

Theme:
Boundaries and Identity

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Editorial

Our opening paper in this issue is a wide ranging study by Lok M. Bhandari of Kathmandu, Nepal on the question of the boundaries of evangelicalism. He calls on biblical and theological perspectives to show that there are no simplistic answers and that the search for identity in a changing world is likely to be a 'painful dialogical process'.

Some of the broader philosophical aspects of this situation are examined by James P. Danaher of Nyack College, NY, in his paper on *Relativism and Christian Theology*. His point is that even although relativism may undermine traditional religion, it is actually more conducive to faith and the spirit of Christianity than the objective and universal realism of the past.

We follow up these two theoretical papers with two that touch on some of the practical outworkings of the issues. Drawing upon his experience in Ukraine, Darrell Cosden of International Christian College, Glasgow, discusses the state of evangelical theology in the former Soviet Union, focusing on the opportunity it now has to develop its own distinctiveness by gaining a critical awareness of and healthy distance from the western evangelical theological method that has dominated it thus far. He suggests that consciousness of the impact of cultural influences will be a vital factor in this process, while at the theological level, insights may be gained from the work of post-liberal scholars.

Proselytism is a sensitive issue in the contemporary world which Cecil Stalnaker of Tyndale Theological Seminary, The Netherlands faces head on. Realizing that for many, evangelism is regarded as none other than proselytism (with its connotations of coercion, threat and manipulation), this paper clarifies many of the issues by means of careful definition and by examining biblical precedents. It concludes that the term 'proselytism' is never confused with 'evangelism' in the New Testament, and that although misunderstandings are likely to occur, evangelism is integral to the gospel and is concerned primarily with the content of the message rather than its recipients, which is the case with proselytism.

We conclude this 26th volume of our journal with a detailed and intensive study by In-Gyu Hong of Cheonan University, South Korea of the concept 'Under the Law' in the Epistle to the Galatians. While this is primarily an exemplary exegetical work, it focuses on the relation between bondage to the law and freedom in Christ which is one of the most crucial foundational themes for any consideration of our identity as Christians.

David Parker, Editor

Defining Evangelicalism's Boundaries Biblically, Historically, Theologically, Culturally, and in Ministry in the 21st Century

Lok M. Bhandari

Keywords: Culture wars, worldview, inclusivity, sectarianism, tradition, context, inerrancy, justification, foundationalism, community, subtext

The issue of boundary definition is one of the key characteristics of Post-World War II evangelicalism. It has centred on evangelicals setting boundaries vis-à-vis both fundamentalism and liberalism.¹ But this begs a more basic question: How do we define evangelicalism? In examining evangelicalism from a sociological, historical and theological perspective, one scholar has opined that evangelicalism evinces four qualities which 'form a quadrilateral of priorities': conversionism (in evangelistic practice), activism (in mission), biblicism, and crucicentrism (as a domi-

nant theological emphasis).²

Nevertheless, in order to do justice to this topic, we must situate the boundary setting of evangelicalism in the 21st century in its wider context: the development of fundamentalism (and its variants) as a worldwide socio-religious phenomenon. In the climate of inter-religious and ethnic conflict and violence, this would include the so-called culture wars in America, the ongoing conflicts in Northern Ireland and the Balkans, the Muslim-Jewish conflict in the Middle East, the Muslim-Christian conflicts in Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia, the Hindu-Mus-

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1 Stone, John R, *On the Boundaries of American Evangelicalism: The Postwar Evangelical Condition* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), p. 197.

2 Bebbington, David, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), pp. 2f.

lim, Hindu-Sikh, Hindu-Christian, and Hindu-Buddhist conflicts in South Asia. Looked at in this global perspective, the issues of community boundaries and socio-religious and political identity are inextricably tied together.³

It is entirely natural for evangelicals to be concerned about boundaries at this present juncture in history because the fundamentalist/evangelical movement in Protestantism is directly related to the reaction of traditionalists to the rise of modernism (and postmodernism) as the ruling cultural paradigm.⁴ The natural response is to erect boundaries in the form of various beliefs, practices and symbols to shore up an embattled worldview.⁵ 'A fundamentalist movement thus originates when a self-identified group of true believers draws an ideological boundary between itself and the "other" by which it feels threatened.'⁶

While we accept the inevitability of this phenomenon, we must also be

honest in acknowledging the negative ramifications, reflected in the development of the 'softer' evangelical expressions of fundamentalism.⁷ But there seems to be little sustained critique of the underlying socio-cultural dynamics of evangelicalism and its fundamentalist roots. We need this to do the theological reflection needed to chart our path in the 21st century, which is so full of opportunities and challenges.

This brief paper will attempt to engage this topic in an exploratory manner, hoping to spur further thought, dialogue and action. The approach here will be eclectic, emphasizing the latest researches primarily from historical-critical and social-scientific perspectives in biblical studies and theology.

This perspective is necessary because we must admit that evangelicalism, as a Christian paradigm, is rooted in a specific socio-historical context (modernity, and increasingly postmodernity), just as Eastern and Western Catholicism are rooted in the 'Ecumenical Hellenistic Paradigm of Christian Antiquity'.⁸ For good or ill '[indeed] every age has its own picture of Christianity which has grown out of a particular situation, lived out and formed by particular social forces and church communities, conceptually shaped beforehand or afterwards by particularly influential figures and theologians.'⁹ For this reason it is

3 Nielson, Nils Jr., *Fundamentalism, Mythos, and World Religions* (Albany: SUNY Press).

4 Stump, Roger, *Boundaries of Faith: Geographical Perspectives on Fundamentalism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), pp. 1ff. This seminal work, focusing on geopolitical and socio-historical factors in the formation of contemporary religious movements, needs to be interacted with by evangelical missiologists and theologians.

5 Wright, N.T., *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), pp. 122-126; Geertz, Clifford, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books 1973). Wright's innovative construal of the concept of worldview as the matrix for understanding Christian theology, and which serves as the basis of his examination of Jesus, the Resurrection, Paul and early Christianity, is heavily dependent on the pioneering work of cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz. It represents a bold and fruitful direction for evangelical NT theology.

6 Stump, *Geographical Perspectives on Fundamentalism*, p. 9.

7 Bloesch, Donald G., *The Future of Evangelical Christianity: A Call for Unity Amid Diversity* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983), pp. 8-22.

8 Kung, Hans, *Christianity: Essence, History, and Future* (New York: Continuum, 1998), p. 111.
9 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

important for evangelicals to take a hard look at the issue of their boundaries, as it engages in the mission of the kingdom of God in the 21st century. We will, in turn, briefly examine the issue of evangelical boundaries from the perspective of the history of evangelicalism, the Old and New Testaments, and contemporary theological method. Finally, we will draw out some implications for Christian mission and ministry in the 21st century.

Evangelical Boundaries from a Historical Perspective

In order to examine evangelicalism's boundaries historically at the beginning of the new millennium, we must view this movement in the context of the development of fundamentalism as a modern, worldwide socio-cultural phenomenon, encompassing all major religions. While there are basic historical, cultural and religious conditions that differentiate them as an inter-religious and intra-religious phenomenon, it is evident that 'both exclusivist Judaism, Islamist Islam, and fundamentalist Christianity represent a rebellion against the modernity which threatens traditional faith. There is a concern to stop this, turn the clock back on it, in order to restore earlier religious, political, and economic conditions.'¹⁰ Fundamentalist movements characteristically believe that without the religious certainty provided by their belief system and praxis, society will suffer a moral and spiritual decline, for it is the foundation for the society and cul-

ture.¹¹

Unlike most traditional examinations of fundamentalism in general and evangelicalism in particular, which focus on the relationship between the historical exigencies of the time and the belief system of the various groups, we must understand evangelicalism in relation to a wide array of socio-cultural dynamics: the rise of modernism, secularism, cultural pluralism, colonialism and imperialism.¹² This is the context in which we are to 'exegete' evangelicalism as a worldwide, cross-cultural movement, and to consider it in terms of discussion about boundaries.

Evangelicalism (and its fundamentalist precursor) reflects the general trend of the development of fundamentalist movements highlighted by sociologists of religion. For example, the success of the revivalist movements of the 19th century in America (and Great Britain) spurred a whole religious culture of reformism in the social and political realm—from the abolition of slavery and the use and production of alcohol (temperance), to attacking political corruption, child labour and the issue of women's rights. Evangelicalism, to a large extent, set the moral and political agenda of the nation.¹³ However, changes in the intellectual, sociopolitical, and economic landscape

11 Stump, *Geographical Perspectives on Fundamentalism*, p. 8.

12 Ibid; also cf. Dyrness, William A., ed., *Emerging Voices in Global Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994).

13 Frank, Douglas W., *Less Than Conquerors: How Evangelicals Entered the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), pp. 12f.

10 Ibid., p. 644.

threatened this evangelical hegemony: 'Protestant culture accustomed to deference...was now beleaguered by the combined forces of the city, the immigrant, the political boss, an elite of new wealth, and the intellectual forces represented by Darwinism and the "new" biblical criticism.'¹⁴

As a result, behind the claims to represent the true biblical religion, evangelicalism has also been coopted by an overly optimistic and triumphalist ideology of worldly success, often adjusting its theology to suit the values of the dominant culture. Thus by concentrating on boundaries that are a reactionary response to the loss of cultural dominance (whose values themselves represent ambivalent socio-economic and intellectual forces like capitalism, secularism and technologism), evangelicals often failed to discern how the deep theological meaning and implications of the *euangelion* ('gospel') should transform this movement. One evangelical historian, writing in the 1980s, comments how American evangelicalism, if it is to be self-critical in a biblical sense,

would not find itself adding to the world's divisions, and thus to its violence, by proclaiming its superiority to sinful humanity, whether found in American homosexuals or Libyan terrorists or Soviet communists. It would see itself in the prodigal son, in the adulterous woman, in the pious Pharisee, in the mockers at the cross, in the stoning of Stephen. Like Paul after years of Christian experience, it would proclaim itself to be 'foremost of

sinners' and thus one with the human race for whom Christ died (1 Tim. 1:15).¹⁵

Evangelicals of all nationalities and backgrounds must engage in the crucial work of differentiating evangelicalism as a cultural phenomenon, interacting with the geopolitical, social and economic currents of the day from the living reality of the gospel of God, for '[the] gospel stands in judgment over all human ideologies, including the ideology of cultural evangelicalism'.¹⁶ It is ironic, yet understandable, how many western (especially American) evangelicals have often failed to grasp the theology of the cross in their implicit political and evangelistic theologies: the allure of worldly power, success and favour can even lead Christians to use the biblical tradition in a self-serving manner.¹⁷

While American evangelicalism has developed in a specific historical context and does not necessarily reflect the struggles and temptations of evangelicalism in other parts of the world, nevertheless it brings to the fore that all evangelicals must maintain a self-critical stance in relation to evangelical theological traditions, in dialogue with a narrative-based, NT-shaped, missional and

14 Williams, Peter W., *America's Religions: Traditions and Cultures* (New York: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 23ff.

15 Frank, *Less Than Conquerors*, p. 277.

16 Bloesch, *Future of Evangelical Christianity*, p. 5.

17 Elliott, Neil, *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle* (Maryknoll, NY, 1994).

political ethic.¹⁸ Evangelicals 'must learn to distance both themselves and God from their own subcultures so as to be able to critically examine those subcultures rather than unsuspectingly reading both the Bible and the world through the lens of those subcultures.'¹⁹ Otherwise, the boundaries we set among ourselves and those outside our group may be, at their deepest level, a reflection of a secular or non-Christian worldview.²⁰ For example, any Christian theology which supports a racial, ethnic, gender, or class based ideology as the basis for group boundaries is contrary to the gospel. The Pauline doctrine of justification by faith 'rules out any claim before God based on race, class, or gender... This was the battle Paul had to fight in Antioch and Galatia, and several other places as well.'²¹ Yet in various places evangelicals have even used the Bible to justify these very boundaries.

18 Cf. Hays, Richard B., *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996); Spohn, William C., *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 1999); Sine, Tom, *Mustard Seed vs. McWorld: Reinventing Life and Faith for the Future* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999); Crysedale, Cynthia, *Embracing Travail: Rethinking the Cross Today* (New York: Continuum, 1999); Gorman, Michael J., *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

19 Volf, Miroslav, 'Teachers, Crusts and Toppings', *Christian Century* 113/1 (1996), p. 133.

20 Clarke, Andrew D., *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-Historical and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 1-6* (AGAJU XVIII); Leiden: Brill, 1993), p. 19.

21 Wright, N.T., *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 160.

Evangelical Boundaries from a Biblical Perspective

When attempting to examine the concept of boundaries, evangelicals ultimately must do this in relation to Scripture, for this is central to evangelical self-understanding. Phenomenologically speaking, this is true also because 'the function of tradition-scripture-canon has largely been to answer for the believing communities the two essential questions of identity and lifestyle.'²² But this forces us to ask the question: Do evangelical claims about Scripture (which functions as a theological linchpin of evangelical boundaries) 'amount to the affirmation of the inerrancy of the evangelical tradition, where evangelicals ought to be affirming the inerrancy of Scripture'?²³ This section of the paper will dialogue with contemporary biblical studies to help us flesh out the issue of how community boundaries are drawn, and on what basis.

When the Bible is viewed as a complex grand epic of YHWH's saving relationship with the world through Israel, and ultimately through Jesus, we see that the God-question becomes the main focus of Scripture.²⁴ The whole array of theological and ethical questions, including the one regarding the boundaries of the people of God, has a centrifugal

22 Sanders, James A., *Canon and Community: A Guide to Canonical Criticism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), p. 28.

23 McGrath, Alister E., 'Evangelical Theological Method: "The State of the Art"' in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), p. 31.

24 Wright, *New Testament*, pp. 471-476.

relationship to theology proper (i.e., who God is). So the operative question becomes: What demarcates the people of YHWH in both the Old and New Testaments in relation to YHWH's salvific purposes for humankind and the cosmos?

The main belief of Judaism issuing from the OT was monotheism, embodied in the *Shema* (Deut 6:4). It asserted that the God who created the world and its peoples is in a special, covenantal relationship with Israel: 'The creator calls a people through whom, somehow, he will act decisively within his creation, to eliminate evil from it and restore justice and peace.'²⁵ Within this understanding of Israel's vocation as YHWH's people—in light of the challenges of persecution and apostasy from pagan nations—is the tension between YHWH as the universal creator at work in the world (creational monotheism) and the salvific intent of Israel's vocation under YHWH, which is constantly under threat (covenantal monotheism).²⁶ This is reflective of the fact that 'Israel's religion, and thus the texts are incessantly pluralistic. On every religious question the matter is under dispute, and we frequently are able to identify the several voices to the adjudication that are sounded in the text. This process, moreover, applies not only to this or that subject, but to the very character of Yahweh, the God of Israel.'²⁷

25 *Ibid.*, p. 252.

26 *Ibid.*, pp. 248-50.

27 Brueggemann, Walter, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), p. 64; for the NT cf. Dunn, James D.G., *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, rev. ed. (London: SCM Press, 1990).

There is this dual emphasis of creational and covenantal monotheism in the book of Jonah, for example. The critical consensus is that Jonah was written during the Persian period during the 4th century B.C.²⁸ Jonah 'conveys the idea of a deity who responds to the plight of the non-Israelite and Israelite alike. The book of Jonah appears to be a cautionary challenge to standard theological formulations.'²⁹ *In nuce*, this book attempts to 'convert' the Israelites to a more universalistic view of YHWH's relationship to the nations, in a context where there would be a natural tendency to view YHWH as primarily centred on their survival as the beleaguered people of God.

The fact that the Bible consists of theological voices that are often in tension with others and vie for dominance means that there is a 'catholizing' or inclusive thrust to the canon, and the traditions it incorporates.³⁰ Thus, if evangelicalism's ethos is to be truly biblical, it must reflect this canonical theological inclusivity. Wrestling with this will help evangelicals to view their intra-group and inter-group boundary definition as an 'ongoing work of adjudication, in which any settled point is reached only provisionally and in

28 Bright, John, *A History of Israel* 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), p. 431.

29 Birch, Bruce C., Terence E. Fretheim & David L. Peterson, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), p. 429.

30 Albertz, Rainer, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament, Period 2: From the Exile to the Maccabees* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1994), p. 481.

turn is subject to reconsideration'; this 'ongoing adjudication is faithful to the character of the [biblical] text itself'.³¹

One cannot discuss the issue of boundaries as it relates to the NT without understanding the socio-cultural and political dynamics from the time of the two exiles. It only intensifies. The Ptolemaic and Seleucid periods in Palestine were marked by the challenge of Hellenization and political uncertainty. These pressures led to an emphasis on group boundaries and the formation of various Jewish parties or sects, as different groups reacted differently to the threat of religious, cultural, and political assimilation.³² The upshot of all this is that the intra-religious boundary setting of the time, as a response to the ambiguities of the 2nd century B.C., 'created the pluriform Judaism known by Jesus and Paul'.³³

We must realize that, in some sense, the Jesus movement was a sectarian response to the ongoing crisis of socio-political oppression and the hope for YHWH's salvation in Jewish Palestinian society during the Roman era. Thus the basic existential concerns, which led to further group definition, had to do with the following issues: 'How and when Israel's God would rescue his people were questions whose answers,

reflecting different perceptions of what it meant to be the people of the covenant God, divided one Jewish group from another.'³⁴ The Pharisees, for instance, who have been traditionally characterized by their hyper-scrupulosity in terms of ritual purity and legalism (cf. Mark 2:23-3:6), had a much deeper *modus operandi*: a theologically-based political resistance to Roman rule. This held true, in different ways, for the 'houses' of Shammai and Hillel.³⁵ In this time of the threat of assimilation, the religious symbols of 'Temple cult, and the observance of Sabbaths, of food taboos, and of circumcision, were the key things which marked out Jew from Gentile, which maintained and reinforced exactly the agenda, both political and religious of the hard-line Pharisees'.³⁶

Jesus' eschatological teaching concerning the inauguration of the kingdom of God led him to a 'radically different interpretation of Israel's ancestral tradition. Jesus, precisely in affirming Israel's unique vocation to be the light of the world, was insisting that, now that the moment of fulfillment had come, it was time to relativize those God-given markers of Israel's distinctiveness.'³⁷ Thus, theologically speaking, Jesus' eschatological focus and programme rightly maintained the centrality of the creational monotheistic vision as the goal of covenantal monothe-

31 Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 64.

32 Cf. Koester, Helmut, *Introduction to the New Testament, Vol. 1: History, Culture, and Religion of the Hellenistic Age* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), pp. 197-235.

33 Wright, *New Testament*, p. 159.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 167.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 201.

36 Wright, N.T., *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), p. 384.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 389.

ism.³⁸

Because, as we have observed, fundamentalist movements arise in situations where traditional socio-religious worldviews are being challenged, the problem of evil is usually projected onto the evil forces behind those outside the boundaries of the community. But in the case of 1st century Jewish Palestine, Jesus' understanding was somewhat atypical: unlike many who would posit 'Evil' motivating their pagan enemies, he believed that 'the Israel of his day had been duped by the accuser, the "satan". That which was wrong with the rest of the world was wrong with Israel, too. "Evil" could not be conveniently located beyond Israel's borders, in the pagan hordes. It had taken up residence within the chosen people.'³⁹

Recent researches into the social history of the Galilee of Jesus' time give us some idea of the nascent socio-economic and cultural pressures that illuminate his proclamation of the renewed Israel and its community boundaries.⁴⁰ The integration of the Galilee into the Roman 'global' market economic system,

exemplified by the development of the cities of Sepphoris and Tiberias, was a challenge to the traditional agrarian subsistence economy and its social system, which was based on the 'Jewish patrimonial ideal, as it had been enshrined in the Pentateuch, upheld by the prophets and re-enacted by reformers such as Nehemiah (Neh. 5:1-11)'⁴¹ This led to a heightened tension between the so-called Herodian and Jewish theocratic ideals of the social order. It appears that Jesus, cognizant of both the negative assimilationist and revolutionary tendencies with these respective socio-economic systems, charted a different path which affirmed the true intent of the kingdom of God: a new way of being the people of God as the light of the world, based on the old but transcending it. 'In proposing such an ideal Jesus was not seeking to revert to the *status quo ante* for Israel as stated in the Pentateuch, but was operating within the framework of adapting the received tradition to the demands of a new situation, and doing so in the name of God's final prophetic word to Israel.'⁴²

This results in a revolutionary response to the question of community boundaries, embodied in the kingdom stories (viz. parables) he told. For instance, the parable of the Good Samaritan has to do with the fact that '[loving] Israel's covenant

38 Glasser, Arthur F., *Kingdom and Mission* (SWM; Pasadena: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1989), pp. 122-135.

39 Wright, *Jesus*, p. 389.

40 Cf. Crossan, John D., *The Birth of Christianity* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1998), pp. 230-235; Stegemann, Ekkehard and Wolfgang Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), pp. 129-136. While one may disagree with some of the findings of these works due to their particular use of certain sociological and anthropological models in analyzing the NT and the social history of Jewish Palestine and the Greco-Roman world in the first century, the goals and approaches they employ are certainly valid and illuminating.

41 Freyne, Sean, 'Galilean Questions to Crossan's Mediterranean Jesus' in *Whose Historical Jesus?*, ed. William E. Arnal and Michael Desjardins (Waterloo, Ont: Wilfred Laurier Press, 1997), p. 87.

42 Wright, *Jesus*, p. 307.

God meant loving him as creator of all, and discovering as neighbours those who were beyond the borders of the chosen people. Those who followed Jesus in this way would be "justified"; that is, they would be vindicated when the covenant god acted climactically within history.⁴³

In terms of Pauline studies and the issue of community boundaries, there is not a more important evangelical theological boundary marker than 'justification by faith'.⁴⁴ Traditionally, Protestants (including evangelicals) have read this Pauline terminology as denoting 'the means by which man's relationship with God is established'.⁴⁵ Justification by faith was understood in contrast to the legalistic nature of the Judaism of Paul's day, whereby one earned one's salvation by works. Martin Luther saw in his time a similar theology in Medieval Catholicism. He appealed to Paul's insight as a breakthrough in his own spiritual struggles.

In the last twenty-five years there has been a revolutionary change in the interpretation of 1st century Judaism, Paul and justification. In Protestant Christian circles, E.P. Sanders' work, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, offered the opinion, after examining a wide array of evidence, that Jewish soteriology is to be understood as based on the grace of YHWH's covenant. One stayed in

a right relationship with YHWH by obedience to Torah. Therefore one must speak of Jewish soteriology as covenantal nomism.⁴⁶ Many evangelical biblical scholars, having looked at the same evidence, have called this thesis into question.⁴⁷ But more have accepted it (with criticisms), and gone about articulating its implications for Pauline theology and Christian doctrine.⁴⁸ Eminent evangelical biblical scholar N.T. Wright states that 'until a major refutation of [Sanders'] central thesis is produced, honesty compels us to do business with him. I do not myself believe such a refutation can or will be offered; serious modifications are required, but I regard his basic point as established'.⁴⁹

In this new scheme, then, what

46 See those who advocate the 'new perspective' on Paul and Judaism cf. Dunn, James D.G., 'The New Perspective on Paul' (with Additional Notes) in *Jesus, Paul and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (Louisville: John Knox, 1990), pp. 183-214; Wright, N.T., *What Saint Paul Really Said*; and Mattison, Mark, *The Paul Page*, <http://www.angelfie.com/mi2/paulpage/>. On the contrary (traditional) view cf. Seifrid, Mark, *Justification By Faith: The Origin and Development of a Central Pauline Theme* (NovTSup 68; Leiden: Brill, 1992); Westerholm, Stephen, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith: Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), pp. 105-197; and Carson, D.A., Peter T. O'Brien and Mark A. Seifrid, eds., *Variegated Nomism., Vol. 1: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, forthcoming).

47 Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, p. 20.

48 Ibid., p. 117.

49 Abegg, Martin, '4QMMT, Paul and the Works of the Law' in *The Bible at Qumran: Text, Shape and Interpretation*, ed. Peter T. Flint (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 203-216. For a less successful analysis of 4QMMT that supports the traditional (Lutheran) understanding of Paul and Judaism, cf. McDonald, Lee M. & Stanley Porter, *Early Christianity and its Sacred Literature* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), p. 360.

43 McGrath, Alister, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 2 Vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

44 McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, pp. 2f.

45 Sanders, E.P., *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), p. 420.

does justification mean? And how does this affect evangelical boundaries? Wright believes that evangelicals have misunderstood Paul by reading him through the lens of Reformation (viz. Lutheran) theology:

Paul may or may not agree with Augustine, Luther, or anyone else about how people come to a personal knowledge of God in Christ; but *he does not use the language of 'justification'* to denote this event or process. Instead, he speaks of the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus, the work of the spirit, and the entry into the common life of the people of God.⁵⁰

Justification, in contrast, in its Jewish setting, had to do with the eschatological vindication/acquittal of the people of YHWH, which was now understood to be affected by God in Christ through the resurrection (with the full manifestation to come at the end of the Age). The eschatological understanding of this term, with its conceptual roots firmly planted in Jewish apocalyptic, has been confirmed by an examination of 'justification by works' in 4QMMT (Miscat Masseh ha-Torah), a recently discovered and translated document from the Dead Sea Scrolls.⁴⁸ As a result of a contextual examination of this phrase (the only time it is attested outside Paul), it is confirmed that it has to do with *'how you tell who belongs to the community'*, not least in the period before the eschatological event itself, when the matter will become public knowledge...In standard Christian theological language, it wasn't so much about soteriology

as about ecclesiology; not so much about salvation as about the church.⁵¹

Because justification means that all those who exercise faith in Christ are vindicated/declared righteous now, that is, they are part of the eschatological people of God, it had the effect of redefining the boundaries of the people of God, from a more religio-ethnic one to an inclusive one, based on faith in Christ (cf. Gal. 2; Rom. 14-15; Eph. 1-3). Thus justification should be understood as the 'ecumenical doctrine'. 'It cannot be right,' opined Wright 'that the very doctrine which declares that all who believe in Jesus belong at the same table (Galatians 2) should be used as a way of saying that some, who define the doctrine of justification differently, belong at a different table. [It] rebukes all our petty and often culture-bound church groupings, and declares that all who believe in Jesus belong together in one family.'⁵²

Evangelicals, who are very vociferous about their fidelity to the Reformation heritage, will question the wisdom of blurring or sacrificing this particular theological boundary marker. But Wright correctly makes the point that 'one is not justified by believing in justification by faith. One is justified by believing in Jesus.'⁵³ Therefore as Anglican reformer Richard Hooker taught, many pre-Reformation people (and non-evangelicals today?) were justified because they trusted in Jesus, even though they might not have known

50 Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, p. 119.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 158.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 159.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 159.

of, understood, or necessarily agreed with the Reformation doctrine as such.⁵⁴ If this is so they must be considered within the bounds of the Christian family and must be treated as such, whether or not we would feel comfortable affixing the label 'evangelical' to them.

While abstract doctrinal formulations regarding theology, christology, eschatology and certain moral issues tend to predominate in defining evangelical boundaries, for Paul a community ethic, based on the theological implications of the self-sacrificial life of Jesus, was one of the main foci of his boundary setting activity in 1 Corinthians.⁵⁵ The problem of boasting, parties and emphasis on 'wisdom' reflects a social context in the highly competitive atmosphere of the Roman colony of Corinth where 'the basis of the parties is the secular practice of aligning oneself with someone of established status and reputation in order to advance one's status. This has been clearly seen in the dynamics of patronage, politics, and sophistic practices.'⁵⁶ Evangelicals have been very astute in adopting the technology and means of communication to advance the gospel of Christ. But has there been the requisite effort to discern how the worldly

wisdom and practices concomitant with it are in agreement with the spirit of Jesus? Thus in the West, and increasingly in the Two-Thirds World,

Church leaders may be incapable of recognizing the threats to Christian practice and life because they are remaking the Church in the image and likeness of the global culture industries...As they begin adopting the techniques, worldviews, and, criteria of advertising/marketing and mass commercial media, Church leaders make it more likely that whatever elements of gospel non-conformity and radical discipleship yet endure will be buried beneath the data of focus groups, Q-scores, psychographic profiles, and multimedia campaigns.⁵⁷

From a brief examination of the biblical evidence, from a socio-historical and social-scientific perspective, we have seen that the issue of community boundaries, socio-cultural context and theology are inextricably tied together. Hopefully, this will encourage evangelical leaders to show more insight in exegeting, not only the Bible, but its contexts responsibly as we struggle to carry out God's mission in a world where economic and cultural change will inevitably lead to reactionary responses by traditionalists of all religions in the world. This is not a new phenomenon; the Bible itself testifies to this dynamic. Now we will examine how evangelical boundaries have been affected by the interplay of the modern and postmodern intellectual and social context with the evangeli-

54 Cf. Barclay, J.M.G., 'Deviance and Apostasy: Some Applications of Deviance Theory to First Century Judaism and Christianity' in *Social-Scientific Approaches to New Testament Interpretation*, ed. David G. Horrell (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), p. 305.

55 Clarke, Andrew C., *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth*, p. 107.

56 Budde, Michael, *The (Magic) Kingdom of God* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), p. 104.

57 Cf. Murphy, Nancey, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Post-modern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996).

cal theological tradition.

