

## CONTENTS

### **THEME: Discerning the obedience of faith**

The Truncated Gospel in Modern Evangelicalism:  
A Critique and Beginning Reconstruction

SAMUEL R. SCHUTZ

*page 292*

Growing Disciples in the Rainforest:  
A Contextualized Confession for Pygmy Christians

BENNO VAN DEN TOREN

*page 306*

The Place of Church Planting in Mission:  
Towards a Theological Framework

RICHARD YATES HIBBERT

*page 316*

Migration, Mission and the Multi-ethnic Church

THORSTEN PRILL

*page 332*

Bevans and Bediako:  
Reconsidering Text-Based Models of Contextual Theologising

ALAN THOMSON

*page 347*

Renewed Journey: A Study of Philippians 3:10-11

JOHN LEWIS

*page 359*

Book Reviews *page 364*

Index to Volume 33 *page 381*

EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY VOLUME 33, NO 4, October 2009

# *Evangelical Review of Theology*

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



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## Editorial: Discerning the obedience of faith

THIS IS MY FINAL ISSUE as editor of this journal. I took up the role from the founding editor, Dr Bruce Nicholls, in 1999, having already been Book Editor for six years before that. It has been a privilege to edit ERT over these years as it has changed from largely a digest of selected pre-published articles for the benefit of the Majority World into a genuine 'forum of global evangelical theology.' This transition reflects the increasing numbers of competent and committed evangelical theologians around the world, and more importantly, their maturity and strategic significance for the future. It has been my pleasure to work with established authors and especially with younger ones, seeking to 'discern the obedience of faith' (Rom. 1:5) for the mission and witness of the church in our rapidly changing world.

I have sought to reflect in ERT the diversity and global nature of the church and its theological work. These features are reflected in this issue as much as in any other as we present articles highlighting the importance of expressing the authentic message of the gospel in all its fullness and hope.

We start with Samuel Schutz's call to avoid presenting a 'truncated' gospel, seemingly effective in securing results from evangelistic effort, but in fact, deficient in producing the kind of disciples that are intended by our Lord. In a remarkable parallel, Benno van den Toren reports on efforts to develop sound evangelistic and discipling prac-

tices among the Pygmy churches in Central Africa.

Richard Yates focuses on the importance of church planting in the evangelistic task (in contrast to a purely individualistic approach) and its role of creating 'communities which display... [the] kingdom qualities of love and unity and thus point to God.' Thorsten Prill discusses an aspect of church planting which is of increasing relevance—the nature of the church in multi-cultural situations, whether they should be mono-ethnic or multi-ethnic. He argues strongly for the latter on biblical grounds. With the cultural context in mind, it is appropriate to investigate the issue of contextualization which Alan Thomson does by means of reviewing the influential ideas of Stephen Bevans in the light of 'best practice' i.e. 'how contextual theologising could (at least theoretically) be done', using the work of the late African theologian, Kwame Bediako as a foil.

To round out this issue, I am also pleased to present another in our important series of Bible study articles, designed to stimulate and feed church leaders and students from the Word. In the midst of an uncertain world, this message from Philippians 'is a passionate plea for fullness of life in Jesus Christ' which calls us 'to trust in the only one who can truly hold us securely and who longs to touch the world through open hearts.'

**David Parker, Editor**

# The Truncated Gospel in Modern Evangelicalism: A Critique and Beginning Reconstruction

Samuel R. Schutz

**KEYWORDS:** *Evangelism, tracts, pragmatism, decisionism, individualism, Imago Dei, covenant, joyful love*

SINCE THE EARLY twentieth century a particular model for proclaiming the gospel has been dominant in American evangelicalism and exported to the world. I will refer to this gospel presentation (often presented by means of small tracts) as the *truncated gospel* because I believe it falls short of the liberating and transforming gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ as revealed in the Bible and authenticated by the lives of his true followers.

The problem of the truncated gospel is subtle and profound. It centres upon

a commonly accepted gospel summary which has become the basis not only for gospel tracts but also for much of the conservative Protestant church's understanding of what it means to be a Christian. The format of the truncated gospel summary *per se* is not in the Bible but originated historically in the early twentieth century as a pragmatic attempt to explain logically and efficiently how one becomes 'saved' and a follower of Jesus Christ the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

Recently a number of writings from the American evangelical camp have begun to expose this gospel presentation as superficial at best and dangerous at worst.<sup>3</sup> What has not yet

<sup>2</sup> One of the earliest examples of a fixed formula was Austin Crouch's five-step 'Plan of Salvation' in 1924, cited in Ronald W. Johnson, *How Will They Hear If We Don't Listen?* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 50-51.

<sup>3</sup> Dave Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity...And Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 2007).

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appeared is a concise and detailed analysis of the core deficiencies of this presentation accompanied by a blueprint for how we might correct these inadequacies without throwing out the multiple truthful elements of the tract content. It is the goal of the present article to fill this void and to recommend the beginning elements of an alternative simple presentation of the gospel.

It should be emphasized that a simple and practical approach for presenting the gospel does not require a fixed formula. One of the earliest proponents of practical evangelism in the nineteenth century was Charles Finney who never advocated a standard approach with predetermined steps.<sup>4</sup> Another early advocate of presenting the gospel simply in the nineteenth century was Dwight L. Moody although he also advised against a rigid 'plan' of predetermined steps because he observed, 'God never repeats himself; he does not approach any two people the same way.'<sup>5</sup>

It is not easy for me to admit that our traditional gospel presentation truncates the biblical gospel in a way that must be corrected. At age seven I was personally guided to new birth in Christ through a presentation of the truncated gospel. Not only I but also whole generations of authentic followers of Christ were first introduced to him and led to new birth through this abbreviated gospel format. Nevertheless, it is increasingly clear to me that

our model of gospel communication is in need of major revision, retaining what is good and true in the old while simultaneously replacing what is deficient with a more faithful biblical model for our own day.

The materials presented in the truncated gospel are in some ways undeniably true and representative of aspects of biblical teaching. Although the order and format vary slightly, the core content includes (1) God's love for humanity, (2) humanity's sin and holy God's apparent predicament between his need to punish on the one hand and his love for humanity on the other, (3) God's resolution of his predicament through Christ's suffering and death as a substitute for our punishment, and (4) God's invitation to each individual to be saved from punishment and to become God's child by praying personally to receive the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ for forgiveness and new life forever. The truths expressed are consistent with the biblical record, and the simple prayer at the end appears to be a valid expression of belief in the truths revealed as well as an honest personal commitment to God. What then is the problem?

Pervasive evidence sadly demonstrates that many alleged converts of the truncated gospel subsequently deny Jesus' core teachings and violate his ethical commands with impunity.<sup>6</sup> How can this be? The New Testament declares that the gospel is 'the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes' (Rom. 1:16) and that the

<sup>4</sup> Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Revival* (Grand Rapids: Bethany House, 1988 reprint).

<sup>5</sup> Dwight L. Moody, *Great Joy* (New York: E. G. Treat and Company, 1977 reprint), 277.

<sup>6</sup> For example, see the web site of social science researcher George Barna at <barna.com>.

gospel eventuates in liberated and transformed lives (2 Thes. 2:14).<sup>7</sup>

The problem is that although the truncated gospel does *resemble* the biblical gospel it is not commensurate with the gospel. At best the truncated gospel eventuates in seedlings whose roots grow beyond shallow soil into the deep and rich earth of the biblical gospel to become healthy and mature plants who demonstrate the power and joy of their Lord's holy love in their lives. At worst, however, the truncated gospel eventuates in seedlings whose shallow roots produce withered and worthless fruits devoid of the biblical gospel: life without love that is not true life at all, words without works, function without freedom. These misguided souls believe they are followers of Jesus but do not know him as revealed in the Bible and have not encountered his love through the ministry of regeneration by the Holy Spirit. Consequently they cannot follow the one whom they do not know.

We who have relied upon the truncated gospel as our means of communication must shoulder much of the blame for resultant spurious conversions. It might be tempting for us to dodge this responsibility by concluding that our message is adequate but the apparent converts were insincere. The phenomenon of people who profess Christ without really experiencing the transforming reconciliation to God that he offers is, after all, not a new problem. Ever since Constantine became the first Christian emperor of Rome in

the fourth century the church has had to deal with *cultural Christianity*, where large numbers of people choose to be nominally Christian for various reasons but lack any real transformation by the Holy Spirit. It is for this very reason that the great Reformers differentiated between the *visible*, institutional church, and the *invisible* church of true saints known only to God. Puritans addressed this dilemma by establishing *gathered* churches, supposedly filled only with authentically regenerate believers. Jesus himself warned in the parable of the Sower (Mt. 13:1-12; Lk. 8:1-15) that not all seeds planted would produce fruit.

We could try to hide behind these historical precedents by arguing that we are fulfilling our only responsibility when we plant the seed by proclaiming the Word faithfully. Tragically, however, our proclamation of the Word has not been faithful. Each generation in the church's history has had its own problems, and we in our generation must take responsibility for identifying and addressing our own. The time has come to proclaim the gospel truthfully for the twenty first century with authenticity and personal integrity.

In concluding this introductory section mention should be made of recent attempts to communicate the gospel with greater clarity. An excellent alternative to the truncated gospel, now extending around the world, is the Alpha Course originating from Holy Trinity Church in Brompton, UK.<sup>8</sup> Another corrective to the truncated gospel over the past half century is the

<sup>7</sup> All scripture citations in this article are taken from the *New International Version* of the Bible (NIV), unless otherwise noted.

<sup>8</sup> Nicky Gumble, *The Alpha Course* (Brompton: HBT Publications, 2000).

work of my colleague, Robert E. Coleman who has expanded the church's understanding of what it means to be an authentic Christian disciple.<sup>9</sup> Recently a plethora of writings have contributed to an understanding of the gospel with biblical fidelity.<sup>10</sup>

A number of evangelistic ministries have had a laudatory history of attempting to communicate the gospel faithfully, often resulting in genuine conversions and changed lives in spite of the deficiency of the truncated gospel for the twenty first century. These include Campus Crusade for Christ, the Navigators, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, to whom appreciation is expressed. These and other organizations are also currently seeking to develop alternative models for communicating the gospel, and so the author considers them to be valued partners to whom the American church is deeply indebted.

The remainder of this article will begin with a critique of how the truncated gospel falls short of the biblical gospel, and then conclude with a recommended alternative theological framework for a simple gospel presentation.

## I How Does the Truncated Gospel Fall Short of the Biblical Gospel?

The truncated gospel is dangerous

because it employs a *pragmatic methodology* and delivers a *partial message*.

### 1 Pragmatic Methodology

The truncated gospel was designed out of recognition that the Great Commission is our Lord's command to work as diligently and efficiently as possible to spread the good news at whatever the cost. Apart from Christ humanity is separated from God. The gospel is good news indeed because without God we are in a desperate situation both presently and eternally. Therefore the motives behind the truncated gospel are to be praised.

The methodology that the truncated gospel employs, however, is fallacious. Driven by a characteristically American spirit of idealism and resolve to 'get the job done,' proponents of the truncated gospel have adopted the *false ethical* system of pragmatism.<sup>11</sup>

An important distinction must be made between 'pragmatic' as a synonym for 'practical' (who would prefer being impractical to being practical?) and 'pragmatism' as a false ethical system. We have unwittingly been betrayed by false ethical pragmatism to believe that by improving our methodology to get as many decisions as possible we will be 'saving' more individuals. There are two closely related reasons why, ironically, this false ethical pragmatism is not practical.

<sup>11</sup> Although beyond the scope of this article, the interested reader is referred again to Kinman and Lyons, *unchristian...* (cited above) for a critique of how the methodologies of a false ethical pragmatism are affecting the life of the American church today.

<sup>9</sup> Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 2006, recent reprint).

<sup>10</sup> See Bibliography at the end of the article.

Firstly, we must begin by recognizing that our pragmatic methodology has been erroneous because our Lord's Great Commission is not *simply* to get decisions but to make disciples. Although obscured by most English translations, the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20) has but one imperative—'Make Disciples (Followers)!'. I suspect that although *when we are reminded* most of us know better, nevertheless our methodology too often focuses simply upon getting decisions. We then hold a vague hope that somehow in the future the one who has 'been saved' will 'be discipled' to become a follower of Jesus. The underlying assumption is, 'At least they're saved now.'

But the questions must be asked, 'Are they?', and, 'How do we know?' In fact, our biblical responsibility is not simply to 'get decisions' but rather to 'make disciples' (followers), and only as the new 'convert' engages in that process can he or she evidence the authenticity of conversion to become a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Secondly, the false ethical pragmatic system of the truncated gospel is erroneous because a pragmatic methodology can never produce salvation. At worst, the truncated gospel attempts to reduce God's sovereign action to renew human lives to a simple formula that can be implemented by humans. The adherents of the truncated gospel too often assume that if an unsaved individual affirms each of the truth propositions and then prays the 'sinner's prayer'—confessing sins and confessing belief in Christ—then on that basis God himself promises salvation.

When we seriously consider the matter we know that intellectual

assent to the principles is insufficient, because as Billy Graham reminds us frequently in his sermons, 'Even the demons believe and shudder' (Jas. 2:19). We also know that no formula can force God to act, not even a formula prayer, because that would be akin to magical superstition or 'salvation by works' instead of salvation by God's grace alone through faith alone. But if the person is sincere, does not his sincerity save him/her when the person prays the prayer? Pragmatism would say yes. However, sincerity in and of itself has no value whatever. Paul's contemporary orthodox religious leaders were very sincere, in fact zealous for God, but were sincerely wrong and lost (Rom. 10:1-2).

Romans 10:9-10 is one of the passages most abused by those who believe that God is obligated to save anyone who goes through the steps of the truncated gospel:

If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

The advocates of the truncated gospel too often urge the inquirer, 'Just go through the steps. Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead. This is God's Word and he does not lie. He is obligated to save you if you do your part by going through the steps.' This ritual teaching is a gross misinterpretation of the passage.

It is unacceptable to turn Romans 10:9-10 into a formula to be manipulated rather than a promise to be

trusted with fear and trembling. It cannot be questioned that 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved' *by him*, because 'anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame' (Rom. 10:13, 11). Those who believe that Jesus is the resurrected and living Lord are enjoined to call on him for salvation (Rom. 10:14). Yet the interaction is personal, not mechanical. When God reveals the Lord Jesus Christ to us and we believe (trust) in him, we call on him in desperation and hope. God then responds freely, according to his sovereign will and way and in his own time to bring about a supernatural rebirth.

Most importantly, the truncated presentation minimizes the gravity of confessing 'Jesus is Lord' and believing that God raised him from the dead. A. T. Robertson argues, 'the word *kurios* was and is the touchstone of faith,' noting that 'no Jew would [make this confession] who had not really trusted in Christ, for *kurios* in the LXX is used of God' and 'no Gentile would do it who had not ceased worshipping the emperor as *Kurios*'.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the word translated 'confess, is a judicial term that indicates the binding and public declaration which settles a relationship with legal force'.<sup>13</sup>

Confessing, 'Jesus is Lord' is not some simple statement to be uttered lightly but is rather the public sign of heartfelt entrance into a binding

covenant to acknowledge Christ as God, trusting him for all things and obeying him in everything. Believing that God raised Christ from the dead is similarly rife with implications. The resurrection vindicated Jesus' actions and teachings, proving that God's loving kingship extends over everything in this sinful world (Col. 2:15; 1 Pet. 3:21-22; Heb. 2:8). Truly believing the resurrection therefore means *following* Christ, living in this sinful age after the model he presented (1 Jn. 2:6; Rom. 8:16-17; Heb. 13:13; Phil. 2:3-5; Eph. 5:1-2; 1 Pet. 1:14-15).

It is vain to believe that such a commitment is easy for a sinful human to make. Jesus criticized the unfaithful religious leaders of his time by quoting Isaiah 29:13:

These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men. (Mt. 15:8-9)

These leaders believed they had trusted in God and committed themselves to him but their actions betrayed their lack of genuine faith. Jesus warned that it would be the same with many who claimed to follow him, 'Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father in heaven' (Mt. 20:21). As D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones reminds us, 'Scripture teaches us very clearly that unbelief is always primarily a matter of the heart, not of the intellect'.<sup>14</sup> Telling people

<sup>12</sup> A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament, Volume IV: The Epistles of Paul* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931), 389.

<sup>13</sup> Cleon L. Rodgers, Jr. and Cleon L. Rodgers III, *The New Linguistic And Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 335.

<sup>14</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 10, Saving Faith* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), 154.

that they are regenerate Christians when they have affirmed some truths and prayed a prayer but have never experienced the regeneration of the heart brought about by God's divine action is misleading and irresponsible.

The adherents of the truncated gospel recognize at their best that obedience follows authentic faith and trust in God, and that all of this is made possible only through a spiritual re-birth by God's grace alone. As we proclaim the gospel and people respond by calling on the Lord Jesus Christ, God by his sovereign will and in his loving power brings individuals to new birth in his timing and in his own way. The Apostle Peter describes Christian conversion in weighty terms: 'For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God' (I Pet. 1:23). Jesus spoke similarly:

Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit...The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit. (Jn. 3:6,8)

The Apostle John teaches the necessity of this supernatural new birth in his Gospel, and says in his first letter:

The [one] who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. (I Jn. 1:4-6)

God's work of authentic conversion eventuates in a transformed heart and life—all because of God's grace, his

love freely given! Our conversion is entirely from God's gracious hand, including the saving faith that we express. God grants us the gift of faith and then as we accept it God responds by bringing about new birth in us so that we can live a new life for him (Eph. 2:8-10):

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

When we depend upon the false ethical pragmatic methodology we fail because salvation is God's work and not ours. We are simply God's humble ambassadors to proclaim the gospel of his salvation. We lack power to change the heart, making it turn from sin and to love God. It is the Holy Spirit poured out in a person that brings authentic conversion.

Few of my brothers and sisters in Christ who employ the truncated gospel would deny the inherent dangers just enunciated and many would quote the Ephesians passage just mentioned (2:8-10) as an integral part of their own gospel presentation. Yet even when our *articulated* theology (what we say we believe) has been sound, our *functional* theology (how we practice what we say we believe) has betrayed us. Furthermore, it is not merely the pragmatic methodology of the truncated gospel that is problematic. More fundamentally the problem of the truncated gospel is its *partial message*, the subject to which we now turn.

## 2 Partial Message

Firstly, a narrow rationalism controls the *context* of the truncated gospel. Bare cognitive propositions come seemingly out of nowhere along with isolated Bible quotations and a picture diagram here or there, all appearing pedantic to the modern or postmodern hearer. In the absence of a larger context, the attempted rational basis for the gospel is simplistic and fragmented.

The biblical gospel, by contrast, is by its very nature profoundly rational, satisfying the deepest quest of the human mind with a structure of reality that provides a framework for a lifetime of continuing inquiry and ongoing discovery. The biblical gospel is eminently simple without being simplistic, poignantly addressing the nagging questions of the human heart regarding where we have come from, the meaning of our world and our place in it, and where we are going.

Far from pedantic or naïve, the biblical gospel rationally addresses the intractable evil of our world and our brokenness in the context of this evil. The biblical gospel moves beyond despair to a rational basis for hope, spurring us to emulate God's courageous and sacrificial loving action toward healing and wholeness (biblical *shalom*) for ourselves and for the world.<sup>15</sup> The biblical gospel pulsates with a vision large enough to capture our imagination and to inspire us to a lifelong purpose with passion.

<sup>15</sup> Cornelius Planginga, Jr. *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

Secondly, narcissistic individualism controls the *content* of the gospel. The underlying message is that you are the *raison d'être* for Jesus' coming to earth and dying on the cross. This aspect of the truncated gospel can be fairly represented as follows.

God loves you, so take advantage of what he has to offer. What do you have to lose? It is expected, of course, that you will give your life to him so you can get more from him forever, including no fear of death because he promises you heaven. Accept Jesus as your *Saviour* to forgive you for your sin in the past and your continuing sins which you should try diligently to avoid, and accept Jesus as your *Lord* so he can lead your life and you can get all the good things he has for you now and forever. Oh, and don't forget, you are making this life commitment for his sake as well as yours. Read the Bible and pray daily so you can get the most out of the Christian life and go to church so you can share all of these good things with others.

Many in the evangelical church who have 'accepted Jesus as Saviour and Lord' would agree with the foregoing description without question. Why would they not? The way they have been introduced to the gospel is that Jesus' sacrifice is *essentially* about them and for their sake. This representation of the gospel is a half-truth which is by itself unwittingly deceptive and erroneous.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth; or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).

It is true that God does love us and Christ did die for us personally. He does call us each individually to a life-transforming love relationship with him. The larger truth, however, is that the second person of the Trinity became incarnate *for* a more significant purpose than 'me,' and he came to call us *to* a more significant purpose than 'me.' A gospel that begins with me and ends with me is no gospel at all, but instead a futile, infantile, selfish pursuit.

