisely and the broader Holiness conversation more generally, efforts have been made to get beyond the connotations of such terminology related to the doctrine of (entire) sanctification, so I can fully appreciate Mann's efforts to nuance this important point.

Yet beyond these insider-debates, use of eradicationism terminology and conceptualization may actually beneficially connect with the variety of radical theologies on the contemporary horizon. The point about such radicalism is too often a restorationist one of getting back to the roots, whether that of the biblical traditions or of the ways and paths of the early apostolic community. Within this framework, talk of the eradication of the sin nature may be hyperbolic from one (Wesleyan) perspective but yet call attention to the palpability and profundity of the Spirit's work in human lives from another (renewalist) angle.

Yet the point about appropriating the many tongues from across the many Christian traditions should not be to misrepresent their witnesses, so any retrieval needs to be alert to the dynamics of theological development within traditions as well. I happily stand corrected by Mann's careful exposition even as I reaffirm the radical-

ity of the relationalist paradigm with which he and his Wesleyan and Holiness colleagues are hard at work.

#### 4. Tom Oord

Tom Oord is a Nazarene theologian like Mark Mann, although Oord's overriding interest at the interface of the theology and science dialogue leads him to focus on my theology of creation instead (chapter 10). Like Mann and me, if not more so, Oord is a thoroughly, if not also primarily, relational theologian.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps the difference between us lies on what I call the practical or performative dimension so that for me, relationality includes essentially and constitutively human praxis vis-à-vis other creatures and a real world.

So, if Oord presses me for further argument about how humans are qualitatively different from other animals, if time and space permitted, I'd elaborate on their relational character and practice, or liturgically-oriented forms of life and thus continue on the performative rather than merely conceptual register. I would also emphasize the scope of possibilities available to human animals but not to others, and thereby attempt to adjudicate teleologically—rather than protologically—the complex questions related to human uniqueness.

Similarly, I am not motivated to say that 'the Bible is wrong when it appears to be so', although not so much because I do not want 'to offend some of the more conservative elements in the renewalist movement'; rather, I

<sup>10</sup> E.g., Charles W. Carter, 'Hamartiology', in Charles W. Carter, ed., *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology: Biblical, Systematic, and Practical*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Francis & Taylor, 1983), I.266 passim, here citing H. Orton Wiley, early twentieth century Nazarene theologian.

<sup>11</sup> By my count, Oord has at least three (of his many) books with the word *relational* in the title.

would like to enable a performative way forward beyond the errancy-inerrancy divide. To be clear: I see no need to be offensive for its own sake (as I am sure Oord agrees), but the issue—as indicated above—is the normativity of the scriptural witness, and that has to be judged by *how* we use, and are normed by, the Bible (a point that Lisa Stephenson's account indicates she appreciates about *RCT*), not by our claims about in/errancy.

My point is that formal definitions—whether about theological anthropology or about bibliology—while useful, will always have to account for concrete realities (apparent exceptions to the rule) and be exemplified in actual practice, so any full response must include historical and performative enactment.

A more weighty difference about how we might call Oord's first-order relationalism plays out differently from my second-order version is that, as I see it, Oord understands relationality as the primary *explanans*—the fundamental framework of explanation—whereas I see it as a subordinate one (to my renewalist, eschatological, pneumatological, and trinitarian rationality). So Oord's relationalism thus presumes a *creation ex amore* rather than a *creation ex nihilo* as well as an open theistic view of the future and of God's (fore)knowledge of such, whereas I am open to these various ideas only on a supporting basis and am comfortable with embracing both or multiple sides of these 'coins' within a more teleologically oriented account to the degree that these various positions reveal their value in different respects.

I think open theism is advantageous for understanding some but not all as-

pects of the scriptural witness; hence I prefer to remain at the theological and pneumatological level to anticipate how unfolding eschatological scenarios illuminate the truth of these (apparently) contrasting possibilities.<sup>12</sup> So I am not just being clever—or obscure or coy—in being inconclusive about foreknowledge or *creation ex nihilo*; it's just that I don't think there is or ought to be only one way through which we can or must respond to such matters.<sup>13</sup>

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**12** Here again, I remain Peircean in terms of presuming that the laws of non-contradiction and excluded middle govern theological statements, albeit with regard to different respects that will be illuminated dynamically (see *Spirit-Word-Community*, 153-54); hence the teleological or pneumato-eschatologic that characterizes my relationalism. At root, as Oord and I discovered when we first met in 1998 and disputed at a session of the joint annual meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies and the Wesleyan Theological Society in Cleveland, Tennessee (no less!), it is my Peircean instincts that most clearly distinguish *how* I think compared with Oord's Whiteheadian sensibilities, a point of contrast that goes back to our days in graduate studies at Boston University (myself under Bob Neville) and at Claremont Graduate University (Oord under John B. Cobb, Jr.). Yet despite our differences, we consider ourselves co-pilgrims and co-labourers along the parallel renewalist and Wesleyan theological highways in common cause and quest.