Evangelical Boundaries from a Theological Perspective

While the critical rereading of biblical texts has helped us to define and refine the concepts of boundaries in the biblical tradition, it can be argued that one of the greatest challenges to evangelical boundaries comes in the form of shifting philosophical paradigms that set the agenda for theological discourse, because, unlike the Bible, evangelicals do not give as much place explicitly to the concept of tradition and its philosophical underpinnings as a source of authority. Thus this tends to be a blind spot that affects the concept of evangelical boundaries.⁵⁸

This is an important matter since many traditional evangelical doctrinal formulations which have tended to demarcate its boundaries are themselves grounded in post-Enlightenment realist philosophy, namely the Princeton theology of Charles Hodge and his followers.⁵⁹ Inasmuch as fundamentalism and evangelicalism are a reaction to modernism, this has arguably led to an imbalanced, speculative doctrine of Scripture and an attenuated doctrine of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁰ 'Although fundamentalists typically adhere to a wide range of beliefs and practices, they often focus on a few select issues. Rather than espouse a wholesale return to a traditional past...

fundamentalists concentrate on what they consider to be most important features of that past in defining the ideological boundary that separates them from others.⁶¹

This phenomenon has recently been intensified in a context where radical constructivist and pluralist notions of truth are increasingly viewed as hostile to evangelical doctrine, epitomized, for example, in David F. Wells' book, *No Place for Truth, Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?*⁶² It can be argued that this evangelical theology, based on a realist, foundationalist philosophy, which is still regnant among laypersons and most scholars, is used as an ideological boundary between itself and theological liberalism, while often seemingly unaware that its language and formulations are 'modern' too. What is happening though, in some scholarly evangelical circles, is a real critical engagement with contemporary intellectual currents, fully cognizant of evangelical distinctives and the biblical heritage.⁶³ We will take this important development up presently.

61 Wells, David F., *No Place for Truth, Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).

62 Cf. Hauerwas, Stanley, Nancey Murphy & Mark Nation, eds., *Theology Without Foundations: Religious Practice & the Future of Theological Truth* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994); Stackhouse, John G., ed., *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation in Theological Method* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000); Grenz, Stanley, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Bridge Point, 2000); Murphy, Nancey, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996).

63 Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, p. 72.

58 Grenz, Stanley, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Bridge Point, 2000), pp. 70-73.

59 *Ibid.*, pp. 141-144; 148-150.

60 Stump, *Boundaries of Faith*, p. 11.

In this section we will look at several areas of revisioned evangelical theology and their implications for evangelical boundaries. First, there is the fundamental question that impacts our inquiry: What is evangelical theology and how do we conceive of it? A dominant strand of evangelical thought has posited a realist, foundationalist epistemology, which saw the propositional truths of the Bible, literally understood, as its source. The organization of these truths into a rational theological scheme, according to traditional Christian dogmatics, was the basic method and mode of discourse.

Thus the great theologian [Charles] Hodge 'patterned his work after that of the scientist. Just as the natural scientist uncovers the facts pertaining to the natural world, he asserted, so the theologian brings to light the theological facts found within the Bible.'⁶⁴ Likewise, '[the] quest for scientific theology required an unassailable foundation, one that could endow the theological construction with epistemological certitude when subjected to the canons of empirical science.'⁶⁵ Philosophically, this is the basis of the 'modernist' doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture and its refinements, which still serves as a defining theological boundary marker for most evangelicals.

It is clear that this way of doing theology (and many of its resultant

doctrinal formulations) was essentially enthralled to the prevailing secular philosophy of the time. For evangelicals to make this theological method—and the doctrinal formulations flowing from it—indispensable evangelical identity markers is to confuse the Word of God with the fallibility of human wisdom, and undermines the Protestant emphasis on the necessary self-critical stance we must take vis-à-vis Scripture. Thus 'evangelicals, of all God's people, cannot allow revelation to be imprisoned within the flawed limits of sinful human reason'.⁶⁶

It was precisely the notion of a universal, objectivist rationality that postmodernism has challenged. Philosophers like Alasdair McIntyre showed that human rationality is a 'tradition-constituted rationality', dependent upon the justification of particular communities of discourse.⁶⁷ Some evangelical theologians have worked assiduously in articulating what a proper evangelical theological method should look like in a postmodern context, aware of the need for a critical engagement with this particular intellectual and cultural context also.⁶⁸

Some of the more exciting proposals for an evangelical theological method refocus on the narrative grammar of the story of Scripture as

66 Murphy, Nancey, 'Introduction' in Hauerwas et al eds., *Without Foundations*, p. 17.

67 Cf. Vanhoozer, Kevin, 'The Voice of the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal About the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology' in *Evangelical Futures*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, pp. 61-106.; Work, Telford, *Living and Active: Scripture in the Economy of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

68 Wright, *New Testament*, pp. 131-137.

64 Ibid.

65 McGrath, Alister E., 'Evangelical Theological Method: "The State of the Art"' in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation in Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), p. 33.

a key element in evangelical self-understanding and boundary making, within the church's ethical, catechetical and missional vocation.⁶⁹

Evangelical theology deals not with disparate bits of ideas and information but with an all-embracing narrative that relates the unified action of God. What the evangelical theologian ultimately wants to say about x, y, and z stems not from isolated word studies but from substantial reflection on the meaning of what God has done through Christ to create and recreate the world. The Bible is not a theological dictionary but a theological drama, and it should be used as such.⁷⁰

What about the notion of biblical authority, in which the doctrine of inerrancy or infallibility serves as an evangelical boundary marker to safeguard against a lapse into theological relativism? NT theologian N.T. Wright's non-foundationalist construal of this doctrine attempts to articulate a more 'biblical' notion of Scriptural authority derived from the narrative grammar of the Bible as a grand epic. He believes that the Bible's authority should be conceived like that of an unfinished multi-act play with the normal development of the plotline, in which the actors must improvise the unfinished act before the final act, based on the 'authority' of the previous acts.⁷¹

Specifically, Wright envisions the biblical epic in five acts: creation; fall; Israel; Jesus; church. The writing of the NT would be the first scene in the act, with some parts of the NT (e.g., Rom. 8 and 1Cor. 15) adumbrating the end of the drama. Christians live

under the authority of the earlier acts, with the requisite sense of plot development. Therefore a faithful performance of the story cannot consist of repeating the previous acts.⁷² Thus '[we] are not searching, against the grain of the [biblical] material, for timeless truths. We are looking, as the material is looking, for and at a vocation to be the people of God in the fifth act of the drama of creation.'⁷³ As a result, in this model there is a shift from a modernist, foundationalist appeal to the 'scientific' reliability of the Bible, to a more biblical understanding of Scripture as God's story with the world, 'focused on Israel and thence on the story of Jesus, as told and retold in the Old and New Testaments, and still requiring completion'.⁷⁴ It brings to the forefront YHWH, the God of the Bible, who promises redemption, and is bringing it about through Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit in and through the church.

This orients us to the missiological impetus of God's work reflected in Scripture and away from fruitless, speculative theories about the Bible, about which the Bible itself (and hence YHWH) is not concerned. As such, these should be questioned as evangelical boundary markers. This is true inasmuch as the Bible is a *'norma normans non normata'*, a norm that norms but has not itself been normed, a source of authority that provides the standards of judg-

69 Vanhoozer, 'Voice of the Actor,' p. 64.

70 Wright, *New Testament*, 140; Vanhoozer, 'Voice of the Actor,' pp. 98-101.

71 Wright, *New Testament*, p. 142.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid., p. 143.

74 Griffiths, Paul J., 'The Proper Christian Response to Religious Pluralism', *Anglican Theological Review* LXXIX/1 (1997) p. 15.

ment for us, but that is itself not subject to standards of judgment extrinsic to it.⁷⁵

In the end evangelicalism always comes back to the centrality of the *euangelion* ('gospel') as the climax of God's work in redemption. It is regrettable but true that some evangelicals have not often had to take a hard self-critical stance in order to come to terms with their heritage; that time is now past. This exercise in rereading biblical texts and engaging in socio-historical analysis to help us understand evangelical boundaries must be fleshed out in terms of our present day agendas. This is our next destination.

Ministry Implications for Revised Evangelical Boundaries

Space limitations and the nature of the inquiry in these days mean that an extended coverage of the ministry implications of this topic will be brief. As a result, the following comments will not be of the 'how to' variety or concern specific policy prescriptions; they will deal more with a 'grammar' or hermeneutic of evangelical Christian existence and praxis for the 21st century. The post-modern turn in philosophy and theology has rightly eschewed 'one-size-fits-all' theologies; they are to be understood as largely culture specific. Thus how we do ministry, to a great extent, will be affected by the cultural, socio-political, and econom-

ic milieu. As Paul did, we must learn to critically reflect on Jesus' kingdom proclamation, life, death and resurrection and, in the power of the Holy Spirit, allow our communities to do the work of incarnating this way-of-being-in-the-world in our diverse cultures and contexts (cf. Philp. 2:1-2).⁷⁶

Given this reality, we must assert that truly there is no such thing as (nor has there ever been!) a non-contextualized gospel. For example, we have four gospels in the NT, reflecting four contextual understandings of what God has done in Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Thus the real issue for evangelicals, in terms of defining their boundaries, has often been to reidentify as 'biblical' the contextual application of certain theological principles and practices, which are to be understood in the context of fundamentalists/evangelicals defining them selves polemically against others, as we have noted.

The danger is that there has not at all times been the self-critical stance toward the in-group to see if it has been faithful to its own reputed Scriptural self-understanding, or whether it has on occasion confused being biblical with reflecting the cultural or pragmatic concerns of its given context in ministry. For example, the growth and vitality of the evangelical church in South Korea has been lauded worldwide by western missiologists and church growth experts. It is truly remarkable what

⁷⁵ Murphy-O'Connor, Jerome, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 198.

⁷⁶ Suh, David Kwang-Sun, *The Korean Ministry in Christ* (Hong Kong: Christian Conference of Asia, 1991), p. 116.

God has done there! But recently both Korean and western scholars and church leaders have taken a closer look at this phenomenon and have come to some searching conclusions. The Korean church may have come close to compromising the evangelical boundary of religious syncretism by assimilating the modus operandi of shamanism, the traditional folk religion of Korea. In the words of one Korean scholar,

Korean Protestantism has almost been reduced to a Christianized *mudang* religion. That is, the form and language of the worship service are Christian, but the content and structure of what Korean Christians do are basically *mudang* religion. Although missionaries rejected shamanism and thought it had been destroyed, Korean Christianity has become almost completely shamanized.⁷⁷

This *mudang* orientation particularly manifests itself in the intense spirituality geared towards the acquisition of material wealth and well being. This has led Jae Bum Lee to observe that 'participants are strongly motivated to individual interests and do not pray for others...and probably half are motivated by magical interests',⁷⁸ Another scholar has gone as far to say that Korean Pentecostalism reflects 'a truncated version of the Gospel that has eliminated personal and public discipline-

ship'.⁷⁹ These indictments may appear harsh and judgmental but if evangelicals are to take their heritage seriously, then they have to exercise a vigorous self-critical biblical and theological stance if its boundaries are to have biblical and theological integrity.

The question that must be asked of the South Korean evangelical church (and, in different ways, of others around the world too) is: How does a Christianized form of *mudang* religion square with Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God, with its call to a sacrificial life for believers within the church, the community of Jesus (cf. Mark 10:17-45; Mt. 5-7). This theme is also central to every strand of the NT (cf. Rom. 12,14; 1 Cor. 1:10-3:21; 1 Pet. 4; 1 Jn. 3:11-4:12; Heb. 13:1-7; James 2, 4, 5 etc.). Strengthening this understanding is the seminal work of NT scholar Luke Timothy Johnson, whose examination of *soteria* ('salvation') and its cognates in Luke-Acts and Paul leads him to state that 'salvation means belonging to the remnant people God is creating out of Jew and Gentile in the present season. For Luke and Paul, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* ['there is no salvation outside of the church'] would not only be true but tautologous'.⁸⁰

In other words, if salvation has to do with one's status in the true community of God, then that means that

77 Lee, Jae Bum, 'Pentecostal Type Distinctives and Korean Protestant Church Growth,' Ph.D. dissertation, School of World Mission (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1986), pp. 154-157.

78 Mullins, Mark R., 'The Empire Strikes Back: Korean Pentecostal Mission to Japan' in *Charismatic Christianity as a Global Culture*, ed. Karla Poewe (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), p. 98.

79 Johnson, Luke Timothy, 'The Social Dimensions of *Soteria* in Luke-Acts and Paul' in *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers 1993* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), p. 536.

80 Aune, David E., *Revelation 1-5* (WBC 52a; Dallas: Word, 1997), p. 104.

we must pay particular attention to the paradigmatic narrative ethics of the Gospels and Paul, which help us define what evangelical boundaries are in various contexts. When we think of salvation as largely extrinsic to community or social ethics, then we tend to evaluate many of the cultural belief-systems and practices around us (usually excluding gender and sexual ethics!) as *adiaphora*, and thus worthy of assimilation to further the gospel in a given culture. But when we look at the NT critically, we see how deeply Paul and the other writers thought about the theological nature of what was central to the faith—issues that impinged upon theology, christology and what it means to be the community of the kingdom of God in Christ.

A small example would be Revelation 1:18d, where the risen Jesus says he has ‘the keys to Death and Hades’. This imagery is not found in the OT; and ‘in early Jewish underworld mythology, the netherworld is not thought of as having doors or gates’.⁸¹ Surprisingly, this image of the Risen Christ in Revelation (which is one of the most fiercely Jewish monotheistic books in the NT) is drawn from popular Greco-Roman conceptions of the goddess Hekete, the regional deity in the Roman province of Asia (Asia Minor), who was worshipped as the queen of the cosmos. She was associated with Selene/Luna in heaven, Artemis/Diana on earth, and Persephone/Proserpina in Hades, where she had the name keybearer (Gr.

kleidouchos).⁸² Perhaps this image was used by the author of Revelation to impact believers living in the socio-religious context of the Roman province of Asia, where the book was probably written, to signify that, in his death and resurrection, Jesus had assumed the role held by Hekete in the popular imagination.

What is interesting from the perspective of our inquiry is that this assimilation of the function of Hekete to Jesus is truly subversive: Jesus is the ‘king of the cosmos’ because of his sacrifice on Calvary and his subsequent resurrection by YHWH. Thus the story of Jesus and the theology of the cross and resurrection is not compromised. This dynamic is repeated time and time again in the NT. If our theological reflection for our preaching, teaching and praxis is done at the level of citing proof texts from Scripture, then we will miss the deep theologizing implicitly reflected in the boundaries evinced in the NT, done in reference to the socio-religious, political and economic currents of late Greco-Roman antiquity.⁸³

In conclusion, there are no easy universally applicable answers to the

82 In order to see how NT boundaries are variously defined in Luke-Acts, Paul and the Pastoral Epistles in relation to the religion and political theology of the Roman Empire cf. Wright, N.T., ‘Paul’s Gospel and Caesar’s Empire’, presented at the Center for Theological Inquiry, Princeton, NJ: <http://www.ctinquiry.org/publications/wright.htm> and Bonz, Marianne P., ‘The Gospel of Jesus Christ vs. the Gospel of Rome’, presented at the WGBH Lowell Institute Symposium at Harvard University: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/symposium/gospel.html>.

83 Cf. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*.

81 *Ibid.*

question of defining evangelicalism's boundaries in the 21st century. Why? Because, as we have shown, both the OT and the NT exhibit a diversity of construals of what it means to be the people of God in different contexts, even though there is continuity in the grand epic of the story of YHWH with his people in the Bible.⁸⁴ Also, we must recognize how often our vision of who we are in relation to God and the world is

blurry and myopic. Thus defining our boundaries will often be a painful dialogical process as we wrestle, as the early church did, with the basic issues of identity in our changing world. What is required of us is better critical exegesis of our text (the biblical tradition), context (socio-historical, religious, political and economic), and subtext (the philosophical, theological and cultural assumptions of our various contexts).

84 One of the main problems in evangelical circles has been the relative lack of interdisciplinary work being done by theologians, biblical specialists, ethicists, missiologists, church leaders, etc. in addressing this issue of boundaries. In the North American and British context a broad-based group of evangelical and mainline scholars and church leaders are engaged in reflection on the missional vocation of the church in the postmodern context, which deals with the topic of this inquiry. This cadre of leaders is known as the *Gospel and Culture Network*: <http://www.gocn.org/>. See selected books of those associated with this network: Hunsberger, George R., Craig Van Gelder, eds. *The Church between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); Chin, Shiba, George R. Hunsberger, Lester Edwin J. Ruiz, eds. *Christian Ethics in Ecumenical Context: Theology, Culture, and Politics* (Grand Rapids:

Eerdmans, 1995); Volf, Miroslav, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996). For other authors who engage in this task from a similar perspective, incorporating all the elements we have advocated in this paper (text, context and subtext) and whose theologizing would be helpful to evangelicals in the task of defining their boundaries, see Jones, Serene, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000); Middleton, J. Richard and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth is Stranger than it used to be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove, ILL: InterVarsity, 1995); Fowl, Stephen E. and L. Gregory Jones, *Reading in Communion: Scripture and Ethics in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991); Spohn, William C., *What are they Saying About Scripture and Ethics?* rev. ed. (New York: Paulist, 1995).

Conscience

*Reproach yields no relief,
To a darker side that would not be so dark.
God within me, yet unknown
Protests misdeeds with gnawing discontent.
Disquiet hardens into cold remorse,
And regret becomes dull resignation,
Till ears bend keenly to Gospel word
Embracing the possibility of new birth.*

by Garry Harris, South Australia (used with permission)

Relativism and Christian Theology

James P. Danaher

Keywords: Perspective, truth, realism, imagination, language, structuralism, mystery, dialogue, revelation

The relativism of our present age is nothing new. In fact, human understanding has always been relative and perspectival in spite of our naive beliefs to the contrary. What is unique today is that great numbers of human beings have become aware of the fact that our understanding of the world is not objective but seen through the filter of our understanding. It would seem that among the last to accept this truth are Christians who cling to an antiquated realism in the belief that it is essential to Christianity. Such a belief, however, is no more essential to Christianity than

was the belief of many early modern Christians that the universe was geocentric. Furthermore, not only is such a realist view less than true, it is also less conducive to the spirit of Christianity than a perspectival, relativist view of reality.

Since the time of Kant it has been generally accepted that our understanding of the world is always mediated by concepts that are in us and not part of the world. Of course, Kant tried to salvage the idea of universal knowledge in spite of our not being able to know objective reality or things-in-themselves. The Kantian solution was that what the individual brought to the experience, and what was therefore not part of the world as given, were ideas that existed as universal mental hardware which, although not part of the world itself, are part of the way all human beings conceptualize and think about the world.

After Kant, however, a host of philosophers as diverse as Hegel, Nietzsche, James, Wittgenstein, Gadamer, and Foucault, just to mention a few, argued that much of what

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Kant thought to be innate hardware was, in fact, the product of history, culture, language communities, and the philosophical perspectives and values of individual human beings. Of course, there remains another camp of philosophers who have retained something of a Kantian claim that what we bring to our experience of the world is more a matter of innate hardware. There is certainly some truth to their claim and we do have a degree of hardware which allows us to process our experience of the world. Mixed with that hardware, however, is imagination, and it is largely because of a freedom in the imagination that our understanding changes with history, culture, and language communities.

It may not appear that imagination is at the root of our conceptual understanding of the world since most concepts which play such a big part in making up our understanding are dictatorially imposed upon us when we are very young. In our initial acquisition of language, we are given the concepts of our language, community and culture. In the early stages of that acquisition, however, we did have concepts that were not 'given' but rather were the product of our own experience and imagination. In fact, the concepts we received from our language community were generally corrections to those initial concepts.

The initial concepts we formed were those based on a limited number of instances and often did not much resemble the concepts of our language community. Our initial concept of a dog may have been that

of a four-legged sock-eater, but as we experienced more instances signified by the same signifier or word, *dog*, our concept changed, and came ever closer to reflect the concept of our language community. Not all instances to which the signifier, *dog* was attached were sock-eaters and there were many more things that had four legs than were signified by the word, *dog*. Our concept of dog changed to accommodate the instances signified by other speakers of our language community. If we had been presented with a different set of instances, it would have produced a different concept within us.

Most of our concepts have been dictatorially imposed upon us in just such a way. Prior to that imposition, however, we were forming concepts out of our imagination. Later in life, some of us become philosophers, and that imagination again becomes a major source of many of the concepts we come to form.

Of course, the concepts of young children and philosophers aside, most of our concepts are not the product of our imagination, but are imposed upon us as we adapt to the concepts of our language communities. But even those concepts ultimately had their origin in the imagination of some individual or individuals whose concepts eventually came to be accepted and to represent the concepts of an entire cultural, historical epoch, or language community. So the understanding that human beings have of the world is made up of a strange mix of raw sensations, innate hardware, and the imagination.

It is, of course, the imaginative element that is the main contributor to relativism. Although Einstein proved the relativity of simultaneity by showing that even our experience of raw sense data is relative to our perspective, and no perspectival position in the universe can be privileged over another, the main source of relativism is certainly the imagination. Since concepts are not simply given in experience but are a combination of raw experience combined with judgments concerning how that raw experience is to be organized and thus understood, imagination plays a large role in our understanding of the world.

Because the imagination is to a great extent free, we can imagine that there are different racial kinds of people or we can imagine that there is only one human race. We can imagine sets of symptoms as a single disease or several different diseases. It is out of our imagination that we divide up the world and create our understanding. That does not mean, however, that the divisions we make are not based upon what we actually experience. It is rather that what we actually experience affords us more bases for dividing up the world than we could ever use. Hence, we must make choices concerning where to make our divisions and form our concepts. Consequently, our conceptualization of what we experience is largely supplied by our imagination and is therefore relative and perspectival rather than objective and universal.

What is necessary to overcome relativism is not that we all have the

same basic understanding, because we all adhere to the same conventions. That would merely produce the illusion of realism. What is necessary is some God-given means to limit the freedom in our imagination. Medieval Aristotelians believed that we did have such a God-given means in the form of a mental hardware or active intellect that caused our conceptual understanding to be formed in a God-prescribed way. If this were the case then we would all form not only similar concepts, but correct, or God-given, similar concepts. Of course, such a view is difficult to maintain today in the light of what we know about the way our understanding of the world changes due to history, culture, and philosophy.

Additionally, in the twentieth century, we have become aware of the structural nature of our understanding. The great contribution of structuralism, and what even post-structuralists retain from structuralism, is the fact that language constitutes a web of meaning. The meaning of one word effects another, and no word stands as an atomistic entity whose meaning is self contained and independent from other words. This further adds to the relative nature of our understanding, for as the meaning of one word changes due to cultural, historical, or philosophical factors, so does the meaning of other words.

In light of all this, can we believe that there is a correct conceptual understanding, or a God's-eye-view to which we might have access? The answer to such a question depends upon what we mean by a God's-eye-

view. If we mean that our understanding of the world can be something like mathematics which all human beings have access to merely by being human, and whose content is objective and universal, then the answer is certainly, no. If, however, we mean by a God's-eye-view that we are able to enter into a personal and intimate relationship with a God who desires to reveal his perspectival understanding in order that we might become ever more like him, then the answer is certainly, yes.

The Enlightenment science of modernity sought an objective and universal understanding. Christians of the modern era followed that dominant view and fashioned their understanding of God after such a model. Moderns supposed that since mathematics is not perspectival but objective in a way that other ways of knowing are not, it would give us an ideal form of knowing. The integral calculus developed by moderns like Newton and Leibniz allowed such an objective way of knowing to be mapped to our ideas of the external world and thus gave us the notion that such a world did not need to be subjective and perspectival.

Certainly there is merit to this and we would not want to do without a mathematical physics and all the benefits it brings. The problem arises when we suppose that it is the best and, in fact, the only model for true knowledge. The problem with modernity was not just that it offered a mathematical model for knowledge, but it insisted that all knowledge be objective and universal. God, however, never intended to be

known with objective certainty. To know God in an objective and universal way may bring us into religion but not faith.

If we are to come to faith, our overcoming of relativism will not be by getting to some objective reality but by getting to a perspectival God's-eye-view through a personal and ongoing dialogue with God. The reason we need to get to a God's-eye-view through a personal dialogue is because God is a person and, like any person, God is a mystery that cannot be discovered but must be revealed.

Whenever we wish to know someone in more than a casual way, we are faced with a mystery which we cannot penetrate. Another's innermost thoughts and desires are not accessible to us and therefore appear mysterious. But although we do not have access to the mysteries which lie within another person, they can reveal those mysteries to us. Hence, the mystery of a person is not an unknowable mystery, so long as the person we wish to know both understands the mysterious depths of her own being, and is willing to reveal those mysterious depths to us. Fortunately, God is a person who both knows himself and is willing to make himself known. Thus, although a mystery, God is a mystery that is knowable. In fact, God is a mystery that is infinitely knowable.

Relativism is therefore overcome, not by getting to some ultimate, objective reality but by getting to some ultimate perspective. We come to that perspective through a series of revelations which constitute an ongoing

ing dialogue. Whether the revelations by which we come to know God take the form of a written or spoken word, a vision or small still voice is of little consequence. What is essential to the nature of the revelation is that it is both ongoing and dialogic. One revelation, or even a dozen, no matter how spectacular, will not bring us very far into an understanding of who God is. The revelations must constitute a continuing series by which our understanding and intimacy increases. In order for such growth to occur, the nature of the revelation must also be dialogic.

The form of this dialogue is not unlike the way we personally communicate to other human beings whom we wish to know evermore intimately. In the Scripture, God's relationship with us is likened to a husband's relationship to a wife (e.g., the fifth chapter of Ephesians, the book of Hosea, the Song of Songs, et al.). In the relationship between spouses, if there is an interest to know the depths of the other person, it will always begin as a mystery. With patience and an ongoing dialogue through which the other person reveals himself, however, understanding and intimacy begin to develop.

Of course, it is not enough that the person reveals herself. If the revelation is to be ongoing and dialogic, the other person in the dialogue must participate. That does not mean that we necessarily need to speak back to God. God knows our hearts so it is not necessary that we speak, but we must participate in the revelation and respond by formulating the next question in order that

the dialogue may continue. Every revelation must bring us to a still deeper question.

With human beings some questions may be considered too delicate to ask for fear that such questions might end the relationship, but in not asking the question, we end the dialogue and our understanding of the other person goes no further. With God, we need not have such a fear so long as the next question we formulate is for the purpose of knowing him better and coming into a greater intimacy with him.

Of course, we must also be willing to accept the answer that, at the present time, God cannot reveal an answer to a particular question. There may be many reasons for this, but one certainly is that we do not know enough about God at the present time and would thus misunderstand what was revealed to us. I am very grateful that God did not reveal certain things to me until I had enough understanding to handle them. Indeed, many things that God reveals to us after a thirty-year journey with him, could not have been properly understood after two years or even ten. This is the nature of any ongoing dialogue with anyone but it is especially true of our relationship with God.

In spite of the fact that God, or any other person with whom we are in intimate dialogue, is able to reveal their unique perspective to us, it would, nevertheless, be an error to think that such a revelation gives us a comprehensive understanding of that other person. We may have particular insights, but much of that oth-

er person will always be a mystery to us. The great error in Christian theology is to either believe that God is not knowable on a personal and intimate level, or to believe that God is completely knowable. Our understanding of God, like our understanding of anyone with whom we are intimate, is both something we grasp and something which escapes us.

Furthermore, the nature of the understanding we gain concerning God, or any other person, is not an objective knowing. It will always be perspectival and therefore relative to our present understanding of that person. This is especially true of God. Indeed, when God speaks to us, either through a spoken or written word, a vision, or an inner witness, we have to interpret what God is attempting to communicate, and that interpretation is not only influenced by where we are in our ongoing dialogue with God, but by a host of other factors as well. Certainly what God communicates to us is 'the given,' but the meaning we attribute to it is always relative to our historical, cultural, and philosophical understanding.

Additionally, our understanding of God is also structural and exists within a web of meaning and therefore our understanding will be relative to that web. If my idea of love changes, so does my idea of God. The same is true of a host of other concepts such as faith, forgiveness, sin, holiness, repentance, etc. Any change in those concepts will affect my concept of God as well.

In spite of all these factors which

make our understanding of God perspectival and relative, our understanding is not relative in the sense that we can think anything we want. If we truly are in an ongoing dialogue, there is an anchor which prevents us from drifting here and there. Just as the external world of sense data provides an anchor for our understanding of the physical world, the other person in a dialogue provides an anchor which keeps us from thinking anything we want about that person. In fact, it is much more of an anchor than the sense data of the physical world. With the sense data that the world provides, we are at great liberty to conceptualize that data, not in any way we want, but in a great variety of ways.

Such freedom is more limited in a dialogue that seeks to know another person in that the other person prevents us from believing a vast variety of false assumptions. If the other person is knowledgeable, trustworthy, and open, our understanding of them, as perspectival as it may be, will be constantly kept in check and not allowed to drift too far from the reality of that other person. Thus, although the thing we seek knowledge of is not an object but a subject, and thus our knowledge will be subjective rather than objective, we cannot think anything we want. There is something or someone to whom our knowledge is attached. So our understanding is not wildly relative, so long as we stay in an ongoing dialogue through which the other person continually corrects the understanding we have of them.