The gospel begins with God and is for God! He alone is worthy to be the gospel's starting point and ultimate purpose. God creates, redeems, and recreates to display his glory, for he himself is the highest good and the ultimate end of all things. We are valuable (and even alive!) because God loves us, and we will experience joy and good things from God because God is joyful and good. Yet we must never confuse the matter and see our own individual (or even collective) destiny as the greatest value or deepest purpose of the universe.

The Apostle Paul proclaims in doxology:

Oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out! 'Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?' 'Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?' For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen. (Rom. 11:33-36)

He then declares, 'Therefore, I urge you...in view of God's mercy, to offer

your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship' (Rom. 12:1). Paul calls upon 'followers' of Jesus to *follow Jesus!* For Jesus life was all about God his Father, and so for us his followers life should be all about following God. For Jesus life was all about loving the Father through complete personal sacrifice on God's behalf (worship), and so for us his followers life should be all about worshiping God through a life of complete sacrifice on God's behalf.

Jesus' sacrifice in his incarnation and in his obedient and faithful life inaugurated a heavenly kingdom revolution on earth—a revolution of victorious love-in-action uniquely different than ever before witnessed on earth. This powerful love continued all the way to Calvary and was consummated by Jesus' victorious resurrection. God's Kingdom revolution continues through Christ's followers, under his authority and in the power of the Holy Spirit. The gospel is a personal invitation from God to follow Jesus in a liberated and transformed life of complete sacrifice—not a burden but a joy, not a laborious striving but a supernatural gift of holy love in resurrection power through the Holy Spirit. However, if ever it seems not a joy to follow God, or if ever we are not immediately rewarded with good things because of our Christian walk, it remains good and necessary for us to follow our Lord. He is God! We too quickly forget his greatness and gravity. Jesus declared unequivocally:

If anyone would come after me he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. (Lk. 9:23)

If anyone loves me he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him. (Jn. 14:23)

I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. (Jn. 14:12)

The true follower of Jesus Christ the Lord is a willing recruit in God's covenant army (the church) for God's invincible revolution of sacrificial love. The biblical gospel is about 'righteousness,' that is, setting things right so that justice prevails in the life of the individual, the community, the nation, and the world. God is committed to righteousness, to saving those who are oppressed, and to saving his planet which is being desecrated. From eternity past Triune God made a covenant among the members of the Godhead to eradicate evil and to bring peace (shalom) to rule and to prevail. God's blueprint was to sacrifice himself in victorious love in order to create a 'covenant people,' the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, who would victoriously sacrifice themselves in love:

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Heb. 13:20-21)

In summary, the gospel is living, loving sacrifice for God's sake, for his glory, and for the coming of his Kingdom. Jesus taught his disciples to pray,

'Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven' (Mt. 6:10). The gospel is for 'me' only if I am for God! More accurately, the gospel is for 'me' because I am one member of Christ's entire body that is for God. Far from narcissistic individualism, the biblical gospel is individual and collective *worship* that eventuates in *witness* to the world. The writer to the Hebrews summarily pens, 'Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name' (Heb. 13:15). This is the true gospel worth living for and worth dying for—the truth that God is at the centre of all things and invites us to labour alongside him to set things right.

This article began by stating that the problems of the truncated gospel are subtle and profound. As we have seen, the truncated gospel is not completely erroneous. The biblical truths in the older model must be preserved. However, the truncated gospel is not simply incomplete but rather complexly incomplete. Below are suggested point-by-point correctives for true but incomplete elements of the truncated gospel.

- 1 God's loving sacrifice on our behalf... leading to our loving sacrifice on God's behalf;
- 2 Christ's atonement as penal substitution... leading to his and our victory of invincible love and triumph over evil;
- 3 Christ rose from the dead... leading to his and our living Kingdom power, joy, shalom;
- 4 *Sola Scriptura* (by Scripture alone)... leading to the written Word Revealing the Living Word



through the Holy Spirit,  
 5 rational truth... leading to rela-  
 6 tional truth,  
 our personal relationship with the  
 Lord Jesus Christ... leading to our  
 personal relationship with Triune  
 God—Father, Son, and Holy  
 Spirit;  
 7 *Solo Christo* (by Christ alone)...  
leading to incorporation into the  
 Body of Christ, the Church;  
 8 our individual life with God...  
 leading to our corporate life in the  
 Church, with others, and with the  
 natural world;  
 9 *Sola Gratia* (by grace alone)...  
leading to a grace-filled life of  
 obedience;  
 10 *Sola Fide* (through faith alone)...  
leading to a life of faithfulness;  
 11 repentance at conversion... lead-  
ing to a daily life of repentance &  
 renewal,  
 12 New Birth as a once-for-all  
 event... leading to a lifetime of  
 ongoing liberation and transfor-  
 mation through the Holy Spirit,  
 13 Peace with God... leading to win-  
 ning warfare by waging peace,  
 14 immediate righteousness from  
 God at salvation... leading to a  
 life of righteous purity for God,  
 15 immediate justification from God  
 at salvation... leading to a life of  
 social justice for God,  
 16 future perspective on life and  
 death... leading to a present per-  
 spective on life & daily living.

The present article does not allow space to develop adequately a complete alternative presentation to the truncated gospel. A separate publication is now in process for that purpose. However, a brief sketch is given here

for one possible approach. No attempt is made below to ‘translate’ the terms and concepts for the audience of the unconverted inquirer, though that could readily be done given more space and with illustrations—perhaps as a booklet but better yet as a brief portable Web-based video.

In formulating this presentation I am indebted to Timothy Keller.<sup>17</sup> He and I both have Jonathan Edwards as our primary source.<sup>18</sup>

## II Theological Framework for a Gospel Presentation

### 1 Background

While the truncated gospel may be viewed as pedantic and parochial, the biblical gospel is quite to the contrary profoundly relevant and universally applicable. The gospel brings light to a dark world and healing to a malignant world. Our planet reels with injustice and insecurity born of evil, from the working machinations of despots in totalitarian nations to the greed and corruption of pandering politicians in ‘democratic’ states. Not all leaders are nefarious, of course, and not all regimes are impossibly corrupt. Yet even among the best and most well

<sup>17</sup> Timothy Keller, ‘The Dance of God,’ in *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Dutton, 2008), 213-226.

<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Edwards, ‘The End for Which God Created the World,’ in *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 94-121. See also John Piper, *God’s Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards, With the Complete Text of the End for Which God Created the World* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006).

intentioned leadership, self-interest in government and attendant systems continually creates disunity and threatens the well being of humanity and the earth on which we live. Injustice is rampant and ethical and moral violations are commonplace. Problems at the macro level of governments intersect with problems at the micro level of individual, family, and community. Entire systems of nations are affected, including the economic, the educational, the social, the arts and media, the law enforcement, and yes the ecclesiastical.

Where can humanity turn for meaning, for understanding, for guidance? C. S. Lewis was fond of pointing out that truth may be found in a variety of places but all truth is ultimately a reflection of the one biblical truth of the gospel.<sup>19</sup>

The Bible deals with evil without flinching—addresses the reality of evil and places it in historical context, describes evil’s contest with us in spiritual warfare, explains God’s decisive conquest over evil in our world, and invites us to follow him to overcome evil and be empowered for joyful life, for wholeness and for love, now and forever. The gospel provides both a ‘strategy of coherence’ for making sense of the seeming nonsense of selfishness all about us and then of doing something effectively about it.

### 2 Brief Sketch of a Gospel Presentation

As we come to understand the gospel we realize that none of the world’s con-

dition has taken God by surprise. From eternity past he has had a design for our world and our place in it with him. Evil’s intrusion cannot thwart God’s design. To the contrary, God is sovereign and by his loving power he will *use* evil and stand it on its head in the end to accomplish his own design. God in his design has a destiny for humanity, for all who follow him. To this end he created us to be closely related to him. In fact he created us in his own image to reflect him by being like him, *Imago Dei*.

To comprehend *Imago Dei* we must begin by realizing God is God and we are not and never will be God. God created us to be *like* him, i.e. like him in our BEING and like him in our DOING. What does this mean? God is Trinity (Father, Son, Holy Spirit), a *covenant* community of love and of holiness. His very nature is **holy** and his very nature is **love**, i.e. **holy love**. For all eternity *covenant* God has engaged within the Trinity in a dance of mutually self-giving joyful love—‘The Beauty of Holiness’—a dance infinitely glorious and purely unselfish, giving and receiving from one another in loving delight. For us to be created in God’s image, therefore, means that we likewise are made to be ourselves a *covenant* community of love and holiness, i.e. a reflection of God’s nature of being holy love and of doing holy love. Our dance of holy love with God and with one another is our expression of living joy for God’s glory.

The biblical account of the Garden of Eden describes the origin of humanity’s birth from God (*Imago Dei*) and humanity’s betrayal of God (the fall). Triune God, the eternal *covenant* community of holy love, blessed humanity, empowered humanity, charged humanity with the privilege and responsibility

<sup>19</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Harper, 2001).

of maintaining *covenant* relationship with himself (worship of God) and covenant relationship with one another and his world which he entrusted to them (witness for God).

Parenthetically it is informative that etymologically 'covenant' may be traced to two independent but complementary sources in the life and literature of ancient Near East. The first may be summarized as *covenant kinship* (family relationship and responsibility).<sup>20</sup> The second may be summarized as *covenant kingship* (suzerainty treaty: vassal king rule under the greater suzerain king).<sup>21</sup>

God's creation call to humanity was to become caretakers of his world in the freedom of *covenant kinship* under God's holy loving *Kingship* and to do so by living in the freedom of *covenant kinship* under God's holy loving *kinship* through *Imago Dei*. Notice, there is no freedom outside of relationship (i.e. no joyful dance without mutually self-giving love), but only selfish isolation and pseudo-freedom. Humanity truly experienced freedom in Eden but only in faithful relationship with God.

Humanity's abject sin of infidelity to God in the Garden of Eden brought God's judgment upon the human race and consequently upon all of creation under their charge. *Covenant kinship* (relationships) and *covenant kingship* (governance) at all levels were no longer a reflection of holy love, but

rather of selfish duplicity. Instead of BEING themselves and DOING God's will, evil contaminated every part of their nature and that of their progeny. *Imago Dei* lost freedom and had become broken and shattered image, judged and condemned by holy and loving God to separation from him. Creation is now in bondage to evil and humanity is bound to death.

The fall involved more than the natural world but spiritual forces of evil personified, represented in Eden as a serpent and known elsewhere in the New Testament as Satan—the devil, the tempter, the evil one, the prince of demons, the dragon, Beelzebub, the accuser. In Eden the battle for the soul of humanity was waged. God or Satan, which would it be? Adam and Eve chose Satan, and the battle was lost by humanity.

God could have justly left humanity to the consequences of eternal death. The good news, the gospel, is that God in mercy and love has come to humanity's rescue. God's design from eternity past has been that humanity and all creation be liberated from the bondage of Satan and of evil. God planned that he himself would come to earth as humanity (the God-Man, the Lord Jesus Christ) to defeat Satan, to pay the penalty for our sin, and to do so through fulfilling humanity's original mandate of the *covenant* of holy love. On behalf of humanity the God-Man came and lived a life of perfect obedience, died a death of complete sacrifice, and authenticated his victory over evil for all time and eternity through his resurrection from the dead. The Lord Jesus Christ brought atonement (at-one-ment) for humanity to restore holy loving relationship with God (wor-

ship of God) and holy loving relationship with others and with creation (witness for God).

Through the power of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, God's call to humanity is now extended again to engage with him in the dance of holy love. Each of us is enjoined personally to respond to God's call to follow him by following Christ in holy love. When we personally commit our life to him he liberates us from the penalty of sin and begins a work of transformation of our heart and life to empower us with the freedom of holy love.

In the reality of the spirit realm we are literally born again. We are simultaneously born into a spiritual body (the church) within which he calls us to love one another and to love our world. The church is God's *covenant* community of holy love now restored, and the church is God's chosen means through whom he works to bring atonement to his world. Satan has been decisively defeated, but now the spiritual battle continues in order to secure the victory already won. In God's own time he will return in final consummation of victory over evil and inaugurate a new heaven and a new earth.

What does it mean to become a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ? The answer may be summarized in one phrase, 'Together we joyfully follow our Lord Jesus Christ in God's liberating power of sacrificial love.' This means nothing less than giving our life up entirely for him, as he has given his life entirely for us. During his earthly sojourn Jesus confessed again and again that he could not follow his Father except by his Father's power. Our Lord has given us his Holy Spirit so that by the power of God's Spirit we

can follow him and demonstrate the victory of living sacrifice and of joyful love: 'Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.' *Soli Deo Gloria* (glory to God alone).

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<sup>20</sup> Frank Moore Cross, 'Kinship and Covenant in Ancient Israel,' in *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000), 3-21.

<sup>21</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1997).

# Growing Disciples in the Rainforest: A Contextualized Confession for Pygmy Christians

Benno van den Toren

**KEYWORDS:** *Aka-Pygmies, Central African Republic, discipleship, doctrine, syncretism, evangelism*

## I The need for a contextualised confession<sup>1</sup>

In this article, I would like to introduce the readers to the growing church among Aka-Pygmies in the Central African Republic. More specifically, I intend to show how the inculturation or contextualisation of the Gospel message in a confessional text is crucial for an adequate discipling of this Christian community towards maturity in Christ. The need for contextualisation has been widely recognized in missionary circles. The practical example of the need for a contextualised Gospel for

Pygmy Christians shows, however, three aspects of this need which are less generally recognised.

Firstly, it shows that contextualisation cannot limit itself to the non-essentials of Christian faith and practice. Many missionary practitioners work with the assumption that there is a universal kernel of Christian faith and practice, which should be kept intact in every context. Around that we can group a number of peripheral beliefs and practices which we are allowed to adapt from one context to another. Appropriate contextualisation demands, however, that even the most central Christian beliefs should be contextualised. That Christ is Lord and Saviour should be understood in relation to the challenges of real life, of contextual life. This is not only good practice, but also sound theology—the Lordship of Christ extends over all aspects of our lives as we actually live them and his redemption touches the concrete reality of the mess in which

we find ourselves. The *reality* of Christ and his redemption are definitely transcultural; the way in which we *understand* it and in which this *relates* to us is not.<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, this example of contextualisation shows that a confession of faith has a crucial role to play in this process. Historically, confessions of faith have had different functions. They have been used, for example, as grids for the education of young Christians. Historically, the so-called *Apostolic Confession* has its origins in the teaching young believers received in the essentials of the faith. In this respect, confessions have a contextual character—they teach what the essentials of the Christian faith and identity are in relation to the challenges and alternatives of the specific context.

Thirdly, appropriate contextualisation requires careful doctrinal or dogmatic reflection if it is to be effective. Contextualisation is not just a question of hermeneutics and the appropriate translation of the biblical text in the receptor language and culture. It cannot limit itself to considerations of practical theology or missiology. We need a proper theological and doctrinal reflection on the content of the faith and how this relates to the specific realities and needs of the receptor culture.

## II Church planting among Aka-Pygmies

We are talking about a community of Aka-Pygmy Christians in the region of the Lobaye in the Central African Republic in the forested region to the southwest of the capital of Bangui. More recently, many Central African denominations have been involved in mission among the Pygmies communities. One of the first groups to start work among them was the *Coopération Évangélique* in the 1970s. There are now many churches of Pygmy Christians and a growing number of Pygmy pastors and evangelists.

The leaders of the work among the Pygmies in the *Coopération Évangélique* have encountered considerable difficulties in the discipling of young Christians. As can be seen in other young churches in Central Africa, many people heartily accept the Gospel of Jesus Christ and are baptised. However, after baptism, they often continue with many traditional religious practices that sometimes completely contradict their newfound faith in Christ.

Local leaders have identified at least two causes at the root of this problem. First of all, many of these Christians were not appropriately disciplined. They have heard how they can be reconciled with God and receive eternal life through Jesus Christ, but they have not learned what this should and could mean for their daily lives. Secondly, their understanding of the Gospel often has little relationship with the challenges they encounter in everyday life. As Kwame Bediako from Ghana has noted in another context, they have received the gospel as an answer to western questions and in

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this article was published in Dutch as 'De geloofsbelijdenis van de Pygmeeën. Leerlingen van Jezus in het regenwoud', in *Soteria* 24/4 (December 2007), 6-15.

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<sup>2</sup> See also Benno van den Toren, 'Is there a humanly accessible supra-cultural core of the Gospel message available?', in Matthew Cook, Rob Haskell, Ruth Julian and Natee Tanchanpongs (eds.), *Global Theology for the Local Church: Principles for an Evangelical Approach to Contextualization* (forthcoming; Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009), Chapter 7.

terms of a western worldview, but the message they received did not adequately address many of the dangers and joys they faced from day to day.<sup>3</sup>

### III The process

This insight led to the understanding that what was needed was a structured presentation of the gospel that could be used as a framework for those involved in the teaching of young Christians. We started thinking in terms of a confession of faith, as this was precisely one of the traditional functions of confessions. Such a confession should at the same time be a contextualised understanding of the gospel that would bring the reality of what God has done in Christ to bear on the reality of life in the rainforest.

In the days after Christmas 2004 a meeting convened in Londo to discuss the terms of a confession. (Londo is one of the centres of the work among Pygmies in the Lobaye region.) Different people were invited who could contribute with their specific experience and expertise. From among the Pygmy community there were three participants: two mature Christians who are part of the local team of the SIL, translating the Bible into Aka (Barthélémy Kombo and François Ndingue), and a Bible school student who would soon be ordained as a pastor (Bokodi Richard). Further there were two other African members of the SIL translation and literacy team (Dominique Kosseke

and Jérôme Sitamon) and two other non-Pygmy leaders of the local church (Blaise-Pascal Mbicko and Faustin Kolibo). All of them have a long history of Christian ministry among the Akas. Finally, there were two guests from the Bangui Evangelical School of Theology (Nuanga Weanzana and myself) who it was hoped could bring biblical and theological depth to the project.

As a group, we first identified the main challenges of Pygmy life. Then we tried to formulate how the Christian faith related to them (critically, affirming, challenging), bringing in a different perspective, and giving their questions a new orientation in the light of the reality of Christ. In our formulation of the confession, we consciously tried to include all the main elements of the historic faith. A Christian confession should not only address the need of the local community, but also show how this local community is part of the global Christian community, which in its diversity is united in Christ.

Historically, confessions have not only functioned as a teaching grid, but have had other functions. Confessions were also formulated to define the true teaching in opposition to heresy. They were to guard the Christian identity against deviations that touch upon the essentials of the faith. In this way, the Confession of Nicea (A.D. 325) defended the orthodox faith of church against heresies which put the heart of the gospel of salvation in jeopardy. We decided that in our current context the primary need was for a confession concentrating on the teaching function of confessions and less on the defence of the faith against false teaching.

We consciously tried to avoid a third function which confessions have his-

torically had—to define the identity of one denomination against another, meaning that a confession could for example be identified as Lutheran, Arminian, Episcopal, or Charismatic. In the Christian ministry among Pygmies in the Central African Republic, people from different denominations have worked together and we hoped that this confession would foster rather than complicate such collaboration.

Furthermore, for many Pygmy Christians their denominational affiliation is less important than their identity as Christians, and rightly so. Their denominational affiliation is mostly not a result of a conscious choice, but determined by the origin of the evangelists reaching their villages and camps. Becoming a Christian involves a choice; becoming a member of a certain denomination is more accidental. In this respect they resemble many other African Christians. Although we met on the premises of the *Coopération Evangélique*, which is a charismatic group, we decided that specific denominational indicators should remain minimal, unless we considered them vital for the Christian life in this specific context.

All our conversations took place in French and Sango, the two national languages of the Central African Republic. In the exchanges, a number of the expressions were compared with their Aka equivalents to see whether they would make sense in this context. Yet the translation of the French draft in Aka will be a vital part of the process and a check whether the theological formulations can be earthed in the Aka world. And clearly the confession will need to be used for a number of years

in the field and in different churches to be tested by local Christian wisdom. This may lead to a later revision.

### IV The role of the professional theologian and of the outsider

The process we followed obviously raises questions about the role of professional theologians and of outsiders in the formulation of contextual theologies. It has often been stressed that Christian grass-roots communities should be the proper subject of localized contextual theological reflection. There is, however, a need for professional theologians in such a process because the professional theologian can help the community reflect on its own experience in the light of the Scriptures and vice versa.

On the one hand, theologians can help the local community in its proper reflections; on the other hand they can help in relating these to the Scriptures because of their knowledge of the Scriptures both in its details and in understanding how these details relate to the message of Scripture as a whole. The professional theologian will also have easier access to the wider traditions of the worldwide and historic Christian community and can bring these to bear on the specific challenges the local Christian community is facing.