**13** See also my essays: 'Divine Knowledge and Future Contingents: Weighing the Presuppositional Issues in the Contemporary Debate', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 26:3 (2002): 240-64, and 'Divine Knowledge and Relation to Time', in Thomas Jay Oord, ed., *Philosophy of Religion: Introductory Essays* (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press/Nazarene Publishing House, 2003), 136-52; cf. 'Possibility and Actuality: The Doctrine of Creation and Its Implications for Divine Omniscience', *The Wesleyan Philosophical Society Online Journal* 1:1 (2001)

But here we touch, again, upon modal and teleological aspects of my overall approach that I sense Oord may not be completely satisfied with.

Let us therefore get directly to the point that puts this issue in stark relief: for Oord, “The “whence” matters if the “whither” is to be believable”—meaning that we have to know about God’s relationship to the origins of sin, evil, and the fall (the ‘whence’) in order to have the assurance that God can make good on his eschatological promises of redemption, restoration, and renewal (the ‘whither’). Oord is too modest to even cite his own impressive book that attempts a full-blown relational theology of providence, and I cannot but strongly recommend all interested in this topic to read it carefully.<sup>14</sup>

My pentecostal, pneumatological, eschatological imagination, however, recommends three lines of response while appreciating Oord’s open and relational assists. First, the *pentecostal* approach that embraces the cacophony and dissonance of the many tongues thinks that Oord’s theodicy is a bit too neat; hence his ‘whence’ would be less tidy if the many voices were to be factored into the conversation in a more robust way.

Second, the *pneumatological* axis stresses the dynamic and hence agential and performative aspects of human thinking and believing; the solutions to our deepest existential and theoretical (theological) questions are most often intertwined with our doing and liv-

ing. Third, the eschatological horizon means that, ‘now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face’ (1 Cor 13:12a, NRSV); hence, a more reserved apophatic account is not just a sign of intellectual weakness but is both theologically appropriate and actually comes in more handy than he might think.

### III In Lieu of a Conclusion

I have not yet said anything about Christopher Stephenson’s introduction. Since I served as a member on his PhD dissertation committee on pentecostal systematic theologies—that dissertation’s lengthy chapter on my work showed that he had mastered my thinking up to that time<sup>15</sup>—he has continued to find what I have had to say helpful enough to recommend to others.<sup>16</sup> Stephenson not only read and commented on a draft version of *RCT* (xx), but has also given me effective feedback on at least three of my other books in the last half dozen years (at least as indicated in the ‘Acknowledgments’ or ‘Preface’ to my recent mono-

<sup>15</sup> Published later as Christopher A. Stephenson, *Types of Pentecostal Theology: Method, System, Spirit*, AAR Academy Series (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), including ch. 4, ‘Systematic Theology as Philosophical and Fundamental Theology in Pneumatological Perspective: Amos Yong’.

<sup>16</sup> E.g., Christopher A. Stephenson, ‘Reality, Knowledge, and Life in Community: Metaphysics, Epistemology, and Hermeneutics in the Work of Amos Yong’, in Wolfgang Vondey and Martin W. Mittelstadt, eds., *The Theology of Amos Yong and the New Face of Pentecostal Scholarship: Passion for the Spirit*, Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies 14 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 63-82.

[<http://home.snu.edu/~brint/wpsjnl/v1n1.htm>].

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Jay Oord, *The Uncontrolling Love of God: An Open and Relational Account of Providence* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015).

graphs). He knows perhaps better than anyone how important methodological concerns are for me and his introductory comments provide important perspective for these essays, especially my rejoinder.

I suggest that the value of whatever I have done will be measured best by the creative and constructive thinking it prompts in others, and in that sense I eagerly and imminently anticipate the full emergence—currently gaining momentum, certainly<sup>17</sup>—of his own voice

<sup>17</sup> See for instance his ‘Speculative Theology

in the theological conversation.<sup>18</sup>

and Spiritual Practice: A Reformed, Catholic, and Pentecostal Conversation on an Aspect of Theological Method’, in Steven M. Studebaker and Amos Yong, eds., *From Northampton to Azusa: Pentecostals and the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* [working title] (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>18</sup> Thanks to David Parker, editor of *Evangelical Review of Theology*, who enthusiastically welcomed the suggestion to publish this collection, and for his patience with my getting my part to him because of unforeseen delays. I appreciate also Christopher Stephenson’s critical comments on an earlier draft of this rejoinder.