Additionally, when this ongoing

dialogue is with the person of God, it also provides us with a knowledge that is certain. Of course, the certainty we have concerning our knowledge of God is unlike the objective certainty of mathematics. Indeed, the certainty we acquire through our ongoing dialogue with God is a subjective certainty concerning God's faithfulness. Such subjective certainty is the kind that develops slowly over time as another person consistently demonstrates their faithfulness. As such faithfulness is demonstrated, we become evermore certain of that other person and their faithfulness.

This kind of subjective certainty differs greatly from the kind of certainty insisted upon by mathematics. For one thing, it is not the kind of certainty which we can demonstrate or pass on to other people, for even when God repeatedly shows himself faithful, and we get the personal assurance that God can be explicitly trusted, it is not the kind of certainty we can demonstrate to others as we can with mathematics. With God we must let everyone come to that certainty through their own personal encounter and journey with God.

CONCLUSION

This kind of subjective, relative, yet certain understanding of God is not only different from the objective and universal understanding that theologians had attempted to set forth in the past, but it is also more conducive to the spirit of Christianity. To begin with, it produces an invaluable humility in us. With the view we have been suggesting, whatever our theol-

ogy is, it is never the last word. Our understanding of God is always ongoing and therefore always perspectival and less than stable. Of course, what we desire is stability, and a theology which purports to be objective and universal gives us the security we desire. Such security, however, is in ourselves and our well-crafted theology rather than God. Such a theology puts us in charge, while a theology based on an ongoing dialogue through which God reveals himself puts God in charge and reduces us to a proper place of humility and dependence.

The consequence of such humility and dependence is that it causes us to draw near to God and seek his wisdom rather than simply applying standard theological solutions to the situations we find ourselves in. Admittedly, that is uncomfortable, and we would all prefer to have been equipped with a better knowledge of God in order that we could serve him out of our own knowledge and wisdom rather than out of a dependence upon him. But, of course, such a dependent relationship is the very essence of Christianity.

Certainly, God could have equipped us with an ability to conceptualize as he does and make wise judgments out of that understanding, but the fact that God chose not to do that tells us that he has something better for us. What God has for us is to personally lead us with his wisdom. Indeed, God chose to retain true knowledge for himself and dispense wisdom as individuals sought his counsel. This is a central theme of the gospel. Jesus commands us to

follow him, to live as he lived. The way he lived was to be in constant communion with the father, and to do nothing out of his own wisdom.

The Son can do nothing by himself, he can only do what he sees his Father doing because whatever the Father does the Son also does. (John 5:19 NIV)

Or as he says later in John's Gospel,

The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. (John 14:10 NIV)

It is God's desire that we would all live in such close relationship with him that it would be his wisdom rather than our own that would lead us through this life. Thus, we do have access to true wisdom, but it is not through objective methods like those of mathematics and science but through a personal relationship with a living God. This is why, in both the third chapter of James' Epistle and the second and third chapters of 1st Corinthians, we are told that there are two wisdoms. One is a wisdom that 'does not come down from heaven but is earthly . . . (James 3:15),' and another wisdom that does come from heaven (James 3:17). If our theology is to be based on a wisdom that comes down from heaven, it will require a theology rooted in a personal and intimate dialogue with God and not in the narrow and exacting doctrines of a theological system.

Finally, it will be only through such a dialogue and the subjective and perspectively relative theology it produces that the unity God intends for his people will come about. Indeed, what has kept Christians apart for so long has been our belief

that we possess an objective and universal theology. Once constructed, such an objective theology causes us to see others who have reasoned up a different theology as either rationally or spiritually deficient. In the past, Christians have killed each other over rather minor doctrinal points because they believed they were in possession of an objective and universal truth.

Such a position is not possible if we believe that an understanding of who God is comes through dialogue which is personal, intimate, and ongoing. With such a view, it is easy to understand how others can be in a different place in the journey which is the Christian life. Indeed, the same Scripture and the same God have different meanings to a seven-year-old who has just encountered God, and to one who has been on the journey with God for fifty years. True, the seven-year-old can experience God every bit as much as the mature Christian, but the understanding and the meaning attributed to that experience will certainly be different. What should be the greatest difference between the two is that the new believer is tempered to think that his/her understanding is complete, while the mature believer should be reluctant to draw such conclusions. Unfortunately, this is not always the case and often the older Christian has not mellowed but has become more rigid. Ideas of God have narrowed rather than broadened, and doctrines are ever more exacting. I would suggest that such a theology is the product of the ego's desire for objective certainty rather than gen-

uine communion with God.

It is very different with the mature believer whose wisdom and theology have come out of an ongoing dialogic journey with God. Such a believer is more likely to embrace what a colleague of mine refers to as 'humble hermeneutics'. Such 'humble

hermeneutics' result from a reduced confidence in our own understanding and alone makes possible the kind of unity God desires for his church. That is, a unity established upon the recognition of other human beings engaged in the mysterious dialogue which is the Christian life.

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Coming of Age: The Future of a Post-soviet Evangelical Theology

Darrell Cosden

Keywords: Russian Protestantism, contextual theology, theological method, post-liberalism, narrative theology, systematic theology, evangelical identity.

Systematic Theology or Poetry?

'The problem is that our pastors write poetry, theirs write the systematic theologies.' We all laughed heartily and continued eating. I was sure that he was right. This must be the problem. After all, this observation disparagingly comparing current Russian/Ukrainian evangelicals with their western counterparts was

made by a prominent Ukrainian Evangelical Christian leader and seminary president. Actually, it was simply a fleeting tongue-in-cheek comment, a mixture of humour and exasperation. For me however, it has become a small verbal icon illuminating the current condition of theology and theological education in post-Soviet evangelicalism.

Ukrainian/Russian Church leaders writing poetry rather than more discursive or specifically 'systematic' forms of theology—how sad, how shameful! But is it really? Is this really a problem for the post-Soviet evangelical church, for her theology, and for Christian living? Or, might this insight be the key for how to do Christian theology in a post-Soviet context? These questions are not easy to answer negatively or positively.

On the one hand, even a casual observer of post-Soviet evangelicalism will quickly discover that this expression of the faith is plagued

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with problems and inconsistencies, practical and intellectual. Many reformers from within and friends and critics alike from the outside often criticize this tradition for lacking a consistent, critically reflective and sophisticated biblical exegesis and theology. Certainly, my own experience with this church confirms that such criticism is not without warrant. Maybe a healthy dose of 'systematic' theology is just what is needed.

On the other hand there is no denying that these Christians – laity and leadership – as unsophisticated, enigmatic or even sometimes sectarian as they may be, have a genuine Christian faith that has been forged in prayer with scripture amidst real persecution and suffering and in obedience to God's call. There is simply no question that these folk have something important and necessary to contribute positively to Christian theology—their own and the rest of the world's. Indeed, they do have a theology, and maybe it is best developed and expressed poetically rather than systematically.

The question of which is better, systematic theology or poetry, presents an interesting dilemma. Would a shift in emphasis from writing poetry to writing more discursive or systematic theology really meet, or begin to meet, the vast theological needs (reflective and active) of the church and believers in the former Soviet Union? Possibly, but maybe not.

Before going further I want to be clear that I am not denying the need for a careful, reflective, critical, con-

structive, orderly and informed intellectual engagement with the doctrines and practices of the Christian faith. Every expression of Christianity needs theology with these characteristics. The question is not whether theology characterized as such needs to be done, or whether a discursive form is an appropriate way to go about doing theology.

The question here is rather how could or should the whole enterprise of theology be approached in a post-Soviet context? Where should the emphasis lie and what form should a theology for the post-Soviet evangelical church take? Likewise, how would a choice for one approach or another, i.e. poetry or 'systematic' theology, affect the content and practice of faith in that context? Here is a question of the method and categorical structure of theology as well as its content for method and structure inevitably influence the substance of the ideas.

There is currently a growing conviction among many post-Soviet evangelicals and expatriate theologians that it is time for post-Soviet evangelicalism to 'come of age' theologically speaking. The challenge is for these brothers and sisters to begin to experiment critically and constructively in the Holy Spirit with the Word toward developing a truly contextualised post-Soviet evangelical theology. In what follows I will explore what this might mean and what might be involved in this process. I likewise suggest some directions that this might fruitfully take. Ultimately, this will mean probing the significance of the observa-

tion that western evangelical Christians 'tend' to write specifically systematic theology while their eastern counterparts 'tend' to write poetry.

Further, a derivative purpose stemming from this exploration will be to suggest that, given the current context, post-Soviet evangelicals would do well to begin to dialogue theologically with others, rather than exclusively relying upon dialogue with or be under the dominance of mainstream conservative North American evangelical theology. Specifically, these partners would need to include among others, Eastern Orthodoxy, various contextual theologies, and, I believe, postliberalism. (This article is specifically interested in the last of these.) This call to broader dialogue however, does not mean that these post-Soviet Christians should lose their distinctive identity as evangelicals. On the contrary, what is needed is for them, in dialogue with others, to finally find it.

A Contextualised post-Soviet Evangelical Theology

To begin, what do I mean by developing a truly contextualised post-Soviet Evangelical theology?¹ What is meant by contextualisation? The idea of contextualisation can mean many different things for both mission and theology. Currently, as for example with some radical feminist theology, it often means an almost total reinventing of Christianity for a

specific group or culture. At the other extreme however, as for example with some evangelicals, it can imply the conservative approach of primarily 'translating' a given formulation or expression of Christianity into another culture or context. The problem with the former understanding is that these expressions of the faith are often so divergent from scripture and tradition that they in essence cease to be Christian. The problem with the latter approach is that it fails to recognize as contextually determined the very presupposition that it is possible to start theology with an objective or 'given' expression of theology.

Of late many contemporary theologians and missiologists have come to understand that all theology is by nature contextual. Every formulation of theology reflects within it something of the context in which it is developed. Every expression of theology, whether consciously or not, has been significantly and necessarily shaped in content and form, intellectually and practically, by the concerns and thought-forms of its setting. Indeed, this realization that 'objective' formulations of theology are neither possible nor desirable is what gives theology its power as a vehicle for the Word of God to a given people at a given place and time. So, as Stephen Bevans has argued, 'contextualization is part of the very nature of theology itself'.²

Theology must be intrinsically linked with a specific social and cultural situation. In fact, building on the 'sociology of knowledge,' liberation theologians would

1 For an interpretation of various approaches to contextual theology see: Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992).

2 Bevans, p. 1.

argue that all theologies always are linked with and shaped by a specific social and cultural milieu. In the words of Dermot A. Lane, 'Knowledge is not neutral or value-free. Instead all knowledge tends to embody the social circumstances and conditions of its time.' In other words, knowledge always tends to reflect the vested interests of the knower. Vested interests vary considerably from one society and culture to another; consequently, knowledge will reflect this variance.

Such a theory of knowledge can and sometimes does lead to relativism—the idea that knowledge is so conditioned by social, political and economic realities that it is impossible to rise above them. Liberation theologians do not embrace this kind of deterministic and reductionist view, however... [They suggest that] each person must gain awareness of one's own vested interests and subject them to scrutiny and criticism. By becoming suspicious and critical (dialectical) in relation to the dominant thought-forms of one's own culture, a person's knowledge can rise above this social-environmental conditioning... So theology is always contextual, never universal. What is developed in one place, whether Rome, or Tübingen or New York, cannot be imposed on every other place.³

One need not be a Liberation theologian to embrace these insights. Conclusions like these about objectivity and theological method ultimately grow from the realization that human knowing is always less than perfect and is to a large degree necessarily dependent upon factors arising in the knower's context. 'As our cultural and historical context plays a part in the construction of the reality in which we live, so our context influences our understanding of God and

the expression of our faith.'⁴ Liberation Theology may have been among the first expressions of the faith to grasp this, but stemming from the demise of enlightenment epistemology, many theologians are again coming to see as proper the subjective aspects of the theological enterprise.

Such subjectivity is not the death of theology or of truth as some might imagine however. Recognizing the contextual nature or subjectivity of theology (indeed of all knowledge) does not mean that theology is now hopelessly subjective and no longer able to speak of God and things truthfully as they 'really are'. Nor must such an understanding signal a denial of revelation as the prime source and ultimate test for all theology. Rather, such an observation about the nature of theology is simply the recognition of an unavoidable condition of theology.

By nature theology is a human enterprise, even though it works with God's revelation to us. It is incarnational in the sense that it brings and holds together both human and divine reality. Indeed, this is why theology can meaningfully be a vehicle for God's Word to us at a particular place and time. The point is simply to recognize the contextual nature of all theology as a given, celebrating and embracing contextual contributions to it where appropriate and criticizing and reforming the context where necessary. This ultimately means that there will be different particularised or localised the-

3 Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olsen, *20th Century Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1992), pp.214-15.

4 Bevens, p. 2.

ologies depending upon one's context, but that there must be a real sense that these theologies are a part of genuine Christian tradition.

The problem for Soviet and post-Soviet evangelical theology, however, has not been the lack of a context or the lack of the context's influence upon it or church life. Rather, the problems for Soviet and post-Soviet evangelical theology, its shortcomings as a theology, have been subtler. Among other things, they have stemmed from Soviet and post-Soviet evangelical theology's own lack of identity, and of late, its lack of confidence and acceptance of itself as a unique and particularised expression of theology. That is, ironically given its usual dogmatism, its inferiority complex in relationship primarily to Eastern Orthodoxy and Western Protestantism, both of which contribute to her own unique identity. The difficulties here, similar to those in any family, seem to be those faced by the youngest child who while maturing seeks to establish her own identity and uniqueness in relationship with and in contrast to her more dominant brothers and sisters. Puberty is a painful time.

To take this further, these shortcomings can be traced to Soviet and post-Soviet evangelical theology's lack of conscious self-awareness and self-critical analysis of its own theological constructs and practices. Until recently it has simply not had the tools or the opportunity for this reflection, which is essential for the natural maturing process. So far it has in many ways been like the young handicapped child who,

although admitting that she has needs, nevertheless still believes that she is the centre of reality and is always right. However, as she now seems to be entering puberty and even overcoming many of her earlier handicaps, or coming of age, she feels the pains of insecurity and tends to react in sometimes contradictory ways. She is only now learning the skills necessary for the kind of self-awareness and self-critical analysis that will help her as a theology both come to accept herself as she is, to imperfect as this may be, and grow through some of her weaknesses.

In short, many weaknesses of Soviet and post-Soviet evangelical theology can be argued to have come from its failure to come to grips intellectually and existentially with the totality of contexts that have and do contribute to its life as a tradition (Russian, Soviet, Protestant, and Orthodox).

Such conclusions however, are not meant to be 'stone-throwing' criticisms. Given their context with all of its restrictions and limitations, Soviet and post-Soviet evangelicals have done admirably well. Rather, these conclusions are simply interpretive observations offered by a sympathetic outsider. A cruel and harsh existence until recently made such a self-understanding next to impossible. Nevertheless, if a mature post-Soviet evangelical theology is to emerge out of both the triumphs and ashes of the past, (one able to serve its own people and Christians worldwide) then these identity issues will need to be addressed seriously. Indeed, the dilemma of whether to write system-

atic theology or poetry is indicative of such a struggle and will probably be answered only in the self-identifying process.

What do I mean though, that post-Soviet evangelicals will need to come to grips with their context and the forces that have uniquely shaped them? Since its beginnings Russian and Ukrainian Evangelicalism has suffered an identity crisis similar to that of all Eurasian institutions: Is it eastern or is it western? The answer is that it is genuinely both. Nevertheless, whether accidental or not, western (often North American 'conservative') evangelical theology, both in its category/structure and content, has formally dominated this Church. This is partly due to an often-necessary dependence upon its western counterparts for theological resources – concepts, materials and teachers. It is also partly due to an often prevalent western evangelical insistence that only its questions, forms and content taken together form a truly Christian and evangelical theology; a universal theology.

However, new contextual realities are beginning to call for new ways of thinking. Ten years on from the fall of the Soviet Union, and ten years into this current wave of mission into these countries many are saying that the stage is now set and that the time is now right for post-Soviet evangelicals to 'come of age' theologically. Initially this simply will entail a discovery of who they actually are (rather than who others, Evangelical or Orthodox say they should be). From this self-awareness they will then be in a position to suggest in

which direction they might or ought to head for the future.

Importantly however, this 'discovery' does not mean that post-Soviet evangelicals need to reactively reject their past or present partner relationship with western evangelicals. Nor does it mean that they must become hostile and reactionary to the form/content of the western tradition that has for so long nurtured and helped it. Rather, what this process means is that it is time for post-Soviet evangelicalism to mature and thus to truly become itself. Only then will it truly enter as an equal theological partner into the worldwide fellowship of Christian believers; both challenging others and being challenged by them.

Practically, to achieve this maturity post-Soviet evangelical theology will have to come to grips with its own unique identity by critically evaluating the conservative western evangelical theology that has often dominated it. It will have to understand the context within which this sister theology developed. Such a coming to grips with its identity will likewise inevitably mean that post-Soviet evangelical theology will need to enter into a close dialogue with Eastern Orthodox theology which has also shaped it and formed it culturally, intellectually and in terms of its spirituality.

Having said this however, there is no reason why post-Soviet evangelical theology needs to limit its dialogue to those with whom it is already related. It need not become isolationist in its growing process. It will also be important for it to seek

other dialogue partners, especially those with which it already has some affinity, if not relationship. Other contextual theologies like Latin American Liberation theology or Asian theology might offer insights into the triumphs as well as the pitfalls of doing theology in context. Some of these might even be doing theology in a context similar to that of today's post-Soviet Christian. Post-Soviet evangelicals will need to learn from such people even if in the end they become critical of many conclusions they have come to.

Additionally post-Soviet evangelicals will need to engage other more traditional approaches to theology (those not self-consciously contextual). Given their intellectual and geographic location, engaging European theologies like Moltmann's 'Theology of Hope' might be both revealing and helpful. Again however, the goal here will be a dialogue and critical appraisal of these theologies in their contexts rather than simply the adoption and translation of them into Russian. Specifically, the method and approach of 'postliberalism' (its North American and related European expressions) could be a quite fruitful dialogue partner for post-Soviet evangelicals. My reasons for suggesting this will emerge in what follows.

Systematic Theology: Western Evangelicalism in Context

Now, having considered what a contextualised post-Soviet evangelical theology might mean and what kinds of enquiries might be necessary for a move toward it, I want to evaluate

the idea that western evangelicals (conservatives) tend to write 'systematic' theologies, rather than poetry. The brief analysis that follows should help post-Soviet evangelicals both to understand a part of their own identity, and to begin to question whether or not they should, or might want to, continue to model themselves after their slightly older western brother.

To begin, we must consider the claim that western (often North American conservative) evangelical leaders tend to theologise by writing 'systematic' theologies rather than say, poetry. Of course, this is a generalisation and as such it is only meant to be true only generally. Conservative evangelicalism in general and western/North American conservative evangelicalism in particular is a long-standing and multifaceted theological and ecclesiastical tradition, incorporating many movements like pietism, Reformed scholasticism, and revivalism. Thus, any stereotype of it is bound to be less than comprehensive. Likewise, there is North American evangelical poetry, devotional literature, hymnology and the like. Usually however, these are considered to be something other than proper 'theology', and often, though not always, they do fail to show the depth of reflection and rigour that is thought to usually characterise theology.

This being so, it is generally correct to characterise conservative evangelicalism, (particularly the North American variety which has been so influential in Soviet and post-Soviet evangelicalism) as favouring theology (when it does) that is primarily

cognitive, logically systematic and often dependent upon some heuristic device for its cohesion and structure. This has been particularly (although by no means exclusively) so since the rise of the modernist-fundamentalist controversy of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Indeed, given this debate and the other related 'contexts' in which the theology developed, it was both necessary and to a large degree inevitable that this theology would primarily be constructed along cognitivist and systematic lines.

As Stanley J. Grenz helpfully summarises in his 1993 programmatic book *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*:

Despite the orientation toward spirituality characteristic of the movement as a whole, contemporary evangelical thinkers generally engage in the theological task with eyes focused on epistemology or the cognitive dimension of faith, rather than toward our shared piety. Evangelical theology tends to move from the conviction that there is a deposit of cognitive revelation given once for all in the Bible... As a result, many evangelicals view the task of theology primarily as systematizing and articulating the body of doctrine they assume to preexist implicitly or explicitly in Scripture.

Klaus Bockmuehl speaks for evangelical theologians in general in declaring that the task of systematic theology 'is to produce a summary of Christian doctrine, an ordered summary or synopsis of the themes of teaching in Holy Scripture. We are to collect the different, dispersed propositions on essential themes or topics of the OT and the NT and put them together in an

order that fits the subject-matter at hand.'⁵

On this account the theological enterprise is primarily an intellectual activity undertaken by trained technicians who seek to gather-up 'rightly' exegeted doctrinal propositions from the Bible and then seek to organize them formally with the primary help of logic onto a coherent system – and the system itself often then functions as the heuristic key for the continuing process of 'rightly dividing the Word of truth'. The dual test for truth in such an undertaking of theology involves firstly, judging whether one's exegesis is objectively 'correct' according to certain 'modern' scientific canons of hermeneutics, and secondly, judging whether one's logic is correct. Thus, while not denying the value of other forms of Christian expression like poetry, the sermon, devotional literature, drama, story and the like, 'theology' in this view has come to be seen more as an objective science of exegesis and logical systematisation. Thus, in the words of Grenz,

Conservative theologians, whether Calvinist, dispensational, Wesleyan or Arminian, fall into step with the assumption that theology is 'the science of God' based on the Bible. Just as the natural world is amenable to the scientist's probings, they argue, so also the teaching of Scripture is objectively understandable. Systematic theology organizes the 'facts'

5 Stanley Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), p. 62. For further examples, and, a more detailed examination of this approach in the history of conservative Evangelicalism see particularly Chs. 2-6 and Ch. 7 pp.220-229., in: Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).

of Scripture, just as the natural sciences systemize the facts of nature. Consequently, the correct theology is a crystallization of biblical truth into a set of universally true and applicable propositions.⁶

Now the limitations of this essay do not allow a full evaluation or critique of this understanding of theology. This has been done elsewhere in sufficient detail.⁷ Rather, I want here to probe briefly the claim that such a 'scientific' and systematic understanding of theology necessarily and inevitably came to dominate western evangelicalism. That is, I want to consider why, due to context, this is the particularly appropriate way for western evangelicals both to do theology and understand its nature. Admittedly this is a very complex exploration and here I will be able only to sketch the contours of a few ideas. However, I believe that these few general illustrative points will suffice to make the point.

Evangelicalism generally has its roots in western Catholic theology and particularly in the Protestant Reformation. Western theology in both of these traditions has always

been somewhat more rationalised and less mystical than its eastern counterpart. As such, it has likewise always emphasized the cognitive and rational ability in the search for theological universals⁸ (although modern Protestants—conservative and liberal—have taken this tendency to extremes). This is what Bevans means when he claims that, 'Classical theology conceived theology as a kind of objective science of faith.'⁹ He meant this of all western theology and he was not referring specifically to post-enlightenment theology as one might expect. This is the first contributing factor to recognize.

Next, this tendency toward the rational and cognitive in conservative mainstream evangelical theology can be further traced from the part of its heritage steeped in Reformed theology. It can be seen emerging in Calvin (a lawyer). It developed through Protestant Scholasticism. It is evident in the theology of Westminster, and it made its way into North America with the Puritans and people like Jonathan Edwards. It later came to prominence in places like Princeton Seminary with the theology of Hodge and Warfield, and through this it became the backbone of conservative theology. This is not to deny the pietistic, and less Reformed roots of evangelicalism. However, the more theological side of mainstream evangelicalism does

6 Grenz, *Revisioning*, p. 65.

7 In addition to Grenz, *Revisioning*, chapter 3, see also Nancy Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism & Fundamentalism*, (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996). Likewise, Grenz has developed further his critique of the modernist, or, rationalistic and foundationalist premises with which much conservative Evangelical theology is constructed. See for this, *Beyond Foundationalism*, co-author John R. Franke, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), and, Ch. 4 in John G Stackhouse, Jr., ed., *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000) These are specifically Evangelical responses to the perceived problem. Also I mention here that 'postliberalism' in general is a critique of this understanding of theology.

8 It should be noted that this desire for universals probably came as much from the practicality of needing unifiers for a diverse 'Christendom' as it did from purely speculative philosophical or theological reasoning.

9 Bevans, p. 1.

seem to own more to its Reformed roots than to either its pietistic, revivalist or other roots. This is even true of Dispensationalism, which is often contrasted with Reformed theology.

Parallel to this specifically theological heritage, the Enlightenment with its epistemological scepticism and resultant empiricism and rationalism likewise set an intellectual context in which cognitive and systematic ways of doing theology would be natural, if not inevitable. The Enlightenment is the soil in which contemporary Protestantism and thus evangelicalism grew.

Now one might be able to see how this would be true for liberal Protestantism, with its tendency to absorb rather uncritically modern Enlightenment beliefs. But could it be true of conservative evangelical or fundamentalist Protestantism which is essentially a reaction against modernism? Nancy Murphy in her book *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Post-modern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda* has convincingly argued that both conservative evangelicalism (at least in North America) and the liberalism that it was fighting are essentially modern constructions. She has demonstrated that they can exist only in a thought world where modern Enlightenment assumptions are to a large degree accepted. This should come as no surprise. Contemporary conservative North American evangelicalism, particularly the brand that has so influenced Russian and Ukrainian evangelicalism, forged its current

identity and many of its particular doctrinal formulations (i.e. inerrancy) against the backdrop of and in direct battle with liberal Protestantism. For this battle to take place there had to be enough common ground for the fight. Arguably, since conservative evangelicalism was the combatant often lacking confidence and the supposed intellectual high ground, it often ended up accommodating, or to state it more positively, contextualising itself to modernity.

This does not mean that it 'went liberal' in the same way that Classical liberalism and the mainline denominations did. However, it does mean that it often both fought on their intellectual turf and developed intellectual weapons that would be effective for fighting in that context. In this sense, it could be argued to have 'gone liberal' to a degree, or, at least to have borrowed many of the foundational tenants of liberalism with which to defeat the liberals. What are these borrowed weapons? One can find a willingness among many conservative evangelicals to accept to a significant degree: 1) The modernist criteria for genuine historicity. 2) Modern epistemology's standardisation of truth depicted as rationally organized objective 'facts' in the search for objective universals. 3) Foundationalism. 4) Modernity's overly propositionalist understanding of the nature of language. 4) A form of Cartesian anthropology leading to a 'strong' individualism.

The point here is not to throw stones at the achievements of the previous generation of evangelicals. Conservative North American evan-

gelical theology has been a powerful contextualised expression of theology in its own context. Its emphasis on system, the individual, and cognitivist rationalism fits well both within its theological heritage of Protestant Orthodoxy and within the intellectual and apologetic contexts demanded by modernity. Nor does pointing out these accommodations necessarily mean that conservative North American evangelicalism is outdated and thus to be abandoned (although it does need some reform).

The point is that as an expression of theology evangelicalism has always been much more particularised / contextualised and much less 'universal' than it itself has often thought. Although it might be, or at least have been, an appropriate form of contextual theology in North America or even in Northern Europe, it may not be appropriate in another context like the former Soviet Union. What needs to be carefully considered by this generation of theologians is whether conservative North American evangelicalism is the best model for a post-Soviet evangelical theology that was conceived and has grown in a very different intellectual, cultural and religious context.

I do not believe that it is the best theological model for the post-Soviet context, notwithstanding the important relational and resourcing links that post-Soviet evangelicals have with conservative North American evangelicalism's missions, churches and theological schools. Nonetheless, I do believe that it will continue to be an important theolog-

ical dialogue partner and that its institutions will be needed as partners for many years to come. The penetrating question here for North American evangelicals is whether they are theologically and emotionally mature enough to have such relationships without necessarily insisting upon the theological dominance that they are accustomed to? At the very least the concerns that I am outlining should begin to challenge tacit assumptions of some that conservative North American evangelical theology is the only truly orthodox theology (and as such should be the only dialogue partner needed) and that its particulars should simply be 'translated' into the post-Soviet context.

Post-Soviet Evangelicals: Poets?

With this in mind I return to the question of whether it in fact would be better for post-Soviets evangelicals to develop systematic theology rather than poetry. I refer here to what conservative North American evangelicals mean by systematic theology since this is the kind that most post-Soviet evangelicals tend to read, are trained with, translate and attempt to copy.

First however, is it actually true that Soviet and now post-Soviet evangelicals tend to write poetry rather than more discursive or systematic theology with the characteristics described above? Generally the answer is yes, but with important qualification. Overall, theological life in the churches tends to take more 'literary' than 'scientific' approaches. Nonetheless, one does find that

even during the Soviet era there were pastors and church leaders who were concerned with writing more discursive theology. As Walter Sawatsky has argued when speaking of the Soviet era: 'The major substitute for a seminary has been *Bratskii Vestnik* [the journal of the Baptist denomination]. General Secretary Karev and his assistant Mitskevich devoted major effort to filling this journal with high-quality didactic articles.'¹⁰ Likewise, during this period Soviet leaders also produced a discursive and more systematic theology, or theology textbook called *Dogmatika* (although this is not systematic to the same degree and in the same way as North American systematic theology would be.)¹¹

Having acknowledged these examples however, it is important to remember that the believers developing these were strongly influenced by and tended to adopt without much question western theological method. They had accepted that British and North American Dispensationalism and Keswick spirituality were the evangelical norm. This theology was passed on to the churches through *Bratskii Vestnik* and *Dogmatika*, but also through the official correspondence training course used to train leaders.¹² This of course demonstrates that there have always been those in the movement who want something more than simply poetry.