One can similarly argue for the need of outsiders in such a process. Where insiders are needed to understand the many-sided issues involved in understanding and living out the Christian faith in a particular context, outsiders can help see the specific trappings of a

<sup>3</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Jesus in Africa: The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience* (Akropong-Akuapem: Regnum Africa; Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000), 20ff.

local situation and particular culture. As representatives of one or more other cultural contexts, they do also represent voices of the wider universal church. As such they facilitate the formulations of confessions that are both local and global, local expressions of the one Gospel entrusted to the universal church.<sup>4</sup>

Because the Aka-pygmy church is still in an early stage of its development, it has not yet raised its own theologians and the only theologians involved in the formulation of this confession were all outsiders. This creates a significant risk that the theological categories of the outsiders dominate the local interpretation of Scripture and experience, rather than serving them. This accentuated the need for sustained listening to the local believers and underlines the provisional nature of this confession.

### V Challenges for Pygmy Christians

When we discussed the aspects of Pygmy life which the confession should address, we looked for different things. First of all we looked to the major challenges Pygmies encounter in their daily lives. Second, we looked for areas in which we felt that Christian Pygmies find it most difficult to live out their Christian life and were most drawn to practices that were irreconcilable with faith in Christ. We did not

only look at the negatives, however. We also asked what their greatest ideals, joys and desires are. Christ should not only be the answer to our greatest needs, but also the fulfilment of our greatest and best hopes.

Though we found a number of challenges that were really specific to the Pygmy community, we also identified a number of challenges that were found more generally among traditional Africans, or among people living in a context of tribal religion, and some challenges that had a more universal flavour. There seems to be a sliding scale between more specific and more universal challenges in this context. Because of this, many elements of our discussion may be valid in other situations.

We noted the following characteristics of the context, which a contextual confession should address:

(1) Pygmy life is a continuous struggle for survival. Life in the rainforest is less romantic than the publications of certain anthropologists want us to believe. This is aggravated by a number of modern influences, such as the exploitation of the rainforest for timber and over-hunting of wildlife by poachers using rifles. Life is insecure and full of worries—will there be sufficient food for the days to come and will the hunting be successful? This is compounded by the many illnesses with few opportunities for effective treatment. There are traditional medicines that can be used, but the rate of child mortality and the low life expectancy shows that these are in many cases not effective.

(2) The spirits of deceased ancestors and other spiritual powers play an important role in everyday life and at

turning points in life. Combined with the struggle for survival, this provides a constant pull back to practices that are aimed at seeking protection in the spirit world, seeking success in hunting and other endeavours, and appealing forces that may be dangerous.

(3) Pygmies fear death deeply, for themselves and their family members. There is also a profound fear of sorcerers, who are believed to live off the 'souls' of the living.

(4) For many Pygmy Christians it is not yet entirely clear if the Father of Jesus Christ is the only God, or if he is one among many whom you can choose to serve and also choose to abandon. There is a strong tendency to combine worship of the Creator God with the service of lesser deities, ancestor spirits, and other spirits.

(5) Most Pygmies have a profound inferiority complex in relation to other Africans. There is a history of centuries of exploitation in which Pygmies were considered slaves of the other African tribes among whom they live. One of my students came from a village that had relationships with Pygmy camps in the surrounding rainforest. He said that the Pygmy boy who was born closest to his date of birth was automatically considered his slave for the rest of his life. Many Africans used to consider them as a sort of sub-human species, closer to apes. Though such slavery has been officially abandoned, the stereotypes and self-image that goes with it is not so easily changed. Even though the proclamation of the gospel has brought considerable change, Pygmies are still a strongly marginalized group in the Central African Republic.

(6) For many Pygmy Christians,

their relationship with their family and clan is more important than their relationship with God. When there is a conflict of loyalty to God or loyalty to family or clan, the latter often prevails. The family is more important for their identity and daily existence than God. This is related to a more general tendency in traditional African religions to understand the entirety of life and religion in relation to the clan and tribe to which one belongs. The good life is essentially living in harmony with the clan. The religion and ethics of the clan are therefore limited in scope: they only have validity for members of the clan, tribe or ethnic group. It is therefore hard to conceive of a universal religion in which salvation comes from another people.

(7) In general, Pygmies do not consider themselves sinful. The only really evil people are sorcerers who feed on the souls of ordinary people.

(8) As many other Africans, Pygmies have a fundamentally pragmatic approach to religion: religious practices are good when they work in bringing healing, harmony and protection. They should moreover work immediately, for Pygmies do not think of salvation in terms of a life to come in a different world, but in the experience of the good life here and now. It is therefore difficult to deal with the fact that many Christians after conversion still face hardship. The traditional gut-reaction would be—if this god or this ritual does not help with our current problem, let us look elsewhere.

(9) Traditionally, the goal in life for Pygmies is to have children and to be respected by the community in an area in which you can excel. They would particularly want to excel in areas that

<sup>4</sup> For the role of the professional theologian and the outsider in the formulation of contextual theologies, see Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 16-20.

are highly valued in the Pygmy community—hunting, dancing, traditional healing, leading the community, and manipulating magic powers for protection and healing.

All of these points merit deeper analysis. In all of them, we can detect needs and desires that are profoundly human, but also coloured and often distorted by their worldview. In part they are distorted by sinful interests that in their turn also feed on genuine human needs. One of the functions of the confession will be to pick up everything that is true and good in the Pygmy worldview and life and to place them in a new relationship to Christ. This not only means that Pygmy Christians must learn to sift the good and the bad in their heritage. All that is good must receive a new orientation, and a richer meaning, when Christ becomes the centre of life.

In what follows, I simply present an English translation of the confession. After every article, I have indicated between square brackets which specific problems they intend to address. There are of course many more references to Pygmy traditions than those that were mentioned before. One example is the name of *Komba* for the Creator, as the Pygmies have traditionally known him. This name has already been used in the first translation of the Gospel of Luke in Aka. Another is the critical reference to the myth shared with other African peoples, according to which the Creator has withdrawn himself from the world in primeval times.

The confession has a narrative structure in order to fit into a culture where crucial values and truths are communicated in stories—it tells the

story from creation to the end of history. As it stands, the text is of course very dense and needs much explanation, but that is precisely how it is meant—as a grid for further teaching, which may explain one article at a time.

## VI Confession

1. There is only one God, *Komba*, Creator of all that exists. *Komba* is almighty and nothing of what he created is stronger than he or than his will. *Komba* made all human beings according to his own image. All human beings therefore have the same value for him. Nobody can consider or treat another man or woman as a slave. *Komba* never withdrew himself from the world, but every day, He takes care of the world and of all human beings. He loves humankind and he has given them the earth as a place where it is good to live. [1, 2, 4, 5]

2. God created humankind, in order that they would live with him, that they would obey him, respect him, and love him as a child loves its father. He created them in order that they would live together in peace and that they would be stewards of the earth. He therefore has a goal for us that by far exceeds having children or being honoured by men. The most important thing is that we live as his children and that we are honoured by God himself. [7, 8]

3. God did not withdraw himself from the world, yet humankind withdrew itself from him. The greatest sin of humankind is that they turned away from God, and that they did not love and trust him as a child its father. Humankind preferred to pray to other gods and spirits rather than to the one

living and true God. When they pray to them, they entrust themselves to powers which cannot help as the true God can help. These powers keep them from their true goal: to live as children of God. [1, 2, 4, 7]

4. God has a plan for all humankind. For him, all tribes and all families are equal. Yet, he began a particular history with one family and one people: the family of Abraham and the people of Israel. He did this in order that through this people all the peoples of the earth may receive his blessing. [6]

5. From this people Israel, the Son of God was born as a human child, Jesus of Nazareth. The Son of God became man in order to bring humankind back to God. He was a son of Israel, but he is Saviour of all humankind. He is not a biological ancestor of the Pygmies, but he came from the Creator of the Pygmies and of all peoples. We all are invited to become sisters and brothers of Jesus of Nazareth. [6]

6. Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, suffered for humankind and died on the cross for them. On the cross, he took away the sin of humankind and he broke the power of sin and of the spiritual powers which oppose God and his plan. This victory became manifest after three days, when he rose from the dead and conquered the power of death. Under his protection, we need no longer fear any powers, because he reigns over all. [1, 2, 3, 8]

7. The Son of God returned to heaven. He sent the Holy Spirit in order that he would live in men and women so that they would know that they are children of God. Becoming children of God does not depend on our own efforts, but is a gracious gift of God,

which they are invited to accept by faith, entrusting themselves to God. The Holy Spirit renews men and women, so that they may live as children of God. The Holy Spirit guides the new community of those who belong to Jesus Christ. He helps them to proclaim the Good News to all people. More and more peoples, families and individuals are invited to experience the victory of Jesus Christ and to live as children of God. [6]

8. The powers of sin, of death, and the spiritual and human powers that are in enmity with God continue to be active in this world. God still permits them in order to give to men and women in the whole world the possibility to hear the Good News of the victory of Jesus. The children of God also experience difficulties in this intermediate time. Sometimes they are hungry, they are ill and they die. Yet, they keep courage, for they know that the powers of evil are already conquered. They see the power of God manifest in their lives, when the sick are healed, when evil spirits are thrown out, when oppressed people are set free, when sinners are converted and when they experience the power of God in their weakness. In the most difficult moments, they know that their most precious treasures, the love of God, to be his children, and eternal life, can never be taken from them. [1, 2, 3, 8]

9. As children of God and as the community of Jesus, we wait for his return from heaven. The dead are also waiting for this moment and in the mean time they have no influence on the lives of the living. When Jesus returns, the death will rise. Jesus will judge them and will destroy all evil. He will establish justice and a renewed

earth and a renewed heaven. There, all the children of God will forever live in peace with God and with each other. [2, 8, 9]

### VII Lessons for the wider church

The formulation of this confession of faith is of course a picture at a given moment of a process that will need to continue. In the coming years it will need to be tested to see whether this text will provide an adequate basis for a teaching program for Pygmy Christians. It will also need to be confirmed whether a wider group of churches can recognise this text as an appropriate expression of the scriptural message and an adequate formulation for their context.

As it stands, this confession already illustrates the three points made in the introduction of this article. First, it shows that the contextualisation of the Gospel needs to touch the central tenets of the Christian confession, so that those central convictions can have their redemptive bearing on the world of the Pygmies. Then it gives an example of how a confession of faith can provide a model for expressing these central tenets in a systematic way, which in turn can be worked out in a variety of teaching programs and formats to address the different needs of groups within the community.<sup>5</sup> Finally, it

shows us that contextualisation is a profoundly theological enterprise: it touches directly on the way we understand God and his relationship to us.

Some readers may disagree about certain theological expressions used, both in respect of their faithfulness to Scripture and also their aptness to express Scriptural truth in this context. Yet, these disagreements itself lead us directly into further doctrinal discussions, which hopefully would lead to a deepening of the theological understanding needed for an adequate and faithful Christian witness in the Central African rainforest.

Looking at this confession from different angles shows the importance of sound contextual doctrine and therefore of critical doctrinal reflection for the Christian life. This becomes clear, when we see how this confession can have the four functions of doctrine developed by Alister McGrath in another context.<sup>6</sup>

Doctrine and a confession such as this function first of all as 'social demarcation'—they show what is essential for Christian identity and how the Christian community should be different from the surrounding world. Doctrine and a confession such as this function secondly as a rule for the 'interpretation of narrative'—they help read and understand the much larger narrative of Scripture and therefore function as a guide for sound preaching in the community.

Doctrine and a confession such as this function thirdly as a guide for the

'interpretation of experience'—they help Pygmy Christians to experience the joys and difficulties of their lives in a different way and to live out the Gospel in relation to them. This is especially important considering that a significant pull toward syncretism lies in the fact that many young Christians tend to experience major parts of their lives the old way. Therefore the old answers continue to seem the most helpful ones and the Christian faith

often seems rather irrelevant in comparison.

Fourthly, doctrine and a confession such as this present us with a 'truth claim'—they show us what our reality is like and therefore what the deepest truth of our life and world is and what we should make of it. We hope that this confession may play such a liberating role for our Pygmy brothers and sisters in Christ.

<sup>5</sup> For other examples, see Jaroslav Pelikan & Valerie Hotchkiss (eds.), *Creeks and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, volume 3 *Statements of Faith in Modern Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundations of Doctrinal Criticism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 35-80.

# The Place of Church Planting in Mission: Towards a Theological Framework

Richard Yates Hibbert

**KEYWORDS:** *Church planting; Missio Dei; Kingdom of God; Holistic Mission; Theology of Mission*

## I The Need for a Theological Framework

Until 1980, there were very few books giving practical guidance to church planters. The succeeding years have seen this vital need met through the publication of scores of texts. Very few of these texts, though, provide anything approaching a satisfying theological basis for church planting, one notable exception being Stuart Murray's *Church Planting: Laying Foundations*, first published in 1998.<sup>1</sup>

The biblical and theological foundation for the planting of churches has generally been assumed rather than

explicitly articulated. As Van Rheenen points out, 'theological reflection is the beginning point of ministry formation.'<sup>2</sup> While insights from the history of mission and the social sciences are extremely helpful in shaping church planting practice, a biblical and theological foundation is essential if church planting is to fulfil God's purposes for it. Robinson and Christine are right in insisting that 'we need to be sure that the activity of church planting lies not just on the practical agenda of activists but that it also belongs to the purpose and call of God for his church.'<sup>3</sup> Murray warns:

<sup>2</sup> Gailyn Van Rheenen, 'The Missional Helix: Example of Church Planting', *Monthly Missiological Reflections* 26 (January 2001), <http://www.missiology.org/mmr/mmr26.htm> (accessed 21 May 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Martin Robinson and Stuart Christine, *Planting Tomorrow's Churches Today: A Comprehensive Handbook* (Tunbridge Wells: Monarch, 1992), 15.

<sup>1</sup> Stuart Murray, *Church Planting: Laying Foundations* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998).

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An inadequate theological basis [for church planting] will not necessarily hinder short-term growth, or result in widespread heresy among newly planted churches. But it will limit the long-term impact of church planting, and may result in dangerous distortions of the way in which the mission of the church is understood.<sup>4</sup>

Malphurs provides this helpful definition of church planting: 'a planned process of beginning and growing new local churches.'<sup>5</sup> Inherent in his definition are three key concepts: (1) Church planting is an intentional activity which involves human planning; (2) church planting is a dynamic process; (3) church planting involves both starting new churches and helping those churches grow.

This article sets out firstly to survey the perspectives of evangelical scholars on church planting, especially over the past fifty years. These perspectives will be arranged topically so that the major themes are highlighted. The second objective of this paper is to evaluate the themes that emerge from the 'conversation' in the literature, and through this process to highlight themes that promise to be significant contributions to a biblical and theological framework for church planting practice, and attempt to integrate them.

## II Historical Perspectives on Church Planting in Mission

David Bosch notes a shift took place at the end of the first century from the mobile ministry of the apostles, prophets, and evangelists of the first century, to the more settled ministry of bishops, elders and deacons. This, he believes, led to the church focusing in on itself. The central concern of mission activity in both the Eastern Church and the Roman Church became the planting and growth of the Church, with the emphasis on Church as institution. Expansion of the Church was often was achieved through coercion, and the words 'compel them to come in' (Lk. 14:26) became the paradigmatic text of the medieval Catholic Church.<sup>6</sup>

Thomas Aquinas wrote that 'the purpose of mission is to so thoroughly root the church... in the various cultures and societies that it serves as an instrument to salvation and good.'<sup>7</sup> Catholic missiologists of the Louvain and Munster schools continued to emphasise church planting, the Louvain school still focusing on the church as institution, and the Munster school taking a more person-centred view. This influence is reflected in the Second Vatican Council's decree on mission, *Ad Gentes*, which describes the goal of mission as 'to preach the Gospel and plant the Church among peoples or groups in which it has not

<sup>4</sup> Murray, *Church Planting*, 30.

<sup>5</sup> Aubrey Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 21.

<sup>6</sup> David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 236

<sup>7</sup> Cited in Johannes Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction*, trans. Dale Cooper (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 182.



yet been established.<sup>8</sup>

The Catholic focus on church planting follows naturally from Catholic theology, which was shaped by Cyprian of Carthage's statement, '... *salus extra ecclesiam non est*....,' i.e., there is no salvation outside the Church.<sup>9</sup> This came to be interpreted in terms of the Catholic Church.<sup>10</sup> Augustine of Hippo pointed to the central purpose of Roman Catholic mission when he responded to another bishop that the world was not about to end because first, '... in nations where the Church does not yet exist, she must come into existence.'<sup>11</sup> Since the Church is the administrator of the sacraments, and the sacraments are seen as the means of grace, Catholic theology maintained that salvation was only available to people who were within reach of a local church. Church planting has thus remained the primary goal of Catholic mission thinking through the centuries.

Following the Reformation in the 16th century, Gisbertus Voetius, a missionary and mission theologian, in his *Politica Ecclesiastica*, stated a seven-fold purpose of mission, six aspects of which were directly connected to the planting and growth of churches. Examples include the planting, grow-

ing, and establishment of churches, the regathering of scattered churches, the reunification and reincorporation of divided or separated churches, and the support of oppressed or impoverished churches.<sup>12</sup>

Very little cross-cultural missionary work was engaged in by Protestants until the Pietistic movement began. Pietism, being a movement within state churches, rather than a specific branch of the church itself, did not emphasise church planting, but rather individual salvation. The primary aim and overriding focus of Pietist missionaries was the conversion of individuals, even though churches were planted through them.<sup>13</sup> William Carey and the many non-denominational missionary societies arising from his example also saw mission primarily as the conversion of individuals, and thus they attached little importance to outward and organizational forms of church life.<sup>14</sup>

These early missionaries were not much concerned with establishing indigenous national churches for several reasons: (1) The Enlightenment view that separated spiritual concerns from the material and practical realm, and in which religion was seen as the private concern of the individual;<sup>15</sup> (2) the prevailing materialism, which led

missionaries to believe they were superior and the assumption they would need to remain there indefinitely to provide education and material goods;<sup>16</sup> and (3) the influence of pietism, which had a highly spiritualised concept of the church and attached little importance to its visible form and ministry.<sup>17</sup>

This is not to say that church planting was entirely missing from the agenda of these early Protestant missionaries. William Ward, one of the Serampore trio together with Carey, wrote in his journal of 1805 'that in planting separate churches native pastors shall be chosen... and that the missionaries shall preserve their original character, giving themselves up to the planting of new churches and superintending those already planted'<sup>18</sup> The felt need to establish churches for the majority of missionaries, however, grew out of the immediate question of what to do with converts rather than as part of a deliberate focus.

This changed in the second half of the 19th century, when denominational agencies reacted to the relativizing tendencies of the Enlightenment, and began to define mission primarily as church planting. The nondenominational societies had been preaching a gospel without a church, but this was

now seen as inadequate, and the remedy was to plant denominational churches which were self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating.<sup>19</sup> In the middle of this century, the three-self formula of Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson helped to crystallise the focus among evangelicals on church planting as the key to mission, but their rationale for doing this was pragmatic—the missions needed to be relieved of the burden of financially supporting the newer churches—rather than theological.

The first half of the twentieth century witnessed a disintegration of the unity of vision of mission as church planting, and 'the old passion for classical evangelistic missions was swallowed up by the other good things a church must do.'<sup>20</sup> Evangelicals, especially in the 1960s onwards, began to recognize God's mission was broader than the activities of the church, and that the many social needs of people needed to be addressed. This was a development which had been birthed in the ecumenical movement in the early twentieth century, and evangelicals had initially reacted by sharpening their focus on evangelism and church planting.

The tension within earlier Protestantism with regard to the place of church planting as opposed to individual salvation continued among evangelicals in the second half of the twentieth century. In the 1940s and 1950s,

8 Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology*, 182-183.

9 Cyprian, letter 73.21, cited in Jayakiran Sebastian, 'Sensitivity and Proclamation: Perspectives on Mission from the Writings of Cyprian', *Mission Studies* 15 (1998): 40.

10 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 258.

11 Augustine, letter 199, cited in *Documents in Early Christian Thought*, eds. Maurice Wiles and Mark Santer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 259.

12 Jan Jongeneel, 'The Missiology of Gisbertus Voetius', *Calvin Theological Journal* 26 (1991), 63-64.

13 Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology*, 178.

14 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 331; Brian Woodford, 'One Church, Many Churches: A Five-Model Approach to Church Planting and Evaluation, PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1997, 23.

15 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 262-273.

16 Woodford, 'One Church', 22.

17 Peter Beyerhaus, 'World Evangelization and the Kingdom of God,' *Let the Earth Hear his Voice: International Congress on World Evangelization*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis, MN: World Wide Publications, 1975), 393.

18 Cited in Brian Stanley, 'Planting Self-Governing Churches', *Baptist Quarterly* 34 (1992), 381.

19 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 331.

20 Robertson McQuilkin, 'The Missionary Task', in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. Scott Moreau, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 648.

despite the field reality that the 'logic of the gospel'<sup>21</sup> had led many missionaries to start hospitals, schools, and orphanages, 'Evangelicals articulated only one major goal of mission: the salvation of individual souls.'<sup>22</sup> This goal was reassessed in the 1960s, especially in the form of the two major evangelical missionary conferences in 1966—the Congress on the Church's Worldwide Mission (at Wheaton), and the World Congress on Evangelism (in Berlin).