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## Book Reviews

ERT (2016) 40:2, 182-184

### The Future of Evangelical Theology: Soundings from the Asian American Diaspora

Amos Yong

Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic,  
2014

ISBN 978-0-8308-4060-1

Pb., pp. 255, indexes.

*Reviewed by Ronald T. Michener,  
Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, Leuven,  
Belgium*

Amos Yong, one of the most prolific  
evangelical Pentecostal (or as he calls  
'pent-evangelical') theologians today,  
has provided an impressive cultural,

missiological and theological analysis  
of the current context and potential of  
Asian American evangelical theology  
while uncovering 'blind spots' (29) in  
American evangelicalism as a whole.  
However, one will readily notice that  
the implications of his thesis are highly  
relevant and essential for evangelical  
postures towards migrants worldwide.

In the prologue, Yong situates himself  
as an 'Asian American Pent-evangelical  
sojourner' (17). Born in Malaysia, Yong's  
parents converted to Christianity in  
response to an Assemblies of God mis-  
sionary from the United States. Yong's  
father became a pastor, and his family  
moved to the States as missionaries  
when Yong was ten years old. Yong de-

scribes his own issues of displacement and integration into North America and North American evangelicalism as the backdrop to his book.

In the first chapter Yong looks to the diversity of global Christianity along with emerging Asian voices in evangelical theology. Drawing upon the work of Lamin Sanneh, Yong wisely recognizes the challenges for Asian evangelicals to articulate both a vernacular, yet globally relevant theology.

Chapter two considers Asian American theology, philosophy, and Christianity in general while nonetheless referring to and generously documenting introductory works (68-71), social-scientific research (71-72), transnational research (72-74), congregational ethnographies (74-77), and recent developments in Asian American scholarship. Yong then points toward current theological developments, claiming that from an institutional standpoint Asian American theology has most significantly advanced in Roman Catholicism and Protestantism.

In chapter three Yong considers the Asian American receptivity to evangelical theology. Asian Americans have unfortunately allowed modernist, Enlightenment based presuppositions to govern their own presuppositions, according to Yong. These Euro-American presuppositions have resulted in neglect for adequate theological consideration of marginal ethnic perspectives. Yong argues that the Asian diaspora is at an optimum place in history to encourage and advance scholarly reflection on migration with respect to theology by 'embracing the historicity of their diasporic experiences' (123).

Yong launches the core argument of his book in chapter four: 'a pent-evangelical theology for the twenty-first century'

(125). Understanding all theological reflection as contextual, an Asian American pent-evangelical theology must then address its own particular contextual realities (146). The direction forward lies in the practice of interactive hospitality, where the Spirit works in reciprocal, dialogical relationships 'between strangers' of various tongues (155-56). Yong furthers these thoughts in chapter five, articulating his vision for an evangelical theology of migration. He notes that Pentecostals have a rich history of migration, but they must engage the subject more intentionally.

After considering contemporary issues of migration, Yong provides a pent-evangelical reading of the Book of Acts with respect to migration. The earliest followers of Christ were migrants from all nations, and their pentecostal diversity reflected the work of their migrant Lord. In fact, Yong insists, migration is a key theme throughout the entire Bible. With this in mind, he challenges the church to be 'intentional about its ministry to immigrants', modelling 'a multicultural life of reconciliation for the world' (p. 179). Yong then specifically considers the issue of 'informal' immigration and economy in chapter six with respect to the Fuzhounese in New York City. This leads Yong to ask how Christians are to apply 'apostolic economics' or 'Jubilee ethics' (198) in the borderlands between legality and illegality.

In the seventh chapter, Yong paints an overall portrait of his vision for evangelical theology that is coloured and influenced by Asian pent-evangelicals via culture, public theology, economics, and interreligious dialogue. In the epilogue, Yong then returns to his own personal challenges in between ecumenism and evangelicalism (244). Ultimately, Yong remains convinced, and in the opinion of this reviewer, effectively convinces his

readers, that living as ‘aliens and strangers’ in ‘diaspora and hybridity’ (248) are not peripheral topics to the gospel, but essential to it.

Yong acknowledges this book was primarily a conglomeration of previously published articles, which does noticeably affect the flow of the book at times. For example, the first portion of chapter six, ‘The Spirit of Jubilee’, seems disconnected from his previous discussion. The link between this and his pent-evangelical reflections in the latter portion of the same chapter could have been more explicit and intentional. This observation, however, in no way diminishes an extremely favourable review of the book as a whole.