Likewise, to move more into the present, there are a host of theological colleges and budding theologians who are interested in writing textbooks, exegetical commentaries and systematic theologies. That the tradition (or at least its more formally theologically trained members) now wants to do its own theology is certain. Yet, this desire raises the question of what kind of theology, or what method would be most appropriate in the context.

Even the casual observer in a worship service would begin to sense that post-Soviet pastors and their churches (those not primarily in the newly developed academies) do prefer something like poetry to 'systematic' theology. A sermon that grabs the emotions and spirit is much more desirable to many of these folk than a rational discussion of theology or an exegesis of a biblical passage that breaks the passage down and analyses its smallest parts for the sake of mastering its truth. Even my students, before they become westernised in their theological orientation, tell me that at times the western evangelical theology presented in class is for them too rationalistic / scientific, too building-block-outline oriented, and in content and form simply not alive nor spiritual enough. For some years I assumed that this was another lazy-student ploy to get them out of the hard work of 'real' and rigorous theology. Now I am not quite so sure that this is always the case.

This general preference for literary and poetic method over rationalistic structure could mean several things.

¹⁰ Walter Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II* (Kitchener Ont.: Herald Press, 1981), p. 331.

¹¹ Sawatsky, p. 344.

¹² Sawatsky, pp. 17, 340-41.

It could mean that these students, pastors, and churches need to 'grow up' and desire the meat of the Word rather than simply its milk. Doubtless, this is sometimes the case. Or, it could mean that we teachers and trained pastors need to do a better job of showing the church member that a sustained theologizing is actually important and relevant. This too is doubtlessly true in many cases. However, it might also mean more significantly that an overly systematic approach to theology simply does not fit the post-Soviet (Russified) cultural and church context.

Why might this latter be the most significant reason? There are several points to consider. Anglo or northern Europeans who work regularly with Russians, who know the Russian language and who know Russian literature (popular and classic) recognize that Russians 'know' in a different way from our knowledge. Intellectually trained Anglos and Germans tend to think like an arrow—that is, in straight logical lines toward a specific end. Russians, however, don't think in this way—they are Slavic culturally and linguistically, and tend to have a more Asian thinking pattern. It might be described as more pictorial or 'iconic' thinking. In terms of a directional patterns it might be described as a corkscrew spiralling and narrowing toward a conclusion or group of conclusions.

This group of conclusions (sometimes seemingly contradictory) can be held together in tension as true with little difficulty. This is because the movement in the process of thinking and concluding allows such

complexity in a way that more rationalistic tests of truth do not. This does not mean that Russians are irrational or illogical, or, even that they have a supposedly different logic, as if that were possible. It does however, mean that thinking and knowing to them involves much more than logic, and that reality is understood as more complex than simple logic or straight thinking in propositionalist terms can convey. Truth and knowing is simply a more complex process than a logical ordering of propositions can grasp.

One finds this 'Russian' style of thinking and knowing evidenced in normal conversation with Russians, in more popular prose or newspapers and, importantly for our discussion here, in much of their serious literature and philosophy. Given this way of thinking, it is not surprising that Russians tend to consider that some of their best and deepest thinking and their best philosophy is found in their more narrative or artistic literature—Dostoevsky for example. Even their discursive philosophy tends to read like narrative or at times like poetry. This probably accounts for why the untrained (usually non-westernised) post-Soviet evangelical pastor or lay Christian would find it more natural to express himself theologically in poetry, testimony, sermon or song rather than in a more 'systematic' form of theology.

Of course Russian mathematics and science tend to be more systematic in their structure and thinking. This is understandable, given the nature of these disciplines. However,

for deeper subjects like probing the depths of human meaning / existence or theology they do tend to adopt less systematic genres for both exploration and expression. Indeed, spiritual poetry, Orthodox icons and the apophatic method of doing theology are good examples of how this kind of thinking works itself out in theology. For example, I doubt that Russian evangelicals could ever have worked out the doctrinal formulation of inerrancy as has been done in North America. Their understanding and experience of life and language would simply not lend itself in this direction. An extremely propositional and atomised view of language simply does not fit within their worldview. We can see this already in the one main theology that Soviet evangelicals produced. 'The *Dogmatika* affirmed biblical inspiration. It rejected the dictation theory of inspiration, as well as a verbal inspiration theory that did not allow for a recognition of the individual writer's memory, intuition, judgment, and character. But it was an affirmation of the Bible as divinely inspired and infallible.'¹³

In the introduction to his book *Triumphs of the Spirit in Russia*, Donald Nicholl summarises well the understanding of Russian knowing that I am describing here when he says: '(T)heories and doctrines are not, after all, the most helpful means of shaping human beings to confront the issues of life and death. But mod-

els are: whether in the form of icons or biographies of the saints, especially when these are set in the context of a liturgy where the chorus of human voices raise the spirit of the worshipper.'¹⁴ Through art, story/testimony, and singing – these are the ways that Russians both think and know.

Of course, there are post-Soviet evangelicals who would argue that despite this natural cultural and linguistic tendency, what they need is something like the systematic theology described above. And, although it is doubtful if they would feel this way were it not for training from or contact with the West, it is nevertheless now a fact that they have had such contact or training and that such thinking has become a part of their experience. Since no culture is a monolith, and since culture is always growing and changing through its contacts with other cultures, a case might be made that such systematic theologising needs to become a part of their culture, regardless of whether average pastors and churches seem ready for it.

To this I would like to respond as follows. There is doubtless the need for post-Soviet evangelicals to undertake a sustained and rigorous process of doing and writing theology. Likewise, there is doubtless the need for post-Soviet evangelicals to write theology for training their own church folk, church leaders and theologians. However, it is highly doubt-

¹³ Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals*, pp. 334-35. (Footnoted: *Dogmatika*, pp. 161ff. especially p. 167. Essentially the same argument in I. I. Motorin's article, *Bratskii Vestnik* 3-4/55, p. 67.)

¹⁴ Donald Nicholl, *Triumphs of the Spirit in Russia* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1997), p. 9.

ful that they need a theology or methodology for doing theology like the systematic theology described above. Apart from the general critiques that can be offered against such a method, the entire way of thinking employed therein is not natural for them and as such, the approach will continue to alienate these believers from both Eastern Orthodoxy and secular post-Soviets. Possibly average church folk would never identify with such an approach. If it does not sound right, look right, or feel right the chances are it might not be right for that context.

That post-Soviet evangelicals tend to write poetry rather than systematic theology may not be the real problem at all. This is especially true if we mean by systematic theology the kind of theology that is characteristic of conservative North American evangelicalism. That post-Soviet evangelicals tend to write poetry may be an indication of what kind of sustained and rigorous theology waits to be done. This may indicate the best future for post-Soviet evangelical theology.

Postliberals and Post-Soviet Evangelicals Together

With this in mind I now turn to the last area of discussion in this essay. If the situation as I have described it thus far is accurate, then one of the best dialogue partners for post-Soviet evangelicalism may prove to be a movement that has come to be known as 'postliberalism.'

Postliberalism, is not associated with any particular denomination.

Nor is it a tradition in the same sense as evangelicalism. Rather, it is a methodology or movement among theologians that 'seeks to reverse the trend in modern Christianity of accommodation to culture'.¹⁵ This specifically means the accommodation to modern culture or modernity (culture formed by the Enlightenment), which has been a prominent feature of Liberal theology. Postliberalism however, is not any longer simply a reform movement within or growing out of liberal theology. Rather, it has become a broader creative and constructive programme for theological exploration in light of the demise of modernity. For this reason it has become an appealing dialogue partner for Evangelical theology in recent years.¹⁶

Who are the postliberals? 'While significantly influenced by the thought of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Karl Barth, Clifford Geertz, Peter Berger and others, the originators of the distinctive "postliberal" agenda and label were Hans Frei and George Lindbeck. Their students, creative and provocative theologians like William Placher, Stanley Hauerwas and George Hunsinger, have further developed these key ideas.'¹⁷ Often postliberalism as a label is associated with Yale Divinity School in the US. However, there

15 Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm, eds., *The Nature of Confession: Evangelicals & Postliberals in Conversation* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1996), p. 11

16 *The Nature of Confession*, which grew out of the 1995 Wheaton Theology Conference is evidence that evangelicals have realized the potential value of interaction with postliberal methodology.

17 Phillips, *Nature*, p. 11.

are also many theologians in Europe like Colin Gunton and Trevor Hart that in parallel broadly share the movement's concerns, including a repudiation of modernity (including modern epistemology) and a revitalisation of and return to biblical narrative in theology.

Essentially postliberalism is a theological methodology that is committed to removing modernity or liberalism (explicit and implicit) from Christian life and thinking. This is its negative function as a movement. Its positive function is to call Christians to return to the Bible so that Scripture rather than say, philosophy, can form Christian thinking, actions and community life. Specifically for postliberalism this means returning to the Bible but not as if it were a collection of propositions to be dissected, broken down, objectively mastered by the reader, and then extracted from their literary forms for logical organization into a system that we can call theology. (This is the liberal approach.) Rather, a postliberal return to the Bible involves a call to read it more as a narrative, as literature, and thus as a whole which we can ourselves enter into and be formed by.

Postliberalism includes a theory that explains the loss of Scripture's formative authority and the church's correlative accommodation to culture as well as a strategy for cultivating Christian identity. As Hans Frei's pathbreaking *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (1974) showed, modern theories of biblical interpretation find the meaning of the text in something more basic and foundational than Scripture—a universally accessible reality. Whether meaning was found in eternal truths that the text symbolized (as for liberals) or identified exclusively with the

story's factual reference (as for conservatives), both displaced the priority of Scripture. Scripture no longer defined the church's social world in a normative way. 'The great reversal had taken place: interpretation was a matter of fitting the biblical story into another world with another story rather than incorporating that world into the biblical story.' When another authority was found, Scripture's world-forming narrative was fragmented and eventually dispersed.

This shift in understanding—the loss of Scripture's grand narrative as well as its christological center and unity—impeded the biblical narrative from shaping the community of disciples. Increasingly, Scripture became a strange book that was closed to the laity and under the control of the academic elite..In place of these modern theories of interpretation, postliberals propose a 'classical' hermeneutic in which the scriptural world structures the church's cosmos and identity.¹⁸

Here is a critique of not just classical liberal hermeneutics but also of traditional conservative evangelical protestant principles of interpretation, systematic theology, and even missiology. Conservative evangelical biblical exegetes and theologians, like the liberals, have often tried to 'get behind' the scriptural stories or narratives to find the eternal truths or principles that are assumed to be the Word of God. It is thought that these truths exist abstractly with God, who encoded them in the particular biblical literature. Thus the task for exegesis, systematic theology and missiology is to dig these timeless abstract universals out of the text, organize them systematically, and then re-encode them into some contemporary setting.

18 Phillips, *Nature*, pp. 11-2.

Postliberalism rejects this approach to doing exegesis, theology and mission. Broadly it says that the message is the story rather than something that is hidden behind it. The narrative is the important and necessary formulation of the depths of the message. To de-particularise and abstract the message out from the narratives (or other genres) into a supposed 'universal principle' with logic or modern/critical exegetical methodology is to destroy both the integrity of the message and its power as the Word of God to transform the Christian community and believer therein.

Of course, narrative hermeneutics and approaches to doing theology are much more complex, diverse, and more nuanced than described here. Nor is this narrative/postliberalism without its weaknesses and shortcomings (some of them quite serious).¹⁹ However, for the purposes of this essay, trying to show its potential as a dialogue partner for post-Soviet evangelicals, its general concerns are clear. Postliberalism

wants to emphasize: 1) The Bible as scripture and central for forming Christian life and community, 2) The accessibility of scripture to all Christians, 3) The literary nature and wholeness of the bible and thus the need for a theology that embraces rather than destroys this nature, 3) The dangers of liberalism and modernist approaches to Christianity, and related to this 4) The need for a contemporary theology that genuinely gets us beyond modernity.

Since postliberalism is a movement striving after these general characteristics, I think that it becomes clearer why I have suggested that it might be a particularly appropriate dialogue partner for post-Soviet evangelical theology. In my experience of living in Russia and teaching and working with Soviet and post-Soviet evangelicals, I have found that many of post-Soviet evangelicalism's concerns (either explicitly or implicitly expressed) are quite similar in both ethos and content to those developed or being developed within postliberalism.

Firstly, Soviet and post-Soviet evangelicals are, as Walter Sawatsky has described them, 'a Bible movement' whose approach has always been, 'to read the Bible and put into practice its plain and simple message'.²⁰ Secondly, post-Soviet evangelicals lean culturally and intellectually toward more literary or narrative approaches in their thinking and knowing. They tend to write poetry rather than 'systematic' theology. And thirdly, post-Soviet evangelicals

19 See Alister McGrath 'An Evangelical Evaluation of Postliberalism' in *Nature*, pp. 23-44. Likewise, Stan Grenz' recent thought, in working toward a specifically Evangelical and yet postmodern ('postliberal') theology, has offered important challenges to postliberal formulations. See for example, *Beyond Foundationalism*, pp. 51-54. Yet illustratively, Grenz here models the kind of evangelical / postliberal dialogue and interaction that I am suggesting would be valuable for post-Soviet evangelicals. While his theology does not ultimately take the more narrative or 'poetic' form as might prove to be the case for post-Soviet Evangelicals, it is nevertheless a conscious attempt to take evangelical theology, here western, beyond the same kind of limitations highlighted by post-Soviet concerns of conservative evangelical theology—e.g., a theology shaped by rationalism and prone toward abstract and intellectualised propositionalism.

20 Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals*, pp. 337-39.

(like their Eastern Orthodox neighbours) are very wary of western enlightenment liberalism and its influence upon theology, even upon western evangelical theology. I have many times heard them accuse western evangelicals (including me) of being 'liberal' because of our emphasis upon logic and systemisation. Often they have lacked the sophisticated arguments to explain what they are sensing. However, as this essay attempts to demonstrate, there may be more to their criticism than some of us have previously considered.

Now of course postliberalism, as it has been developed so far, is predominantly a western construct. As such, its methods and conclusions need to be evaluated in that context just as any other theological method and programme needs to be evaluated in its context. And in doing this, many of its specifics may be shown to be flawed, inadequate, or at least to be foreign to a post-Soviet/evangelical context. However, I am calling here for a dialogue to begin and

not for an uncritical adoption of its method and conclusions. I am calling for this specific dialogue because I believe that it will help clarify for post-Soviet evangelicalism many issues that are actually internal to it. The result of such dialogue I suspect will be that western postliberalism and post-Soviet evangelicalism will be helped and moved forward by the interchange.

Conclusion

In conclusion I simply want to state again that I and others believe that it is time for post-Soviet evangelicals to come of age theologically. It is time for these believers to hammer out a more contextualised post-Soviet evangelical theology, and to do this consciously in context. Whether this theology ends up taking a more systematic form (systematic as described in this essay), a more poetic or literary/narrative form, or indeed some other yet undiscovered form remains to be seen. My hope is that his essay has simply contributed something helpful to this process.

Proclamation

*Preaching recounts the dialogue between God and humankind,
Exposing our reticence to hear and reluctance to respond.
Christ-filled words become saving logology,
And God's gracious vehicle to call the dead to life.*

by Garry Harris, South Australia (used with permission)

Proselytism or Evangelism?

Cecil Stalnaker

Keywords: Foreigner, rights, justice, alien, diaspora, Pharisees, Judaism, manipulation, freedom, persuasion

Those who seek to convert others are 'arrogant, ignorant, hypocritical, meddlesome'.¹ For many religious leaders any efforts of evangelism are nothing more than proselytism. Proselytism is for most religious leaders a derogatory term, depicting the image of coercion, force, abandonment, threats, manipulation, and cults. It is an act that is abhorred and detested by all religious bodies, both non-Christian and Christian—Catholic, Eastern or Greek Orthodox, Mainline or Evangelical Protestant. But is proselytism distinguishable from evangelism? Are there distinctive differences?

The focus in this work concerns

proselytism within Christianity. An attempt will be made to answer the above question by providing a biblical and historical overview of proselytism, the distinction between proselytism and evangelism, and the reason for true evangelism. In essence, proselytism is prohibitory but evangelism is to be pursued.

Proselytism is problematic

Concern for proselytism is on the agenda of many Christian religious bodies. At one time the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches in its publication *A Monthly Letter on Evangelism* invited its readers to send in comments, opinions, and remarks regarding this subject. It was overwhelmed by the response from Orthodox, Catholic, Evangelical, Pentecostal, Jewish, Lutheran, Methodist bodies as well as other

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¹ Jay Newman, *Foundations of Religious Tolerance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), p. 89.

groups.² The same debate, discussion, frustrations, and hostilities continues today with little relief.

The charges of sheep-stealing arise. Within the World Council of Churches, proselytism is recognized 'as a scandal and counterwitness'.³ Accusers testify that these intruders are insensitive regarding theological and cultural issues. Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and charismatic groups are especially accused of proselytism. Any religious group that even attempts to talk, discuss, and share their religious ideas, even the gospel, is often labelled a sect because of its so-called attempt to proselytise. As if the term 'sect' is not enough, some Christian groups have been likened to vicious wolves or crocodiles because of their attempts at contact with other Christian groups. In a private survey taken in Belgium among the general Catholic population regarding evangelical Protestantism, one Belgian responded: 'That's the religion where the people always visit you,' which, for this individual indicated some impure motive on the part of the visitor. Not only do churches fear that certain groups, especially evangelicals and Pentecostals, fish in their water but that they are taking the fish out of their own basket as well.

2 Originally published by the World Council of Churches, *A Monthly Letter on Evangelism*, 10-11 (March, 1988) to 12 (January, 1989). The publication by Raymond Fung, *Evangelistically Yours* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1992), pp. 188-223 contains many of these responses and commentaries.

3 'Towards Common Witness: A call to adopt responsible relationships in mission and to renounce proselytism,' *International Review of Missions*. LXXXVI (October 1997), p. 463.

Why these accusations and concerns? The reasons are varied. A primary concern by the World Council of Churches is that it is a destructive force in the ecumenical movement. For them, 'It does not build up but destroys. It brings about tensions, scandal and division, and is thus a destabilizing factor for the witness of the church of Christ in the world.'⁴ Yet, the core of the problem very much focuses on the theological and historical tenants of several of the Christian churches.

For historical reasons, certain Christian denominations, often the traditional and mainline churches, consider themselves as keepers of the basket of faith. Rightly so, they feel that they have an obligation to guard and protect their people from the enemy. These churches 'are like mothers who embrace all children born to them—that is, all those who were baptized'.⁵ Those practising certain religious rituals such as baptism are, without question, considered to be authentic Christians. The authenticity of the baptized is not to be questioned even though they may be considered to be nominal in their faith and have little or often nothing to do with the church.

In some countries where nominal Christianity appears to be the norm rather than the exception many of these baptized are even hostile towards 'the mother' and have little idea of the true gospel. Yet, they are

4 'Towards Common Witness', p. 468.

5 Miroslav Wolf, 'Fishing in the Neighbor's Pond: Mission and Proselytism in Eastern Europe', *Missionary Bulletin of Missionary Research* 20 (January 1996), p. 27.

considered to be authentic in their commitment to Jesus Christ by their particular church denomination because of their religious upbringing and practice of particular religious rituals. However, some, in their own words admit to lacking any true relationship with Jesus Christ. In any case, the mother church desires that they not be approached by other Christian denominations or groups. Cecil Robeck clearly states the problem: 'one group's evangelization is still another group's proselytism'.⁶

Biblical and historical overview of proselytism

Initially, proselytism was an internal affair. In other words, proselytism occurred within the confines of Palestine. Yet, in time, proselytism outstretched its borders as well-meaning Jews would traverse the sea and land to make proselytes. Proselytism appears differently prior to and after the exile.

Pre-exilic proselytism

The concept of proselytism originates in the Old Testament and is tied to the Hebrew word, *ger*, meaning a foreigner or sojourner. In Ezekiel 14:7, the New American Standard Bible translates this word as 'immigrant'. Such immigrants would 'attach themselves to the house of Jacob' (Is. 14:1). This word 'ger' is translated in the LXX as 'proselyte'.

In the book of Genesis the notion

of proselytism appears (Gen. 15:13; 23:4). Early on, the Lord God declared to Abraham that his descendants would be enslaved 'strangers' or proselytes in the foreign land of Egypt (Gen. 15:13). In fact, due to the Israelites' own personal experience as strangers, they were able to empathize with foreigners in their own land (Ex. 23:9). Here, the term applied initially to both Israelites and non-Israelites. In his intensive study of the proselyte Richard DeRidder Based explains: 'The rabbis taught that Abraham was the first proselyte, and that he made converts and brought them under the wings of the Shekinah',⁷ and that the 'persons whom Abraham and Sarah had gotten in Haran (Gen. 12:5) were said to be people whom they had converted from idolatry'.⁸

Biblically, Israel had specific obligations towards the *ger*. First, God had warned it several times to 'not wrong' or 'oppress' them (Ex. 22:21; Deut. 24:14; Jer. 7:6; 22:3; Zech. 7:10) nor to turn them aside (Mal. 3:5). Unfortunately, the rulers of Israel violated this at certain times (Ezek. 22:7, 29). On the contrary, they were to treat them according to Leviticus 19:34: (T)he 'stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself ' They were to provide for the proselytes by permitting them to glean from the fruits of their fields (Lev. 19:10), by giving them food and clothing (Deut.

6 Cecil Robeck, 'Mission and the Issue of Proselytism,' *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 20 (January 1996), p. 2.

7 Richard R. DeRidder, *Discipling the Nations* (n.p.: J.H. Kok Co., 1971; reprint: Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 26.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 27.

10:18-19), and even part of their tithes (Deut. 26:12). Concerning worship, they were not to be hindered if they worshipped the true God of Israel (Num. 15:14). The *ger* were considered to be among the needy strata of society along with orphans and widows (Deut. 14:29).

Not only were there obligations on the part of Israel towards the proselyte, but stipulations were made for these converts as well. Regarding worship, they were obligated just as were the Israelites. For instance, they were to observe the Feast of the Unleavened Bread (Ex. 12:19), the Feast of Weeks (Deut. 16: 10-11), the Sabbath (Ex. 20:10; Deut. 5:14), and the day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29-30). They were to stay clear of false worship by not offering sacrifices to pagan gods (Lev. 20:2) and were warned against blasphemy against Yahweh (Lev. 24:16; Num. 15:30). Because they had attached themselves to the house of Jacob (Is. 14:1), they were to fulfill their spiritual obligations to the Lord just as were the Jewish faithful.

The *ger* had many of the same rights as the native Israelites, including access to the cities of refuge (Num. 35:15) and to a just trial (Deut. 1:16; 24:17; 27:19). Most importantly, they were permitted to learn from and fear the Lord (Deut. 31:12) and to enter into the covenant with him just as were the naturally born Israelites (Deut. 29:11-12).

Beyond the period of the patriarchs and the exodus, the *ger* are seen participating in the worship of the true Lord with the nation of Israel

(Jos. 8:33-35; 2 Chr. 30:25). In referring to the building of the Temple, it is implied that foreigners were also engaged in its construction (1 Chr. 22:2).

In general, the expression *ger* in the Old Testament identifies those who did not actually have Jewish blood. They were outsiders who had come on their own initiative into the confines of Judaism and who had aligned themselves with Israel and its faith in the true living God. In other words, there was a type of internal proselytism taking place as outsiders were coming into the midst of Israel.

The expression 'proselyte' had both religious and sociological connotations. It was a term used to describe the assimilation of the foreigner into the Semitic community, that is, to identify a resident alien within the boundaries of Israel (Ex. 12:49; Deut. 5:14; 31:12). But because the foreigner had to worship the God of Israel, it is impossible to separate the political and cultural spheres from the religious.

Israelites were to be the people of God. In Exodus 19:15-16, God confirms to the nation the nature of the life he would have Israel live in these words: 'And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' This expression calls attention to the universal priestly status of Israel and refers to Israel, as being set apart for God's possession and service. 'It is here that Israel's missionary role became explicit . . . The whole nation was to function on behalf of the kingdom of God in a mediatorial

role in relation to the nations.⁹ Israel was to play a priestly role in the midst of the peoples of the world. Israel would become the recipient of God's mercy and justice, and in turn, would attempt to live as the people of God, demonstrating his grace, mercy, justice, and liberating power. 'As the priest is a mediator between God and man, so Israel was called to be the vehicle of the knowledge and salvation of God to the nations of the earth.'¹⁰ Thus, the reality of being 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' would also have its effect on the proselytes, those living within the nation of Israel.

At Sinai the Lord God had laid down basic legislation regarding the proselyte, which indeed related to the fulfilment of mission to the world. DeRidder states that 'when the *ger* assumed all the group obligations—ethnic, social, and religious—the proselyte became a full-fledged member of the congregation of Israel and the descendants were legally indistinguishable from other Israelites. In Joshua 8:33 the *ger* is described as being 'part of Israel'.¹¹

Some would say that the translation 'stranger' for the Hebrew *ger* is an unfortunate one because the proselyte 'was a guest, a resident alien, under the protection of the law

of the land'.¹² When foreigners fully accepted the true faith of Israel, they became in essence Israelites and had the same privileges, rights, and commitments as native Israelites. The proselyte was considered to be of the true faith, participating in the covenant promises of the Lord. The non-Israelites could share in salvation through obedience of faith in God just as the Israelites did. Becoming a proselyte was an act of conversion.

Although the term 'proselyte' does not occur in reference to the Moabite Ruth, it is evident that the notion of conversion occurs. Ruth returns to Judah with her mother-in-law Naomi and meets Boaz. Taking an interest in her work in the fields and her plight, he said to her: 'May the Lord reward your work, and your wages be full from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge' (Ruth 2:12). The latter part of the phrase is most likely a reference to Ruth when she committed herself to Yahweh, abandoning Chemosh, the god of the Moabites. She sought protection and comfort from God.¹³ Not only was she looking to the Lord as her protector but in seeking refuge she was identifying herself with Israel. In essence, she was converting to Judaism.

According to 2 Kgs. 5:15-19 Naaman, a foreigner, was a Syrian convert to the worship of Israel's true

9 Walter G. Kaiser, 'Israel's Missionary Call', in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, ed. Ralph Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library and Carlisle, United Kingdom: Paternoster, 1999, 3rd edition), p. 13.

10 Keil, C. F. and F. Delitzsch, 'The Pentateuch', in *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 98.

11 DeRidder, *Discipling the Nations*, p. 44.

12 DeRidder, *Discipling the Nations*, p. 46.

13 Daniel I. Block, 'Judges, Ruth', in *The New American Commentary*, E. Ray Clendenen, vol. 6, (Nashville: TN: Broadman and Holman, 1999), p. 664.

God. The term *ger* is used also to express the pilgrimage of the faithful in 1 Chronicles 29:15 and Psalms 39:12; 119:19. These proselytes were not gathered by any missionary zeal on the part of Israel. Rather, they, themselves, approached Israel and were seeking the one true God.

Earlier in the history of Israel, thousands of foreigners came to Israel on their own initiative. Prior to the exile, great numbers of aliens joined their ranks. Later on, according to the census of Solomon, foreigners in Israel's midst numbered 153,600 (2 Chr. 2:17). The *ger* was looked upon as more or less a permanent resident of Israel and basically accepted in the society.

Examination of the lives of the prophets leads one to conclude that they did not go forth and make proselytes. The message of the prophet varied. Sometimes it was disciplinary in nature; at other times it concerned the future. In reality, 'the central concern of the prophets was to communicate to Israel what it meant to be Israel'.¹⁴ It was the ministry of the prophet to remind the nation of her election, an election that has a testimony among the other nations, for her choosing was not for personal privilege but for service.

When the nation did not heed her responsibilities the Lord God would raise up his prophetic messenger. The prophets attempted to call the nation back to her covenant, back to being a 'kingdom of priests and a holy nation'. Why? Their ministry

was a witness to and emphasized the fact that Israel's mission in the world was to bring the nations to the knowledge of the true God. The prophets, for the most part, directed their ministries to the nation of Israel itself. However, a few of the primarily pre-exilic prophets, Obadiah, Jonah, and Nahum, headed toward the non-Israelite nations to proclaim God's message. But on the whole the prophet focused on the nation of Israel.

Israel was not, for the most part, called to cross national boundaries to make proselytes, but she was to be a blessing to the world of nations. Dr. George Peters states Israel's responsibility in the following manner: 'Israel, by living a life in the presence and fear of the Lord, was to experience the fullness of the blessings of God. In this way they were to startle the nations to attention, arouse their inquiry, and draw them like a magnet to Jerusalem and to the Lord.'¹⁵ Foreigners would come to Israel and conversion to the faith of Israel would occur, resulting in proselytes.

Proselytism was a natural consequence of Israel's being a light to the nations. The *ger* referred to the individual who would come voluntarily to Israel, adopt its religion, and become Yahweh's worshiper. They were in essence converts to Judaism, having joined themselves to the Lord God from other nations. To be completely incorporated into religious union with God's people and become a proselyte, they had to be circum-

14 W. Bruggemann, *Tradition for Crisis* (Richmond: John Knox, 1968), p. 25.

15 George Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago: Moody, 1975), p. 21.

cised. DeRidder comments: 'A careful reading of the Old Testament legislation concerning circumcision leads to the conclusion that this rite was intended to mean the incorporation of the person into a special relationship to God.'¹⁶ In essence this indicated entrance into the redemptive covenant of God. So, in a real sense, a religious meaning was attached to the Old Testament term 'proselyte.'