The Wheaton conference (as well as much of evangelical missions thinking from the 1960s onwards) was deeply influenced by the Church Growth Movement under Donald McGavran's leadership. Arthur Glasser, a co-faculty member with McGavran and church growth proponent, initially drafted the report, which included the statements: 'The Church's work is to preach the Gospel and plant congregations in every community' and 'church planting has the priority among all other mission activities.'<sup>23</sup> The reports of these conferences reveal a 'major shift from the strongly individualistic categories of previous decades to an increased emphasis on the church....'<sup>24</sup> In these evangelical conferences and the regional conferences which fol-

lowed them, the need for missionary and church involvement in social issues which had already been embraced by the ecumenical movement also became a recurring theme.<sup>25</sup>

During the 1974 Lausanne Congress on World Evangelism, church planting continued to hold a prominent place, especially through the influence of Donald McGavran and Ralph Winter. They and others emphasised 'the place of the local church both as goal and as instrument of world evangelization.'<sup>26</sup> But church planting was not the only topic addressed; the relationship between evangelism and social action also kept coming up for discussion during the conference, and following John Stott's lead, they came to be seen as partners by many evangelicals, with evangelism being primary.

During the 1980s, although the primacy of evangelism (including church planting) was again stressed, two major conferences—the Consultation on the Relationship between Evangelism and Social Responsibility (Grand Rapids, 1982), and the Consultation on the Church in Response to Human Need (Wheaton, 1983)—affirmed that evangelicals must be involved with people in all their needs.<sup>27</sup> The Grand Rapids Consultation report included a statement on the relationship between evangelism and social responsibility, which outlined three kinds of legitimate connection (in the view of the writers) between the two: social activ-

ity as a consequence of evangelism, as a bridge to evangelism, and as the partner of evangelism. Evangelism was once again affirmed as having 'a certain priority,' but the discomfort of some of the delegates with this was noted.<sup>28</sup>

The Manila Manifesto which emerged from the 1989 Lausanne II Congress on World Evangelism kept evangelism in the form of proclamation as a focus, but evidenced a shift towards the wide acceptance of social concern as an integral part of the gospel.<sup>29</sup> It called for 'an integration of words and deeds' and emphasised the gospel as having 'inescapable social implications' while also affirming that evangelism is primary.<sup>30</sup> Church planting, and even multiplication, was interestingly also specifically highlighted in the statement '... the gospel creates the church which spreads the gospel which creates more churches in a continuous chain-reaction'.<sup>31</sup>

This overview confirms Johnston's statement that, despite periods when the salvation of individuals was the dominant concern, 'There seems to be adequate evidence that the planting of

indigenous churches has been a general characteristic of missions since the apostolic age.'<sup>32</sup>

### III The Current Evangelical Debate

In Justice Anderson's view, 'Evangelical missions have always emphasised personal evangelism and starting churches (congregations) as their basic purpose.'<sup>33</sup> Yet there are important differences among evangelicals concerning the relative importance of church planting and social responsibility.

Scott Moreau's analysis has led him to see three streams within evangelicalism, which have solidified since the International Congress on World Evangelization held at Lausanne in 1974.<sup>34</sup> The first emphasises mission as evangelism and church planting; the second, following John Stott, focuses on integrating a holistic approach to mission; and the third, which includes Samuel Escobar and Rene Padilla, considers social justice to be just as important a goal of mission as evangelism and church planting.<sup>35</sup> The second two streams are fundamentally similar in that they view social action with the hope of societal transformation as a

21 cf. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: Sketches for a Missionary Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 102-103.

22 Charles Van Engen, *Mission on the Way: Issues in Mission Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 131.

23 Wheaton Declaration, *International Review of Mission* 55 (1966), 467; Scott Moreau, 'Congress on the Church's Worldwide Mission', in *Evangelical Dictionary*, ed. Scott Moreau, 223.

24 Van Engen, *Mission*, 134.

25 Paul Hiebert and Monte Cox, 'Evangelism and Social Responsibility', in *Evangelical Dictionary*, ed. Scott Moreau, 345.

26 Van Engen, *Mission*, 138.

27 Hiebert and Cox, 'Evangelism', 345.

28 *Evangelism and Social Responsibility: An Evangelical Commitment*, Grand Rapids Report No. 21, Consultation on the Relationship between Evangelism and Social Responsibility (Wheaton, IL: Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization and the World Evangelical Fellowship, 1982), 4, C.

29 Doug McConnell, 'Holistic Mission', in *Evangelical Dictionary*, ed. Scott Moreau, 449.

30 'Manila Manifesto', in *Making Christ Known: Historic Mission Documents from the Lausanne Movement 1974-1989*, ed. John Stott (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1989), A, no. 4.

31 Manila Manifesto, B, no. 8.

32 Arthur Johnston, 'Church Growth Theology and World Evangelization', in *Theology and Mission: Papers Given at Trinity Consultation No.1*, ed. David Hesselgrave (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), 190.

33 Justice Anderson, 'Church Development', in *Evangelical Dictionary*, ed. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 198.

34 Scott Moreau, 'Mission and Missions', in *Evangelical Dictionary*, ed. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000b), 637.

35 Moreau, 'Mission and Missions', 637-638.

vital goal of mission, and will be considered together.

Donald McGavran, David Hesselgrave, and Kenneth Mulholland are representative of those who contend that church planting is the heart and primary purpose of Christian mission. McGavran saw church growth, which he defined as 'the planting and care of self-propagating churches,' as the primary goal of mission and of God's mission.<sup>36</sup> Hesselgrave agrees, contending that while Christians have many other important tasks, few of them can be accomplished unless new churches are planted and grow in maturity in Christ.<sup>37</sup> He sees medical, educational, and other types of social help as worthy Christian endeavours in keeping with Galatians 6:10, but insists that unless these activities support church planting significantly, they should not be thought of as part of the Church's mission.<sup>38</sup> Mulholland similarly puts church planting at the centre of missionary activity. 'The goal of missions is to establish within every people group in the world... indigenous church movements which are capable of so multiplying congregations....'<sup>39</sup>

The second group of missions

thinkers, which includes Johannes Verkuyl, David Bosch, John Stott, James Engel, and William Dyrness, see church planting as an indispensable element in mission, but not as necessarily the most important goal. Verkuyl, for example, argues that viewing mission only as church planting is too ecclesiocentric, and that it must not be seen as an end in itself, but rather as part of the wider goal of the kingdom of God.<sup>40</sup> He also criticises McGavran's consistent setting of church growth as the first priority as being 'one-sided and unbiblical.' Instead, he sees the priority in the New Testament as changing according to the situation, so that addressing hunger, or sickness, or justice are sometimes the focus.<sup>41</sup>

Stott understands social action to be a partner of evangelism in the sense that they each stand independently and in their own right as worthy goals of mission, with neither being the means to the other nor the manifestation of the other.<sup>42</sup> Engel and Dyrness, in their book *Changing the Mind of Missions: Where Have We Gone Wrong?*, affirm that evangelism is the indispensable first step in making disciples, and that church planting is needed. However, they challenge the validity of evangelism without social transformation, and question the call by some to accelerate church planting in order to evangelise the maximum number of unreached in the shortest possible

time.<sup>43</sup>

Those who see church planting as the fundamental task of missionary activity are concerned that broadening of the missionary task to include addressing physical, social, and political needs has had the effect of redirecting much missionary effort away from the central task, and has opened the door for missionary activity to become 'all the good things a church does away from home.' Robertson McQuilkin notes that the focus of many evangelical missionaries has indeed shifted away from church planting to pastoral, educational, and other helping roles, and the definition of 'missions' has become 'sending people away from the home church to serve God in some capacity elsewhere, especially cross-culturally.'<sup>44</sup>

#### IV Missio Dei and the Kingdom of God

In order to understand both the rightful place of church planting in evangelical mission theology and its relationship to social action, we need to explore the relationship of church planting to God's mission, or *missio Dei*, and to the kingdom of God. Ecumenical theologians in the Willingen meeting of the World Council of Churches in 1952 felt that both mission and church needed to be subordinated under the *missio Dei*<sup>45</sup> and many evan-

gelical missions theologians have agreed with this perspective, affirming that 'our missionary activities are only authentic insofar as they reflect participation in the mission of God.'<sup>46</sup>

Van Engen identifies the need for an integrating idea, which would hold the various themes in the *missio Dei* together.<sup>47</sup> For many missiologists<sup>48</sup> the kingdom of God is that integrating idea, and God's bringing in of his kingdom is the goal of the *missio Dei*. Bavinck explains that church planting, along with the conversion of the unsaved and the glorification of God, is one of the three main purposes of mission, and that each are in fact part of one overall purpose of God—the coming and extension of his kingdom.<sup>49</sup>

If God's mission is to bring in his kingdom—and there is broad agreement on this—what role does the church—his people—play in this work? Most theologians, whatever their primary picture of the kingdom of God is (and it is multifaceted), see an essential link between the church and the kingdom, and see at least a partial identification of the church and the kingdom.<sup>50</sup>

36 Donald McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 32, 34, 67.

37 David Hesselgrave, *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally: A Guide to Home and Foreign Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 30.

38 Hesselgrave, *Planting Churches*, 31.

39 Kenneth Mulholland, 'A Church for All Peoples', in *World Mission: An Analysis of the World Christian Movement*, ed. Jonathan Lewis (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1994), 3-20.

40 Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology*, 188, 201.

41 Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology*, 192.

42 John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (London: Falcon, 1975), 26-27.

43 James Engel and William Dyrness, *Changing the Mind of Missions: Where Have We Gone Wrong?* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 64-65, 80, 178.

44 McQuilkin, 'The Missionary Task', 648.

45 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991, 370.

46 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 391.

47 Van Engen, *Mission on the Way*, 42-43.

48 e.g., J. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, trans. David H. Freeman. (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1960); Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology*; and Arthur Glasser, 'The Whole Bible Basis of Mission', in *Contemporary Theologies of Mission*, ed. Arthur F. Glasser and Donald McGavran (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983).

49 Bavinck, *An Introduction*, 155.

50 Howard Snyder, *Models of the Kingdom* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1991), 69; Andrew Kirk, 'The Kingdom of God and the Church in Contemporary Protestantism and Catholicism', in *Let the Earth*, ed. J. D. Douglas, 1073.

In his seminal work on the kingdom of God, George Eldon Ladd contends that the church, while it is not the full expression of the kingdom, is nevertheless the primary manifestation of the kingdom in the world today.<sup>51</sup> Evangelicals have largely agreed with Ladd's conclusions. Missiologists Michael Griffiths, Arthur Glasser, Wilbert Shenk, Peter Kuzmic, and Charles Van Engen, and church planters Eddie Gibbs, Rick Love, and Martin Robinson and Stuart Christine all agree that the church is closely related to the kingdom, but not identical to it, and that the church is an agent of and the primary manifestation of the kingdom today.<sup>52</sup>

Others contend that making church planting the goal of mission narrows the concept of the kingdom of God. For example, Stuart Murray, agreeing with David Bosch, feels that when church planting becomes the goal of mission,

the church begins to point to itself rather than to God or the future, and a very human-oriented ecclesiastical expansionism can set in. In addition, they fear that social justice and cultural engagement will be neglected if church planting is central.<sup>53</sup>

Murray and Bosch are right to criticise ecclesiastical expansionism, which is motivated by pride in one's own denomination or tradition and tends to focus on the institutional aspect of the church. However, they confuse the issue by failing to separate the human, imperfect, institutionalised expressions of church from the church as God sees it. The church (and therefore local churches) although composed of imperfect people, is not a human invention. It is the body and bride of Christ who Jesus gave his life for and loves (Eph. 5:23-27). Jesus' pouring out of love on the church, to the point of extreme suffering and death, was for the purpose of presenting the church to himself as a pure and holy bride to her husband (Eph. 5:27). The church is, then, not only an instrument of God's purposes, but an end in itself, and even the central goal of what God in Christ is doing in the world. The church is at the heart of God's purposes and Christ's saving work, and is therefore also at the heart of the mission of God.<sup>54</sup>

The charge that making church

planting the goal of mission leads to the church pointing to itself is an attractive argument, but in both the Old and New Testaments the community life of the people of God is a sign which points to God. Jesus says that the love that disciples have for each other will be the way people know that they really are disciples of Jesus, and he prays that they may be one, so that the world will know the Father sent him (Jn. 13:35; 17:23).

The aim of church planting, then, is to create communities which display these kingdom qualities of love and unity and thus point to God. Bryant Myers, a key evangelical proponent of holistic mission, states that 'A church full of life and love, working for the good of the community in which God has placed it, is the proper end of mission' and that community development 'that does not work towards such a church is neither sustainable nor Christian'<sup>55</sup> While the blessings of the kingdom of God include the social, physical, and cultural dimensions, the planting of new communities of the kingdom is the primary means by which these blessings can be brought to new communities. Chester aptly concludes: 'The choice is not between church planting and social justice. The choice is between planting introverted churches and planting open, socially engaged churches.'<sup>56</sup>

Newbigin makes a very practical, but nevertheless vital point, when he shows that acts of justice and compas-

sion, in order to be signs pointing to the Kingdom of God, must flow from the agency of the Kingdom—churches. Without such communities, the social aspects of the Kingdom cannot be expressed. He states:

It is futile to talk about the task of the church as an agent of liberation—in whatever terms we understand that task—unless we also pay attention to the ways in which the church in any place comes into being and grows. It is useless to talk about the task if you are not concerned about the agency which is to carry out the task.... The calling of men and women to be converted, to follow Jesus, and to be part of his community is, and must always be, at the center of mission.<sup>57</sup>

There are several biblical pointers to the church's role as the central expression of the kingdom of God until Jesus comes again. The first of these is found in Matthew chapter sixteen, where the Kingdom and the church are explicitly linked.<sup>58</sup> A second pointer is the fact that the church is the result of preaching the kingdom of God.<sup>59</sup> The gospel Philip and Paul each preached was the message of the kingdom of God (Acts 8:12; 19:8); Paul saw himself and his fellow-workers as working for the kingdom of God (Col. 4:11). Churches were the result of this preaching. A third pointer is the way the early church displayed the reign of Christ. The baptism of the Spirit on the day of

51 George E. Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (London: Paternoster, 1959), 117.

52 Michael Griffiths, *The Church and World Mission: Arousing the People of God to Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980); Glasser, 'The Whole Bible'; Wilbert Shenk, 'Kingdom, Mission, and Church Growth', in *Exploring Church Growth*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983); Peter Kuzmic, 'The Church and the Kingdom of God', in *The Church: God's Agent for Change*, ed. Bruce Nicholls (Exeter, UK: Paternoster, 1986); Charles Van Engen, *God's Missionary People: Rethinking the Purpose of the Local Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1991); Eddie Gibbs, *I Believe in Church Growth* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981); Rick Love, *Muslims, Magic, and the Kingdom of God* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2000); Robinson and Christine, *Planting*.

53 Bosch *Transforming Mission*, 332; Stuart Murray, *Church Planting*, 43-47.

54 Tim Chester, 'Church Planting: A Theological Perspective', in *Multiplying Churches: Reaching Today's Communities through Church Planting*, ed. Stephen Timmis (Fearn, UK: Christian Focus, 2000), 29.

55 Bryant Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practice of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 1999), 39.

56 Chester, 'Church Planting', 32.

57 Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 135.

58 Ladd, *The Gospel*, 54-56, 111-114.

59 Kuzmic, 'The Church', 65.

Pentecost was marked by the same signs of the kingdom that had characterized Jesus' earthly ministry—authoritative preaching, the forgiveness of sins, healing of the sick, and victory over the powers.<sup>60</sup> A final pointer is found in Colossians 1:12-13 and Revelation 1:6, which make it clear that believers in Jesus Christ have been brought into his kingdom, and that 'He has made us a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father.'

Church planting, while not the ultimate goal of mission, is the primary means of bringing in the blessings of the kingdom. Churches function as God's channels of blessing as they serve the physical and social needs of people in their community through the various gifts given to them. But the primary missionary task of the church remains the planting of churches where there are none, a task which is accomplished by various means, but most often by the sending out of apostolic (i.e. church planting) workers.

In summary, both the church and the kingdom are brought about by *missio Dei*, preaching the kingdom seems to be a synonym for evangelism and church planting, and although the kingdom is the final goal of God's mission, the church is the way and means by which he is accomplishing that purpose now.<sup>61</sup>

## V A Gradually Unfolding Revelation

Several evangelical writers suggest

that the importance of planting churches was a revelation which unfolded gradually. Jesus said nothing about church planting directly, but his ministry and teaching gave hints about it. Once the disciples themselves engaged in mission, however, their understanding of that mission and its consequences developed in stages.

### 1. The Embryonic Church

Jesus drew around himself a group of disciples which he shaped into a community focused on his kingship and kingdom. This group of disciples was an embryonic church which was added to on the day of Pentecost.<sup>62</sup> Jesus both modelled and taught the principles of living as a kingdom community. He also envisaged the church both coming into being when he promised 'I will build my church' (Mt. 16:28) and being fleshed out in real communities of disciples in Matthew 18:15-19, in which he teaches that a brother who will not listen must finally be disciplined by the church community, and he promises his own presence to those who gather in his name.

### 2. The Great Commission

Church planting is implied by The Great Commission. According to Bosch, Matthew 'talks about disciples and discipling', but in his thinking this is the same as 'being a member of the Church' and 'incorporating peo-

<sup>62</sup> Talmadge Amberson, 'The Foundation for Church Planting', in *The Birth of Churches: A Biblical Basis for Church Planting*, ed. Talmadge R. Amberson (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1979), 35.

<sup>60</sup> Glasser, 'The Whole Bible', 42-44).

<sup>61</sup> Griffiths, *The Church*, 19-20.

ple into the Christian community'.<sup>63</sup> The command to baptise in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit reflects not only the individual's change of allegiance, but also (and perhaps more importantly) the incorporation of the person into Christ and his community. Since it is a public ritual of identification with, and incorporation into God's people—the Church—it assumes and points to the Church.<sup>64</sup>

Making disciples by baptising and teaching implies 'a range of activities involving other believers being gathered together and having a relationship of accountability in a congregation.'<sup>65</sup> Jesus' command to teach the new disciples everything he had commanded his disciples includes obedience to the central command to love and to the other 'one another' commands. These require mutual interdependence which necessitates Christian communities.

### 3. Pentecost

When the Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost, the disciples were baptised into one body and thus made members of the church (Acts 2:1-4; 1 Cor. 12:13). The Lord led these new believers into a pattern of life together, described in Acts 2:5-47 and 4:23-37, and 'they began to discover that God had given to them a corporate life quite distinct from their individual relation-

ship to Christ.'<sup>66</sup> Hill notes that the message about Jesus was translated into the structure and formed the character of the new community of believers.<sup>67</sup>

Preaching the gospel led to people becoming believers, and wherever this happened, churches were formed. Talmadge Amberson draws attention to the 'sense of spontaneity about churches coming into being in the book of Acts' and that 'The testimony of Scripture is that obedience to Jesus Christ in sharing his message of salvation inevitably and spontaneously brings into being the outward, external structure termed *churches*.'<sup>68</sup> Thus, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, churches appear as the natural consequence, and God's intended result, of proclaiming the gospel.

### 4. Antioch and the Jerusalem Council

The Antioch church made two key contributions to the emerging church planting movement. Consisting as it did of both Jews and Gentiles, it firstly acted as a model for all the churches later established through Paul's missionary journeys. Secondly, its leaders took the question of whether Gentile believers needed to become Jews to be saved to the Council at Jerusalem,

<sup>66</sup> Arthur Glasser, 'The Missionary Task: An Introduction', in *Crucial dimensions in World Evangelization*, ed. Arthur Glasser, Paul Hiebert, Peter Wagner, and Ralph Winter (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1976), 6.

<sup>67</sup> Monica Hill, *How to Plant Churches* (London: MARC Europe, 1984), 13.

<sup>68</sup> Amberson, 'The Foundation', 41-42.

<sup>63</sup> David Bosch, 'The Structure of Mission: An Exposition of Matthew 28:1-20', in *Exploring*, ed. Wilbert Shenk, 243.

<sup>64</sup> cf. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 167.

<sup>65</sup> Patrick Johnstone, *The Church is Bigger than you Think* (Fearn, UK: Christian Focus, 1998), 19.

which became the pivotal event for the development of the Christian movement.<sup>69</sup> The council's decision opened the way for anybody—Jew or Gentile—who responded to the gospel to be included in churches. From the birth of the church at Antioch onwards, '... the New Testament clearly indicates that churches were formed wherever some became Christians.'<sup>70</sup>

### 5. Paul's Ministry

The ministry of church planting is revealed most clearly and fully in Paul's life and letters. Although Paul was primarily engaged in evangelism, 'he also founded churches as a necessary element in his missionary task. Conversion to Christ meant incorporation into him, and thus membership within a Christian community.'<sup>71</sup>

Paul's missionary activity went beyond gospel proclamation to the starting and nurturing of churches.<sup>72</sup> He uses the words 'planting' (1 Cor. 3:6-9; 9:7, 10, 11), 'laying foundations' (Rom. 15:20; 1 Cor. 3:10), 'giving birth' (1 Cor. 4:15; Phlm. 10), and 'betrothing' (2 Cor. 11:2) for starting churches.