Yong submits in his prologue that this book is written for his Asian American evangelical colleagues, but also for the broader theological academy. He fulfills both of these intentions impressively. He also provides extensive footnotes from widely diverse sources, many of which are also Asian, that will greatly aid the reader in future research. Although several of Yong’s descriptive analyses are specialized and contextualized with regard to Asian American theology, Yong ends up delivering an incipient evangelical theology of migration, critical for global evangelical thought and practice.

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**The First Step in Missions Training: How our Neighbors are Wrestling with God’s General Revelation**

**Thomas K. Johnson, PhD**

**World of Theology Series 1 (World Evangelical Alliance)**

**Bonn, Germany: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2014**

**ISBN 978-3-86269-084-8**

**Pb., pp 146, study questions.**

*Reviewed by Dr. James Dahl, Tyndale Theological Seminary, Badhoevedorp*

In this study, Dr. Thomas Johnson reminds the missiological community of the importance of general revelation to give us a valuable understanding of our neighbours, a starting point for meaningful conversations, and boldness in proclaiming the gospel.

This book is a theological and philosophical discussion of the missional implications of Paul’s argument in Romans 1:16-2:5, in which Paul teaches that God has made himself known to all people in and through creation. Later in the book (chapter 8), Dr. Johnson states that this revelation is both direct—within human nature—and indirect—outside human nature, through the world. This knowledge is, in fact, quite extensive, including knowledge about the nature of God, his moral demands, and our lack of obedience which leads to condemnation.

This knowledge, though, has been rejected and suppressed by all people, resulting in the basic condition of humanity, that is, conflict with God. But because general revelation is a part of the very structure of creation, it cannot remain totally suppressed. It continually emerges in human thought, even when people try to contradict and reject it.

This results in a second fact of human existence: cognitive dissonance, which, in turn, gives rise to guilt and fear.

This discussion is the main theme of Part I of the book, which offers a fairly standard Reformed view of general revelation (see John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*). In Part II, the author states some of the implications of this doctrine for the proclamation of the gospel. This is, in the reviewer's opinion, the most valuable and creative part of the book. The emotional and cognitive consequences that result from the rejection and suppression of God's revelation are responsible for the common human experience of *Angst*, which the author defines as our subjective awareness of our objective status as fallen and separated from God. This *Angst* manifests itself in basic types of human anxieties (moral, existential and ontological), and is seen in the various dominant questions which make up one's worldview concerning things like existence, identity, morality, epistemology, alienation and significance.

These basic concerns of humanity, though, are answered by the gospel. They are caused by our rejection and separation from God, and so can be resolved by God's action of providing an objective solution to them through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is why we can be 'not ashamed of the gospel'. Dr. Johnson should be commended for bringing this topic to the attention of those involved in the great task of missions.

The book is not without issues, however. The title of the book comes from the view that Romans was written as a textbook on missions, with this topic intentionally coming first. The author says, '... the arguments are convincing that Paul wrote his great epistle to the Ro-

mans to be a missions training manual,' but does not give any substantial arguments to back up that assertion. A quick perusal of modern commentaries shows that, to the contrary, the purpose of this epistle is a matter of much debate.

He also gives his own translation of Romans 1:16-2:5 which is problematic at points, such as his translation of the verb *noeō* ('to understand', in 1:20) as 'received into consciousness' (a second verb, *kathoraō*, 'to perceive clearly' does not seem to be translated at all), and translating the adjective *adikia* ('wickedness' in 1:19) as 'injustice', which, though appropriate in other contexts, is puzzling here. These exegetical peculiarities are not necessary for the argument of the book and do not advance it.

The author gives an excursus as well as an appendix on some distortions concerning general revelation in contemporary theology. These again do not play an important role in carrying out the purpose of the book, and it seems that a fuller development of his own argument would have been more beneficial. The lack of references and of a bibliography also lessens the value of the book as a resource for study.

Finally, while the author rightly warns against a neglect of general revelation, he ought to give more consideration to special revelation, recognizing that a passing down of the tradition of God's early special revelation could also account for some of the remnants of the knowledge of God that persist to this day (this is the theory of 'original monotheism' of Wilhelm Schmidt and others).

This essay, though, can be useful as supplementary reading. It takes themes that are familiar in apologetics, and brings them to a wider global audience to show their value for missiology. It demonstrates how a cross-disciplinary

approach can benefit the proclamation of the gospel. This book can promote creative thinking to better communicate the bright hope of the gospel to a world confused and frightened by its flight from the knowledge of God.