The fact that foreigners came into the fold of Israel is interesting because, with the major exception of a few minor prophets, Jonah being one, we do not find the mission of crossing geographical and cultural barriers to take the message of Yahweh to those who know nothing about the Lord God. However, the Old Testament does not ignore this issue. The concept of reaching out to other nations is inherent in its revelation for the concept of universality in reference to salvation pervades the entire Old Testament. God the Father manifests his missionary nature in the Old Testament.

Dr. George Peters very clearly states: 'The Old Testament does not contain missions; it is itself "missions" in the world. Like a lonely voice in the wilderness the Old Testament boldly proclaims revelational, ethical, monotheism in protest to Greek, Egyptian, and early Indian heathenism—the multitudinous systems of surrounding polytheism and incipient philosophical Eastern monism.'¹⁷ Johannes Blauw also

declares that 'long before the missionary movement as an act of witness of the Christian Church started, Israel itself was engaged in missionary work'.¹⁸

Post-exilic proselytism

The true sense of the word 'proselyte' took on the notion of convert later on, especially during the Babylonian exile. It was with the Exile that the attitude and outlook of Israel undertook a drastic change. Judaism began to take on a more centripetal sense, an aggressive missionary spirit during the post-exilic period.

With the deportations, Jews could be found scattered throughout the Persian empire. After the sixth century B.C. most of the Israelites lived outside of Palestine. Assyria, Babylonia, and Egypt became homes to many of the Jews. As time passed, it has been estimated that one-third of the population of Alexandria was Jewish. All commercial centres in Asia Minor, Macedonia, Greece, or the Aegean area had Jewish residents.¹⁹ J. Klausner maintains that the major portion of the three million Jews living in the Diaspora were proselytes.²⁰ Wherever the Jews went they took with them their monotheistic faith. It was during this postexilic time that many non-Israelites were drawn to the Jewish

18 Johannes Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), p. 54.

19 C. L. Feinberg, 'Proselyte', in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney, vol. 4, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), p. 906.

20 Cited by Frederick W. Danker, 'Proselyte, Proselytism', in *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Everett F. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 1975), p. 426.

16 DeRidder, *Discipling the Nations*, p. 29.

17 Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions*, p. 129.

faith and assimilated into it. In other words, proselytism was taking place outside of Israel's geographical borders—an external proselytism was prominent.

It was really during the Inter-Testamental period that the term 'prose-lyte' took on a new meaning. An intensive missionary movement began in the Hellenistic Jewish Diaspora. In time proselytism became quite common. Many Jews aggressively propagated Judaism. The use of the Greek language in the LXX made it easier to proselytize the Greeks.

The desire to proselytize did not stop with the Greeks, but continued well into the Roman world. Before the birth of Christ, many of the Jews settled in Rome and were so intense in their zeal to proselytize that the Roman authorities expelled many of their leaders. Some showed their discontent with this proselytizing spirit. Horace wrote: 'If you won't come willingly, we shall act like the Jews and force you to.'²¹ Exposing some of the cruel side of proselytism, the Jewish historian, Josephus, maintains that Ituraeans were forced to convert to Judaism by Aristobulus²² and that a Roman centurion was forced to accept circumcision in order to live.²³ Prior to Christianity, Judaism had made abundant prose-

lytes. In almost every corner of the biblical world Jewish customs and moral virtues were adhered to by its followers, namely, Jewish proselytes. In summary, the activity of direct proselytism at this time is well attested. Some have summarized it in the following manner:

With the conquests of Alexander, the wars between Egypt and Syria, the struggle under the Maccabees, the expansion of the Roman empire, the Jews became more widely known, and their power to proselytize increased. They had suffered for their religion in the persecution of Antiochus, and the spirit of martyrdom was followed naturally by propagandism. Their monotheism was rigid and unbending. Scattered through the East and West, a marvel and a portent, wondered at and alternatively, attracting and repelling, they presented, in an age of shattered creeds and corroding doubts, the spectacle of faith, not least a dogma, which remained unshaken.²⁴

In the New Testament era, there is considerable evidence that the activity of proselytism was carried out among the Gentiles in the early part of the first century. For instance, the Jews prepared extensive literature to win over converts to Judaism.

The Greek New Testament uses the word for proselyte, *proselutos*, only four times (Mt. 23:15; Acts 2:10; 6:5; 13:43). In three of the four occurrences it maintains a neutral or positive connotation.

In the Judaism of Palestine, the *ger* always referred to the pagan who made the conversion from paganism to Judaism. Male proselyte candidates were required to undergo circumcision, a purifying bath, and an offering of sacrifice in the Temple at

²¹ Quoted by DeRidder, *Discipling the Nations*, p. 94.

²² Flavius Josephus, *The Life and Works of Flavius Josephus*, trans., William Whiston (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Co., n.d.), article XIII, pp. 9,3.

²³ Cited by John McIntock and James Strong, eds., 'Proselyte', *Cyclopedia Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 1981), p. 659.

²⁴ McIntock and Strong, 'Proselyte,' p. 658.

Jerusalem. Female proselyte candidates submitted to the latter two requirements. Woman proselytes outnumbered men converts.²⁵

Referring to the one negative occurrence in Matthew 23, Jesus makes reference to Palestinian proselytism. He condemns the teachers of the law and the Pharisees by pronouncing seven curses or woes on them (vv. 13-33). The second woe concerns the subject of proselytism. The scribes and Pharisees were winning non-Israelites to their own position. The New Testament scholar D. A. Carson believes that the 'converts in view . . . are not converts to Judaism but to Pharisaism'.²⁶ In any case, they were scouring the empire to make converts. It is interesting to see that Jesus did not criticize nor condemn them for making proselytes but for making them 'sons of hell'. Carson adds that 'the Pharisees' teaching locked them into a theological frame that left no room for Jesus the Messiah and therefore no possibility of entering the messianic kingdom'.²⁷ Jesus did condemn the fact that their proselytizing efforts were leading people to eternal damnation. The word 'proselyte', and this is important, is never employed in reference to a convert to Christ.

Having dealt with the negative use in Matthew, let us look at its employment in the book of Acts as it reveals

some additional information regarding the proselyte. Acts 2:10 shows that proselytes who had come from geographical boundaries beyond Jerusalem made up part of the apostle Peter's audience at Pentecost. In using the expression 'Jews and proselytes' Luke is distinguishing between the national group of Jews and non-birth Jews. He called for them to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Because they continued to go to the Temple and synagogue after their conversion (2:46; 3:1; 14:1; 21:26), Heide-man, says that 'there is no indication that they are expected to change their community identity'.²⁸ However, this is understandable because the need for the true church to distinguish itself from Judaism had not yet arisen.

Acts 6:5 speaks of 'Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch'. He was not born a Jew but a pagan. He was appointed as one of the original deacons in the early church. Philip baptized an Ethiopian proselyte or God-fearer who was travelling to Jerusalem to worship (Acts 8:27-39). Many of the proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, committing their lives to the gospel (Acts 13:43). These devout Jewish converts left Judaism to follow the ways of Jesus Christ.

The term 'proselyte' does not occur in the writings of Paul. However, he does desire that his own Jewish brethren experience true salvation through the Messiah, Jesus

25 F.F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1972), pp. 147, 156.

26 D. A. Carson, 'Matthew', in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. F. E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), p. 478.

27 Carson, 'Matthew,' p. 479.

28 Eugene P. Heideman, 'Proselytism, Mission, and the Bible,' *The International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 20 (January 1996) p. 11.

Christ. He states, 'My heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation' (Rom. 10:1). Although proselytism does not occur in the ministry of Paul, converts to Christ do occur. Multitudes of Jews converted to Christ during Paul's ministry.

In the New Testament, the term 'proselytism' never occurs in reference to Christianity. Neither Paul nor the other apostles viewed their ministry of evangelism and church planting as proselytism. Their activity in proclaiming the gospel was never done in order to build their own kingdom. They had no desire to enlarge their borders nor increase their numbers for their own sake. Paul says that his ministry did not come 'from error or impurity or by way of deceit' (I Thess. 2:3). Paul did want to proclaim the gospel and see the kingdom of God advance. His motive was to give to all the world the great redemptive truths of the gospel which is rooted in Jesus Christ. This was his passion and his plea, that East and West would be evangelized, not proselytized.

So the new followers of Christ were not considered to be proselytized but evangelized, even though they actually changed religious commitment from Judaism to Christ. Many of these individuals were actually Jewish proselytes who became followers of Christ. So, religious change was quite common in the New Testament era, from paganism to Judaism, and to Christianity.

In addition, the issue of people changing from one branch of Christianity to another was non-existent.

The call to conversion in the New Testament is, of course, a call to follow Jesus Christ. Some individuals would, therefore, say that it is not a call to change one's Christian community. However, it is also evident that other Christian communities did not exist at that period of time.

In Judaism, the proselytism of Gentiles continued late into the first century A.D. Some Jewish Christians still attended the Synagogues until as late as 80-90 A.D. when it became unbearable for them to do so. Jewish anti-Christian propaganda attempted to exclude Christian participation in worship at the synagogue.²⁹

Proselytism was looked upon positively by Judaism. Rabbis were often zealous for converts. The very large number of favourable references in the Talmud and Mishnah towards the true proselytes shows how eager the Jews were to acquire them.³⁰ In fact, some 'rabbis were provoked when they saw a country or province that had produced few proselytes.'³¹ It may be concluded that many rabbis approved of proselytizing and encouraged it. They even used the patriarchs and other great historical figures as examples to follow in their making of proselytes.³²

Some contend that the proselytizing efforts by the Jews continued

29 DeRidder, *Discipling the Nations*, 73, citing the work of James W. Parks, *The Conflict of the Church and Synagogue* (London: The Sociono Press, 1961 and Cleveland and New York: World Publishing Co., 1961), pp. 61-79.

30 DeRidder, *Discipling the Nations*, p. 93.

31 William G. Braude, *Jewish Proselytizing in the First Five Centuries in the Common Era* (Providence: Brown University, 1940), pp. 18-19.

32 DeRidder, *Discipling the Nations*, p. 101.

even after 478 A.D. when the Theodosian Code was published, which threatened those who were circumcised with the death penalty.³³ Eventually Roman laws were created to abort the proselytizing efforts of Jews towards Gentiles. Some Jews were even exiled from Rome for proselytizing activities.³⁴

Distinguishing proselytism from evangelism

Some would say that proselytism basically means the changing from one religion to another, like moving from Buddhism to Christianity. More related to this paper, the concern is for change of church affiliation, from one major Christian denomination to another, such as the change from Eastern Orthodoxy or Roman Catholicism to a protestant denomination. Some church leaders even within Protestantism feel that 'proselytism' occurs when an individual moves from one Protestant denomination to another or even from one church to another within the same denomination. However, the major problem today regarding 'proselytes' concerns moving from one major religion to another or from one major Christian religion to another Christian religion.

Within Christian circles the label 'proselytism' generally arises when one group does not approve of the

mission activities of another, especially when this group is losing members or the potential exists for this to occur. What theologically conservative and evangelical movements consider to be legitimate evangelism, the traditional and established churches may consider proselytism. Some religious groups define proselytism in such a way that practically any legitimate religious activity assumed by another religious group is called proselytism, especially if this group 'puts their hands into the basket of another'.

Christian perspectives on proselytism

How do Christian groups and denominations view proselytism? A few examples will suffice in order to gain an understanding of feelings and attitudes towards those who proselytize.

- The World Council of Churches feels that proselytism is encouraging Christians who belong to one church to change to another denomination through means that are in opposition to Christian love, which are in violation of freedom and dignity, and which decrease trust in the Christian witness of the church.³⁵
- The Middle East Council of Churches which is made up of Oriental Orthodox, Eastern Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant say that proselytism occurs when an attempt is made to attract church members from a particular church, which alienates the individual from his or her church of origin.³⁶ The General Secretary of the Holy Synod,

³³ Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel, Etude sur les relations entre Chrétiens et juifs dans l'empire romain (135-425 A.D.)*, (Paris: E. De Boccard, 1948), pp. 315-355; Joachim Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations* (London: SCM press, 1967), pp. 11-12.

³⁴ DeRidder, *Discipling the Nations*, p. 120.

³⁵ World Council of Churches, 'Towards Common Witness', p. 468.

³⁶ 'Proselytism, Sects, and Pastoral Challenges: A Study Document', Fifth General Assembly, July 1989. See paragraphs 6-11.

Ethiopian Orthodox Church, in a letter to the World Council of Churches complained of proselytism going on against his church. He made the accusation that there had been infiltration into his organization, especially through the Sunday School, that the proselyters had attempted to blur the distinction between the Orthodox Church and other Christian groups and that they had attempted to buy converts, giving material inducements through food assistance programs.³⁷

- Vatican II speaks of proselytism when it states, 'The Church strictly forbids that anyone should be forced to accept the faith, or be induced or enticed by unworthy devices; as it likewise strongly defends the right that no one should be frightened away from the faith by unjust persecution.'³⁸
- Evangelical and Roman Catholics together identified proselytism during their dialogue between 1977 and 1984 by stating that it occurs when the motive of the witness and the methods are unworthy as well as when there is an unloving image presented of the other's church community.³⁹

It is clear that proselytism is understood negatively by the above Christian groups and is condemned by almost everybody. To put it in simple terms, proselytism is sheep-stealing in which unethical methods are used to attempt to encourage religious people to change their Christian affiliation and possibly their religious convictions. Proselytism might be

labelled 'evangelistic malpractice.'⁴⁰ However, are proselytism and evangelism to be considered synonyms? Is proselytism the same as evangelism? Is there a distinction between the two?

The Distinction

Although the line of demarcation between the two may not be evident to some church leaders, there is a clear distinction between them. The table opposite attempts to distinguish between the two.

To explain briefly, the proselytizer boldly presents his religious institution or organization, whereas the evangelist faithfully presents the gospel as defined by the Word of God. Those who carry out activities of proselytism carry the message of the institutional church, and not necessarily of the gospel. Although the church is essential and is the body of Christ, it is not the gospel message. Faith is not to be placed in the church but in Christ. The proselytizer desires to build his own kingdom rather than the kingdom of God. It is his desire to expand the religious institution, rather than proclaim the message of the death and resurrection of Christ. He, himself is the builder of his church, whereas the true builder of the church is Jesus Christ. It is he who said to Peter, 'I will build my church' (Matt. 16:18) The church belongs to Christ, not to man. It is 'his' church not ours.

37 Fung, *Evangelistically Yours*, pp. 189-193.

38 Austin P. Flannery, ed., *Documents of Vatican II*, 'Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, *Ad Gentes Divinitis*', (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), chapter 2, section 13, p. 828.

39 'L'Eglise dans le Monde: Dialogue entre catholiques et évangélique sur la mission', *La Documentation Catholique*, 1932 (18 January 1987), p. 119. See also *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society of Pentecostal Studies*, 12 (1990), pp. 77-141.

40 This is a term employed by Natan Lerner, 'Proselytism, Change of Religion, and International Human Rights,' *Emory International Law Review* 12 (Winter 1998) p. 495.

DESCRIPTION	PROSELYTISM	EVANGELISM
Its authority	none	Scripture
Its message	the church, religious denomination or organization	the gospel
Its kingdom	human	divine
Its builder	man	Jesus Christ
Its power	human effort	Holy Spirit
Its method	manipulative, coercive	loving, caring, and concerned
Its motive	ego-centred motivation: institutional or personal	God-centred: honour and glory of God
Its result	larger religious institution	authentic followers of Jesus Christ
Its language	uncharitable	speaks the truth in love
Its love	false	authentic
Its invitation	to the institution	to follow Jesus Christ in discipleship

This notion is an important one. Pastor-teacher John MacArthur states that ‘no leader in Christ’s church should have the desire to build it himself. Christ declared that He alone builds the church, and no matter how well intentioned he may be, anyone else who attempts to build it is competing with, not serving, the Lord.’⁴¹ The power behind the building of the church is clearly the Holy Spirit. Man can, of course, build a church through his own cleverness, but will it be a divine entity? It is certainly possible through perseverance, persuasiveness, zeal and diligent effort to make converts and build a religious organization, even a church. However, this does not guarantee that the result is a divine entity. ‘Human effort can produce only human results. God alone can produce divine results.’⁴²

In authentic evangelism the communication of the gospel is entirely void of any coercive methods. Mark Elliott, co-editor of the *East-West Church and Ministry Report*, testifies to having attended a church meeting in Moscow where the participants, who were elderly women, received meal tickets without cost upon their attendance at the meeting.⁴³ To avoid proselytism finding a good solution to meeting people’s physical and spiritual needs without being manipulative is part of the challenge of effective and God-honouring gospel communication.

In proselytism, one’s motive is institutional and in many ways, personal. Desire to expand a church or religious organization can be a glorious experience, but often it is done for one’s own glory. The invitation must be for the glory of God. The

41 John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 16-23* (Chicago: Moody, 1988), p. 30.

42 MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 16-23*, p. 30.

43 Mark Elliott, ‘Evangelism and Proselytism in Russia: Synonyms or Antonyms?’, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 25 (April 2001), p. 73.

goal is not to build a larger organization but to make disciples of Jesus Christ who will in turn become effective members of the local church. Personal motives have no place in true biblical evangelism. Proselytism, no. Evangelism, yes.

In proselytism, one's language is uncharitable. I Peter 3:15 exhorts us to sanctify the Lord in our hearts, always being ready to make a defence to every one who asks us to give an account for the hope that is in us, 'yet with gentleness and reverence'. In evangelism, our speech is to be God glorifying and immersed in love. But it is to be truth in love.

If the messenger of the gospel truly loves the hearer and they know it, he or she can tell them anything! Sensing a personal spiritual need on the part of a religiously minded friend, yet an unbeliever, I attempted to share the gospel with him, but suspicious of my motives—having in mind possible proselytizing motives on my part—he asked me in an irritated manner: 'Why are you telling me these things?' I responded: 'It is because I am concerned for you and your relationship with God.' Upon his request, we continued our conversation.

Proselytism prohibited but evangelism pursued

Biblically, all Christians have the right to evangelize, but not to proselytize. Proselytism is not to be identified with evangelistic activity. Neither Jesus, Paul, nor the apostles refer to their missionary efforts as proselytism. Yet, they aggressively evangelized by proclaiming the

gospel. Proselytism and evangelism are not the same. Of course, even evangelism is morally unacceptable to many people, especially in our theologically, pluralistic world. It will continue to be unacceptable as long as God's people are trying to be obedient to him. Whether accused of proselytism or not, the Christian is responsible for evangelizing those who do not follow Jesus Christ, even those who claim the name Christian, but who are truly non-authentic in their faith, which is the case for many nominal Christians—no matter what part of Christianity they call home. The former as well as the latter must be evangelized. Unfortunately, so many in our world today, even those professing the Christian faith, have little sense of what it means to be a true Christian.

Fortunately, many nominal Christians have become authentic in their faith through the witness of other sincere and faithful Christians. Although these marginal believers had believed they were true Christians, they discovered that they were merely nominal in their beliefs, having never grasped the implications of the gospel in reference to sin and the death and resurrection of Christ. Upon their discovery and total commitment to follow Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, some left their own Christian church denomination to join another, while others returned to it with a new vigour and a transformed, yet authentic faith in Christ.

While modern-day proselytism is never encouraged in Scripture, evangelism is. Although proselytism

should be prohibited, evangelism should be pursued for several reasons.

To follow the Lord Jesus Christ in obedience

The Christian church cannot ignore the commands of the Lord to preach and make disciples of all the nations (Mt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15). The church is missionary by nature and is the agent of evangelism. It is imperative that all Christians and churches be in obedience to the Lord. Part of that obedience involves evangelism, the proclamation of the gospel. Vatican II is in accordance with this. *Lumen Gentium* states that 'the church has received the solemn command of Christ from the apostles, and she must fulfill it to the very ends of the earth'.⁴⁴ The active, verbal witness of the church is a ministry of love towards humanity because it has the potential to move people from eternal darkness to eternal light. This certainly also applies to nominal Christians who are not authentic in their faith.

To follow the ministry of the Holy Spirit

To neglect the evangelization of professing Christians who truly have no authentic faith in Christ would, in essence, deny the leading of the Spirit of God, as it is he who creates and energizes the church to evangelize. It was the Holy Spirit who directed the apostle Paul to do missionary work

(Acts 9:17; 16:6), who led Peter to evangelize the religious Cornelius (Acts 10:45ff), and the Antioch church to outreach (Acts 13:2). The book of Acts shows that it is the Holy Spirit who leads the church beyond its own barriers to reach the Samaritans (Acts 8), god-fearers (Acts 10), and Gentiles (Acts 13). Because the true believer is indwelt by the Spirit of God, who has in part a missionary nature, it is normal that Christians share their faith with others. The Holy Spirit produces an inner compulsion and desire to share the good news of Jesus Christ, regardless of religious or church affiliation.

To give full dignity to human beings

Because the true witness for Jesus Christ respects all of God's human creation, who are created in his image, it is only natural to give full dignity to fellow humans and to love them. Knowing that there is nothing more destructive to human dignity than sin what could be more important than sharing the gospel with them? Stephen Neill once said that 'No man is fully human unless he has come to know God and himself in the searchlight of Jesus Christ.' True humanization comes only through personal faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

For such a reason true evangelization should not be hindered. Additionally, to impede the evangelization of those non-committed to the faith, whether, mainline or Evangelical Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, or Anglican, actually violates several international legal declarations;

⁴⁴ Flannery, *Documents of Vatican II, Lumen Gentium*, chapter 2, section 17, 368.

namely, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); The European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1950); The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966); and The Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (1981).⁴⁵

In particular, article two of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly December 10, 1948, affirms that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms with respect to religion. Article eighteen states: 'Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.'⁴⁶ Freedom of expression is of extreme importance and is a human right. Of course, these protections require ethical procedures in gospel communications whereby all the hearer's rights and dignity are upheld. To share the gospel is the best thing that a believer can do for a non-follower of Jesus Christ.

45 Lerner, 'Proselytism, Change of Religion, and International Human Rights', pp. 497-498, 500, 519, 542.

46 A copy of the essential elements pertaining to religious freedom can be viewed in the work of James E. Wood, 'Religious Liberty in Ecumenical and International Perspective,' *A Journal of Church and State* 10 (Autumn 1968), p. 427.

To provide clear biblical truth

Evangelism is necessary for the sake of the truth. Although many people in our modern world tend to be pluralistic and postmodern in their thinking, denying absolute truth, Scripture clearly says that Jesus is the truth (Jn. 14:6); and Paul had the 'truth of the gospel' (Gal. 2:5). Humans can be truth seeking beings. Vatican II maintains that people are

impelled by their nature and bound by a moral obligation to seek the truth, especially religious truth. They are also bound to adhere to the truth once they come to know it and direct their whole lives in accordance with the demands of the truth. . . . everybody has the duty and consequently the right to seek the truth in religious matters so that, through the use of appropriate means, he may prudently form judgments of conscience which are sincere and true.⁴⁷

In many cases, the seeker of the truth will never hear the truth if it were not for a gospel messenger. In fact, without God-honouring evangelism, individuals would be deprived of hearing the truth, of exchanging their errant thoughts for the truth. If personal religious ideas and thoughts are not explored and integrated into one's personal world-view and life, they often become nothing more than dead theology. Exchanging ideas renews and revitalizes the personal lives of people when based on the truth. Clear biblical truth, of course, stimulates thought and discussion, keeping professing Christian from an irrelevant spirituality. The benefits are for the hearer and

47 Flannery, *Documents of Vatican II, Dignitatis Humanae*, sections 2 and 3, 801.

not the messenger. Proselytizing is never advantageous for the hearer because it has its roots in egotism, represents deception and denies the truth principle. On the other hand, evangelism is rooted in the true and eternal gospel.

To purify and renew the church

Evangelism often has a purifying effect on the church. It is necessary if dead and unresponsive churches are going to be renewed and revitalized. The evangelism of nominal and indifferent Christians often causes these churches to re-examine themselves, doctrinally, structurally, and methodologically. The evangelistic zeal of committed Christians plays a prophetic role, often within their own particular Christian Church.

Summary and conclusion

In reference to nominal Christians, which exist in all Christian denominations, whether Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican, Protestant—mainline and evangelical—heeding the challenge of evangelism is important. The evangelism of nominal Christians should be taken seriously by all Christian churches. They must be challenged and encouraged to fully commit themselves to Jesus Christ. The witness of the gospel is valid not only to non-Christians, but to professing Christians who have not really grasped the implications of the gospel message for themselves.

John Stott declares that 'evangelism must not be defined in terms of the recipients of the gospel'.⁴⁸ In oth-

er words, all who are non-authentic in the Christian faith, having failed to put their faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ, for salvation are in need of evangelism and conversion. Whether one is non-religious or belongs to a Christian denomination is of little consequence.

Thus, evangelism is mandatory for the church to have any transformative character. This is especially true if individuals are not hearing or have not heard the gospel message and its implications within their particular Christian denomination. Due to a message devoid of the true gospel, it is unfortunate that the evangelism of 'Christians' is sometimes necessary.

If evangelism is carried out, the accusation of proselytism will surely arise, but the command of Christ to make disciples of all nations must take precedence. Even if Jesus Christ were physically present today, it is quite probable that he too would also be accused of proselytism.

⁴⁸ John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (London: Falcon, 1975), p. 38.

Incarnation

*Incarnation was required,
By the utter inconceivability of
God.*

*And Jesus, the man who
brought God down to earth,
Spanned the conceptual chasm
In a baby's cry.*

by Garry Harris, South Australia
(used with permission)

Being 'Under the Law' in Galatians

In-Gyu Hong

Keywords: Sin, curse, slavery, salvation history, freedom, redemption, new life,

Introduction

The phrase 'under the law' is of considerable importance in Pauline theology and especially in the letter to the Galatians, where it appears five times (3:23; 4:4; 4:5; 4:21; 5:18). Being 'under the law' is parallel to being 'under sin' (3:22), 'under a pedagogue' (3:25), 'under guardians and stewards' (4:2), and 'under the *stoicheia* of the world' (4:3). This phrase primarily refers to the existence of Jews before the coming of faith (3:23-25).¹ Paul also relates the existence under the law to subjection to the flesh which stands in opposition to the Spirit (5:16-18). However, with the coming of Christ the

bondage of the law was brought to an end (3:25).

Now the question is: what is the nature of the Jewish existence 'under the law'? The majority of interpreters nowadays argue that that existence means a situation under the guardianship or supervision of the law, considering the basic functions of pedagogue (3:25) and guardian and steward (4:2) in the Graeco-Roman world. For them, the Jewish situation is a state of spiritual minority before the arrival of spiritual

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1 Many interpreters think that the switch from 'we' in 3:23-25 to 'you' in 3:26-29 is a switch from discussion of the Jewish situation to discussion of the Gentile situation. L.L. Belleville, "'Under Law': Structural Analysis and the Pauline Concept of Law in Galatians 3.21-4.11", *JSNT* 26 (1986), pp. 69-70; T.L. Donaldson, 'The "Curse of the Law" and the Inclusion of the Gentiles: Galatians 3.13-14', *NTS* 32 (1986), pp. 94-112; J.D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 137-43.

maturity.² Does this view correctly represent what Paul really intends by the phrase 'under the law' in Galatians? In my opinion, it fails to grasp Paul's point correctly.

In setting out a better interpretation in this article, I will first of all discuss the function of the law in the history of redemption in 3:15-22, especially 3:19, then the meaning of being 'under the law', and lastly freedom from the slavery of the law. I shall argue that in view of the statements in 3.10, 13 and 4.4-5 'under the law' in Galatians means 'under the curse of the law'.

The body of Galatians except for the prescript (1:1-5) and postscript (6:11-18) is divided into four sections: proposition (1:6-10), narration (1:11-2:21), argument (3:1-4:31), and exhortation (5:1-6:10). The phrase 'under the law' occurs four times in the second argument (3:23; 4:4, 5, 21) and once in the second exhortation (5:18).

The argumentative section contains two basic points: no one is justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Christ (3:1-14); the believers

are no longer slaves under the law but sons of God (3:23-4:7; 4:21-31). The pericope 3:15-22 which treats the salvation-historical function of the law in relation to the promise is a transitional excursus. The pericope 4:8-20 is an appeal, anticipating the exhortative section in 5:1-6:10. The exhortative section based on the argumentative section also includes two exhortations: the believers should not accept circumcision for justification, but live by faith (5:1-12); the believers should not subject themselves to the flesh, but walk by the Spirit (5:13-6:10).³

1. The Function of the Law

Against his opponents' contention that the Gentile Galatians should receive circumcision and the law in order to inherit the promise made to Abraham, Paul argues that Abraham by faith accepted the promise and that the Galatians by faith received the Spirit which was the actual fulfilment of the promise of Abraham (Gal. 3:1-14).⁴ He then goes on to assert that the inheritance is not based on the law (3:18). For Paul the law, which came much later, had no power to invalidate the promise (3:17). The law was not contrary to the promise (3:21); rather, it prepared the way for its fulfilment. The law was originally given as the obligation of the Sinai covenant. Yet it was broken and thus pronounced a curse upon those who transgressed

2 R. Longenecker, 'The Pedagogical Nature of the Law in Galatians 3:19-4:7', *JETS* 25 (1982), pp. 53-61; Belleville, 'Under Law', pp. 59-71; D.J. Lull, "'The Law Was Our Pedagogue': A Study in Galatians 3:19-25", *JBL* 105 (1986), pp. 481-98; N.H. Young, 'Paidagōgos: The Social Setting of a Pauline Metaphor', *NouT* 29 (1987), pp. 150-76; T.D. Gordon, 'A Note on paidagōgos in Galatians 3.24-25', *NTS* 35 (1989), pp. 150-54; R. Longenecker, *Galatians* (WBC; Dallas: Word Books, 1990), pp. 145-50; M.A. Kruger, 'Law and Promise in Galatians', *Neotestamentica* 26 (1992), pp. 320-21, 324; F.J. Matera, *Galatians* (SPS; Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992), pp. 136-40; J.D.G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (BNTC; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993), pp. 196-200; Dunn, *The Theology of Paul*, pp. 137-43.