<sup>69</sup> Robinson and Christine, *Planting*, 19.

<sup>70</sup> Francis Schaeffer, *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1970), 60.

<sup>71</sup> Andreas Kostenberger and Peter O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001), 180.

<sup>72</sup> Newbigin, *The Open Secret*; Paul Bowers, 'Fulfilling the Gospel: The Scope of Pauline Mission'. *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30 (1987); Peter O'Brien, *Gospel and Mission in the Writings of Paul: An Exegetical and Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993).

His nurturing of churches is clear from the longer times he spent at Corinth and Ephesus, from Luke's description of his encouraging and strengthening new disciples (Acts 14:22), and from his own description of his task as bringing believers to maturity in Christ (Rom 1:1-15; 15:14-16; Eph. 3:8-9; Col. 1:24—2:7).<sup>73</sup>

## VI Local, Incarnational Communities

The strong individualism of Western culture, of Pietism in the early missionary movement, of revivalism in the second half of the nineteenth century, and of crusade evangelism in the twentieth century has deeply influenced the worldview of the church and the theology of much of the northern hemisphere. Chester states: 'By making a personal relationship with God its touchstone, evangelical theology has struggled to give the communion of God's people the importance it receives in the biblical narrative'.<sup>74</sup> We need to explore, therefore, why the gathering of believers into local churches is vital.

### 1. The Communal Nature of Salvation

The gathering of believers into churches is essential because God's salvation is communal. God's purposes throughout the Bible are not focused on many unrelated individuals, but on his people. 'The church is not an *ad hoc* collection of those individuals who

<sup>73</sup> Bowers, 'Fulfilling', 186.

<sup>74</sup> Chester, 'Church Planting', 27.

have come to know God.... Quite the opposite: individuals are saved insofar as they become part of the people of God by grace through faith.'<sup>75</sup> Andreas Kostenberger and Peter O'Brien state that 'Conversion to Christ necessarily involved incorporation into a Christian community.'<sup>76</sup> Evangelical missiologists and theologians are united on this point.<sup>77</sup>

From the birth of the church in Jerusalem, believers became related to one another in concrete ways. Baptism was a public identification not only with Christ but also with other believers, and that this is what Peter called people to in Acts 2:38. Baptism is no individualistic act; it is the seal of membership into the people of God.<sup>78</sup> The new believers were related to one another in visible ways as they devoted themselves to fellowship, supporting each other and relieving the needs of the poor.<sup>79</sup> In Paul's mind, too, embracing the gospel necessarily implied

entering a community.

Several reasons for the necessity of community have been put forward. Firstly, acceptance by and reconciliation with God necessitated acceptance of and reconciliation with those God had already welcomed (Rom. 15:7; Phil. 4:2-3), and union in the Spirit involved union with one another, for the Spirit was primarily a shared experience (2 Cor. 13:14; Phil. 2:1; Eph. 4:3).<sup>80</sup> Secondly, it is only 'together with all the saints' that we are able to comprehend the dimensions of Christ's love (Eph. 3:17-19).<sup>81</sup> Thirdly, Christians are branches of the same vine, living stones in the same building, sheep in the same flock, children in the same family, organs in the same body, and their corporate nature needs to be expressed in practical mutual interdependence and obedience to the "one another" commands.<sup>82</sup> Fourthly, each person before their encounter with Christ belongs to a community in solidarity with Adam, but God calls a second community has come into existence through the 'second man,' Christ. He is the foundation of a new community, humanity, or creation (Rom. 5:12-21; cf. Rom. 6:3-7; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:15-16).<sup>83</sup> Fifthly, just as Jesus called the first disciples into fellowship with the Father and the Son, to follow his example they also called new believers into fellowship with themselves and with each other (1 Jn. 1:1-3).<sup>84</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Banks, *Paul's Idea*, 33.

<sup>81</sup> Bavinck, *An Introduction*, 159.

<sup>82</sup> Mulholland, 'A church', 3-20.

<sup>83</sup> Banks, *Paul's Idea*.

<sup>84</sup> Tippett, *Introduction*, 40-43.

<sup>75</sup> Chester, 'Church Planting', 28.

<sup>76</sup> Kostenberger and O'Brien, *Salvation*, 269.

<sup>77</sup> Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), 76; Robert Banks, *The Early House Churches in their Historical Setting* (Exeter, UK: Paternoster, 1980); Bavinck, *An Introduction*, 159; Howard Snyder, 'The Church as God's Agent in Evangelism', in *Let the Earth Hear his Voice: International Congress on World Evangelization*, ed. John Douglas (Minneapolis, MN: World Wide Publications, 1975); Stott, *Christian Mission*, 119; Alan Tippett, *Introduction to Missiology* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1987), 34. Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology*, 200.

<sup>78</sup> cf. Bosch, *Transforming*, 167.

<sup>79</sup> John Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World: The Message of Acts* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1990), 87.

The fundamental and most compelling reason for believers to be in community, though, is implicit in the fifth reason above. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are already a community, and members of the family of God have been made part of that community which provides a pattern for relationships among believers.<sup>85</sup>

## 2. God's People in Local Communities

Paul uses the word *ekklesia*, which is found sixty times in his letters, primarily to refer to actual gatherings of Christians or to Christians in a locality as regularly-gathering communities.<sup>86</sup> In his later letters, Paul also uses *ekklesia* to mean a heavenly reality to which all Christians belong. Banks explains how local churches are tangible, local expressions in time and space of the eternal, heavenly church.<sup>87</sup> Since local churches are the tangible, visible expression of the heavenly church, God's intent that 'now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms' (Eph. 3:10), is a purpose which is worked out through local churches. The messages in the second two chapters of Revelation to the seven churches in Asia, set as they are the context of God's cosmic plan, further strengthen the idea that local churches are precious to God and a vital part of

<sup>85</sup> cf. *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004), 84-85.

<sup>86</sup> Banks, *Paul's Idea*, 36.

<sup>87</sup> Banks, *Paul's Idea*, 43-47.

God's plan for the world.

Congregations are 'a hermeneutic of the gospel,'<sup>88</sup> meaning that people interpret Christ and the gospel through the mediation of the local church. In particular, it is when people see how God's people live out their lives together, how their relationships function, and how they love each other, that they can comprehend Christ and are drawn to him (Jn. 13: 35).<sup>89</sup> 'In the New Testament the role of the Christian community as a witness to God's Word in its own right features prominently.'<sup>90</sup> One biblical example of this is Acts 2:42-47, which describes the quality of the believers' community, and is immediately followed by the statement that 'the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.'

## VII Church Planting as Reproduction

The activity of starting new churches is part of God's in-built design for churches. The image of the body of Christ expresses that the church is a living organism and, as such, it has been designed to reproduce. Snyder writes: 'Just as all biblical figures for the Church imply life, so do they suggest growth and reproduction. It is of the nature of the Church to grow and reproduce....'<sup>91</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 227.

<sup>89</sup> Michael Green, 'Methods and Strategy in the Evangelism of the Early Church', in *Let the Earth*, ed. J.D. Douglas, 165-169.

<sup>90</sup> Nigel Biggar, 'The Church's Witness in Evangelism and Social Praxis', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 16 (1992), 303-304.

<sup>91</sup> Snyder, 'The Church', 331.

One of the principles of creation is that living things have been designed to reproduce according to its kind (Gen. 1:9, 12, 21, 25). Spiritual reproduction follows the same pattern, in that like gives birth to like: 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit' (Jn. 3:6). Churches are designed to reproduce, and the reproduction of the life of a church involves the planting of new healthy churches.<sup>92</sup> Paul's image of planting seed, watering it, and God making it grow, referring to the church at Corinth, strongly suggests reproduction through the agency of the human sower and the seed, which is the message of the kingdom (Mt. 13:19; 1 Cor. 3:6-7).

## VIII Conclusion

Evangelical mission theologians have always seen the establishment of new churches as a fundamental task of mission. In practice, however, the salvation of individuals has often taken priority, and Protestants have done little to develop a theology of church planting.

Over the past few decades the theme of bringing in the kingdom of God has begun to be embraced by many evangelical theologians as the dominant motif of mission. God's bringing in of his kingdom is now seen by many evangelical scholars as the goal of his mission, the *mission Dei*. Concurrent with the recognition of the importance of the kingdom of God has been an emphasis on the transformation of

<sup>92</sup> cf. Luis Bush, 'The Identity of the Local Church: Biblical Principles', in *The Church: God's Agent for Change*, ed. Bruce Nicholls (Exeter, UK: Paternoster, 1986), 89.

societies through community development and working for social justice. These have begun to be seen as primary goals of mission as part of bringing in the kingdom of God, and church planting has been relegated to being a secondary goal or a stepping stone to the other goals.

Here it has been argued that the planting of new churches is the primary way God's mission is accomplished, and that without it the other goals of his mission cannot be achieved. The church is at the heart of God's purposes, and is the primary agent and sign of the kingdom of God. Transformation of societies in God's desired direction occurs through the agency of God's people, and it is local churches which are designed to be the central expression of the values and life of the kingdom. Although the importance of church planting was only gradually unfolded through the book of Acts, a reading of the whole Bible makes it clear that God's plan—his mission—is to draw people from all nations into the new people he is creating and to use each local church to display his wisdom and character to their communities.

Churches have been given the life of the Holy Spirit to reproduce and start new local churches, so that where there is no relevant expression of Christ's body, existing churches are to bring new churches into being. The challenge for churches and for the church planters which they send out is to start and nurture new churches in such a way that those new churches express the values of the kingdom and so draw as many people as possible to God and bring the kind of transformation God wants to their communities.

# Migration, Mission and the Multi-ethnic Church

Thorsten Prill

**KEY WORDS:** *Church planting, Council of Jerusalem, integration principles, migrants, mission, mono-ethnic church, multi-ethnic church,*

## I The Challenge: Migration and Integration

The increased cross-border movement of millions of people, which is a common feature of globalisation, impacts many Western societies and the church in these countries. Since the mid-nineties the United Kingdom, for example, has seen a significant number of both forced and voluntary migrants entering the country.<sup>1</sup> Migrants have been both Christian and non-Christian. Some immigrants were Christians

before they came to the UK, others embraced Christianity following their arrival. They face two immediate challenges: integration into British society and establishment in the Christian community.

In June 2006 a conference entitled *Ethnic Churches in Europe—a Baptist Response* looked at the issue of migration and its implications for the mission of Baptist churches in Europe.<sup>2</sup> One of the key questions was: Should churches plant mono-ethnic or multi-ethnic churches? For some churches and mission agencies the answer to that question is a straightforward one. In their report *Mission-shaped Church* the Church of England, for example, encourages its members to plant churches for specific cultural groups,<sup>3</sup>

and the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention argues that the planting of ethnic churches is not only an important strategy for today's church but that it is also an approach that was used by the early church. The Mission Board believes that the planting of mono-ethnic churches was at the heart of the apostle Paul's mission strategy.<sup>4</sup> However, the picture presented by Luke in the Book of Acts of both the first Christian churches and Paul's missionary activities seems to suggest that it was the formation of multi-cultural and multi-ethnic churches which dominated the mission of the early church.

## II The Jerusalem Church

First century Jerusalem was a multi-lingual and multi-cultural city. The major languages spoken were Aramaic and Greek. It is estimated that between ten and twenty per cent of the population spoke Greek while the rest used Aramaic or Hebrew in public.<sup>5</sup> In addition, Latin was used by members

of the Roman occupation force. The influence of Greek culture on Jerusalem was immense at that time. The city had Greek-speaking schools and synagogues as well as a Greek gymnasium and hippodrome.<sup>6</sup> A great number of its Jewish population had migrated to Jerusalem from all parts of the Roman Empire. Some of these Diaspora Jews had come in their old age so that they could be buried in Jerusalem; others had come as pilgrims for one of the religious feasts and had decided to stay.<sup>7</sup> In other words, first century Palestinian Judaism was significantly Hellenized.<sup>8</sup>

When the very first Christian church started in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, Luke tells us that it was composed of Jewish believers and carried out its mission among Jews only. In Acts 2:5 Luke writes that 'there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven' being present on that day in Jerusalem. Apart from Jewish proselytes (2:10), he does not mention any Gentiles who 'were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages' (2:4). Furthermore, Peter's speeches, which Luke summarises in chapters 2 and 3, are clearly directed at a Jewish audience. Luke mentions that Peter addressed his listeners as 'men of Judea' (2:14), 'Israelites' (2:22, 29; 3:12), and 'brothers' (2:37). While Luke leaves no doubt that the

<sup>1</sup> Between 1996 and 2006 0.7 million European Union citizens, 1.75 million Commonwealth citizens and 1.64 million citizens of other foreign countries moved to the United Kingdom. Source: National Statistics, 'Total International Migration (TIM) tables: 1991—latest, 2 series (TIM calendar year)', <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=15053>, date of access: 25-08-2008.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. T. Peck, 'Introductions', in *Ethnic Churches in Europe: A Baptist Response* ed. P.F. Penner (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag, 2006), 9-12 (esp. 10).

<sup>3</sup> Church of England Archbishops' Council, *Mission-shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004), 107.

<sup>4</sup> The Board states: 'Ethnic church planting since its beginnings have strengthened, unified, and drawn solid leaders to start New Testament Churches. Just like the apostle Paul, Ethnic Church Planting has planted cultural churches throughout North America. Paul looked toward places such as Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia. Today new exciting ethnic congregations are being planted in Toronto, Miami, San Diego, and Seattle. North American Mission Board, 'Multiplication Team: Ethnic Church Planting', [http://sub.namb.net/cp/Multiplication/thinking\\_ethnic.asp](http://sub.namb.net/cp/Multiplication/thinking_ethnic.asp), undated, date of access: 02-04-2007.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. M. Hengel, *The 'Hellenization' of Judaea in the First Century after Christ* (London: SCM, 1989), 10.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. B. Witherington III, *New Testament History* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 139.

<sup>7</sup> Witherington III, *New Testament History*, 139.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. M. Hengel, *The 'Hellenization' of Judaea in the First Century after Christ*, 53.

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first Christian church in Jerusalem was made up of Jews alone he does not depict it as a completely homogeneous group.

In chapter 6, verses 1-7 Luke describes a dispute between Hellenists and Hebrews within the Jerusalem church over the distribution of food. Luke tells us that Hellenists complained that their widows 'were being neglected' (2:6). Some scholars believe that the distinction between these two groups was simply one of language: Hellenists were Greek-speaking believers while Hebrews spoke Aramaic as their mother tongue.<sup>9</sup> According to Witherington, Hellenists spoke Greek only, while some of the Aramaic-speaking Hebrews also had some command of Greek.<sup>10</sup> F.F. Bruce even argues that many of the Aramaic-speaking Jews were bilingual.<sup>11</sup> Other commentators hold that there were also theological differences between the two groups. They believe that the Hellenists were more mission-minded than the Hebrews and that both interpreted the law in different ways, with the Hellenists following Jesus' teaching.<sup>12</sup>

However, Luke neither mentions

language problems nor a division between theologically and ethically liberal Hellenists and conservative Hebrews as the cause of the dispute. In verse 1 he indicates that the reason for ignoring the Hellenist widows was more of a logistic nature: the increasing number of believers. By naming the particular group among the Hellenists who were being ignored, i.e. 'their widows' and writing that the apostles 'called together the whole community' to solve the problem Luke also indicates that Hellenists and Hebrews had their own social meetings. In other words, this practice of holding separate gatherings was another reason for neglecting the Hellenist widows.

The existence of such separate Greek-speaking and Aramaic-speaking Christian meetings in Jerusalem is also argued by Williams and Dunn. While Williams talks about a 'Greek-speaking Christian community' that formed a minority in an overwhelmingly Hebrew church,<sup>13</sup> Dunn prefers to use the term 'Hellenistic house churches' for the Greek-speaking gatherings.<sup>14</sup> Hertig notes that the relationship between these two groups was not free of any tensions. 'The numerical growth of the minority group', she writes, 'sharpened group consciousness and thus resulted in intergroup tension, particularly when resources were limited.'<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> D.J. Williams, *Acts* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999), 118.

<sup>14</sup> J.D.G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 1996), 84.

<sup>15</sup> Y.L. Hertig, 'Cross-cultural Mediation: From Exclusion to Inclusion', in *Mission in Acts: Ancient Narrative in Contemporary Context*, eds. R.L. Gallagher and P. Hertig (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004), 59-72 (esp. 65).

These tensions, she argues, can be traced back to the rift between Hebrews and Hellenists that started with the attempts of the latter to transform Jerusalem into a Greek city in the second century B.C.<sup>16</sup>

However, it is striking that Luke does not mention any further conflicts between Hellenists and Hebrews in the Jerusalem church in later parts of Acts. Neither does chapter 6 paint the picture of a Jerusalem church that was divided into two independent hostile communities, factions or parties. On the contrary, Luke presents the dispute over the food distribution as a 'one-off' incident that was dealt with immediately. He tells us that in response to the complaints made by the Hellenists, the twelve apostles called together the assembly of Christians in Jerusalem, in order to sort out the issue (6:2). They then suggest choosing seven men for the distribution of food among the Greek-speaking widows. The selection of the candidates is left to the community (6:3), while the apostles regard it as their task to commission the chosen candidates (6:6).

Luke emphasises that the problem of the food distribution was a matter for the whole Christian church, and not one of the Greek-speaking group alone. Fernando notes: 'The solution of the problem facing the church was not to divide and have separate churches—one for the Grecians and another for the Hebraists. Rather, they sought to ensure that the Grecians were cared

for.'<sup>17</sup> Luke also stresses that the issue was not only dealt with immediately but also in a sensitive way. Thus, Luke deliberately lists the seven men chosen who all have Greek names (cf. 6:5). By listing the Greek names he indicates that they were all members of the Hellenist group and that their selection was an attempt to appease the Hellenists. Some scholars, however, argue that the Greek names cannot be taken as a clear proof that the seven men were all drawn from the Hellenist section of the church, since many Palestinian Jews of that period had Greek names.<sup>18</sup> While this is true, these scholars overlook the fact that most of these Greek names were quite uncommon names for Palestinian Jews.<sup>19</sup> They also seem to forget that it was quite natural for the seven to be from the Greek-speaking section as they were appointed to serve that very group.<sup>20</sup>

To summarise, one can say that Luke presents the early Christian church in Jerusalem as a diverse mono-ethnic community. The church consisted of an Aramaic-speaking majority and a Greek-speaking minority. These two groups had their own meetings but they accepted the overall leadership of the apostles. Luke stresses that the church leaders showed sincere concern for the needs of the minority group

<sup>17</sup> A. Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary: Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 230.

<sup>18</sup> E.g. J. Munck, *The Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), 57.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. I.H. Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1999), 127.

<sup>20</sup> Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (1990), 183.

<sup>16</sup> Hertig, 'Cross-cultural Mediation: From Exclusion to Inclusion', 65.

<sup>9</sup> E.g. O. Bauernfeind, *Kommentar und Studien zur Apostelgeschichte* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1980), 103; J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 347; J. Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 216; L.T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 105.

<sup>10</sup> Witherington III, *New Testament History*, 180.

<sup>11</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester: Apollos, 1990), 181.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. G. Schneider, *Die Apostelgeschichte I. Teil* (Freiburg: Herder, 1980), 414-415.

and the unity of the church. He also emphasises that they were flexible enough to restructure the community and to give leadership responsibilities to members of the minority group when it became necessary. Luke's account of the beginning of the Jerusalem church suggests that the Greek-speaking minority were fully integrated into the church: they had a voice in the assembly and Luke does not mention any attempts made by the Aramaic-speaking majority to demand cultural or linguistic assimilation.

The overall picture of the early Jerusalem church, presented by the author of Acts, is that of a caring community united by faith. This fits well with the main theological purposes of Luke, i.e. to strengthen the faith of his Christian readership and to encourage them to get on with their mission, which is to all people whatever social or ethnic background they might have.

### III The Church in Antioch

In the first century A.D. Antioch was not only the capital of the Roman province of Syria, but also the third-largest city of the Roman Empire, next to Rome and Alexandria.<sup>21</sup> The estimates of Antioch's population size vary between 100,000 people, set by modern historians, and 600,000, as some ancient sources suggest.<sup>22</sup> Antioch was

a free city and attracted people from many different cultures.<sup>23</sup> The inhabitants of Antioch were Greeks, Macedonians, Syrians and Jews, the latter being mostly veterans of the army of Seceulus. Antioch was what today we would call a global city.