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### Understanding Spiritual Warfare: Four Views

James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes  
Eddy (eds.)

Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic,  
2012

ISBN 978-0801039362

Pb, pp 240, Indices

*Reviewed by Dr. Keith Ferdinando,  
Université Shalom de Bunia, Democratic  
Republic of Congo, and Woodford  
Evangelical Church, UK.*

Previously published in Trinity Journal (TrinJ 35 NS, No. 2 Fall 2014), used with permission.

*Understanding Spiritual Warfare* facilitates a conversation between advocates of four contrasting approaches to spiritual warfare. The book opens with a substantial introduction in which the editors survey 'key issues and debates', including the moral objection to spiritual warfare language, the ontological status of spirits and of a personal devil, and the nature and practice of spiritual warfare.

It is the third of these issues that is the focus of the work and the editors identify four principal tendencies; namely the 'world systems' model, the 'classic' model, the 'deliverance' model (in which they identify a wide variety of theories) and the 'strategic level' model. These four approaches are then individually developed by well-known exponent(s) of the respective positions in chapters

of around 25 pages. Every article is critiqued by each of the other contributors in responses of about five or six pages apiece.

Walter Wink explains the 'world systems' model with editorial assistance from Gareth Higgins. He rejects the idea that Satan and the powers are to be seen in personal terms and argues rather that they symbolize the 'inner aspect' of human structures and systems—the ethos or spirituality that pervades them, shaping attitudes, values and so on. As such they may be evil but can also be redeemed, and Wink argues that in the Bible Satan himself appears initially as 'the servant of the Lord'.

Nevertheless, the present reality of Satan is 'as a profound experience of numinous, uncanny power in the psychic and historic lives of real people ... the real interiority of a society that idolatrously pursues its own enhancement as the highest good' (57). The result is the various forms of political, social and economic oppression and exploitation, and the response, according to Wink, is intercession which envisages a different reality and 'liberates the origin, goal, and process of the universe' (67). The powers can thwart God's purposes but intercession understood in this sense ultimately prevails.

David Powlison's exposition of the 'classical' model is based on careful biblical exegesis and interpretation. He identifies Satan and the powers of darkness as individual beings possessed of intelligence and will, and not as personifications, symbols or metaphors. However, he rejects what he terms 'animistic, occult and superstitious' conceptions of spiritual warfare, arguing that the Old Testament demythologizes the animistic worldview.

From this perspective the expression,

'spiritual warfare', denotes the moral conflict of the Christian life, which Powlison discusses from the perspective of Ephesians 6:10-20. 'To win spiritual warfare is simply to live as light in a dark world', while to lose is 'to revert to what comes naturally to every fallen heart' (98). On the basis of the biblical evidence he refutes the view that those who have been involved in the occult or who live in 'addictive bondage to sin' need deliverance from demons. He argues that the deliverance taking place in the synoptic gospels should be understood simply as a subcategory of healing.

Boyd explains his own perception of 'ground-level deliverance model'. He argues for the presence of cosmic conflict throughout the Bible and its centrality in the ministry of Jesus: God has to battle the powers to establish his will. He then critiques views that deny the existence of evil powers, points to cross-cultural support for the reality of demons and exorcism, and spends some time responding to Wink's view. Finally, Boyd discusses spiritual warfare itself, arguing that the 'center of the faith' according to the New Testament is on imitating Jesus rather than believing in him as Lord and Saviour. Specifically this means fighting against poverty, racism, dehumanizing religion, violence and the demonization of territories and individuals including, Boyd argues, believers.

The 'strategic-level deliverance model' is largely written by Rebecca Greenwood, although Peter Wagner contributes a brief 'personal note' and his name is given precedence. She distinguishes ground, occult and strategic levels of spiritual warfare, the last of which purportedly involves liberating territories from the control of evil spirits by various means such as 'spiritual mapping' and 'prayer walking', which she defines.

Each article provides a succinct and generally clear introduction to the approach advocated by its author(s), while the critiques identify what the other contributors see as weaknesses and highlight points of divergence. It might have been helpful if the authors had also been allowed to write a response to the critiques of their own articles, as is the case in other books of this type. Nevertheless, as an introduction to a field of study the format certainly serves its purpose well. It enables readers both to gain a general overview of the issues and also to identify the major options presently in vogue as well as the principal criticisms of each—and all by means of a single volume.

At the same time, however, the genre risks producing a 'fast-food' approach to complex theological issues. The brevity demanded of contributors inevitably tends towards a degree of superficiality and a flattening of complexities. No doubt editors and authors hope that the book will whet readers' appetites to pursue the conversation further and at greater depth elsewhere.