3 See In-Gyu Hong, *The Law in Galatians* (JSNTS; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), pp. 68-73.

4 See Hong, *The Law in Galatians*, pp. 125-48.

it, particularly Israel. From this curse of the law Christ redeemed them so that the Abrahamic promise was fulfilled (3:13-14). With this fulfilment the law as the covenant obligation gave way. Thus it was temporally limited to the period between the promise and its fulfilment. This period of the law is something like a parenthesis.

At this point Paul raises a question about the purpose of the law in the history of redemption. In Gal. 3:19a he formulates it this way: 'Why (*ti*) the law then?' This question is elliptical. The word *ti* here can be understood as 'why'⁵ or 'what'.⁶ No matter how we take it, the context clearly suggests that the question primarily concerns the function, purpose and significance of the law in the divine plan of salvation, not its nature.

Paul answers the question: 'It was added for the sake of transgressions (*tōn parabaseōn charin prosetethē*)' (3:19b). The verb *prosetethē* refers back to the giving of the law 430 years later than the promise of Abraham (3:17). The prepositional phrase *tōn parabaseōn charin* is not unambiguous, for the *charin* may denote either purpose (1 Tim. 5:14; Tit. 1:5, 11; Jude 16) or reason (1 Jn. 3:12; cf. Lk. 7:47; Eph. 3:1, 14).⁷ If the former is the case, the phrase may mean 'for the purpose of

transgressions', namely to produce transgressions or reveal transgressions. In the second case, it can mean 'because of transgressions', namely to check transgressions.

This latter view agrees with the traditional Jewish understanding of the Torah as a hedge against sin.⁸ Some think along this line.⁹ To my mind, however, it is impossible to interpret *tōn parabaseōn charin* to mean 'because of transgressions' as if these transgressions had taken place without the law, since *parabasis* is a legal term, referring to a concrete act of breaking a promulgated law or an explicit command.¹⁰ The term *parabasis* is not something which is antecedent to, but something which is subsequent to the coming of the law. According to Romans 4:15 and 5:14, there was *hamartia* but no *parabasis* between Adam and Moses because the law had not yet been given.¹¹

The real issue is whether Paul thinks of the law's function as *evoking* transgression or as *revealing* sin as transgression. Many interpreters correctly regard the first option as representing Paul's intention here. In doing so, however, they do not provide sufficient evidence drawn

8 Cf. H.J. Schoeps, *Paul: The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History* (ET; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), pp. 194ff.; T. Laato, *Paulus und das Judentum: Anthropologische Erwägungen* (Abo: Abo Academy, 1991), pp. 83-94.

9 L. Keck, *Paul and his Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), p. 74; Lull, 'The Law Was Our Pedagogue', pp. 482ff.; Kruger, 'Law and Promise in Galatians', pp. 318-21.

10 J. Schneider, *TDNT*, V, pp. 739-40; BAGD, pp. 611-12.

11 Cf. Lull, 'The Law Was Our Pedagogue', p. 484.

5 E.g. RSV; NASB; F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Exeter: Paternoster, 1982), p. 175; Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 137.

6 E.g. H.D. Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), p. 161; Belleville, 'Under Law', p. 55.

7 BAGD, p. 877.

from Galatians itself, but mainly appeal to Romans 5:20.¹² I certainly agree that a close parallel exists between Galatians 3:19 and Romans 5:20. But in my opinion, Galatians alone, especially the immediate context of 3:19b, divulges significant indications to support the first view.

First of all, 3:8-14 states that the promise was made to Abraham long before the law was promulgated, and was fulfilled through the cross of Christ which removed the curse of the law imposed upon Israel owing to their transgressions. This means that when the promise was given, there was no law; when it was fulfilled, however, the law, especially its transgressions, was presupposed. It follows that the law came to help the promise to find fulfilment through Christ by producing transgressions.

Secondly, Paul's forceful denial that the law is against the promise (3:21a-b) can be understood *only* when we presuppose a possible attack by his opponents on his provocative view of the law in 3:19b.¹³ Since the opponents firmly believe that the law and the promise

are compatible, they would immediately ask in reaction to the offensive statement: do you mean, then, that the law contradicts the promise?

Thirdly and lastly, we should note the *enslaving* function of the law. Galatians 3:23 says: '(B)efore faith came, we were confined under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed.' This bondage under the law is described as being equivalent to bondage under sin in 3:22 and bondage under the elemental spirits of the world in 4:3, 8-9.¹⁴ This entirely negative character of the law denotes the role of the law in causing transgressions.

We therefore understand Galatians 3:19b to mean that the law was added for the purpose of *provoking* transgressions. This function of the law is more than one of revealing sin as transgression (cf. Rom. 3:20), though it does include it.¹⁵

In this connection it is worthwhile to consider Romans 5:20a: 'And the law came in that the trespass (*paraptōma*) might increase.' It is not so easy to determine the precise meaning of the term *paraptōma*. In 5:15, 17 and 18 *paraptōma* is used to describe Adam's sin (*parabasis*) in 5:14. This leads many scholars to see *paraptōma* as equivalent to *paraba-*

12 E.g. C.E.B. Cranfield, 'St. Paul and the Law', *SJT* 17 (1964), p. 46; J. Eckert, *Die urchristliche Verkündigung im Streit zwischen Paulus und seinen Gegnern nach dem Galaterbrief* (BU; Regensburg: Pustet, 1971), p. 82; Betz, *Galatians*, p. 165; Bruce, *Galatians*, p. 175; G. Ebeling, *The Truth of the Gospel: An Exposition of Galatians* (ET; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), p. 193; J.L. Martyn, *Galatians* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1997), pp. 354-55.

13 Cf. A.J. Bandstra, *The Law and the Elements of the World: An Exegetical Study in Aspects of Paul's Teaching* (Kampen: Kok, 1964), p. 128; J. Lambrecht, 'The line of Thought in Gal. 2.14b-21', *NTS* 24 (1977-78), p. 492; Betz, *Galatians*, pp. 173-74.

14 See below.

15 Cf. E. Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1921), p. 188; F. Mussner, *Der Galaterbrief* (HTKNT; Freiburg: Herder, 1974), p. 245; R.Y.K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 160; D.B. Wallace, 'Galatians 3:19-20: A *Crux Interpretum* for Paul's View of the Law', *WTJ* 52 (1990), p. 238.

sis.¹⁶ Yet, in 5:20, *paraptōma* is parallel to *hamartia*, which was in the world before the law (5:13). There is, however, no instance in which *paraptōma* shares in the personal use of *hamartia*.¹⁷

All these observations seem to indicate that *paraptōma* has a broader connotation than *parabasis* (a violation of a commandment or a law which did not exist between Adam and Moses¹⁸), but it is not the same as *hamartia*. According to Cranfield, *paraptōma*, being equivalent to *hamartēma* (Rom. 3:25), refers to 'a false step, a going astray (it is cognate with *parapiptein*), and so a misdeed' which disrupted humanity's relationship with God.¹⁹ If this is correct, we can understand Romans 5:20a this way: the law came in to increase sinful deeds which had occurred. This thought is not an exact parallel to that of Galatians 3:19b, but there is no essential difference between the two refer-

ences. They basically concern the same thing: the law was given to intensify the seriousness of the existing sin and to radicalize the crisis of Adamitic human existence (cf. 1 Cor. 15:56; 2 Cor. 3:6, 7, 9).²⁰

Returning to Galatians 3:19b, a question may be raised: how does the law produce transgressions? Unfortunately, in this regard Galatians is silent. If, however, we accept Romans 5:20a as a parallel (not exact but approximate) to Gal. 3:19b, we can find an answer to the question in Romans, since Romans 7:5ff. offers a clarification of the abrupt statement of Romans 5:20a.²¹ Although the assertions of Romans 5:20a and Galatians 3:19b are slightly different, they share one and the same explanation. In Romans 7:5 Paul states that through the law 'passions of sins' were aroused in people who were in the flesh. The 'passions of sins' means passions which express themselves in concrete acts of sin rather than in false striving for self-righteousness, as implied in the plural form of the words 'passions' and 'sins'.²²

16 E.g. C.K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (BNTC; London: A. & C. Black, 1962), p. 113; J. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), pp. 207-208; O. Michel, *Der Brief an die Römer* (KEK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), p. 140; U. Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer (Röm 1-5)* (EKKNT; Zürich: Benzinger Verlag, 1978), p. 322 n. 1070.

17 W. Michaelis, *TDNT*, VI, p. 172 n. 11; cf. H. Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* (WUNT; Tübingen: Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1983), p. 144 n. 81; H. Hübner, *Law in Paul's Thought: A Contribution to the Development of Pauline Theology* (ET; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), p. 80.

18 J.D.G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8* (Dallas: Word, 1988), p. 279.

19 C.E.B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, I (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), p. 284; cf. Michaelis, *TDNT*, VI, p. 172; J.P. Louw and E.A. Nida, et al. (eds.), *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domain*, I (New York: UBS, 1988), 88.297.

20 Thus it is not necessary to assume a theological development from Galatians to Romans in this respect. Cf. Hübner, *Law in Paul's Thought*, pp. 80-1.

21 Cf. J.C. Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), p. 239; K. Snodgrass, 'Spheres of Influence: A Possible Solution to the Problem of Paul and the Law', *JSNT* 32 (1988), p. 104; D. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 348.

22 Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, p. 364; cf. Bandstra, *The Law and Elements of the World*, pp. 127-28; G. Bornkamm, *Paul* (ET; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1975), p. 126; Hübner, *Law in Paul's Thought*, pp. 72ff.; T.F. Morris, 'Law and the Cause of Sin in the Epistle to the Romans', *HeyJ* 28 (1987), pp. 285-87.

The thought is specifically elaborated in Romans 7:8ff. In the absence of the law sin was 'dead', that is, powerless and inactive (at least relatively). When the commandment 'Thou shall not covet' appeared on the stage, however, sin, through this commandment, took occasion to stir up in man coveting of every kind. This account is an obvious allusion to the fall story in Genesis 3, in which the serpent (sin) tempted Adam to eat the forbidden fruit by means of the commandment not to eat it.²³ Notice that the expression 'sin deceived (*eksēpatēsen*) me' in Romans 7:11 is reminiscent of the woman's complaint 'the serpent deceived (*ēpatēsen*, LXX) me' in Genesis 3:13.²⁴ It can be said, therefore, that by providing an operational base for sin to kindle people's sinful passions, the law served (though not directly) to provoke or stimulate transgressions.²⁵

Hübner ascribes the negative function of the law expressed in Galatians 3:19b to its origin from the demonic angels. In order to avoid any cynical comment on God's dealing with peo-

ple for salvation, he interprets the participial clause *diatageis di' angelōn* in 3:19d to mean 'ordained by the angels', taking the *dia* causatively to express source.²⁶ It should be noted, however, that the participle *diatageis* is subordinate to the main verb 'was added' (*prosetethē*). This verb is a divine passive, suggesting God as the giver of the law. Moreover, the verb 'was added' is qualified by the subordinate clause 'until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made' in 3:19c. This temporal clause clearly refers to God's design with regard to the law (cf. 3:22).

Thus it becomes obvious that it is God who added the law to provoke transgressions.²⁷ This does not say that God is responsible for sin. Rather it seems to mean that the law still remained in God's hands, serving his redemptive plan, though it assumed the negative function in encountering the power of sin.

In any event, the consequence of the giving of the law is: 'The Scripture has shut up all people under sin' (*synekleisin hē graphē ta panta hypo hamartian*) (3:22a; cf. Rom. 11:32).²⁸ It is remarkable that the singular *graphē* is not accompanied by any Old Testament quotation, in view of the fact that in Paul (and also in the New Testament in general) the term usually refers to a specific pas-

23 Barrett, *Romans*, p. 143; F.F. Bruce, 'Paul and the Law of Moses', *BJRL* 57 (1975), pp. 268-69; Hübner, *Law in Paul's Thought*, pp. 74-5; Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, p. 400.

24 I think that Romans 7:7-13 depicts the Christian Paul's look in hindsight at the plight of Israel under the law, including himself before his conversion. Beker, *Paul the Apostle*, pp. 238-42; D.J. Moo, 'Israel and Paul in Romans 7.7-12', *NTS* 32 (1986), pp. 122-35; cf. Cranfield, *Romans*, I, pp. 342-44; M.W. Karlberg, 'Israel's History Personified: Romans 7:7-13 in Relation to Paul's Teaching on the "Old Man"', *TrinJ* 7 (1986), pp. 65-74; S. Westerholm, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith: Paul and his Recent Interpreters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), pp. 181-82.

25 Cf. Hübner, *Law in Paul's Thought*, pp. 70-8.

26 Cf. BAGD, p. 180.

27 For further objections to Hübner's suggestion, see Hong, *The Law in Galatians*, pp. 154-55.

28 Although the *alla* connects Galatians 3:22 with the preceding hypothetical assumption in v. 21 by showing a contrast between them, v. 22 actually stands in a result-reason relation to 3:19b. See Hong, *The Law in Galatians*, pp. 42-5.

sage in the Old Testament (Gal. 3:8; 4:30; Rom. 4:3; 9:17; 10:11; 11:2). It is also notable that the *graphē* is described in personal terms. These observations suggest that it refers to the entire Scripture which is invested with the authority of God.²⁹

The *synkleiō* can be taken in various senses,³⁰ but is undoubtedly used here in the negative sense of 'to shut up', 'to confine', or 'to imprison'. The neuter plural *ta panta* probably refers to all people (cf. Jn. 6:37, 39), since the entire argument here is on the personal level.³¹ The expression *hypo hamartian* means under the bondage of sin, a supreme power of the old age, as the *synkleiō* suggests.³² This understanding of sin fits into the broad framework of Paul's eschatological understanding of the Christ event in Galatians (1:4; 6:14-15).³³ As Witherington argues, being under sin is a broader category than being under the curse mentioned in 3:10, for it includes all, even the Jews.³⁴ Sin is the universal human dilemma, but the curse is the dilemma for the people of the law, name-

ly the Jews.³⁵ The picture behind the statement in 3:22a seems to be that of the jail. The Scripture is represented as the magistrate, all people as the prisoners, and sin as the jailer.³⁶

2. Being 'Under the Law'

After dealing with the law and sin in the transitional section in 3:15-22, Paul goes on to describe the slavery of the law in antithesis to the sonship in Christ in 3:23-4:7. The slavery is expressed as being 'under the law' in 3:23 and 4:4-5 (cf. 4:21; 5:18). Then it is compared with being 'under a pedagogue' (3:25), 'under guardians and stewards' (4:2), and 'under the *stoicheia* of the world' (4:3).

Here it is important to note that these 'under' (*hypo*) phrases are parallel to 'under sin' in 3:22. The linkage between being under the law and being under sin also appears in Romans 6:14: 'For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace.' 6:14a contains a promise which is valid for every believer at the present time and 6:14b offers the reason for it. This suggests that if people are under the law, sin has dominion over them. For Paul, to be under the law means to be under the power of sin.³⁷

Before considering the import of the diverse analogies of the law we should first investigate the meaning

29 Cf. D. Guthrie, *Galatians* (NCB; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1973), p. 107; C.H. Cosgrove, 'The Mosaic Law Preaches Faith: A Study in Galatians 3', *WTJ* 41 (1978-79), p. 160; Ebeling, *The Truth of the Gospel*, pp. 192-93; Belleville, 'Under Law', p. 56; Fung, *Galatians*, p. 164; Martyn, *Galatians*, pp. 360-61.

30 See O. Michel, *TDNT*, VII, pp. 744-47.

31 Guthrie, *Galatians*, p. 107; Betz, *Galatians*, p. 175 n. 116; Fung, *Galatians*, p. 164 n. 65; cf. Bruce, *Galatians*, p. 180; Belleville, 'Under Law', p. 56.

32 Cf. Burton, *Galatians*, p. 196; Belleville, 'Under Law', p. 56.

33 See Hong, *The Law in Galatians*, pp. 74-96.

34 Cf. Martyn, *Galatians*, p. 371.

35 B. Witherington, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), p. 261.

36 Guthrie, *Galatians*, p. 107; cf. Fung, *Galatians*, p. 164.

37 Cf. Moo, *Romans*, pp. 388-89.

of the phrase 'under the law' in the context of Galatians. This is a legitimate order of interpretation. In my opinion, it is wrong to adopt the approach followed by a number of interpreters,³⁸ that is, to consider first the role of the metaphors 'pedagogue' (3:24-25) and 'guardian and steward' (4:2) in the Graeco-Roman social context in order to understand the phrase 'under the law'. I regard it as essential to determine the significance of the metaphors by first examining what Paul is trying to say by 'under the law', *not vice versa*.

The peculiar phrase 'under the law' first appears in 3:23. It is accompanied by the verb 'were held' (*ephrouroumetha*) and the participle 'being shut up' (*synkleiomenoi*),³⁹ and thus refers to the condition of the Jews⁴⁰ before the coming of faith.

A number of interpreters these days understand the Jewish situation under the law in a positive or neutral light. Gordon regards the function of

the law as that of guarding or protecting Israel from the profane idolatry of the Gentiles.⁴¹ Similar in some respects is Young's view that the law's function was to prevent Israel from free association with the Gentiles.⁴² Longenecker thinks Paul's places emphasis on the supervisory role of the law until Christ.⁴³ Lull argues that the primary purpose of the law was to curb the desires of the flesh.⁴⁴ According to Kruger, the law functioned like walls which protected until the Spirit came.⁴⁵ Dunn claims that the role of the law was a protective and disciplining role.⁴⁶ Belleville thinks the function of the law was that of a custodian who closely regulated and supervised God's people in a period of spiritual minority.⁴⁷

At first glance these interpretations seem to be in harmony with the functions of pedagogue (3:25) and guardian and steward (4:2) in the Graeco-Roman society. They, however, fail to take into consideration seriously the parallelism of 'under sin' in 3:22 and 'under the law' in 3:23. In my opinion, if being 'under sin' refers to the slavery of the evil power of sin, as interpreted above, then we are not permitted to see any positive element in being under the law. Further, the negative function of the law to provoke transgressions as

38 E.g. Longenecker, 'The Pedagogical Nature of the Law in Galatians 3:19-4:7', pp. 53-61; Belleville, 'Under Law', pp. 59ff.; Young, 'Paidagōgos', pp. 150-76; cf. Lull, 'The Law Was Our Pedagogue', pp. 481-98.

39 Lull ('The Law Was Our Pedagogue', pp. 487-88) takes the present participle *synkleiomenoi* as a substitute for an imperfect which indicates a continued action prior to that of the main verb, mainly in order to justify his mistaken interpretation of 3:19b that the law was added because of the transgressions that had occurred. But it is more natural to see the present participle as denoting the same action which is expressed by the principal verb. E.D. Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1894), §120; Burton, *Galatians*, p. 199; Young, 'paidagōgos', p. 170.

40 See above; cf. L. Gaston, 'Paul and the Torah', in A.T. Davies (ed.), *Antisemitism and the Foundations of Christianity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), pp. 62-3.

41 Gordon, 'A Note on paidagōgos in Galatians 3:24-25', pp. 150-54.

42 Young, 'Paidagōgos', pp. 150-76.

43 Longenecker, 'The Pedagogical Nature of the Law in Galatians 3:19-4:7', pp. 53-61.

44 Lull, 'The Law Was Our Pedagogue', pp. 486-98.

45 Kruger, 'Law and Promise in Galatians', pp. 317-25.

46 Dunn, *The Theology of Paul*, pp. 137-43.

47 Belleville, 'Under Law', pp. 55-70.

expressed in 3:19b⁴⁸ clearly speaks against any attempt to perceive the function of the law in 3:23 as a positive one.

What, then, is the exact nature of existence under the law? Note again that being 'under the law' in 3:23 is parallel to being 'under sin' in v. 22 and that the same verb *synkleiō* is used in connection with both existences. Here we see that the law, like sin, is also depicted as a jailer. It holds its prisoners in jail with a view to *suppression*, not protection. For this reason the verb *phroureō* used besides *synkleiō* in association with the phrase 'under the law' in v. 23 is to be taken in the sense of a restrictive confinement, though it is elsewhere employed in the sense of a protective guarding (2 Cor. 11:32; Philp. 4:7; 1 Pet. 1:5). Why were God's people confined under the law? The simple answer is because all people, even God's people, were under the power of the sin already and their transgressions of the law made clear to them that they were the slaves of sin.⁴⁹

We now turn to the passage in 4:4b-5a, where the expression 'under the law' occurs twice, in order to give a further clarification of the character of the bondage of the law: 'God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order that he might redeem (*eksagorasē*) those who were under the law.' Here, too, being 'under the law' is described as a bondage, as suggested by the term *eksagorazō* which has a connotation

of deliverance or liberation.

It is common to regard being under the law here as being under obligation to keep the law.⁵⁰ To my mind, however, it is absurd to think that being under such an obligation is a desperate (or non-exit) situation from which Christ redeemed his people. We should not forget what Paul says in 3:13a: 'Christ redeemed (*eksēgorasen*) us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us.' Note that the same verb *eksagorazō* is employed here as in 4:5. In fact, 3:13a and 4:4b-5a are 'the only christological instances of that verb in the New Testament',⁵¹ forming a parallelism. The first person plural pronouns in the quotation of 3:13a refer to the Jews only.⁵² According to 3:10, they were 'under a curse' (*hypo kataran*) because of their failure to fulfil the law. We can now change the structure (not the meaning!) of 3:13a so as to make its correspondence to 4:4b-5a more striking: Christ became a curse in order to redeem his people who were under the curse of the law. Note the parallelism between the two statements.

This parallelism makes it clear that those 'under the law' in 4:5a are the Jews under the curse of the law. What naturally follows then is that existence under the law in 4:4b-5a means existence under the curse of

48 See above.

49 Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, p. 266.

50 Fung, *Galatians*, p. 182 n. 73; Louw and Nida, et al., *Greek-English Lexicon*, I, 37.7.

51 Martyn, *Galatians*, p. 408.

52 E.g. Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 216; Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, p. 288.

the law.⁵³ This understanding is reinforced in Galatians 5:16-21. According to 5:21b, being captive to the desires of the flesh will result in eternal condemnation (see also 6:8a). As implied in the parallel between 5:16 and 5:18, this subjection to the flesh is equal to being 'under the law'. In this connection it is noteworthy that in 2 Corinthians 3 the Mosaic covenant is described as 'the ministry of death' (3:7) and 'the ministry of condemnation' (3:9).

It is perplexing that Paul employs the metaphor of pedagogue in Galatians 3:24-25 (cf. 1 Cor. 4:15) to describe the bondage of the law, that is, existence under the curse of the law. The figure of pedagogue was widely known in Graeco-Roman society.⁵⁴ He was not a teacher (*didaskalos*) but a household-slave who accompanied the free-born boy wherever he went, especially to school. His task consisted of protection of the boy from all kinds of dangers and supervision of his general conduct which involved reproach and punishment for his bad manners. The pedagogue kept the lad under his control and restricted his liberty until he reached the age of

puberty.⁵⁵

According to Lull and Young,⁵⁶ however, there was a big gap between the ideal and the actual. It was quite common to put old and decrepit slaves in charge of children while appointing fit and young slaves to manage more demanding works such as financial affairs. Plutarch lamented this practice of using the most useless slaves for the important early discipline of the children (*Mor.* 4A-B). The pedagogues were supposed to assist their charges to realize and achieve virtue, but many, if not most of them, were not educated but rough and abusive men. They often failed to advise well or to provide a good example to be followed. What they taught best were 'petty and childish duties' (Plutarch, *Mor.* 439F). Yet this teaching was often accompanied by threats of whipping. It is not surprising, then, that the pedagogues gained a bad reputation for being rude and harsh and were often depicted with a cane, a whip or a rod. It is true, however, that there were some good pedagogues who attracted respect and affection.⁵⁷

What, then, is Paul's point in using the pedagogue metaphor for the law? To be sure, the primary task of the pedagogue was to protect children from all sorts of harm and to teach them proper manners. But there is no indication in the context of 3:24-25 that the law played such

53 Cf. H.N. Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), p. 156; Betz, *Galatians*, p. 176; Bruce, *Galatians*, p. 196; B.C. Lategan, 'Formulas in the Language of Paul: A Study of Prepositional Phrases in Galatians', *Neotestamentica* 25 (1991), pp. 82, 85.

54 See Longenecker, 'The Pedagogical Nature of the Law in Galatians 3:19-4:7', pp. 53-6; Belleville, 'Under Law', pp. 59-60; Lull, 'The Law Was Our Pedagogue', pp. 489-94; Young, '*Paidagōgos*', pp. 150-69; cf. A.T. Hanson, 'The Origin of Paul's Use of *paidagōgos* for the Law', *JSNT* 34 (1988), pp. 71-6.

55 Plato was of the opinion that a child should be treated as a slave during his minority (*Leg.* 7.810E).

56 Lull, 'The Law Was Our Pedagogue', p. 493; Young, '*Paidagōgos*', p. 159.

57 See Lull, 'The Law Was Our Pedagogue', p. 490; Young, '*Paidagōgos*', pp. 165-68.

a protective and educative role, as observed above. The context rather suggests that the unpleasant restraint of the pedagogue is the force of the analogy.⁵⁸ It should be noted that the comparison of the law with the pedagogue in v. 24 is motivated by the situation depicted in v. 23: 'before faith came we were confined under the law, kept under restraint...so that (*hōste*) the law has become our pedagogue...' This demonstrates that Paul employs the pedagogue metaphor in order to describe vividly the enslavement of the law. For Paul, subjection under the pedagogue amounts to imprisonment, that is, lack of freedom, and thus is comparable to slavery under the law, the plight of the Jews before (or outside) Christ.

In this connection some construe the dominion of the law in an existential way. Taking the preposition *eis* in the phrase *eis Christon* (3:24) to express the goal, they think of the enslaving function of the law as oppressing individuals and creating a growing passion for liberty in Christ.⁵⁹ However, the *eis* must be taken in a temporal sense in the light of many temporal references in 3:19-25: 'until' (v. 19), 'before' (v.

23), 'until faith should be revealed' (v. 23), 'now that faith has come' (v. 25), 'no longer' (v. 25). This understanding is further substantiated by the fact that in 4:1-7 also Paul uses different images to stress the temporal limits of the law's subjugation (see below). Thus it is clear that Paul here speaks of a non-exit situation of people under the law before the coming of Christ *in terms of salvation history*, not in terms of subjective psychology.⁶⁰

In Galatians 4:2 Paul sets forth another analogy of bondage under the law: being 'under guardians and stewards' (*hypo epitropous kai oikonomous*).⁶¹ There has been much discussion on the precise meaning of the two titles and the legal system behind them which Paul has in mind.⁶² In general, however, *epitropos* is a legal term for the guardian, appointed by the father or by the court, who oversaw the person and education of a minor and

58 F. Thielman, *Paul and the Law: A Contextual Approach* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1994), pp. 132f.; Young, 'Paidagōgos', pp. 170-71; Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, p. 266; cf. Westerholm, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith*, p. 196.

59 M. Luther, *A Commentary on Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1891] 1979), pp. 340-41; Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, p. 146; R.A. Cole, *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians: An Introduction and Commentary* (TNTC; Leicester: IVP, [1965] 1983), p. 108; cf. C.B. Cousar, *Galatians* (Interpretation; Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), p. 79.

60 E.g. Burton, *Galatians*, p. 200; Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, I, p. 266; Beker, *Paul the Apostle*, p. 55; Fung, *Galatians*, p. 169; Westerholm, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith*, p. 196.

61 The basic thought of Galatians 3:23-29, that is, the antithesis between slavery under the law and freedom in Christ, is repeated in 4:1-7, though with some elaboration. This is implied in the opening words *legō de* in 4:1 (cf. 3:17; 5:16; Rom. 15:8; 1 Cor. 1:12) which may be rendered as 'this is what I mean' (NEB) or 'let me put it this way' (Bruce, *Galatians*, p. 192).