In the Book of Acts Luke emphasizes that the multi-ethnic character of the city of Antioch was reflected both in the composition of its first Christian church and in the church's leadership. In chapter 11, verses 19 to 21 Luke tells his readers how the church in Antioch was established by members of the Jerusalem church who had fled from the persecution that had broken out after the death of Stephen. In Antioch they started to evangelise Jews only (11:19), but then some of them began to preach the gospel to members of the Hellenist population also (11:20). By identifying these early evangelists as 'men of Cyprus and Cyrene', i.e. Greek-speaking Jewish believers in Christ, Luke makes clear that he is using the term 'Hellenists' not in the sense of Acts 6:1. While in 6:1 'Hellenists' stand for Greek-speaking Jewish Christians, here it refers to 'the non-Jewish, Greek-speaking inhabitants of Antioch'.<sup>24</sup>

Bruce believes that some of these new Greek-speaking disciples of non-Jewish origin might have been God-fearers, i.e., Gentiles who had attended the Jewish synagogue and therefore already had some knowledge of the Jewish faith.<sup>25</sup> Other scholars hold that

the majority of these new converts belonged to that class.<sup>26</sup> Jervell thinks that they were all God-fearers.<sup>27</sup> Luke, however, does not give us more information about their background. To him it seems to be more important to stress that the evangelism among the Greek-speaking gentile population of Antioch was very successful. In verse 21 he writes: 'The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number became believers and turned to the Lord'.

In Acts 13:1 Luke shows that the leadership group of the new Christian church in Antioch was as diverse as the church itself. Thus, he mentions that it was served by prophets and teachers, and, as before in Acts 6:5, he gives a list with the names of the men concerned: 'Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the ruler, and Saul'. By listing the names of these church leaders Luke highlights the wide range of both their social and cultural backgrounds.

Barnabas, whom he mentions first, was a Jewish Cypriot, who had sold his property and given the proceeds to the church in Jerusalem (4:36-37). He had been sent to Antioch by the Jerusalem church in order to establish a relationship with the new believers (11:22-23). Simeon is a Jewish name that also appears in Acts 15:14 as the Jewish name of the apostle Peter, while the nickname Niger is Latin and means black or dark-complexioned. Lucius was a very common Latin name in the Roman world.<sup>28</sup> There is no evidence

that this Lucius is identical with the Lucius of Romans 16:21. However, Luke tells us that he was from Cyrene, a city on the northern coast of Africa. The next name in the list is Manaen, which is the Greek version of the Hebrew Menahem meaning comforter.<sup>29</sup> According to Luke, Manaen had been brought up with Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, the ruler of Galilee during Jesus' ministry. The last person that Luke mentions is Saul, a Jew from Tarsus, who has been recruited as an assistant and brought to Antioch by Barnabas (9:11; 11:25-26).

After listing the names of the church leaders in Antioch, Luke gives an account of the call and commissioning of Saul and Barnabas as the first missionaries of the Antiochene church (13:2-3). Thus, he indicates that the multi-cultural church of Antioch became not only the sponsoring church for their missionary activities but also the church model that the two missionaries sought to replicate in other cities of the Roman Empire.<sup>30</sup>

### IV The Philippian Church

It was the Roman emperor Octavian who made the Macedonian city of Philippi a Roman colony after his victory over the army of Cassius and Brutus in 42 B.C.<sup>31</sup> By the time Paul and

<sup>21</sup> Cf. T.C. Smith, 'Antioch', in *Lutterworth Dictionary of the Bible*, gen. ed. W.E.Mills (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1994) 34-35 (esp. 34).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. F.W. Norris, 'Antioch of Syria', in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 1, gen. ed. D.N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 265-269 (esp. 265).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Smith, 'Antioch', 35.

<sup>24</sup> C.K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 550-551.

<sup>25</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 225.

<sup>26</sup> E.g. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 154.

<sup>27</sup> Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 322.

<sup>28</sup> Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 45.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 497.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. P.H. Towner, 'Mission Practice and Theology under Construction (Acts 18-20)', in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* eds. I.H. Marshall and D. Peterson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 417-436 (esp. 422).

<sup>31</sup> Cf. T.C. Smith, 'Philippi', in *Lutterworth Dictionary of the Bible*, gen. ed. W.E.Mills (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1994) 683-684 (esp. 684).

Silas came to the city in 49 A.D. its population was made up of Romans, who had been encouraged to settle there, and the Greek-speaking Thracians, descendants from the settlers brought in by Philip II, king of Macedonia. Although Latin was the official language in Philippi, it was Greek that dominated both business and everyday life.<sup>32</sup>

In Acts 16 we are told by Luke how the first church on the European continent was founded by Paul and Silas, and again Luke points to the social and ethnic diversity of the Christian church. Thus, he describes in detail the conversions of a woman named Lydia and her household (16:13-15), as well as those of a jailer and his family (16:23-34). The name of Lydia, the first convert in Philippi, corresponds to the name of her home country.<sup>33</sup> Lydia was an immigrant from Thyatira (16:14), a city in Lydia which was part of the Roman province of Asia Minor. Luke also tells us that she was a 'worshipper of God' (16:14), i.e. a Gentile attracted to the Jewish religion. Furthermore, he mentions that Lydia was 'a dealer in purple cloth' (16:14), indicating that she was a well-to-do woman. Conzelmann points out that Thyatira was famous for its dyeing industry,<sup>34</sup> and Williams writes: 'It was a luxury trade, and Lydia must have been a relatively

wealthy woman to be engaged in it'.<sup>35</sup> By giving so much information about her and quoting her invitation to Paul and Silas to stay in her house (16:15), Luke seems to suggest that she became a leading figure in the Philippian church.

The jailer's social and national status is in contrast to Lydia and is representative of a completely different subgroup of Philippian society. As a prison guard he was part of the Roman administration and probably a Roman himself.<sup>36</sup> In a city that was distinctly Roman he typified Roman culture and society. As a jailer he was either an active or a retired soldier of the Roman army.<sup>37</sup> Thus, Luke emphasises that he was quick to follow instructions from the magistrates (16:24), and determined to commit suicide at the prospect of allowing his prisoners to escape (16:27). These reactions reveal a Roman soldier's sense of duty and discipline. The same is true for his short and straightforward question: 'Sirs, must I do to be saved?' which Luke mentions in verse 30, and the fact that 'he and his entire family were baptised without delay' after their conversions (16:33).

Whether the slave girl belonged to the founding members of the church in Philippi is debatable. On the one hand,

Luke does not mention her baptism as he does in the case of Lydia (16:15) and the jailer (16:33), or her presence in Lydia's home when Paul and Silas said their farewells to the new believers (16:40). Neither is it clear if her proclamation in 16:17 can be taken as a true confession of faith. While the title "Most High God" (*hypsistos theos*) is also used in Acts 7:48 and in Luke's Gospel (1:32, 35, 76; 6:35; 8:28; 19:38), Luke stresses that Paul was annoyed with the girl's behaviour (16:18). Trebilco suggests that the apostle was angry with her because '[she] was proclaiming that the way of salvation was found in which ever god the hearer considered to be 'the highest god'.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, Luke tells us that the girl's deliverance from an evil spirit took place between Lydia's conversion and the jailer's conversion. Stott argues that this allows the conclusion that she became a member of the church too.<sup>39</sup>

In sum, the core group of the church in Philippi is portrayed by Luke as a very diverse community. Luke stresses that they had not only been brought up in different cultures but also belonged to different social classes. Whether or not the slave girl was among the first Christians in Philippi, Luke presents the church as a multi-ethnic community.

## V Other Pauline Churches

According to Luke, a similar ethnic, cultural and social mix could be found in the churches that were set up by Paul and Silas in Thessalonica, Berea, and Corinth. In Acts 17:4 he informs us that the first Christian congregation in Thessalonica was composed of Jews, a great number of God-fearing Gentiles and a considerable number of leading Macedonian women. In 17:12 he mentions that the new Christian church in Berea included a larger group of Jews and some Greek women and men.

Finally, in chapter 18 Luke goes to great length showing that the foundational members of the church in Corinth were of a diverse background too. Thus, he mentions not only Aquila and Priscilla, both Jewish refugees from Italy, who had been forced to leave Rome by an order of the Emperor Claudius (18:2), but also Titius Justus, a gentile God-fearer (18:7). As Titius Justus is a Roman name it is quite possible, as Barrett writes, that he was also a Roman citizen.<sup>40</sup> The next person in the list is Crispus, a Jewish synagogue official who together with his household became a believer (18:8). The lists ends with 'many Corinthians' who 'became believers and were baptized' (18:8), and with the promise that many more will come to faith in city of Corinth (18:10).

## VI Paul's Multi-Ethnic Mission Teams

Finally, it is noteworthy that Luke not

<sup>35</sup> Williams, *Acts*, 282.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. D.L. Matson, *Household Conversion Narratives in Acts: Pattern and Interpretation* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 156.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. B. Rapske, *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting: Vol. 3: The Book of Acts and Paul in Roman Custody* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 252-253.

<sup>38</sup> P.R. Trebilco, 'Paul and Silas—'Servants of the Most High God' (Acts 16:16-18)', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* (1989) 36, 51-73 (esp. 62).

<sup>39</sup> J.R.W. Stott, *The Message of Acts* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 265.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. C.K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles, Vol. 2* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 868.

<sup>32</sup> G.D. Fee, *Philippians* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 26.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 585.

<sup>34</sup> H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, trans. J. Limburg, A.T. Kraabel and D.H. Juell (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 130.

only portrays the first Christian churches as multi-cultural and multi-ethnic communities, but that he also depicts Paul's missionary teams as culturally and ethnically diverse. Luke informs us that on his first journey Paul, originally from Tarsus, travelled together with Barnabas, 'a Levite' and 'a native of Cyprus' (4:36).

After Paul and Barnabas' split over John Mark (15:36-39), Paul continued his work with Silas (15:40), a member and prophet of the Jerusalem church (15:22, 32) and, like Paul, a Roman citizen (16:37), before they were joined by Timothy from Lystra, the son of a Greek father and a Jewish-Christian mother (16:1). Luke goes on to tell us that on his third missionary journey Paul recruited the Italian couple Aquila and Priscilla, who went with him to Antioch and Ephesus (Acts 18:1-28). In Ephesus Priscilla and Aquila met Apollos, an Alexandrian Jew and evangelist who needed some further instruction in the 'Way of God' (18:24-26). In 19:22 the author of Acts informs his readers that during his stay in Ephesus Paul also sent a helper named Erastus together with Timothy to Macedonia. According to McRay this Erastus is identical with the Roman city treasurer of Corinth mentioned in Romans 16:23 and 2 Timothy 4:20.<sup>41</sup> However, Luke does not give us any further information about him.

<sup>41</sup> J. McRay, *Paul: His Life and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 167-168.

## VII The Antioch Crisis and the Jerusalem Council

According to Luke, Paul and Barnabas' multi-cultural mission in places like Cyprus, Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, and Derbe was very successful (cf. 13:4-14:21). Luke stresses that both Jews and Gentiles found faith in Christ as a result of the missionaries' work. Thus, he mentions Sergius Paulus, a Roman proconsul, who became a Christian in Cyprus (13:12), and writes that 'a great number of both Jews and Greeks became believers' in Iconium (14:1). However, with the missionaries' successful evangelism among Gentiles problems of membership and integration began to arise.<sup>42</sup>

In Acts 15:1 Luke describes the intervention of a group of Christians who came to Antioch from Judea insisting that male Christians had to be circumcised in order to be saved. Luke underlines that a policy existed at Antioch that non-Jewish believers were not required to keep the Jewish law.<sup>43</sup> Thus, he mentions that both Paul and Barnabas 'had no small dissension and debate' with those Judeans (15:2). It is obvious that Luke identifies with Paul and Barnabas' position. He does not mention the names of their opponents but describes them only as 'certain individuals' from Judea (15:1). Furthermore, he writes that the news of gentile converts 'brought great joy' to the believers in Phoenicia and Samaria (15:4).

In Acts 15:5-29 Luke gives a detailed account of the Council of

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 242.

<sup>43</sup> Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 242.

Jerusalem which was summoned in order to discuss the issues of circumcision and incorporation into the church.<sup>44</sup> It is not by chance that Luke's account of the Jerusalem meeting can be found in the middle of Acts.<sup>45</sup> For Luke the council is a central event in the history of the early church. In verse 5 he tells us that in Jerusalem the demand of circumcision was repeated by a group of believers of Pharisaic background. Bauernfeind argues that the demands for circumcision in verses 2 and 5 put the relationship between circumcised and uncircumcised believers at risk.<sup>46</sup>

However, Luke does not say anything about a split over the issue in the church in Antioch. There was dissension caused by the visit of Christians from Judea, and all those actively involved in the debate were Jewish Christians. The same is true for the meeting in Jerusalem. The participants

<sup>44</sup> Traditionally, scholars have argued that in Galatians 2 the apostle Paul gives a personal account of the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15. This view has been challenged by other commentators who believe that Galatians 2 describes Paul's famine relief visit of Acts 11. A third position equates Galatians 2 with Acts 18:22. An in-depth discussion on this subject can be found in H. Zeigan, *Aposteltreffen in Jerusalem: Eine forschungsgeschichtliche Studie zu Galater 2,1-10 und den möglichen lukanischen Parallelen* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2005).

<sup>45</sup> Cf. R. Deines, 'Das Aposteldekret—Halacha für Heidenchristen oder christliche Rücksichtnahme auf jüdische Tabus?' in *Jewish Identity in the Greco-Roman World*, eds. J. Frey, D.R. Schwartz and S. Grippentrog (Leiden: Brill, 2007) 323-395 (esp. 327).

<sup>46</sup> Bauernfeind, *Kommentar und Studien zur Apostelgeschichte*, 187.

he mentions by name, i.e. Paul, Barnabas, Peter and James, are all Jewish believers in Christ. Moreover, Luke leaves no doubt that the speeches of the apostles, which he summarises, were addressed to Jewish Christians (cf. 15:10, 12, 19). Consequently, the conflict was not between gentile and Jewish believers but between Jewish Christians only.

Still, Luke makes very clear that the dissatisfaction over the practice of welcoming gentile converts into the church by baptism without circumcision was potentially dangerous to the church's unity and mission and that a solution needed to be found. Luke lets his readers know that the mission among the Gentiles was not only God's will but also God's mission. Thus, he quotes Peter who reminded the meeting that 'in the early days God made a choice among you, that I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of good news and become believers' (15:7). Luke also summarises the main point of Paul and Barnabas' speeches, i.e. that it was God who had done all the signs and wonders through them among the Gentiles (15:12). By quoting Peter's statements that gentile and Jewish believers have been given the same Holy Spirit (15:8), that there is 'no distinction' between them (15:9), and that both 'will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus' (15:11) Luke assures his readers that all believers are equal in Christ. Consequently, no one can demand from gentile Christians to obey the Jewish law and be circumcised.<sup>47</sup>

This is also the message of James'

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 250.

speech, which Luke summarises in verses 13 to 21. In this speech James stresses that gentile Christians are included in God's people. Referring to the Cornelius incident that Peter also referred to in his speech (15:7), James argues that on this occasion God showed his favour to Gentiles and took from them 'a people for his name' (15:14). He goes on to say that this is in line with Old Testament prophecy which speaks of the restoration of the kingdom of Israel and the incorporation of gentile nations (15:15-18). For this reason, James concludes that Jewish Christians should not burden gentile believers by asking them to add to their new faith the whole Jewish law code. They are only to abstain from a few practices, which might cause offence among Jewish Christians:

Therefore I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God, but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood (15:19-20).

Luke makes great efforts to show that this decision was the right one. While verse 19 suggests that the decisive voice lay with James, Luke points out that James' decision was supported not only by the other leaders but also by the whole Jerusalem church. In verses 22 to 23 he writes that 'the apostles and the elders, with the consent of the whole church' decided to send some of their members together with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch to deliver a letter with the council's decision. Furthermore, he mentions that the letter was received well by the

Antiochene church (15:31), that Judas and Silas had a peaceful send off after having encouraged and strengthened the Antiochene Christians (15:32-33), and that Paul and Barnabas had no problems continuing with their ministry in Antioch (15:35). In other words, Luke presents a harmonious picture of the church after the Jerusalem council.

The council's decision, as Luke portrays it, was clearly a compromise. All the church leaders did was to ask gentile Christians to observe certain Jewish food laws and to abstain from sexual immorality.<sup>48</sup> In other words, the church decided not to demand cultural assimilation from gentile believers. It made clear that they were not expected to become Jewish. The church leadership realized that mandatory circumcision would have been a stumbling block for gentile Christian integration into the church and would endanger the unity of the whole church. However, gentile Christians were asked, as Willimon writes, 'to observe the minimum requirements that had been set for strangers wanting to enjoy fellowship with conscientious Jews'.<sup>49</sup>

The prohibition of eating non-kosher food needs to be seen as a reminder for non-Jewish Christians to

<sup>48</sup> The four required abstentions mentioned in verse 19 to 20 have been the object of much debate among biblical scholars. Some have argued that they must be regarded as being moral, while others see them as being of a ceremonial nature. For an extensive discussion on this subject see Deines, 'Das Aposteldekret—Halacha für Heidenchristen oder christliche Rücksichtnahme auf jüdische Tabus?', 352-377.

<sup>49</sup> Willimon, *Acts*, 130.

be sensitive to Jewish scruples but not as an effort to absorb them into Jewish culture and tradition.<sup>50</sup> For the early church, to have common meals was an essential aspect of church life.<sup>51</sup> If this table fellowship was going to survive, gentile believers would have to respect the Jewish concerns about purity upon which their cultural and national identity in a Diaspora situation depended. Köstenberger and O'Brien comment on the council's decision:

Without necessarily solving all future problems of relationships between Jewish and gentile Christians, this way of living by the gentile believers would make fellowship with more conservative Jewish believers possible.<sup>52</sup>

In summary, the fact that Luke gives such an extensive report about the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 and that he mentions the council's decision again in Acts 16:4 and 21:25 demonstrates his concern for church unity and racial equality within the church, as well as his aim to assure his Christian readership that a church composed of both Jews and Gentiles was not an apostate or heretical group but stood in continuity with Judaism.<sup>53</sup>

## VIII Principles of Integration

The results of the above analysis of

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary: Acts*, 419.

<sup>51</sup> Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary: Acts*, 419.

<sup>52</sup> A.J. Köstenberger, P.T. O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Leicester: Apollos, 2001), 151.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 22; Williams, *Acts*, 15-16.

various New Testament churches and Paul's missionary activities as they are portrayed by Luke in the Book of Acts clearly contradict the view that the early church had a strategy of planting ethnic churches. On the contrary, they provide us with guidelines or principles that can help us to develop strategies for the integration of migrants into local indigenous churches.

### 1 The Congregation within a Congregation

The example of the church in Jerusalem shows that it might be necessary for a minority ethno-cultural group within a local church to have not only its own meetings but also its own ministers (cf. Acts 6:1-7). Where language barriers make it difficult for an ethno-cultural minority to take part fully in the church life of the majority group a church needs to offer separate language meetings and select, if possible, ministers from the different groups to serve these groups. For a local church that has one or more groups of immigrants this means that it might need to develop a *congregation within a congregation* structure. In such a structure immigrants have a worship service, house group or Bible study meeting in their own language. However, this does not mean that they form a separate church; they remain part of the local church. As one local church all its congregations accept one overall church leadership, make important decisions together, and share resources with each other.

### 2 Unity

In the Book of Acts Luke also stresses

that Christian unity is more than an ideal. Christian unity has to be lived in the local church. It finds its expression in common leadership, common service, and, if possible, common worship, as well as the willingness to make concessions (cf. Acts 6:2; 13:1, 15:19-20, 18:24-28). Luke underlines that for early church leaders like Paul the founding of separate gentile churches was not an option, even though the integration of Jewish and gentile Christians was a difficult enterprise.<sup>54</sup> Christians, whatever their ethno-cultural background, have a new identity. They are united through their common faith in Christ. This principle of unity in Christ calls Christians to integrate Christian migrants into existing indigenous churches. To establish completely separate, independent migrant churches would contradict the Christian doctrine of unity.

### 3 Equality

Luke demonstrates that there is no place for racial discrimination within the Christian church. In Christ all believers are spiritually equal, whatever their ethnic background (cf. Acts 15:8-11). Such an understanding of equality has implications for the treatment of migrants. While forced migrants, for example, are denied certain rights by society because of their legal status, churches must not do the same to Christian refugees and asylum seekers if they are to replicate the early church. Luke reminds his readers of the important role that refugees

played in the mission of the first century church (cf. Acts 8:4-5; 11:19-20; 18:8). In other words, churches that minister to Christian migrants today should not treat them not differently from any other church members, i.e. they should not be discriminated against because of their legal status or ethno-cultural background. Instead, they need to give them the opportunity to serve in the church and to use their God-given gifts.