As for the individual contributions, Wink's philosophical and psychological preconceptions so determine his reading of the biblical text that the resultant 'liberalism' is, in Powlison's words, 'a different kind of religion' from the historic Christian faith (77). Powlison himself engages more seriously and carefully with the Bible than do the other contributors and, in particular, strenuously refutes tendencies to read the text through animistic lenses. However, his discussion of demon possession and of biblical references to magic, witchcraft and the like, belief in which was clearly pervasive in the world of both Old and New Testaments, is inadequately developed.

Meanwhile, Boyd overemphasizes the presence and significance of cosmic powers in the world and human life, and thereby misconstrues the heart of the gospel. Specialization in any particular area doubtless entails the risk of a distortion of perspective, which in this case means losing sight of the very reticence of the Bible with respect to demonology, especially when compared with the near obsession of surrounding societies. In Boyd's case the problem is further compounded by a failure to apprehend the rich and subtle biblical testimony to divine sovereignty.

Finally, the article by Greenwood and Wagner is characterized by really bad exegesis alongside inconclusive anecdote. If, however, this is the best argument that can be made for the 'strategic level' model, its inclusion in the book doubtless serves a purpose, although probably not the one its authors intended.

In conclusion, *Understanding Spiritual Warfare* is a useful and broad introduction to current debates on the subject. It can be read with profit, especially as a way into the much larger literature available on the subject.

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**Jesus without Borders: Christology in the Majority World (Majority World Theology Series)**

Gene L. Green, Stephen T. Pardue and K.K. Yeo (editors)

Grand Rapids, MI / Cambridge, U.K.:  
William B. Eerdmans, 2014  
ISBN 978-0-8028-7082-7  
Pb., pp viii + 193, bibliog., indices

*Reviewed by Boris Paschke, Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, Leuven, Belgium.*

This insightful anthology is the first volume to appear in the new 'Majority

World Theology Series', the editors of the book and of the series being identical. Under the heading, 'An Invitation to Discuss Christology with the Global Church' (1-7), Stephen T. Pardue, on behalf of the editorial team, provides an introduction to both the series and its inaugural volume. In view of the fact 'that 80 percent of Christians lived in North America and Europe at the turn of the twentieth century but currently almost 70 percent live in the Majority World' (1), Pardue rightly postulates: 'So we need the strongest theological resources available, from both past and present, both West and East, to do theology in our current context' (2). This new series provides a platform for such intercultural and global theological endeavour.

The relevancy of its first volume's topic, i.e., Christology, is obvious: 'What it means, in thought, word, and deed, to make Jesus Lord in Bangkok is quite different from what it means to do the same in Chicago' (1-2). As Pardue remarks, the eight contributors to the anthology are 'leading scholars from around the world' (cf. 180-182 for biographical sketches), who work during the annual meetings of the Evangelical Theological Society and the Institute for Biblical Research in 2012 in order to discuss the papers that are now published, in revised form, in the present volume (5-6).

With regard to the overall conception of the book, Pardue explains that the authors were asked to develop their Christological contributions in relation to both the Christology of Chalcedon (451 C.E.), i.e., 'two natures in one person', and their respective geographic/ethnic perspectives (5). After the introduction, the book is sub-divided into two parts, i.e., 'Theological Engagements' (9-100) and 'Biblical Explorations' (101-179), consisting of four contributions each.

In the opening essay, 'Christology in the West: Conversations in Europe and North America' (11-36), the North-American theologian Kevin J. Vanhoozer stresses that the fact that the Chalcedon Definition happens to be a product of western thought and theology does and should not diminish its relevancy and authority for the development of any global Christology. In his article, 'Jesus as God's Communicative and Hermeneutical Act: African Christians on the Person and Significance of Jesus Christ' (37-58), Victor I. Ezigbo provides an overview of the sub-Saharan Neo-Missionary, Ancestor, and Revealer Christologies.

The essay, 'Christologies in Asia: Trends and Reflections' (59-79), of Timoteo D. Gener deals with a 'missiological Christology' and suggests approaches to proclaim Jesus Christ to people coming from Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, and Confucian backgrounds. Overall, Gener affirms, 'In many Asian religions God is often featured as inaccessible and distant. As such, a fully human Jesus, or Jesus as God in human form, is good news in Asia' (69).