62 E.g. W.M. Ramsay, *A Historical Commentary on St Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1900), pp. 391-93; Burton, *Galatians*, pp. 212-15; J.D. Hester, 'The "Heir" and Heilsgeschichte: A Study of Galatians 4:1ff.', in F. Christ (ed.), *Oikonomia: Heilsgeschichte als Thema der Theologie: Festschrift für O. Cullmann* (Hamburg: Herbert Reich Evangelischer Verlag, 1967), pp. 119-22; Belleville, 'Under Law', pp. 60-3.

managed the inheritance in his interest until he attained his majority. On the other hand, *oikonomos* usually means a steward who administered the estate of his master (cf. Lk. 12:42; 16:1, 8; Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 4:1-2; Tit. 1:7; 1 Pet. 4:10). We should note, however, that there is no clear instance of the use of *oikonomos* for one who has charge of the person or estate of a minor heir.⁶³

It is puzzling that here the administrative term *oikonomos* occurs in association with the legal term *epitropos*. It is unlikely that in combining the two terms Paul has in mind the Roman law which stipulates that a minor is to be under a *tutor* (*epitropos*) until the age of 14, and thereafter under a *curator* (*kouratōr*) until the age of 25.⁶⁴ For if Paul had been thinking of this law, he could have used the phrase *epitropos kai kuratōr* instead of *epitropos kai oikonomos*.

Moreover, it does not seem that Paul has a historical succession of guardians in mind. The single preposition *hypo* and connective *kai* (*hypo epitropous kai oikonomous*) implies that the minor is *at the same time* 'under guardians and stewards'.⁶⁵ It is possible, however, that the combination of the two terms takes place because of the references to slavery in 4:1 and 3, since *oikonomos* can be the one who superintends the slaves of his mas-

ter.⁶⁶ It is also plausible that Paul in his use of the two titles is merely referring to those who had effective control of the person and estate of a child. In some cases the *epitropos* might delegate some of his responsibilities to the *oikonomos*.⁶⁷

Whatever the case, the point of the analogy is clear: as Paul explicitly states in 4:1, the minor heir does not differ at all from a slave as long as he is put under the restricting power of guardians and stewards. Although he is theoretically the owner and master, he is in reality without control over his life and possessions. By the same token, the Jews under the curse of the law have no capacity for self-determination and freedom, though they have received the promise to inherit the eschatological land.

Further, Paul equates slavery under the law with bondage 'under the *stoicheia* of the world' in 4:3ff. The phrase under 'the *stoicheia* of the world' here is simply 'the *stoicheia*' in 4:9. This implies that the emphasis within the phrase is placed on the ideas conveyed by 'the *stoicheia*' rather than 'of the world'.⁶⁸ The word *stoicheion* basically means a member or component of a row or series, probably being derived from *stoichos*, 'a row', 'a series', 'a line'. In Hellenistic and Classical literature the plural, 'the *stoicheia*', is princi-

66 Betz, *Galatians*, p. 204; cf. Longenecker, 'The Pedagogical Nature of the Law in Galatians 3:19-4:7', p. 56.

67 Belleville, 'Under Law', p. 63; cf. Burton, *Galatians*, pp. 213-14; O. Michel, *TDNT*, V, p. 150; Longenecker, 'The Pedagogical Nature of the Law in Galatians 3:19-4:7', p. 56.

68 Burton, *Galatians*, p. 516; cf. Bandstra, *The Law and the Elements of the World*, pp. 541ff.

63 Burton, *Galatians*, p. 212.

64 Cf. Ramsay, *Galatians*, pp. 392-93.

65 Belleville, 'Under Law', p. 62.

pally used in two senses: either (a) elements of knowledge or fundamental principles (e.g. Plato, *Leg.* 7.790C; Xenophon, *Mem.* 2.1.1; Plutarch, *Lib. Ed.* 16.2; Heb. 5:12), or (b) the physical elements of the universe such as earth, water, air, and fire (e.g. Plato, *Tim.* 48B; Diogenes Laertius 7.134-35; 4 *Macc.* 12:13; Philo, *Dec.* 31; *Op. Mund.* 146; Hermas, *Vis.* 3.13; Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 62.2; 2 Pet. 3:10, 12).

As the references in brackets show, however, this second sense is predominant in Jewish and Christian literature of the NT period. In the second century CE another meaning of *stoicheia* appears. Justin Martyr in his *Second Apol.* 5.2 employs the word to refer to heavenly bodies, especially the sun, the moon, and other planets which influence seasonal events in nature (see also *Dial.* 23.3; Theophilus of Antioch, *Autol.* 1.6, 2.35). We also find the word denoting spiritual beings such as demons and spirits in the *T. Sol.* (8:1-2; 18:1-2) which may not be earlier than the third or fourth century CE.⁶⁹

How, then, does Paul understand 'the *stoicheia* of the world' in Galatians (cf. Col. 2:8, 20)? Paul's understanding of the phrase is one of the most debated issues in Pauline studies. In my opinion, there are five major solutions.

1. Assuming the inclusion of the law in the *stoicheia*, many scholars interpret the phrase as elementary

principles or teachings by which people lived prior to Christ.⁷⁰

2. Howard and Martyn take up the most frequent meaning of *stoicheia* in the first century CE, and propose that 'the *stoicheia* of the world' refer to the elements of the cosmos which the Gentiles worshipped as gods.⁷¹

3. Schlier, appealing to 4:10, understands the *stoicheia* to refer to stars which were revered as spiritual beings, in spite of the lack of any pre-Pauline attestation of the usage.⁷²

4. Betz thinks that the *stoicheia* include both the physical elements and the heavenly bodies which were thought of as exerting their control over people.⁷³

5. Finally, other interpreters offer a somewhat loose understanding of the *stoicheia*. Observing that both Judaism and paganism are forms of bondage to the *stoicheia*, they consider the *stoicheia* as covering all the things which people serve as their

⁷⁰ J.B. Lightfoot, *St Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (London: Macmillan, 1880), p. 167; Burton, *Galatians*, pp. 510-18; Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, p. 154; W. Carr, *Angels and Principalities: The Background, Meaning and Development of the Pauline Phrase 'hai archai kai hai exousiai'* (SNTSMS; Cambridge: CUP, 1981), p. 75; Belleville, 'Under Law', pp. 67-9; Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 166; Matera, *Galatians*, p. 150; Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, pp. 284-87.

⁷¹ G. Howard, *Paul: Crisis in Galatia: A Study in Early Christian Theology* (SNTSMS; Cambridge: CUP, 1979), pp. 66-7; Martyn, *Galatians*, pp. 393ff.; cf. W. Wink, 'The "Elements of the Universe" in Biblical and Scientific Perspective', *Zygon* 13 (1978), pp. 225-48.

⁷² H. Schlier, *Der Brief an die Galater* (KEK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971), p. 192.

⁷³ Betz, *Galatians*, pp. 204-205; cf. Hübner, *Law in Paul's Thought*, p. 33.

⁶⁹ For the history of the use of *stoicheion*, see Burton, *Galatians*, pp. 510-14; G. Dellinger, *TDNT*, VII, pp. 670-83.

gods, including the Jewish law.⁷⁴

In order to decide which one of these various solutions is most plausible, we should take the following points into consideration. First of all, it is important to note that in 4:3-5 *bondage* under the law is parallel to *bondage* 'under the *stoicheia* of the world'. This does not necessarily mean that the law is identical to the *stoicheia* or that the law is included in the *stoicheia*. As observed above, in 3:22-23 Paul equates being under sin with being under the law. However, he never asserts that the law is sin (see e.g. Rom. 7:7). The same can be said for his comparison of the law to pedagogue in 3:24-25 and to guardian and steward in 4:1-2.

Secondly, the description of the Galatians' past in 4:8 suggests that the *stoicheia* were regarded by pagans as gods. Verse 8 reads: 'at that time, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those who in nature are not gods.' The expression, 'those who in nature are not gods' reminds us of a typical Jewish polemic against Gentile polytheism (Is. 37:19; Jer. 2:11; 5:7; 16:20; Epistle of Jeremiah 14, 22, 28, 49, 50, 64, 68, 71).⁷⁵ For Paul as a Christian Jew, pagan gods are not really 'gods' at all. The close conjunction in thought between vv. 8 and 9 shows that these counterfeit gods are identical with the *stoicheia* in v. 9. In this connection it is note-

worthy that the *stoicheia* are described as being 'weak and beggarly'.

Thirdly, we should notice the connection between the Galatians' attempt to return to the slavery of the *stoicheia* in 4:9 and the calendar observances in 4:10 (cf. Gen. 1:14) which were usually associated with star worship.⁷⁶ It was not uncommon to regard the stars as living beings in the ancient world. The problem here is, however, that the use of *stoicheia* for the stars does not appear before the second century CE. Nevertheless, we cannot simply ignore the suggestion of 4:10. Lastly, it is well known that the use of the *stoicheia* for the elements of the universe was predominant in the religious literature of antiquity, and that the elements as well as the stars were conceived as divine beings in the Gentile world of Paul's time (Wis. 13:1-5; 7:17; Philo, *Vit. Cont.* 3-5).⁷⁷

All these considerations compel us to adopt Betz's view that *stoicheia* include both the elements of the universe and the heavenly bodies which were worshipped as gods in paganism. For Paul, they represent *demonic forces* which dominate 'this present evil age' in view of his eschatological understanding of the redemptive work of Christ in Galatians 1:4 and 6:14,⁷⁸ and which enslave not only the Gentiles but also

74 Dellling, *TNDT*, VII, pp. 684-85; H.H. Esser, *NIDNTT*, II, p. 453; Bruce, *Galatians*, p. 204; Fung, *Galatians*, p. 191; Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 213.

75 Howard, *Paul*, pp. 67, 98 n. 224; Bruce, *Galatians*, p. 201; cf. Betz, *Galatians*, pp. 214-15.

76 Cf. Schlier, *Der Brief an die Galater*, p. 206.

77 See Martyn, *Galatians*, pp. 398-400.

78 Cf. Romans 8:38; 16:20; 1 Corinthians 2:6, 8; 5:5; 7:5; 8:5; 10:19-20; 15:24; 2 Corinthians 2:11; 4:4; 11:14; Ephesians 6:12; Col. 1:16; 1 Thessalonians 2:18; 3:5.

the Jews before and outside Christ.⁷⁹ Thus we can understand Paul's reason for equating slavery under the *stoicheia* with slavery under the law; both the *stoicheia* and the law are enslaving powers which constitute and dominate this evil world. Being under these powers means absence of freedom and subjection to oppression.

Finally, we should observe that Paul relates existence under the law to subjection to the flesh in 5:16-18. Verse 18 reads: 'If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.' This statement is a reinforcement of that in v. 16: 'Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.' The correspondence between these two statements implies that submission to the flesh is tantamount to being under the law.

This association of the law with the flesh is not new. It has already taken place in 3:2-3 and 4:21-31. In the former place the flesh seems to refer to the circumcised flesh; in the latter it denotes the basis of natural procreation. The flesh in 5:16ff. including 5:13 is, however, viewed from quite a different perspective. It is presented as a *personified power* which stands in dualistic antithesis to the Spirit, the enabling power of the new era. It 'sets its desires against the Spirit' (5:17) and produces its works against the fruit of the Spirit (5:19-21).

⁷⁹ The 'we' who were held in bondage under the *stoicheia* in Galatians 4:3 primarily refers to the Jews, since the first person plural certainly means the same as 'those who were under the law' in 4:5; on the other hand, the 'you' who are about to turn back again to the *stoicheia* by accepting the Jewish law without doubt refers to the Galatian Gentiles.

For Paul the flesh is also an enslaving power of the old age, just like the law. Subordination to the rule of this power leads helpless people to transgress the law and thereby brings them under the curse of the law.⁸⁰ That is why Paul says that a life corrupted by the flesh cannot 'inherit the kingdom of God' (5:21b) and that the end of the sower who sows 'into his flesh' will be eternal 'corruption' (6:8a).⁸¹ Thus it can be said that subjection to the flesh is equivalent to slavery under the law.

In short, for Paul the law was given in addition to the promise in order to provoke transgressions. The consequence is that the law imprisoned all the transgressors under its curse. Paul compares this imprisonment to being under the restrictive supervision of a pedagogue (3:25) and under the power of guardians and stewards (4:2). Further, he connects this confinement with the enslavement to other powers in the old age (1:4; 6:14): sin (3:22), the demonic forces (4:3, 9), and flesh (5:13, 16ff.).

Bondage under the law is the main characterization of the existence of the Jews before the coming of

⁸⁰ Most of interpreters think that being 'under the law' in 5:18 refers to being under the guidance of the law before the coming of Christ. But this view is mistaken. We should remember, as argued above, that 'under the law' means 'under the curse of the law'. Cf. Fung, *Galatians*, p. 252; T.R. Schreiner, *The Law & Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), p. 81.

⁸¹ Martyn (*Galatians*, p. 553) states: 'To sow to one's own flesh is to be circumcised, under the illusion that...circumcision of one's flesh is the antidote to the enslaving power called Flesh. To sow to one's flesh is then also to fall victim to the Flesh, precisely because nomistic circumcision of the flesh is impotent to curb the Flesh.'

Christ. This particular slavery represents the universal human plight under sin, demonic powers and flesh.⁸² It is, however, the prologue to the redemption of Christ.

3. Freedom from the Slavery of the Law

After comparing being 'under the law' with being 'under a pedagogue', Paul declares in Galatians 3:25 that with the coming of Christ, the dominion of the law was brought to an end: 'But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a pedagogue.' The coming of faith here corresponds to the coming of Christ in 3:19c, 24 and 4:4.

How Christ came is described in 4:4b: 'God sent (*eksapesteilen*) His Son.' This statement probably refers to God's act of sending his Son out of his previous state into this world. Although the verb *eksapesteilen* does not necessarily assume the pre-existence of the Son,⁸³ the idea may well have been in Paul's mind in writing the verse. There are several reasons for this.

First of all, Paul believed in the idea (1 Cor. 8:6b; 10:4; Phil. 2:6; Col. 1:15-17), then pre-existence is alluded to in Romans 8:3 which is a parallel to Galatians 4:4-5⁸⁴ and finally, it seems that Paul here, as in 1 Corinthians 1:30 and 10:4, applied Jewish Wisdom ideas to Christ including ideas of pre-existence (Wis.

9:10-17).⁸⁵

Some suppose that the statement in 4:4b is part of pre-Pauline material.⁸⁶ Even if this is so, it is highly probable that the notion of the Son's pre-existence was still present when Paul wrote the verse, in view of the fact that the idea is not unique to Paul but popular in the early Christian community (cf. Jn. 1:1ff.; Heb. 1:2; Rev. 3:14).

Verse 4b further describes the manner of the appearance of the Son: 'born (*genomenon*) of a woman, born (*genomenon*) under the law.' The former phrase clearly refers to his birth out of a woman, since the *ginomai* in it is used as 'a quasi-passive of *gennaō*' (cf. 1 Esd. 4:16; Tob. 8:6; Wis. 7:3; Sir. 44:9; Jn. 8:58).⁸⁷ The aorist participle *genomenon* indicates that the events of God's sending his Son and of the Son's birth from a woman were coincident (cf. Philp. 2:7).⁸⁸ Here it is emphasized that Christ was born in the normal human manner and at his birth assumed normal human nature and thus became a *real* human being (cf. Jn. 1:14). This indicates 'the descent to the level of those whom he came to redeem'.⁸⁹

The latter phrase is somewhat per-

85 B. Witherington, *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), pp. 295ff.; cf. E. Schweizer, 'Zum religionsgeschichtlichen Hintergrund der "Sendungsformel" Gal. 4.4f., Rm. 8.3f., Joh. 3.16f., 1 Joh. 4.9', ZNW 57 (1966), pp. 199-210.

86 E. Schweizer, TDNT, VIII, p. 374.

87 Bruce, *Galatians*, p. 195.

88 In Philippians 2:7 also the same aorist participle (*genomenos*) has coincidental force.

89 Burton, *Galatians*, p. 217; cf. Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, p. 155; Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 171.

82 See Hong, *The Law in Galatians*, pp. 83-4.

83 K.H. Rengstorf, TDNT, I, p. 406.

84 E.g. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, pp. 484-85; Moo, *Romans*, pp. 478-79; Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, p. 288.

plexing. Burton views it as 'made subject to law' rather than 'born under the law'.⁹⁰ However, the participle *genomenon* here, as in the former phrase, probably denotes an action coinciding with that of the main verb *eksapesteilen*. So it is more sensible to understand the phrase to mean 'born under the law'. Many interpreters see it as referring to Christ's birth in the Jewish people who were subject to all the requirements of the law.⁹¹ However, we should remember my preceding argument that 'under the law' in the given context means 'under the curse of the law'. If this assumption is correct, what Paul means here is that at his birth Christ took upon himself the curse which the Jews had incurred because of their non-fulfilment of the law.⁹² To my mind this points to the *deep condescension* of his incarnation (cf. Phil. 2:7).

This humiliating incarnation is the first significant step of Christ's redemptive work. It led him to be subject to all human weaknesses, to be misunderstood, despised, rejected, to suffer, and eventually to die on the cross. On the cross he was completely forsaken by God. In this way Christ carried the curse of the law and exhausted it on behalf of his people. He thereby redeemed his people from the curse (3:13).⁹³ This particu-

lar redemption of the Jews brought about a universal consequence, namely the redemption of all people from sin, demonic forces and flesh, for the Jewish plight served as the representative sample of the universal human plight, as seen above. In fact, in his incarnation, suffering and death Christ fully identified himself with the Gentiles as well as with the Jews.

In the second part of his speech to Cephas (2:18-21), which corresponds to 3:23-4:7,⁹⁴ Paul speaks from the standpoint of the beneficiary of the redemptive work of Christ: 'For through the law I died to the law (*nomō*), that (*hina*) I might live to God (*theō*)' (2:19a; cf. Rom. 7:4). This statement is made against Cephas's falling back into the bondage of the law by his withdrawal from table fellowship with the Gentile Christians in Antioch (2:11ff.).

The first person singular 'I' is not used to refer to Paul himself alone, but primarily to represent the Jewish Christians in general. This means that what Paul is talking about here is not so much his own personal experience as something that is true of any Jewish believer.⁹⁵ The law in 2:19a as in 3:23-4:7 refers to a power of the old age, as the antithesis between 'law' and 'God' indicates. It is to this law that the Christians died, as they died to sin (Rom. 6:11) and died to the world (Gal. 6:14). This means their complete *separation*

90 Burton, *Galatians*, p. 218; cf. Schlier, *Der Brief an die Galater*, p. 196; Betz, *Galatians*, p. 207.

91 Burton, *Galatians*, p. 218; Cole, *Galatians*, pp. 115-16; cf. Fung, *Galatians*, p. 182.

92 Martyn (*Galatians*, p. 408) states: 'Christ's being sent by God was his being born under the Law (4:4), specifically the event of his birth under the Law's power to pronounce its universal curse (3:10).'

93 Cf. Cousar, *Galatians*, pp. 94-5.

94 See Hong, *The Law in Galatians*, p. 71.

95 Cf. Burton, *Galatians*, p. 132.

from the power of the law.⁹⁶ The consequence is that the law no longer has any claim on or control over them.

The death took place 'through the law'. How should we understand this? We should notice that the main clause of 2:19a is rephrased in 2:19b: 'I have been crucified with Christ.' Here we see the close link between the death to the law 'through the law' and the crucifixion of Christ. As seen above, the law played a role in the death of Christ. The curse of the law caused Christ to descend to this world in a human form and to die on the cross for his people. In this sense it can be said that Christ died 'through the law'.⁹⁷

By virtue of their participation in the death of Christ by faith, the believers also died 'through the law' (cf. Rom. 6:6; 7:4).⁹⁸ Thereby they have been freed from the condemnation of the law and its dominion. For Paul this release from the power of the law is an eschatological transfer from the old aeon to the new aeon (cf. 1:4; 6:14). It follows that the release is at the same time the release from other old powers such as sin, demonic forces and flesh.

This release opened up a new possibility for all the believers to 'live to God', as the *hina* clause expresses. Living to God is an eschatological reality (cf. Rom. 6:10-11). This new life to God has been customarily

understood as life in the service of God, taking the dative *theō* as a dative of advantage.⁹⁹ This sense may not be entirely excluded here. But I do not believe that it is what Paul really has in mind. It is to be noted that in 2:19a living to God is in direct contrast with dying to the law, an old power. This implies that the new life means life which is intimately related to the power of God and surrendered to his sovereign control.¹⁰⁰ To put it simply, it is life under the rule of God, the new Master. 2:20a describes this life as life lived and controlled by Christ dwelling in the believers, the Lord of the new era. In 5:25 the life is further characterized as living by the Spirit, the enabling power of God (cf. Rom. 8:10). This life by the Spirit 'shall reap eternal life' (Gal. 6:8b; cf. 5:23b).

Conclusion

For Paul, the law functions as an enslaving power, seen from the perspective of the history of salvation. The law, in addition to the promise, was given by God in order to produce or provoke transgressions (Gal. 3:19; cf. Rom. 5:20) by providing an operational base for sin to kindle man's sinful passions (Rom. 7:5ff.). In consequence, all people were imprisoned under the power of sin (Gal. 3:22). More particularly, all the transgressors were kept in jail under the law (3:23). 'Under the law' here

⁹⁶ The dative *nomō* as *theō* is a dative of relation (cf. Rom. 6:10-11).

⁹⁷ Cf. Burton, *Galatians*, p. 134.

⁹⁸ Cf. Lightfoot, *Galatians*, p. 118; T. Zahn, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Galater* (KNT; Leipzig: Deichert, 1907), p. 113; Burton, *Galatians*, pp. 132-34.

⁹⁹ E.g. Burton, *Galatians*, p. 134; Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, p. 103; Fung, *Galatians*, p. 123.

¹⁰⁰ Ebeling, *The Truth of the Gospel*, p. 138; cf. Guthrie, *Galatians*, pp. 89-90.

means 'under the curse of the law' in view of the statements in 3:10, 13 and 4:4-5.

Paul compares this bondage of the law with being under a pedagogue (3:25), being under guardians and stewards (4:2), and being under the elemental spirits of the world (4:3, 9). The point of comparison here is lack of freedom, absence of self-determination, and subordination to foreign control. Further, Paul relates the existence under the law to subjection to the flesh in 5:16-18 which stands in opposition to the Spirit.

However, with the coming of Christ the slavery of the law was brought to an end (3:25). At his birth Christ took upon himself the curse of the law, and carried it during his whole life on earth and eventually exhausted it on the cross on behalf of his people (3:13; 4:4). By virtue of their participation in the death of Christ by faith, the believers died in relation to the enslaving power of the law (2:19). Thereby they were liberated from it (5:1, 13) and now live under the sovereign rule of God, the new Master (2:19; cf. 2:20; 5:25).

NEW FROM PATERNOSTER

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Editor: Peter Oakes

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Peter Oakes studied for a BA in Theology at London Bible College, graduating in 1991. He then moved to Worcester College, Oxford, where he studied for a DPhil under Tom Wright.

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Books Reviewed

Reviewed by Rev Prof. Norman T. Barker

Hugh Wetmore

'Why Christians Disagree when they interpret the Bible'

Finding unity in our loyalty to Scripture

Reviewed by Rev. Dr Jae Sung Kim

Donald K. McKim

Introducing the Reformed Faith

Reviewed by Ray Laird

Richard J. Mouw

He Shines in All that's Fair: Culture and Common Grace

Reviewed by David Parker

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The Holy Spirit: works and gifts
Christian Foundations

Book Reviews

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**'Why Christians Disagree when they interpret the Bible'
Finding unity in our loyalty to Scripture**

Hugh Wetmore with participants in National Hermeneutics Workshops

Cape Town, S. Africa: Struik

Christian Books, 2001

ISBN 1 86823 444 4

P/B 232 pp. No index

Reviewed by Rev Prof. Norman T. Barker, Emmanuel College, University of Queensland

The aim of Wetmore's book is to clarify issues involved in interpreting Scripture with the aim of deepening unity and understanding among evangelicals committed to the authority of the Bible. It originated in

hermeneutics workshops sponsored by the Evangelical Alliance of South Africa, of which Wetmore has served as general secretary and national coordinator. Suggested readership is lay evangelical. It specifically embraces Pentecostals, as 'a vital part of the wider evangelical family'. Participants responsible for several chapters are listed on p. 8, but with some errors.

Typical areas of disagreement are listed – some perennial and general, others coloured by the African context. Not all are addressed specifically. Wetmore seeks first to distinguish the solid ground of evangelical agreement to determine which are 'gospel' or 'kingdom' issues and which are not. Not all will agree with relegating questions like baptism or women in ministry to non-gospel status.

Common principles of Bible interpretation, such as history, context, literary genre, are dealt with. David Whitelaw propounds psychological differences as part explanation for differences on interpretation—left and right sides of the brain: left-brain rational, logic and analysis, suited to liturgical-reformed Christians; right-brain leaning to the spiritual or intuitive, to imagination and synthesis, suited more to pentecostal/charismatic styles of worship and preaching. Scripture embraces both aspects—law, history, gospels, doctrinal books aligning with the left-brain, poetic and apocryphal with the right-brain. A constant emphasis is on the need and value, therefore, of group Bible study, for the simple reason that it brings together a range of individual pre-understandings and personalities.

Various ‘gaps’—historical, geographical, cultural and linguistic—between Bible times and ours make interpretation more difficult. A philosophical gap arises from changing world-views; the spiritual gap, constituted by our human sin, stubbornness and self-will, constitutes a barrier. The book has a healthy emphasis on spiritual qualifications for Bible interpretation and the need not only to understand but also to ‘do the Word’ (Jas. 1:22-25). The ‘Scripture Union Method of Bible Reading’ is commended.

Chris Mngadi, writing on the unity of the Bible, relates how an African Christian queried his carrying a New Testament alone (for convenience). He acknowledged that his practice (which he changed) was ‘a symbol of

a major problem in evangelical theology.’

Historical methods of interpreting the Bible are outlined—Alexandrian allegorization, grammatical-historical (Antioch) and the Roman development of a four-fold meaning of Scripture. Not all will agree that ‘there is some truth, some value, in most of the methods,’ and that ‘the allegorical method is useful in dealing with apocalyptic Scriptures’ (p. 150)—we can recall Luther’s designation of allegorizers as ‘clerical jugglers performing monkey tricks’. We may also ask whether the term ‘allegorical’ embrace the peculiar aspects of apocalyptic literature?

The grammatical-historical method resurfaced in the Reformers, who insisted on the plain meaning of the text interpreted grammatically in its historical context. The influence of our ‘pre-understanding’ is stressed, and well illustrated from Church-State relationships in South Africa. I should confess my own pre-understanding in holding to the priority of the grammatical-historical interpretation as the basis for any sound teaching that claims to have the authority of Scripture.

The designation of varying emphases among the Reformers, God-centred (Calvin), Christ-centred (Luther) and Holy Spirit emphasis (Anabaptists), is a bit too tidy. Calvin has been called the ‘theologian of the Holy Spirit,’ and his concept of the ‘inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts’ (West. Conf. 1.5) became a vital part of Reformed orthodoxy. Luther’s principle of Christ-centred-

ness is stated to be a key evangelical approach to Scripture.

I turned with expectation to Mathew's Clark delineation of 'The Pentecostal Way'. Many evangelicals appreciate the vitality displayed in this movement and renewed emphasis on the Holy Spirit. Clark claims that for Pentecostals, 'the Bible is primarily a witness to the manner in which God deals with humankind, rather than a source book of doctrine or conceptual truth' (p. 153). Is this a needful correction to certain expressions of evangelical theology, and a reflection that God has been pleased to reveal himself primarily in history?

He states that the Bible is 'reliable and adequate for understanding the origin, nature and implications of our faith' (p. 153). Some will question whether the stress placed on present experience detracts from the normative nature of Scripture. The same emphasis is found when he views the Bible as 'a pointer to the Deity who still works today as he did in biblical times' (p. 153). Evangelicals stress a living relationship with a living God, but Clark's statement raises problems for those who believe that revelation is tied integrally to certain once-for-all events by which God has brought us life and salvation. Clark states that God continues to reveal himself by such means as dreams and visions. Given the validity of such experiences, are we speaking of 'revelation' in the biblical sense or guidance for the believer?

This is a fine production with an interesting format, illustrated by boxes dealing with key questions. Given

evangelical concern for truth, we may find ourselves often disagreeing with some point of view. Balancing truth and love (ch.14) we need to learn to be zealous for truth and at the same time embrace all who 'call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours' (1 Cor. 1:2).

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**Introducing the Reformed
Faith:
Biblical Revelation, Christian
Tradition, Contemporary
Significance**

Donald K. McKim
Louisville: Westminster John Knox
Press, 2001
ISBN 0-664-25644-9
Pb., 261 pp, index.

*Reviewed by Rev. Dr Jae Sung
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Seminary in Korea.*

It is good to see a very concise book of Reformed theology in a new readable style, particularly for international researchers of Christian doctrines. Donald K. McKim again shows his skill in categorization and summarization, as he has done in his other books. His style and explanations are so clear that most sincere Christians could understand the views of reformed theologians on difficult topics of Christian dogmatics. However, this book seems to be an editor's compilation of traditional systematic theology rather than a presentation of his new interpretation.

This book consists of nineteen

chapters which deal with the most important doctrines by the Reformed and other contemporary theologians. Each issue has been carefully examined from three main points. First, the author guides the reader to what is in the Bible. Then there is material dealing with how the subject has been discussed by many well known Reformed theologians. I would say that this section shows the strong points of the author's work revealing his depth of knowledge. Finally, a modern consideration has been added with careful resources in footnotes which is very helpful to serious readers.