### 4 Non-Assimilation and Mutuality

Luke points out that at the Council of Jerusalem the early church decided to have a non-assimilation policy, i.e. it was decided that to become Christian, non-Jews did not have to become Jewish first (cf. Acts 15:19). The church knew that such an obligation would have been a stumbling block for its mission and the integration of non-Jewish believers. Burnett writes that '[in] rejecting circumcision for gentile converts the meeting also rejected cultural conversion'.<sup>55</sup> For a church involved with migrants this means that it must not expect them to abandon their language and all their traditions and customs and adopt the dominant culture.

In parallel, the Council of Jerusalem made clear that while there was no need for non-Jewish believers to give up their cultural heritage it required them to respect certain Jewish customs (cf. Acts 15:20). It defined integration as a mutual process. Migrants

<sup>55</sup> D.G. Burnett, *The Healing of the Nations: The Biblical Basis of the Mission of God* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1996), 172.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. E.J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission, Vol. 2* (Leicester: Apollos, 2004), 1370.

who want to join a local church are not entitled to demand radical change. They too have to respect the cultural norms of the dominant group. What is needed is, as Strong puts it, 'an attitude of mutual submission, prioritizing mutual accountability and fellowship over personal rights and freedoms'.<sup>56</sup>

### 5 Mixed-leadership

Luke stresses that New Testament churches, like those in Antioch, Philippi, Thessalonica, Beroea, and Corinth were multi-ethnic communities (cf. Acts 11:19-20; 16:13-34; 17:4,12; 18:2, 7-10). It is significant that the leadership of these churches reflected not only the diverse local church membership but also the diversity of the whole body of Christ.<sup>57</sup> The fact that the role was not based on the politics of ethnicity but upon the giftings of the Holy Spirit established a protocol for unity which has relevance today.<sup>58</sup>

It follows that it is mandatory for multi-ethnic churches to select their leaders on this basis and to avoid a mono-ethnic leadership. A church that has an ethno-cultural diversity in its

membership should foster and call leaders from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Green writes about multi-ethnic church leadership:

Cross-cultural fellowship is not easy. We naturally tend towards our own kind. But to mix with those from other nations, other cultural backgrounds, should be a particular characteristic and glory of the Christian church.<sup>59</sup>

The same applies to local churches involved with Christian migrants. Such churches need to identify spiritual leaders from among them and call them into the overall leadership of the church. Doing so demonstrates that the local church takes the spiritual status of migrants seriously and validates the fact that they are brothers and sisters in Christ. Further, it shows a willingness to listen to them and to learn from them.

### 6 Mixed-Ministry Teams

Finally, Luke puts stress on the fact that Paul's missionary teams were culturally and ethnically diverse, too. People of different cultures and social rank worked together for the sake of the gospel (cf. Acts 4:36; 16:1; 18:1-4). For the New Testament church the God-given gifts and talents of people assumed greater importance than their socio-cultural background. In addition, the cultural insights which they brought to mission enabled the church to be more effective in its outreach.

<sup>56</sup> D.K. Strong, 'The Jerusalem Council: Some Implications for Contextualization', in *Mission in Acts: Ancient Narrative in Contemporary Context* eds. R.L. Gallagher and P. Hertig (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004) 196-208 (esp. 206).

<sup>57</sup> N.E. Thomas, 'The Church in Antioch: Crossing Racial, Cultural, and Class Barriers', in *Mission in Acts: Ancient Narrative in Contemporary Context* eds. R.L. Gallagher and P. Hertig (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004), 144-156 (esp. 151).

<sup>58</sup> Cf. C.H. Cosgrove, 'Did Paul Value Ethnicity?' *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* (2006) 68(2), 268-290 (esp. 290).

<sup>59</sup> M. Green, *30 Years that Changed the World: A Fresh Look at the Book of Acts* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2002), 154.

Thomas speaks of the 'Antioch model of every-member ministries'.<sup>60</sup> A local church which wants to integrate Christian migrants should replicate this model.

An important step to integrate migrants into the local church is to help them to find opportunities of service according to their abilities and gifts. Serving others is an important

dimension of Christian life. The status of migrants should not reduce people to the passive receipt of service from other church members. Migrants need an equal chance to serve side by side with indigenous Christians in roles of mutual reciprocity. Where equal opportunities exist their contribution towards God's mission can be recognised by the whole church and in the process their participation enables them to get to know other members of the church better and to form friendships.

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<sup>60</sup> Thomas, 'The Church in Antioch: Crossing Racial, Cultural, and Class Barriers', 148.

# Bevans and Bediako: Reconsidering Text-Based Models of Contextual Theologising

Alan Thomson

**KEYWORDS:** *Translation model, countercultural model, radical discontinuity, narrative, dialectic, practitioner, best practice.*

The primary problem this paper wants to address is the question of how to understand these models. Bevans was writing to identify current practices, and the level of interest his book engendered amply demonstrates he hit a chord. Now, more than fifteen years after it first appeared, it is appropriate to look back and consider the ramifications of this publication. Over the course of time *Models of Contextual Theology* has gained stature; it is now a text book for courses around the world and an integral element of missionary and missiological thinking and strategising. In short, it has entered into received wisdom, becoming less an account of contemporary practice and more a normative theoretical framework providing the foundations for emerging approaches.

The following article addresses this transition considering the models not as expressions of what is but as platforms for what will be. This necessarily involves consideration of how well

## I Introduction

IN 1992 STEPHEN BEVANS published *Models of Contextual Theology*, a typology of contextual theologising that outlined five methodologies: the translation, anthropological, praxis, synthetic and transcendental models. A decade later Bevans published a revised and expanded edition that incorporated the countercultural model. These models are located across a continuum bounded by two primary parameters: text and context with each model being considered paradigmatic: representative of a number of approaches bearing similar characteristics. As Bevans further notes, the six models can be grouped into two categories: two *text-based* models and four *context oriented* models.

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Bevans' theoretical observations fitted the data he relied upon, but it involves this also as a means of critically probing his theoretical constructs. The real question concerns the extent to which his models are useful in a normative rather than descriptive role.

Bevans' work was wide ranging, drawing from numerous sources and condensing a significant amount of material. Tackling this again is quite beyond the scope of an article and therefore the parameters of consideration here are much narrower. The focus will be on his two-text based approaches—the Translation and Countercultural models. Even within this narrow focus there is a need for further refining, hence the ensuing will concentrate on highlights—on establishing a *prima facie* case that these models should be reconsidered if they are to be used normatively.

Propelling this investigation is the question of what might constitute *best practice*, of how contextual theologising could (at least theoretically) be done. Within this schema Bevans' two text-based models become very interesting dialogue partners, not just by usefully pointing to key aspects that need to be thought through but more importantly by the way they interact with each other. This last point occupies a central role in the discussion because Bevans describes them as distinct models. It is hoped that the following will show that while to some extent they can be separated, describing them in this way predominately misses an important opportunity for defining a more sophisticated and robust model for text-based theological engagements with different contexts.

The key to establishing this case is

showing that Bevans' typological analysis results in a theoretical and practical separation between the two text-based models that overemphasises their differences and underplays their similarities. While it will be found that this is indeed the case, it will also be shown that this approach is exacerbated by an unfortunate reductionism in his summaries. The net effect of these influences is for the two models to seem quite distinctive, as if separated by irreducible differences, despite Bevan's best efforts to ameliorate this consequence. In essence, the general case is considerably more fluid than he allows.

As a corrective this paper explores the possibility that the points of difference he notes actually signify, in many cases, relative degrees of emphasis rather than qualitative differences. Further, when this observation is coupled with a greater emphasis upon similarities between the Translation and Countercultural models it becomes clear that his two model structure can be displaced by a quite different framework.

This schema reflects the possibility that beneath the two apparently distinct models there lurks a single, perhaps ideal, model of text-based cultural engagement. When this model is applied to the evidence presented by Bevans, it becomes clear that at least some practitioners operate by way of a dialectical or negotiated process of cultural engagement, carefully weighing the degree of affirmation and prophetic critique required in each context. A tendency for adopting either a positive or negative stance towards culture does not therefore stem from the application of a different model, as Bevans

notably suggests with Pope John Paul II, but emerges from a specific response to contingent requirements. As will be seen, this has important implications for both mission theology and mission practice.

There are two important caveats over the following discussion. First, this is an exploratory analysis, a study that aims to highlight another potentially useful way to construe the underlying data upon which Bevans relies. The length of this article necessarily constrains the amount of evidence that can be used in adducing this conclusion, and therefore the evidence is paradigmatic rather than exhaustive. The specific data highlighted is therefore to be treated as representative rather than comprehensive, though those acquainted with Bevans work will be able to extrapolate it beyond the particular claims highlighted here. Second, this article makes its central point by focussing upon the translation model, an approach that allows an element of in depth consideration not otherwise attainable. This unfortunately truncates discussion of the countercultural model. At a later point it is hoped to publish a similar engagement from the countercultural perspective, for which Michael Goheens' work on Lesslie Newbigin provides an important resource.

## II An Initial Foray

Bevans' analysis of each model consists of two inter-related components. The first, comprising the bulk of his text, is a detailed discussion of the main elements in each model built up on the basis of supporting examples. The second consists of a concluding summary

that allows him to highlight the main points. It is this summary that then forms the skeletal foundation which Bevans later uses to describe and therefore separate his models; hence it becomes the 'detail' in his account of how these models differ from each other. In terms of how he distinguishes between his models it is therefore this summary section that is particularly important; it is a way of approaching the project that has significant implications for his overall conclusions.

At one level this overall strategy is a very useful process, for it allows Bevans to establish classifications that express commonalities between certain practitioners within a specific model, and to highlight differences of method between pools (or models) of practitioners. But summaries are notoriously reductive mechanisms, tending to depict fine gradations of emphasis in aggregate terms, terms that can sometimes belie the underlying subtleties they are reporting. This is, as it were, a 'necessary evil', but its effects should be mitigated by a comparatively high degree of correlation between the detail and the summary in terms of overall thrust. This aspect of his discussion therefore needs to be carefully examined.

In the translation model, for example, Bevans summarises the translation view of 'context' as 'basically good and trustworthy.'<sup>1</sup> Later he moderates this description by noting that the model 'recognizes cultural ambiguity.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (rev.ed.) (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 44

<sup>2</sup> Bevans, *Models*, 44.



Given this description it would be fair to suppose that these practitioners understand cultural contexts to be 'basically good' but that there is some recognition of ambiguity. Bevens provides an expanded comment on this in the body of his analysis: 'The practitioner of the translation model is one who can accept the good in all cultures or contexts while still being committed to the transforming and challenging power of the gospel.'<sup>3</sup> Here Bevens is clearly distinguishing between grades of emphasis, in this case presenting both a primary and a secondary emphasis. The primary emphasis centres upon a positive evaluation of context, and it is this view that characterises the model in Bevens' final summary.<sup>4</sup> By contrast the secondary thrust is an implied negative assessment; that each context contains elements requiring prophetic engagement.

Turning to the countercultural model, Bevens is even clearer in his descriptions. Practitioners are portrayed as focussing on the negative aspects of context: 'Context: radically ambiguous and resistant to the gospel'.<sup>5</sup> Within the body of his analysis this apparently unambiguous statement of radical contextual ambiguity is moderated by a far more optimistic perspective. So, on the one hand adherents advocate the need to 'express the strong critical function that the model plays over against human context.'<sup>6</sup> But on the other hand, 'Contextual the-

ology is best done... by an analysis of culture and by respect for it.'<sup>7</sup> This element of respect is more clearly articulated as the need to explicitly recognise the requirement for the gospel 'to be clothed in symbols which are meaningful' and that in fact 'culture itself is not an evil'<sup>8</sup> even though, as a human product, it displays sinful propensities that degrade it.

These observations lead Bevens to argue the countercultural model's central emphasis is 'respectful yet critical analysis and authentic gospel proclamation in word and deed'.<sup>9</sup> Once again this seems to indicate shades of emphasis, with the countercultural model based on a dual cultural thrust in which one aspect (the negative assessment) is considered a primary focus while the other (the positive perspective) forms an important though distinctly secondary factor. Once again, though this time in reverse order to the translation model, this latter secondary feature is absent from his final summary.

This initial foray shows that both models, when considered at the detail rather than summary level, display closer affinities to each other in terms of their attitudes towards culture than first appears. Furthermore the nature of the similarity seems to suggest the possibility, or at least a *prima facie* case, for the existence of an underlying structural similarity. Having established this as a possibility there then arises the question of how this should be understood, some explanation of

which can be gained by considering another of the examples Bevens uses.

One of Bevens' key examples of the translation model, Pope John Paul II, usefully highlights the theoretical point under consideration. Using the work of Aylward Shorter, Bevens notes that the pope had been primarily concerned with cultures influenced by western thinking, particularly those that were then under the sway of communist thought. Bevens comments that this communist concern 'would explain a certain hesitation on the pope's part regarding the value of particular cultures'<sup>10</sup> and that 'for him, while culture is important and central to human existence, it is nevertheless something thoroughly ambiguous and therefore something in need of purification and redemption.'<sup>11</sup> This is language decidedly reminiscent of the central convictions guiding Bevens' description of the *countercultural* model.

Bevens acknowledges this apparently discordant note, and therefore uses Pope John Paul II to demonstrate the existence of what may be called modular transitions—examples of how, in this case, translation modelists can at times seem very countercultural in their approach. He argues that when the exigencies of individual contexts require it, practitioners switch models. The pope, given the change of situation when his attention shifts from Africa to the West, is presented as an exemplary example of

this.<sup>12</sup> This strongly suggests the interesting scenario that the pope is concurrently operating with and comfortably conversant with two distinctive models.

But, we can note, the idea of switching models is not the only possible explanation. It is perhaps simpler, and more likely, to suppose that Pope John Paul II was not shifting models between contexts but merely changing his emphasis. Instead of a convoluted mechanism of model transition it is surely more plausible to suggest that he was operating with a flexible model. The evidence is in fact suggestive of a single context sensitive model of contextual engagement that adapts into a primarily translation mode when confronting a virgin or newly opened territory of Christian influence and a countercultural mode when faced with a syncretistic, 'old' territory.<sup>13</sup> Instead of each 'mode' reflecting a separate model, as argued by Bevens, it represents the result of a process of dialectical engagement in which context considerations are pragmatically balanced.

So far we have been primarily concerned with thinking this question through by way of Bevens' analysis, considering thereby the implications of certain discordant notes within his

<sup>3</sup> Bevens, *Models*, 43

<sup>4</sup> Refer particularly to the tables with which he concludes his book.

<sup>5</sup> Bevens, *Models*, 126.

<sup>6</sup> Bevens, *Models*, 119.

<sup>7</sup> Bevens, *Models*, 119.

<sup>8</sup> Bevens, *Models*, 119.

<sup>9</sup> Bevens, *Models*, 119.

<sup>10</sup> Bevens, *Models*, 50, at which point Bevens provides n. 64, in which it is argued that the Pope is following the countercultural model.

<sup>11</sup> Bevens, *Models*, 50.

<sup>12</sup> Bevens, *Models*, 50.

<sup>13</sup> This is a bold statement of the thesis with many important nuances simply assumed, some of which are described later. Certain other factors, such as elements of the historical development of missions, also play an important part in the distinction between the older and newer territories; however this discussion ranges far beyond the parameters of our purpose here.

framework. We are not limited to this resource though; in a quite different context another theologian has been working through very similar issues; providing a very instructive analysis for our purposes.

### III Kwame Bediako and African Theology

Kwame Bediako, a Ghanaian theologian, has, in the course of his analysis of the African theological context, helpfully considered aspects of the question we are currently pursuing.<sup>14</sup> In his assessment African theological discourse was being conducted within an overly dichotomous framework that tended to emphasise either of two popular postures. He argued that instead of pursuing either of these paths African theologians would be better served adopting a mediating, 'third way' position.

At one extreme he located those who argued for a radical continuity between the gospel and culture, or what in Bevans' terms amounts to an extreme translation model perspective. Bediako called these theologians 'indigenisers', with Bolaji Idowu presented as an exemplar. Idowu's position can be broadly characterised as an argument against an essential foreignness of the gospel and a contention for recognising instead a foreignness stemming from the Western imperial garb that cloaked the gospel when it arrived in Africa. He goes on to contend

for the need to recognise African pre-Christian revelation—a divine preparation in African religions. The gospel, once uncloaked, is not foreign to the African mindset; instead it fulfils a divine preparation already present within African cultures. Bediako argues that this position minimises the 'newness' of the gospel in the context of African tribal religions, thereby truncating the challenging or prophetic role the gospel plays over against traditional African culture.

In the next section Bediako cites Byang Kato as a champion of radical discontinuity, or what Bediako calls the Biblicist position. Notably Kato is explicitly listed by Bevans as an example of the translation model. However where Bevans' analysis of the translation model is suggestive of an emphasis on cultural continuity, or at best neutrality, Bediako presents Kato as stressing an assertive Biblicism that *highlights the distinctiveness* of the gospel message and the newness of the biblical revelation to the African cultural environment. This approach ultimately leads Kato into an antithetical stance regarding the gospel and culture relationship.

In an important way even this countercultural expression of the translation model is benign relative to the clear intentions Kato expresses through his other writings. He markedly constrains contextualization, limiting it to the physical expressions of the context; the gospel is not to interact with the underlying thought forms of the context.<sup>15</sup> For Kato 'theo-

logical meanings must not be sacrificed at the altar of comprehension... the congregations should be taught the meaning of the term as originally meant.'<sup>16</sup> In similar vein he concludes his 1974 Lausanne presentation by picking up on Donald McGavran's observation that Christianity purges cultures.

Returning to Bevans' analysis for a moment, it is instructive to pause here and note the effects of the preceding. Working from Bediako's analysis and Kato's own statements it is apparent that Kato is a curious example for Bevans to call upon. Far from the generally affirmative stance towards culture that Bevans' summary suggests, Kato demonstrates a very strong sense of cultural ambiguity and suspicion. In fact it would appear that Kato ostensibly undermines the conclusions Bevans reaches in his presentation of the translation model.

Kato certainly does not advocate context as 'basically good and trustworthy', though he still maintains a distinctively text-based translational emphasis. In Bevans' analysis such a stance is difficult to describe; it combines core elements of both the Countercultural and Translation models. Further, Kato's position is not articulated such that the modular transition argument applied to Pope John Paul II can rescue it; the elements are all inherent in his overall posture.

Certainly the existence of a single instance such as this is not sufficient in and of itself to disturb Bevans' contentions; it could perhaps operate as the exception proving the rule. Yet it does seem to contribute to a wider picture, providing further evidence in support of an alternative view; namely that missionaries and missiologists operate in a context of negotiation considerably more nuanced than Bevans' is able to suggest through his typology, at least as it currently stands. A translational or countercultural stance is not necessarily reducible to the effects of a similarly labelled model but is more likely, it is contended here, to emerge from a complex interaction that incorporates elements of both.

Bevans does seem to ameliorate this critique somewhat by proposing that the models be understood as relatively porous; that is, they are theoretical constructs that shade into each other. Yet this fuzzy demarcation can only be applied so far before the practicality of his modular approach begins to lose cogency. At what point do they shade into each other such that their separable identities are still maintained? It is time now to press the positive case for the existence of a mediating model that better explains the examples Bevans refers to and the theoretical framework he is seeking to portray.

### IV Bediako's Mediating 'Third-Way'

Bediako's analysis of the 'Biblicist' and 'Indigenisers' positions presents a picture that is very similar to Bevans' 'Translation' and 'Countercultural'

<sup>14</sup> Kwame Bediako, 'Understanding African Theology in the 20th century', *Themelios*, 20(1)(1994):16-17; idem, 'The Roots of African Theology', *IBMR*, 13(2)(1989):61-62.

<sup>15</sup> Byang Kato, 'The Gospel, Cultural Context and Religious Syncretism' in J.D. Douglas

(ed.), *Let The Earth Hear His Voice, International Congress on World Evangelization. Lausanne, Switzerland: official Reference Volume: Papers and Responses* (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975), 1217

<sup>16</sup> Kato, 'The Gospel', 1217

models. Given the significance of the challenges which each view presents to the contextual practitioner, Bediako goes on to articulate the need for a third perspective that takes the middle ground between the two options championed by Idowu and Kato. Bediako explicitly describes this model as a Translation model, labelling its adherents as 'translators'.<sup>17</sup> In his ensuing discussion he suggests scholars such as John Mbiti, Harry Sawyerr, and Kwesi Dickson as exemplars of this stream of thought, before noting that it is his own preferred option for contextual understanding.

Bediako notes this approach is characterised by an understanding of 'Christianity, as a religious faith', and as being 'not intrinsically foreign to Africa'.<sup>18</sup> Yet it is distinguishable from the Indigenisers' position because it retains the centrality of the gospel, 'having firmly taken on board the notion that the Christian faith is capable of "translation" into African terms without injury to its essential content'<sup>19</sup> while concurrently upholding a central plank of the Biblicists' position.