In his article, '¿Quién Vive? ¡Cristo! [i.e., "Who lives? Christ!"] Christology in Latin American Perspectives' (80-100), Jules A. Martínez-Olivieri presents the Roman Catholic Liberation Christologies of Leonardo Boff and Jon Sobrino as well as Protestant Christological approaches. According to Martínez-Olivieri, the creed of Chalcedon is too abstract and philosophical and neglects the concrete actions of the historical Jesus. He, thus, suggests, 'The creeds need the fundamental corrective of the focus on the good news as an announcement primarily directed toward the victims of institutionalized exclusion and violence, as well as to all who are subject to all kinds of captivities' (96).

The first three essays of the second part of the book all provide instructive and valuable interpretations of New Testament books (John; 1 Peter) or persons (Mary) from the respective contributor's ethnic/geographical perspective: Yohanna Katanacho, 'Reading the Gospel of John through Palestinian Eyes' (103-122); Aída Besançon Spencer, 'From Artemis to Mary: Misplaced Veneration versus True Worship of Jesus in the Latino/a Context' (123-140; cf. 124: 'from a Latina feminist evangelical perspective'); and Andrew M. Mbuvi, 'Christology and *Cultus* in 1 Peter: An African (Kenyan) Appraisal' (141-161).

The essay, 'Biblical Christologies of the Global Church: Beyond Chalcedon? Toward a Fully Christian and Fully Cultural Theology' (162-179) by editor K.K. Yeo is an apt conclusion to the anthology. Yeo develops his own Christological approach by reflecting upon and responding to all seven preceding contributions: 'In keeping with previous chapters in this volume, the following section is my Chinese attempt to listen to the voices around the table' (169).

Without exception, the contributions are written in an easy-to-follow manner. In accordance with its title, the book is 'without borders' in the sense that it is accessible to a broad audience of potential readers: It abstains from technical language, translates almost all foreign phrases into English, and transliterates Hebrew and Greek words. All contributions are wrapped up by a section, 'For Further Reading', that provides a helpful bibliography for additional personal study.

As a European theologian, I have learned a lot from the sister and the brothers writing from the perspective of the Majority World (and, to be sure, from Kevin J. Vanhoozer as well). For me,

they have opened a door to enriching Asian, Latin American, and sub-Saharan African theological perspectives. This richness is reflected in the index of authors (183-187), replete with names that are unfortunately absent from mainstream western theological publications. Thus, as far as I am concerned, the editors' wish, 'We hope you enjoy the book' (7) has most certainly been fulfilled. Forthcoming volumes of the new and promising book series are much awaited and very welcome!

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### How (Not) To Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor

James K.A. Smith

Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans,  
2014

ISBN 978-0-8028-6761-2

Pb, pp 148, glossary, indices

*Reviewed by C.S. Bene, Tyndale Theological  
Seminary, Badhoevedorp, The Netherlands*

Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap, 2007) was an academic *hit*, when first published, because it put in words the *feel* of the age—a feeling shared by many but articulated by few. *A Secular Age* remained an academic treasure largely inaccessible to the general public. *How (Not) To Be Secular* popularises Taylor's *magnum opus* (over 700 pages), thus making it available to a larger audience. Smith's digest of Taylor's work is an accomplishment in itself.

What moves the argument in this book forward is the fundamental question of Taylor's thesis: 'How, in a relatively short period of time, did we go from a world where belief in God was the default assumption to a secular age in

which belief in God seems, to many, unbelievable?' (47) Secularisation is not merely a story of 'subtraction', 'disenchantment' or the loss of God and faith as a point of reference towards a meaningful life. Secularisation is much more than that. The secular age is a time when men and women are able to imagine and to live meaningful lives without any reference to God, the beyond or an afterlife. It is a truly humanistic and 'authentic' life lived in the 'immanent frame'. How does life look like? How does life feel like in the closed reality of the immanent frame? This is the theme of the longest chapter of the book. It is here that the reader will be confronted with the realities of living in a secular age. In the end there is no resolve or a solution to the *problem* of the secular age, but in the spirit of Taylor, only a mutual and a fair understanding of a shared reality.

Smith takes readers congenially by the hand and leads them through the intricacies of Taylor's reconstruction of late medieval history, his analysis of the reformation and the enlightenment and his dissemination of the present post-modern age. Smith hardly ever enters into a critical discussion with Taylor. This is beneficial to the reader because, the book was not meant to be a detailed dissemination and evaluation of Taylor work. Rather it was meant to show the interested theologian, the student and the lay person how to read Taylor and make sense of his work.

At times Smith's book is reminiscent of Taylor's philosophical style, both in its use of language and argumentation. This might be perceived as a hurdle while reading, but Smith comes to the aid of those who are not familiar with the academic discussions in philosophy or social studies by offering many helpful side notes and challenging questions

throughout the book. Readers will find the glossary at the end of the book very helpful.