While the book is very useful, I would like to point out a couple of reservations, if one were to introduce this book to the reformed church as a new text. First of all, when the author explains the modern theologians' views, he depends too much on Karl Barth's neo-orthodox theology. Barth's view is predominant in the whole book. For example, according to Barth's view McKim claims, 'Not all Reformed Christians today subscribe to these five points of Calvinism' (p. 183). Furthermore, most reformed systematic theologians would be critical of Barth's doctrine of the Trinity as a modalistic approach as 'Revealer, Revelation and Revealedness' (pp. 28-29). But the author never comments on this very curious paradigm which would not be acceptable to many Bible study classes in reformed churches.

I also would like to point out that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is the smallest section (pp. 97-106) of this book, which would mean that it

could not fully cover the many questions on this topic that are current at the present time. Although usually the weakest aspect of the Reformed theology is pneumatology, Reformed theologians should remember that Calvin has been called 'the theologian of the Holy Spirit' by B. B. Warfield. We can note that in fact there are many more fine recent studies on the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, if one would like to study the most important characteristics of the Reformed faith in a church Bible study group, some sections of this book should be read with a little more consideration. First, the atonement of Christ is crucial for Reformed faith, and we understand Christ's death as a penal substitution in terms of sacrifice, propitiation and reconciliation. However, the author just follows the ways of Edward Schillebeeckx, a Roman Catholic theologian (p. 89) rather than the Reformed doctrine of *solus Christus*. Second, Reformed faith would strongly emphasize the imputation of Christ's righteousness by faith rather than the infusion of grace which is the essential difference between the Reformed faith and Roman Catholicism. The doctrines of *sola fide* and *sola gratia* are still key issues in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999) between the Roman Catholics and the Protestants. Thirdly, the models of the church from a Roman Catholic theologian's viewpoint have been largely summarized by the author without serious criticism of this paradigm (pp. 127-8).

The author, however, just skips over the Reformed emphasis on church officers and disciplines which John Calvin considers as the essence of the church.

The weakest point of this book as a text of Reformed faith is the omission of modern Reformed theologians' accomplishments. It seems to me that the author ignores the important heritage of Reformed tradition from Jonathan Edwards to major Reformed theologians in America, such as C. Hodge and Old Princeton theologians, James Henry Thornwell, Robert L. Dabney, and the Southern School, G. Vos and the Dutch school, J. Gresham Machen, John Murray, Cornelius Van Til, and the Westminster school.

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**He Shines in All that's Fair:
Culture and Common Grace**

Richard J. Mouw
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2001
ISBN 0-8028-4947-4
Hardcover, ix + 101 pp

*Reviewed by Ray Laird, Bible
College of South Australia,
Adelaide*

As contemporary evangelicalism emerges from its pietistic fortress to engage with the world rather than ignoring it in a distorted understanding of separation, it is very helpful to have some guidance from those who have trodden the pathway of a 'theology of commonness'. Mouw, in this book on culture and common grace, has provided such a guide.

The beauty about Mouw's book is that it presents the value of the way of common grace in the context of a lived-out debate among the theologians of the Dutch Reformed Church. The result for the reader is that the issues are raised and discussed in a form that reveals the weaknesses of the extremes and that points towards a balanced position. In reading the book I found that many of the questions raised in my mind over the years about common grace were discussed. It was as though the author had anticipated my hesitations in accepting some aspects of classic common grace theology. It is always comforting to know that someone has asked the same questions previously.

Does God take delight in a Tiger Wood putt? Was he pleased with Benjamin Franklin's wit? What about the well-crafted passages of the latest acclaimed writer of novels? Thus the issue of aesthetic approval by God of the actions of the unbelieving is aired. Likewise, the problem of moral approval of unbelievers' actions is given attention. Then Mouw takes us beyond these areas to a theology of empathy which is vividly and convincingly argued by reference to living examples.

In endorsing the concept of 'multiple divine purposes in the world' Mouw plunges into an examination of the supralapsarian versus infralapsarian debate. At first glance this seems a rather obscure path to tread until it is realized that what is at stake is the Calvinist understanding of the way in which God relates to his creation, especially his purpose for

bringing it into being. Non-Calvinist readers may think this debate irrelevant, but it highlights and clarifies the basic question which all must face. Our answer to that question will, to a large degree, determine our stance and the direction of our ministry.

In summary the book, though brief, is thoughtful and provocative. It deals well with a basic issue that all evangelicals should deeply ponder: should we or should we not actively seek the *shalom* of the larger societies in which we spend our sojourn?

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The Holy Spirit: works and gifts

Christian Foundations

Donald G. Bloesch

Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000

ISBN 0-8308-1415-9

Hb 415pp indexes

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

We welcome the fifth of Donald Bloesch's seven volume 'Christian Foundations' series. Written in his typical aphoristic and dialogical style, it is the largest so far and tackles irenically a number of thorny issues on the topic of the work and gifts of the Holy Spirit. Many of these are surveyed in the first main scene-setting chapter on the contemporary debate with extra comment and reflection at many other places in the book. Some of the most notable of these are the person of the Spirit, gifts, baptism, holiness and assurance, and (in a lengthy appendix to

the chapter on Pentecostalism), demonism.

As Dr Bloesch is well aware, this work is as much (or even more so) a book on spirituality as it is of systematic theology, and as such, it follows up on several of his earlier works in the same field. Historical theology is also a focus of treatment—in fact, six out of the total of eleven chapters are given over to this perspective. As the author states, 'In order to grasp the mystery of the working of the Spirit as delineated in the Bible, one also needs to explore the manifestations of the Spirit in the history of the church.'

As well as ancient and classical authors, this historical overview covers recent and contemporary thought (orthodox and otherwise). Literally dozens of cameos present insights from an extremely wide range of people from every age, many of whom would not make it into the pages of more narrowly focused theological work but are shown to be essential for portraying the rich texture of the heritage of Christian spirituality. This may be one of the greatest strengths of the book, confirming the author's view that 'a comprehensive theology of the Spirit is formed not only out of the testimony of the prophets and apostles of biblical history but also out of the thoughts and deeds of the great saints in the various traditions of the church.' The primary impression one receives upon reading this vast panorama so skilfully presented is of the varied splendour and impressive power of God's grace.

The topic of this volume gives the

author a good opportunity to reinforce many of the characteristic features of his 'Word and Spirit' theology already outlined in this 'Christian Foundations' series. For example, he opens with the warning that the 'the two deadliest enemies of true faith are formalism and spiritualism' and he goes on to highlight the dangers of evangelical rationalism emphasizing Scripture as the Word of God over against a biblicistic approach and affirming a sacramental rather than a sacramentalist position.

He is cautious about the tendency of the holiness and renewal movements towards subjectivism, legalism and perfectionism, but endorses them for their recovery of 'the biblical call to holiness', the priesthood of all believers and the awareness that there are ongoing blessings of the Spirit for the empowering of the Christian life, fellowship and mission. In a lengthy chapter on Pentecostalism, which traces its background to a surprising number of these renewal movements, he finds that it shares many of the same benefits as its precursors. However, he is cautious about its superficiality, proclivity to sensualism, spiritualism and triumphalism. However, he welcomes a sense of self-criticism that he believes has promise for the future, and wants to see Pentecostalism regarded by others not as an 'adversary' but as 'a challenge to regain the fullness of the gospel.'

Some of the author's key theological perspectives take on special focus in view of contemporary conditions. In fact the book opens with a substantial introduction outlining a

theology of the Christian life based on a 'revelation-pneumatic' position in the context of postmodernism. Reopening some topics which have already been discussed in this series, such as theological method, authority and the relation of the Bible and church, this chapter includes a long appendix on 'evangelical rationalism and propositional revelation'.

Although there is a strong emphasis on historical and contemporary perspectives, the biblical material is not overlooked. It is treated generally in a separate chapter – and occasionally in discussion in other places – but in a quite unusual move for the author, there is direct discussion of several 'difficult texts' in a 14 page Excursus to chapter 10. These include John 3; Pentecost in John and Acts; Acts chapters 2 and 8; Galatians 4; and 1 John 5. However, they are treated separately as discrete texts only and not synthesised or strongly related to the main argument.

Although the author presents his evaluation of various movements and ideas throughout the book, it is not until the final two chapters that his own theological views are presented more systematically. Even so, the particular treatment here only partly reflects the subtitle of this volume, although the intended focus of the whole book on 'the work of the Spirit in renewing the church and shaping the Christian life rather than on his person' is carried through effectively.

In relating the Spirit to the Trinity, he works from the unity of the Godhead and is cautious about the con-

temporary emphasis on the social relations in the Trinity. Therefore, he upholds the *filioque* clause and opposes trends towards a 'Spirit christology' and those who seek the Spirit in the inner recesses of the human self' awaiting discovery. As expected, Bloesch finds a close nexus but not identification between Spirit and Word and between Spirit and water; he emphasizes the revealing and regenerating work of the Spirit and the spiritual gifts.

For Bloesch, the Christian life is one of pilgrimage, and 'the metaphor that most clearly describes' it is 'battle' yet in a positive assured sense because he advocates a *springtime* theology, not a *wintry* one (as in orthodox Calvinism and Lutheranism) or a *summery* one (as in the Holiness movement and Pentecostalism). This is perhaps why he

ends the book with a strongly worded appendix on 'A theology of the cross' which critiques Michael Horton's *In the Face of God* for failing to realise that there is both a *theologia crucis* and a *theologia gloriae*.

In a closing statement which reflects the hallmark of Dr Bloesch's thinking, he sums up his theology of spirituality:

'Indeed, the cross without the resurrection becomes a pretext for despair just as the resurrection without the cross becomes a fantasy that deceives. Our mandate is to herald both the reconciling work of Christ on the cross and the redeeming power of the Spirit of Christ who seals the truth of the gospel within us through the experience of faith.... The way to glory is through the cross, but the cross itself brings assurance of glory, for the Spirit surprises us with joy even in our descent into the darkness of sacrificial service in the name of Christ.'

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Evangelical Review of Theology

Editor: David Parker

**Volume 26
2002**

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Peter S. Williams studied philosophy at Cardiff University, Sheffield University and the University of East Anglia. He is the author of *The Case for God*.

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Alistair Wilson

Matthew's Portrait of Jesus the Judge, with Special Reference to Matthew 21-25

2003 / 1-84227-146-6 /

Nigel G. Wright

Disavowing Constantine

Mission, Church and the Social Order in the Theologies of John Howard Yoder and Jürgen Moltmann

This book is a timely restatement of a radical theology of church and state in the Anabaptist and Baptist tradition. Dr. Wright constructs his argument in dialogue and debate with Yoder and Moltmann, major contributors to a free church perspective.

2000 / 0-85364-978-2 / xv + 251pp

Stephen Wright

The Voice of Jesus

Studies in the Interpretation of Six Gospel Parables

This literary study considers how the 'voice' of Jesus has been heard in different periods of parable interpretation, and how the categories of figure and trope may help us towards a sensitive reading of the parables today.

2000 / 0-85364-975-8 / xiv + 280pp

NEW FROM PATERNOSTER

Church Without Walls: A Global Examination of Cell Church

Editor: Michael Green

The decline of the traditional church in the West has met with the emergence of new ways of being the people of God. One of these is the phenomenal growth of cell churches – small groups of committed Christians meeting in homes and spawning new cells with enthusiasm. Whilst the cell church movement is still small in most Western countries, it is likely to become a major factor in the church of the future. In countries like China, Singapore and Malaysia it is the most popular vehicle for their extraordinary explosion of Christianity. *Church Without Walls: A Global Examination of Cell Church* brings together a number of scholars and church leaders from across the world to examine and critique the natures, values and growth of the cell church movement.

Contributors include Dr Graham Tomlin, Bishop Moses Tay, Dr Bill Beckham, Rob Merchant and Michael Green.

ISBN: 1-84227-139-3 / 198x130 / p/b / 146pp / £7.99

Paternoster Press, PO Box 300, Carlisle, Cumbria CA3 0QS, UK

Studies in Baptist History and Thought

Series Preface

Baptists form one of the largest Christian communities in the world, and while they hold the historic faith in common with other mainstream Christian traditions, they nevertheless have important insights which they can offer to the worldwide church. *Studies in Baptist History and Thought* will be one means towards this end. It is an international series of academic studies which includes original monographs, revised dissertations, collections of essays and conference papers, and aims to cover any aspect of Baptist history and thought. While not all the authors are themselves Baptists, they nevertheless share an interest in relating Baptist history and thought to the other branches of the Christian church and to the wider life of the world.

The series includes studies in various aspects of Baptist history from the seventeenth century down to the present day, including biographical works, and Baptist thought is understood as covering the subject-matter of theology (including interdisciplinary studies embracing biblical studies, philosophy, sociology, practical theology, liturgy and women's studies). The diverse streams of Baptist life throughout the world are all within the scope of these volumes.

The series editors and consultants believe that the academic disciplines of history and theology are of vital importance to the spiritual vitality of the churches of the Baptist faith and order. The series sets out to discuss, examine and explore the many dimensions of their tradition and so to contribute to their on-going intellectual vigour.

A brief word of explanation is due for the series identifier on the front cover. The fountains, taken from heraldry, represent the Baptist distinctive of believer's baptism and, at the same time, the source of the water of life. There are three of them because they symbolize the Trinitarian basis of Baptist life and faith. Those who are redeemed by the Lamb, the book of Revelation reminds us, will be led to 'fountains of living waters' (Rev. 7.17).

David Bebbington (ed.)

The Gospel in the World

International Baptist Studies

This volume of essays deals with a range of subjects spanning Britain, North America, Europe, Asia and the Antipodes. Topics include studies on religious tolerance, the communion controversy and the development of the international Baptist community, and concludes with two important essays on the future of Baptist life that pay special attention to the United States.

2002 / ISBN 1-84227-118-0 / xiii + 361 pp

Geoffrey R. Breed
Strict Communion

Strict Communion Organisations amongst the Baptists in Victorian England

This work, which makes considerable use of contemporary records, identifies the principal strict communion organisations which, whilst working within the framework of the Baptist Union, nevertheless did not compromise what they believed to be scriptural principles of church government.

2002 / ISBN 1-84227-140-7

Anthony R. Cross
Baptism and the Baptists

Theology and Practice in Twentieth-Century Britain

At a time of renewed interest in baptism, *Baptism and the Baptists* is a detailed study of twentieth-century baptismal theology and practice and the factors which have influenced its development.

2000 / ISBN 0-85364-959-6 / xvii + 530pp

Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson (eds.)
Baptist Myths

This collection of essays examines some of the 'myths' in Baptist history and theology: these include the idea of development in Baptist thought, studies in the church, community, spirituality, soul competency, women and the civil rights movement.

2003 / ISBN 1-84227-122-9

Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson (eds.)
Baptist Sacramentalism

This collection of essays includes historical and theological studies in the sacraments from a Baptist perspective. Subjects explored include the physical side of being spiritual, baptism, the Lord's supper, the church, ordination, preaching, worship and religious freedom.

2002 / ISBN 1-84227-119-9

Paul S. Fiddes

Tracks and Traces

Baptist Heritage in Church and Theology

This is a comprehensive, yet unusual, book on the faith and life of Baptist Christians. It explores the understanding of the church, ministry, sacraments and mission from a thoroughly theological perspective. In a series of inter-linked essays, the author relates Baptist identity consistently to a theology of covenant and to participation in the triune communion of God.

2003 / ISBN 1-84227-120-2

Stanley K. Fowler

More Than a Symbol

The British Baptist Recovery of Baptismal Sacramentalism

Fowler surveys the entire scope of British Baptist literature from the seventeenth-century pioneers onwards. He shows that in the twentieth century leading British Baptist pastors and theologians recovered an understanding of baptism that connected experience with soteriology and that in doing so they were recovering what many of their forebears had taught.

2002 / ISBN 1-84227-052-4 / xvi + 276pp

Brian Haymes, Anthony R. Cross and Ruth Gouldbourne

On Being the Church

Revisioning Baptist Identity

The aim of the book is to re-examine Baptist theology and practice in the light of the contemporary biblical, theological, ecumenical and missiological context drawing on historical and contemporary writings and issues. It is not a study in denominationalism but rather seeks to revision historical insights from the believers' church tradition for the sake of Baptists and other Christians in the context of the modern-postmodern context.

2003 / ISBN 1-84227-121-0

Ken R. Manley

From Woolloomooloo to 'Eternity'

A History of Baptists in Australia

From their beginnings in Australia in 1831 with the first baptisms in Woolloomooloo Bay in 1832, this pioneering study describes the quest of Baptists in the different colonies (states) to discover their identity as Australians

and Baptists. Although institutional developments are analyzed and the roles of significant individuals traced, the major focus is on the social and theological dimensions of the Baptist movement.

2004 / ISBN 1-84227-194-6

Ken R. Manley

'Redeeming Love Proclaim': John Rippon and the Baptists

A leading exponent of the new moderate Calvinism which brought new life to many Baptists, John Rippon (1751–1836) helped unite the Baptists at this significant time. His many writings expressed the denomination's growing maturity and mutual awareness of Baptists in Britain and America, and exerted a long-lasting influence on Baptist worship and devotion. In his various activities, Rippon helped conserve the heritage of Old Dissent and promoted the evangelicalism of the New Dissent

2003 / ISBN 1-84227-193-8

Peter J. Morden

Offering Christ to the World

Andrew Fuller and the Revival of English Particular Baptist Life

Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) was one of the foremost English Baptist ministers of his day. His career as an Evangelical Baptist pastor, theologian, apologist and missionary statesman coincided with the profound revitalization of the Particular Baptist denomination to which he belonged. This study examines the key aspects of the life and thought of this hugely significant figure, and gives insights into the revival in which he played such a central part.

2003 / ISBN 1-84227-141-5

Peter Naylor

Calvinism, Communion and the Baptists

A Study of English Calvinistic Baptists from the Late 1600s to the Early 1800s

Dr Naylor argues that the traditional link between 'high-Calvinism' and 'restricted communion' is in need of revision. He examines Baptist communion controversies from the late 1600s to the early 1800s and also the theologies of John Gill and Andrew Fuller.

2003 / ISBN 1-84227-142-3

Frank Rinaldi

'The Tribe of Dan'

A Study of the New Connexion of General Baptists 1770–1891
 'The Tribe of Dan' is a thematic study which explores the theology, organisational structure, evangelistic strategy, ministry and leadership of the New Connexion of General Baptists as it experienced the process of institutionisation in the transition from a revival movement to an established denomination.

2003 / ISBN 1-84227-143-1

Peter Shepherd

The Making of a Modern Denomination

John Howard Shakespeare and the English Baptists 1898–1924
 John Howard Shakespeare introduced revolutionary change to the Baptist denomination. The Baptist Union was transformed into a strong central institution and Baptist ministers were brought under its control. Further, Shakespeare's pursuit of church unity reveals him as one of the pioneering ecumenists of the twentieth century.

2001 / ISBN 1-84227-046-X / xviii + 220pp

Brian Talbot

The Search for a Common Identity

The Origins of the Baptist Union of Scotland 1800–1870
 In the period 1800 to 1827 there were three streams of Baptists in Scotland: Scotch, Haldaneite and 'English' Baptist. A strong commitment to home evangelisation brought these three bodies closer together, leading to a merger of their home missionary societies in 1827. However, the first three attempts to form a union of churches failed, but by the 1860s a common understanding of their corporate identity was attained leading to the establishment of the Baptist Union of Scotland.

2003 / ISBN 1-84227-123-7

Philip E. Thompson

The Freedom of God

Towards Baptist Theology in Pneumatological Perspective
 This study contends that the range of theological commitments of the early Baptists are best understood in relation to their distinctive emphasis on the

freedom of God. Thompson traces how this was recast anthropocentrically, leading to emphasis upon human freedom from the nineteenth century onwards. He seeks to recover the dynamism of the early vision via a pneumatologically oriented ecclesiology defining the church in terms of the memory of God.

2004 / ISBN 1-84227-125-3

Linda Wilson

Marianne Farningham

A Study in Victorian Evangelical Piety

Marianne Farningham, of College Street Baptist Chapel, Northampton, was a household name in evangelical circles in the later nineteenth century. For over fifty years she produced comment, poetry, biography and fiction for the popular Christian press. This investigation uses her writings to explore the beliefs and behaviour of evangelical Nonconformists, including Baptists, during these years.

2004 / ISBN -84227-124-5

NEW FROM PATERNOSTER

Postmission: World Mission by a Postmodern Generation

Editor: Richard Tiplady

The West is experiencing a significant culture change. Estimates of its nature and importance vary, but it is undeniable that new generations are growing up with a worldview radically different to that of their parents and grandparents.

If generation 'Xers' did world mission their way, what would it look like? Are new strategies, structures and methodologies needed or can the existing structures be changed to allow the Xer worldview exist alongside others? This book provides ideas and models for systematic organizational culture change, as a postmodern generation seeks to do world mission.

Richard Tiplady works as an organizational development consultant, specializing in innovation, new projects and organizational change. Prior to this, he was Associate Director of Global Connections, the UK evangelical network for world mission.

ISBN: 1-84227-165-2 / 229x145 / p/b / 152pp / £10.99

Paternoster Press, PO Box 300, Carlisle, Cumbria CA3 0QS, UK

Studies in Evangelical History and Thought

Series Preface

The Evangelical movement has been marked by its union of four emphases: on the Bible, on the cross of Christ, on conversion as the entry to the Christian life and on the responsibility of the believer to be active. The present series is designed to publish scholarly studies of any aspect of this movement in Britain or overseas. Its volumes include social analysis as well as exploration of Evangelical ideas. The coverage extends backwards to the Reformation, when the term 'Evangelical' was first used in roughly (though not exactly) its modern sense, and forwards to the present day, when the movement is one of the most prominent features in the religious landscape. Most books in the series, however, consider aspects of the movement shaped by the Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century, when the impetus to mission began to turn the popular Protestantism of the British Isles and North America into a global phenomenon. The series aims to reap some of the rich harvest of academic research about those who, over the centuries, have believed that they had a gospel to tell to the nations.

John Brencher

Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899–1981) and Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism

This study critically demonstrates the significance of the life and ministry of Martyn Lloyd-Jones for post-war British evangelicalism and demonstrates that his preaching was his greatest influence on twentieth-century Christianity. The factors which shaped his view of the church are examined, as is the way his reformed evangelicalism led to a separatist ecclesiology which divided evangelicals.

2002 / 1-84227-051-6 / xvi + 267pp

Neil T.R. Dickson

Brethren in Scotland 1838–2000

A Social Study of an Evangelical Movement

The Brethren were remarkably pervasive throughout Scottish society. This study of the Open Brethren in Scotland places them in their social context and examines their growth, development and relationship to society.

2002 / 1-84227-113-X /

David Hilborn

The Words of our Lips

Language-Use in Free Church Worship

Studies of liturgical language have tended to focus on the written canons of Roman Catholic and Anglican communities. By contrast, David Hilborn analyses the more extemporaneous approach of English Nonconformity. Drawing on recent developments in linguistic pragmatics, he explores similarities and differences between 'fixed' and 'free' worship, and argues for the interdependence of each.

2003 / 0-85364-977-4 /

Mark Hopkins

Baptists, Congregationalists, and Theological Change

Some Late Nineteenth-Century Leaders and Controversies

2003 / 1-84227-150-4 /

Kenneth S. Jeffrey

When the Lord Walked the Land

The 1858–1862 Revival in the North East of Scotland

Previous studies of revivals have tended to approach religious movements from either a broad, national or a strictly local level. This study of the multifaceted nature of the 1859 revival as it appeared in three distinct social contexts within a single region reveals the heterogeneous nature of simultaneous religious movements in the same vicinity.

2002 / 1-84227-057-5 /

R.T. Kendall

Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649

The author's thesis is that those who formed the Westminster Confession of Faith, which is regarded as Calvinism, in fact departed from John Calvin on two points: (1) the extent of the atonement and (2) the ground of assurance of salvation.

1997 / 0-85364-827-1 / xii + 263pp

John Kenneth Lander

Tent Methodism 1814–1832

2003 / 1-84227-151-2 /

Herbert McGonigle

‘Sufficient Saving Grace’

John Wesley’s Evangelical Arminianism

A thorough investigation of the theological roots of John Wesley’s evangelical Arminianism and how these convictions were hammered out in controversies on predestination, limited atonement and the perseverance of the saints.

2001 / 1-84227-045-1 / xvi + 350pp

James I. Packer

Richard Baxter

2002 / 1-84227-147-4 /

Ian M Randall

Evangelical Experiences

A Study in the Spirituality of English Evangelicalism 1918–1939

This book makes a detailed historical examination of evangelical spirituality between the First and Second World Wars. It shows how patterns of devotion led to tensions and divisions. In a wide-ranging study, Anglican, Wesleyan, Reformed and Pentecostal-charismatic spiritualities are analysed.

1999 / 0-85364-919-7 / xii + 309pp

Geoffrey Robson

Dark Satanic Mills?

Religion and Irreligion in Birmingham and the Black Country

This book analyses and interprets the nature and extent of popular Christian belief and practice in Birmingham and the Black Country during the first half of the nineteenth century, with particular reference to the impact of cholera epidemics and evangelism on church extension programmes.

2002 / 1-84227-102-4 / xvi + 294pp

James H.S. Steven

Worship in the Spirit

*A Sociological Analysis and Theological Appraisal of Charismatic
Worship in the Church of England*

This book explores the nature and function of worship in six Church of England churches influenced by the Charismatic Movement, focusing on congregational singing and public prayer ministry. The theological adequacy of such ritual is discussed in relation to pneumatological and christological understandings in Christian worship.

2002 / 1-84227-103-2 /

Martin Sutherland

Peace, Toleration and Decay

The Ecclesiology of Later Stuart Dissent

2003 / 1-84227-152-0

Jacob Thomas

Evangelical Social Thought 1975–1990

Unscheduled / 1-84227-048-6 /

Martin Wellings

Evangelicals Embattled

*Responses of Evangelicals in the Church of England to Ritualism,
Darwinism and Theological Liberalism 1890–1930.*

In the closing years of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century Anglican Evangelicals faced a series of challenges. In responding to Anglo-Catholicism, liberal theology, Darwinism and biblical criticism, the unity and identity of the Evangelical school were severely tested.

2002 / 1-84227-049-4 /

James Whisenant

A Fragile Unity

Anti-Ritualism and the Division of Evangelicalism in the Nineteenth Century

This book deals with the ritualist controversy (approximately 1850–1900) from the perspective of its evangelical participants and considers the divisive effects it had on the party.

2002 / 1-84227-105-9 /

Linda Wilson

Constrained by Zeal

Female Spirituality amongst Nonconformists 1825–1875

Constrained by Zeal investigates the neglected area of Nonconformist female spirituality. Against the background of separate spheres, it analyses the experience of women from four denominations, and argues that the churches provided a 'third sphere' in which they could find opportunities for participation.

2000 / 0-85364-972-3 / xvi + 293pp



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Web: www.paternoster-publishing.com

SCRIPTURE AND HERMENEUTICS

After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation

Editors: Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene and Karl Möller

"There is always some view of language built into biblical interpretation. If we are to read Scripture to hear God's address it is vital that we attend to current debates about language and become critically conscious in this respect."

Craig Bartholomew

After Pentecost is the second volume from the Scripture and Hermeneutics seminar. This annual gathering of Christian scholars from various disciplines was established in 1998 and aims to reassess the discipline of biblical studies from the foundations up and forge creative new ways for reopening the Bible in our cultures.

"This is an excellent collection on a topic for which interdisciplinary conversation between biblical scholars, theologians and philosophers is vital. These essays deserve to be widely read and to draw many more of us into that conversation."

Richard Bauckham, Professor of New Testament Studies, St Mary's College, University of St Andrews

"This is a serious book, a genre in which there are few current representatives. The book will bear careful, patient study. It cannot be 'read', but must be studied. Immense learning is mobilized in the service of serious critical reflection on behalf of the church as the church faces an entirely new situation with the demise of modernist rationality and its accompanying positivism."

Walter Brueggemann, Professor of Old Testament, Columbia Theological Seminary

Craig Bartholomew is a research fellow in the School of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Gloucestershire.

Colin Greene is Head of Theology and Public Policy at the British and Foreign Bible Society.

Karl Möller is a researcher in the School of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Gloucestershire.

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A Major Reference Work

Dictionary of Historical Theology

General Editor: Trevor A Hart

Consulting Editors:

Richard Bauckham, Jan Milic~ Lochman,

Paul D. Molnar, Alan P.F. Sell

Until now, there has been no concise and comprehensive manual on the history and development of Christian theology. ***The Dictionary of Historical Theology*** fills this gap. The range and depth of the 314 entries (varying in length from 500 to 15,000 words), written by over 170 contributors representing the best of contemporary scholarship from around the world, are unequalled. Another key feature of the Dictionary is its comprehensive index, which enables the reader to track down references to many more subjects than those actually included in the list of entries. Deliberately international and interdenominational, the Dictionary's aim is to tell the story of Christian theology – a story that is wider and more complicated than any individual strands of development to which Christians today may belong. Entries focus on the key figures, movements and texts from the early church to the present day and include biographical and wider historical material as well as relevant bibliography. Each entry treats the intellectual antecedents and descendants of its subject, as well as its role in shaping the wider development of the Christian theological tradition. This volume will be of use to students writing essays and dissertations, ministers and priests writing sermons, and the informed layperson interested in furthering his or her general knowledge of the Christian tradition and its development.

1-84227-002-8 / 260x180mm / c/b / 620pp / £39.99



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