Taylor's *A Secular Age* is a standard work on understanding the western mind from the late middle ages up until the twenty-first century. Smith's book does not just offer an accessible gateway into reading Taylor, but it also offers a window into the complexities of our christian existence and shared context now at the beginning of the twenty first century. Therefore this book is a must-read for theologians, students, pastors and church leaders.

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### Transformative Power of Faith: A Narrative Approach to Conversion

Erin Dufault-Hunter

Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012,  
ISBN 978-0-7391-6783-0, Hb, pp  
203, bibliog, index

*Reviewed by Joshua Lyadurai, Marina  
Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies in  
Religion, Madras, India*

Reprinted with permission from *Dharma Deepika*, July-December 2013, 88

Erin Dufault-Hunter, assistant professor of Christian ethics at Fuller Theological Seminary, CA, contextualizes her study in the USA where religion is ridiculed and reduced. She argues for a better understanding of religion and underlines the constructive role that religion plays by a study on religious conversion. The focus of her study is conversion narratives of people who had a destructive past transformed into a constructive one, for example, drug addicts and prostitutes whose lives were transformed by faith. In order to appreciate such a role for religion in society, she appeals for

a narrative approach to study religious conversion.

In chapters 2 and 3 she surveys literature on how scholars approached conversion against the reductionists and analyses the approaches of religious ethics and social sciences. She argues, 'Narrative provides a means of focusing on one part of a person without ever losing sight of the whole'. (56-57) She further claims that 'all characters in the tale be taken seriously, even Divine ones—regardless of whether one personally believes such a character exists or acts in the fashion described by the convert'. (57) The author calls for an integrated approach between social scientists and theological ethicists to understand religious conversion. She observes that when converts reconstruct their life, they execute a hermeneutical task. The author warns, '[W]e cannot speak of religious conversion as reducible to a shift in values, principles, unconscious forces, or behaviors, as if these could be abstracted surgically from the complex web of an embodied alternative world'. (147)

The author's appeal for a narrative approach to conversion is placed in a larger context of the USA where academics, mainly social scientists, attempt to reduce religion and name believers 'fanatics'. She demonstrates that even the Enlightenment is based on its own narrative framework and demands a narrative approach to understand conversion particularly and religion in a larger sense. The complexity of religion cannot be dissected and abstracted, but it needs to be understood holistically for which narrative ethics is a suitable approach. She laments, 'Even well respected scholars in the sociology of religion sometimes speak with seeming ignorance of the complexity of the religions or movements that they have,

presumably, studied a great deal' (149). She concludes, 'If we are to build a truly pluralistic society in which religious alterity is honored, we need to adopt a stance that recognizes deep faith's inseparability from all spheres of life—including the political' (161).

I find this book a fascinating volume that challenges the reductionists of

religion on the one hand and offers an alternative approach to the study of religious conversion, a narrative ethics. *Transformative Power of Faith* will be an invaluable tool to anyone who is interested in social transformation to understand the role of religion in personal transformation that eventually leads to transformation of a society.

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*Sex Difference in Christian Theology: Male, Female, and Intersex in the Image of God*, Megan K. DeFranza, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015  
ISBN 978-0-8028-6982-1, Pb, pp 311, bibliog, index

*Reviewed by Brian J. Wright, Ridley College, Melbourne, Australia.*

In this volume, a slightly revised PhD dissertation about the theological status of intersex people, the author tries to do a number of things. She gives us a potted history of theological anthropology, a discourse on the medical and sociological implications related to this topic, and her analysis of some biblical passages. She does none of these things brilliantly, but the book has its moments, not least when she proclaims what any reasonable evangelical should acknowledge: all people are made in the image of God. Given that her stated audience is evangelicals, however, it is surprising that there is inadequate weight given to Scripture. She devotes more space to postmodern theological reflections than to the bible, for instance.

Moreover, the author has no discussion of Acts 8:26–40. This is an astonishing omission and reveals a troubling blindness on her part—not least of all because the person Philip meets is described as *both* a man (άνήρ) and a eunuch, and the widespread assumption in Acts' scholarship is that he (the eunuch) is an elite member of society, given his designation as an official, with access to political power and wealth via queen Candace, ability to read and possession of the scroll of Isaiah, and his polished utilization of language given his use of the optative.

While evangelicals can appreciate DeFranza's experiences and affirm her pastoral goal of loving and embracing any person marginalized in society, I cannot recommend this book. *Caveat emptor!*