<sup>17</sup> This does not necessarily make them translation model adherents, at least according to Bevans' definitions, though such self-definition does imply the acceptance of central tenets of a broadly conceived translation approach. As will become evident, their self-labelling is based on characteristics that do fulfil many of the core elements of Bevans' description, even if in ways not originally envisaged by him.

<sup>18</sup> Bediako, 'Understanding African Theology', 16.

<sup>19</sup> Bediako, 'Understanding African Theology', 16.

Given this, it is suggested that Bediako's 'third way' presents itself as a plausible candidate for a mediating model within Bevans' typology. Instead of the either/or structure to which Bevans subscribes, this would amount to a both/and approach, though one that still maintains a constant tension between the two poles. Within this framework Bevans is therefore right to note that there are some practitioners occupying the outlying regions of the extremities, rigorously maintaining these extreme postures for theological reasons. In short, this approach allows for the separability that Bevans discerns. But it also reflects the essential commonality pointed out above. This commonality, when expressed in terms of Bediako's mediating process, quite explicitly points to the possibility that all three of the 'models' outlined above actually reflect differing manifestations of a single model. Within this framework Bevans' modular typology becomes a description of the extremes within which the model moves, with the translation and countercultural 'models' providing the outer limits of the range of available possibilities.

So far attention has been focussed on the broad thrust of Bevans' arguments, paying little attention to the supplementary components he presents in support of his contentions. Explicit, though brief, consideration of these aspects, with an emphasis on the countercultural model, will sharpen the analysis and lead to a statement of the core conviction being expressed through this paper.

## V The Core Components Rethought

This section will briefly run through three central points. Turning first to context, Bevans describes the counterculturalist perspective as '*radically ambiguous and resistant to the gospel; unequal to scripture/tradition*'.<sup>20</sup> We need not dwell on this point here because it has been covered above within the translation model analysis. Suffice it to say that even in Bevans' own analysis this does not adequately convey the heart of the model, for there is some considerable nuancing of this bald statement within the body of his book. The foregoing discussion shows that, far from a dichotomous presentation, it is more appropriate to depict the model as a 'mode' within a context sensitive process of dialectical engagement that gives rise to a spectrum of pragmatically determined responses. Admittedly the translation and countercultural 'models' as described by Bevans occupy opposite ends of this spectrum, but they are nonetheless found across the same continuum.

Regarding the second point, revelation, the countercultural model is described by Bevans as upholding '*narrative and story; the "fact" of Jesus Christ*'.<sup>21</sup> The obvious inference is that the translation model generally does not do this, and in fact, Bevans characterises this model as primarily propositional in nature. Unfortunately this characterisation is neither empirically nor theoretically supported, for there is certainly room for a narrative under-

standing within the ambit of the translation model.

Several of the practitioners whom Bevans uses as examples of his translation model engage their task with such an understanding, Kwame Bediako being a prime example.<sup>22</sup> Bediako comments, 'Scripture is a story in which we participate. When understood like this, Scripture becomes recognised by us as the narrative that explains who we are, and therefore as our narrative.'<sup>23</sup> The full range of possible perspectives on scripture that may be upheld from within the confines of the translation model are therefore considerably wider than Bevans intimates, and hence divergent views on scripture do not constitute the boundary between models his schema would otherwise tend to indicate.

The final characteristic we can examine is the understanding of Scripture/Tradition that practitioners operate with. For Bevans, the countercultural model was characterised by its focus on Scripture/Tradition as '*the "clue" to the meaning of history; complete, even though human understanding of it is not; can be understood more completely through the understanding of other cultures*'.<sup>24</sup> A dynamic historical perspective is central to the premise expressed here, as is an orientation to

<sup>22</sup> Bevans does not explicitly refer to him, but helpfully points out that the participants in the 1982 conference on sharing Jesus in the Two Thirds World hold to a translation model understanding, of which one was Bediako.

<sup>23</sup> Kwame Bediako, 'Scripture as the Hermeneutic of Culture and Tradition', *Journal of African Christian Thought*, 4(1)(2001):5

<sup>24</sup> Bevans, *Models*, 143.

<sup>20</sup> Bevans, *Models*, 143.

<sup>21</sup> Bevans, *Models* 143.

a centre of the gospel rather than a doctrinal core. Such alternative perspectives are not actually foreign to translation model practitioners, some of whom adhere to very similar principles, Kwame Bediako being once again paradigmatic.

In all, the distance apparent between Bevans' summary descriptions of the translation and countercultural models has less to do with qualitative differences of separation than with methodological differentiation. When examined according to similarities rather than differences, the practitioners he identifies for each model tell a quite different story. Rather than depicting apparently diametrically opposed models, they seem to engage through a method of contextual engagement in which the specific characteristics of each context determines the particular polarity that is emphasised.

For example, when confronted with a deeply syncretised environment, practitioners adopt a challenging or confrontational stance, whereas in 'virgin' territory the approach is apt to be positive as they seek points of appropriate engagement. Contextualizing theology is therefore not a process of either challenge or relevancy. Rather, it is a process of dialectical engagement that weaves its way between these twin influences. A key indicator that this is a primary underlying process between the translation and countercultural models is the way each of Bevans' examples, at least those which we have examined here, have expressed elements of both aspects in line with what would be expected from a dialectical process.

For Bediako, in the African situa-

tion, there was a need for the reductionist dichotomising characterising entrenched positions to be opened up to a position of inherent tension, to a place where the otherwise polarising positions of continuity and discontinuity could relate to each other through creative interaction. It is at this point of tension that the respective positions are able to most benefit from the valuable insights offered by the alternate perspective. At particular times, and in specific places, one pole or the other will tend to be emphasised, however successful contextualization will only occur when *both* continuity and discontinuity are acknowledged and allowed for.

## VI A Dialectical Model

There are a number of key observations emerging from this study. First, the translation model elaborated by Bevans in his summary is a highly homogenised and narrowly defined description. In effect the complex realities of translating the gospel into various cultural environments have been reduced to a model based on the assumptions of conservative orthodoxy. The specific evangelical examples Bevans uses serve only to reinforce this. Bevans' observations do have some historical relevancy, capturing an important element of mid twentieth century missiology. However mission theology and practice has evolved, moving well beyond the parameters his models imply.

Conservative orthodoxy is no longer the sole foundation upon which a translational engagement of contexts may be based. Kwame Bediako stands as an exemplar of a Two-Thirds World model

that operates through a translational mode derived from alternative roots. In the West, Robert Webber has helpfully described an emergent evangelical movement predicated upon similarly different foundations. Clearly the translation approach is now a much broader and richer model of contextual theology than that envisaged by Bevans' articulation of it.

Second, this broader understanding of the translation model displays greater affinities with the countercultural model than Bevans' analysis suggests. Bediako's formulation of it is particularly instructive and leads to the central implication of this study. Bevans' summaries describe two apparently very distinctive methodologies of contextual theology by focussing on the points of difference between them. This approach becomes a self-fulfilling methodology, bolstered by specific examples that serve to reinforce the defined distinctions. Importantly however, it leads to a result that is inconsistent with the underlying analysis it is based on.

Changing the approach from one focused on differences to one emphasising both similarities and differences results in a quite different conclusion, even when recourse is made solely to the analysis and theologians Bevans relies on. In most cases it was found that the translation model could be intimately connected with the countercultural model in a relationship highly suggestive of an underlying commonality. This finding indicates the possibility of a core model of translational/countercultural contextualization, one related to Bevans' two models in the same way Bediako's 'third way' is related to the polarities it mediates

between. This may perhaps be described as a dialectical model of contextual theologising.

The contours of this dialectical model can merely be hinted at here. It is certainly based upon a dialectical process of challenging relevance—and therefore it is the context that determines the particular emphasis given to either a translational or countercultural approach. It encompasses a wide range of theological foundations. Hence the core characteristics of revelation and scripture are not tools of differentiation as such, as if the translation mode was solely related to propositional thinking and the countercultural to narrative approaches. Instead the two modes are separated by a methodological necessity stemming from the specific concerns of the cultural context being encountered. There is certainly a link between content and method that must be acknowledged, yet this is not usually, and nor should it be, a determining factor in deciding the particular approach to be used.

## VII Conclusion

Bevans has provided an important typology of contextual theologising approaches. Through it he has been able to articulate clearly some core aspects of the various approaches key practitioners are using, a strength achieved by highlighting the differences between these practitioners. Unfortunately it is at this very point that a significant problem emerges. With particular reference to his text-based discussion, his models were found to be insufficiently nuanced to act as more than nominal guides to approaches currently in vogue. His

process tended to focus attention on the more hard-line exponents of each approach that then tended to radicalize the views of most of those he included alongside them.

It is suggested that a better approach would be to recognise these radical elements in a more practical way that also identifies broad commonalities. The analysis of Bediako highlighted this need by calling attention to the many complexities involved in engaging different cultures with the gospel, suggesting in the process that practitioners were often more complex and highly nuanced in their engagement than Bevans' findings suggested.

Upon examination it was discovered that the text-based models were not primarily related through their differences but through their similarities. The nature of the relationship was not, therefore, the dichotomous description Bevans provided, but was instead a much more complex process of dialectical interdependence. Instead of two unrelated polarities, the translation and countercultural models were found to be descriptions of the extreme boundaries of a single broad spectrum of context engagement postures. Further inquiry will be necessary in order to derive a more comprehensive understanding of the dialectical model this

implies, but for now it is sufficient to note that such a model exists, and that analysis of it is likely to be of greater practical benefit than the overly simplifying approach of the two models Bevan's advocates.

In closing, we can note the potential for linkage to be made here with the work of Paul Hiebert.<sup>25</sup> His 'critical contextualization' approach would seem to embody a basic framework for thinking through the dialectical approach being advocated above. Instead of the gospel being simply identified with culture, or acting as a rejection of it, he suggests a 'critical' process in which the particular culture being encountered is first carefully examined and assessed. He notes that this is not a distant missionary analysis, but a lived indigenous experience in which relevant aspects of the culture are deconstructed in light of the gospel. This is a methodological clue as to how the dialectical model may both affirm aspects of culture and critique others, or, at a global level, how it may be more inclined towards a positive assessment of some cultures but a negative view of others.

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<sup>25</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, 'Critical Contextualization', *IBMR*, 11(3)(1987):104-112.

## Renewed Journey: A study of Philippians 3:10-11

John Lewis

**KEY WORDS:** *Church, mission, power, suffering.*

### I The Context of Ministry

In recent decades the church found confidence in its ability to understand society and connect emotionally with it. Christians around the world established a new and meaningful awareness of their surrounding cultures for the purpose of reaching out with vibrant relevancy. But recently it has become clear that this confidence no longer exists. We are travelling on a journey into a midnight of uncertainty and we do not know what the new dawn will bring. The effect on the church has been dramatic. Once self-proclaimed experts of the collective psyche, Christians in their multitudes have withdrawn to the blog, where, by way of an avalanche of chats, they wait for a clear way forward.

It is unlikely, however, that the type of clarity sought will ever emerge. The world will continue to roll forward in ever new ways and these will continue

to defy Christians' grasp and provide nothing of substance on which hang our plans. The new wine skins will not hold the old wine. Therefore there must be a fashioning of a new awareness if the church is to be faithful to our Lord's commission to preach the Gospel. Instead of seeking to know the world, God's people are called upon to know Jesus Christ with a new and revived passion, so that, through revived fellowships of faith, the world would come to know him.

Indeed, the church is not an institution to be fashioned according to its ability to connect with its neighbourhood but a living entity in movement through history. Each local church is a complex and unique collection of relationships, feelings, backgrounds, perceptions, emotional capacities, wounded hearts, dreams and hopes. To be sure, the church is the body of Christ (Eph. 4:15-16), each congregation or branch having its own distinct personality. The biblical passage for our consideration is a passionate cry of the heart that exhorts these distinct 'per-

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sonalities' to a full embrace of Christ in the fullness of his being. Indeed, in this part of Paul's letter, all knowledge, other than the knowledge of Christ, is cast aside as 'unspeakable filth'.<sup>1</sup> To know him is the goal to which we are called to set the course of our collective lives.<sup>2</sup>

## II Overcoming the Problem

At its most engaging Christianity is faith in the Word of God, encountered by a faithful and passionate people of the Spirit who seek revival in our time. However, the consumerism of our western society, impacting unnoticed upon many compliant Christian communities, has often left Christians with a minimalist vision high on ambition, but low on faithful discipleship. With fragmentary notions of the Reformation and revivals of the past, many Christians, possessed with a determined individualism, and fully aware of their many needs to be met, can sometimes portray more of an image of holy greed than humble and prayerful obedience to Christ.

Indeed too many Christians today, entrenched in prevailing societal thought patterns and attitudes, and unwilling to forsake it all for Christ through a total circumcision of the heart and a consecration of life, take on the unfortunate existence of being saints on the take. Often lacking fortitude and perseverance they deal with challenges and conflicts in ways that

would never be tolerated in the workplace or broader society. Sadly, they do so in contrast to a willingness to mature in Christ through trial and perseverance as they face difficult issues regarding self, others and the complexity of relationships. In contrast to Paul's passionate vision in Philippians 3:10-11, they seek to receive Christ's power, but they will not suffer with him. It amounts to a devotion to a fragmented Christ who is not found in the gospels. The impact on the churches has often been devastating.

## III Starting again with the Power of his Resurrection

Many churches are emerging out of a season of endless strategies, conferences, seminars and proposals with a collection of dreams and expectations that have never been realised, with hopes that have never been fulfilled, and with visions that are buried under the weight of too many failures. For some, and no doubt too many, the burden of church growth has taken them on a downward spiral, from passionate feelings that they were going to bless many, to feelings of despair that this vision would not be realised, and then, finally, no feelings at all. The way to avoid this numbing end is to go back to the beginning and start on a different footing.

The passage under consideration possesses a distinct Christology. It is an outlook on life, a world-view, in which Christ stands at the centre of Christian life and fellowship. We are called to know Christ, and live in him. The Christian's life must be possessed of a vision characterised by the life of

Christ and our longing to mature in embodying that life. Indeed, Christians must constantly turn to the hope that Christ offers to his workers and trust in his ability to bring renewing strength from the storehouse of his resurrection power. It is only Christ who can bring new life as he quickens and stimulates the whole moral and spiritual being.<sup>3</sup> Christ must be the basis of our ministries, our starting point and vision, and our hope during those inevitable days of distress, when our roaring flames of faith seem to struggle as tiny embers.

Those who are despondent and overcome by a sense of hopelessness must at least pause and reflect on the promises of the Word. There we find the assurance that those small embers of faith, reminders of a once great fire, now shy and fading, will flame again with holy love. Indeed, as we immerse ourselves in the Word and meet with the Lord of Life by way the illumination of his faithful Spirit, we do in fact find a new expectation and reality of ministry. From it we will begin to reach our world with something greater than social studies. We will touch them with our hearts; lives circumscribed by repentance and aflame with faith and love.

Large numbers of Christians have developed expectations of church life that are totally unrealistic. Instead of being guided by the gospel, they have turned to the thought patterns of their surrounding culture with all its false assertions and promises of success and fulfilment. Many pastors, unable to sustain the ferocious greed that has come to define so many of these fel-

lowships, walk away. For these pastors ministry has become a way without life, the painful passing of time in some vain effort to guide the ways of an organisation greedy for self-fulfilment, and on the take for grandeur. But often they cannot be helped. Unable to get what they want, their corporate anger increases and they cease to have purpose. After pursuing—with their own strange fervour—a multitude of *cul de sacs*, they eventually destroy their purpose for being.

The only hope for such churches, of which there are many, and their pastors, is a reformation that draws one back to the Word, and a revival of the heart that seeks for new life. They must forsake and repent and seek for Jesus and fullness of life in him. It is an incarnational vision, a life lived in love with Jesus Christ, as his life giving power nurtures our obedience and faithfulness. It is the longing that the narrative of our lives submit to the grand narrative of Christ. It is a way characterised by the life of the Lord, as it is revealed to us in the gospels, with its highs and lows, triumphs and disappointments, blessings and struggles.

It is a life that weeps at Gethsemane, longs to embrace Jerusalem, is distressed and troubled by desertion and loneliness, and is affirmed and blessed. It is a life that heals the hurting, proclaims the truth, confronts the wrong, and seeks to be in the Father's will.<sup>4</sup> It is a life that longs for prayer and yearns for holiness. It is a scene of many images, numerous thoughts, and

<sup>1</sup> G. Hawthorne, *Word Biblical Commentary: Philippians* (Vol 43), (Texas: Word Books, 1983), 129.

<sup>2</sup> Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 143.

<sup>3</sup> Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 144.

<sup>4</sup> Luke 22:44; Matt 23:37; Mk 1:11, 14:32-42; Jn 17:20-26.

many feelings. It is an unpredictable narrative as diverse as the people who seek it.

But there is one common factor, a single thread that unifies the whole. It is a way that seeks constant intersection with the life of Christ. Ultimately, it is the way of the cross that leads to the glory of resurrection life. It is a Divine narrative that must characterise the narrative of our lives and be played over time and time again. Our reassurances cannot be in our search forever increasing successes, less still in our bitterness that we are not enjoying nobler days, but in our willingness to embrace the life of Christ at every juncture. We must shun what Karl Barth referred to as the sin of mediocrity<sup>5</sup> by going on in our mission of ascent to fullness in Christ with a resolute spirit. We must see our ministries through to the end with undiminished hope, which is the glory and strength of our faith.

The Word directs us to see our lives in the context of our journey completed and fulfilled. Only then, crowned in victory, will the full fabric of our journey come to light. We are not automated entities designed to find purpose in the rules of reasoned logic. We are more like waves that roll upon the shore; a myriad of shades and sounds moving forward, through an unavoidable submission to a divinely ordained passing of time, toward a state of peaceful bliss.

There is no escape from this sovereign chronology. All must capitulate to

the passing of the divine journey. For the people of God it is a journey of complexity and contradictions that can never be completely defined or fully reconciled, but that continually moves forward from Sabbath to Sabbath with the promise of a sweet resolution into the fulfilment of existence, the end of our labour and the celebration of our final Sabbath rest. Therefore, as we discard our shallow aspirations and monitors of accomplishment, and embrace the way of Christ, we will find ourselves on a different footing, inspired by true purpose and hope.

#### IV Suffering with Him

We never know what the next day brings, but whether we find ourselves alone at Gethsemane, or preaching to thousands, in the middle of a conspiracy to undo us, or giving hope to the hopeless, we must find our life in Jesus Christ, whose life and way is blessed and loved of the Father and empowered by the Spirit. In Christian life suffering never amounts to defeat but always offers the possibility to join with Christ and experience a kind of depth of understanding that can never be attained by any other means.

As we meet with Christ on his cross we discover his love and find a new light that guides us forward. With the Israelites of the Exodus, we discover in our desert experiences God's grace of guidance, provision, and covenant love. Indeed, through our submission to the Lord's embrace even painful screams from the depths of our being can be transformed into new journeys of hope in the wilderness, where we might build our sanctuaries and worship our Redeemer. The path that

Jesus took to the empty tomb was made up of many shades and colours, highs and lows, rejoicing and sadness, excruciating pain and hopeful praise. We should expect no less of ourselves; we who seek to follow after him.

Paul longs to share in the sufferings of Christ. His purpose is not to seek suffering for its own sake, but to know and experience the Christ who, out of the massive storehouse of his love, lived in full obedience to the Father and who gave totally of himself for the sake of all humanity. Paul wants to know what it is to love that much. Indeed, it is likely that Paul was fully aware that his mission would lead to his death. Yet as he reconciled himself to this expression of love he had full confidence that his Lord would deliver him into the hands of a glorious resurrection from the dead.

We would be right to interpret this as the fusion of Paul's faith in Christ and love for him. Ascent to the truth of Jesus Christ must lead to a submission of our beings. Geoffrey Bromiley superbly summarised Barth's consideration of the relationship between faith and love. According to Bromiley,

Barth affirmed that by the working of the Holy Spirit faith can be called 'the living and active reception of God's work in Christ.' But this reception must bear its fruit in our lives. There must be, according to the work of that same Spirit, 'a second and related act of self-giving in confirmation of what has been received in faith. This act of self-giving is Christian love.'<sup>6</sup>

#### V Conclusion

This passage under consideration here is a call from the heart. It is a passionate plea for fullness of life in Jesus Christ. The church today must finally rid itself of the many societal snares that entrap her and seek fullness of life in Christ by way of a renewal of the Spirit that leads to repentance, submission, faith and hope in the One who bids us to join with him. We propose here a courageous letting go of our securities to trust in the only one who can truly hold us securely and who longs to touch the world through open hearts.

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<sup>6</sup> Bromiley, *Karl Barth*, 214.

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<sup>5</sup> G. Bromiley, *Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1979), 205.

## Books Reviewed

Reviewed by David Parker

Matthew Guest

*Evangelical Identity and Contemporary Culture: A congregational study in innovation*

Reviewed by David Bradnick

Allan Coppedge

*The God Who Is Triune: Revisioning the Christian Doctrine of God*

Reviewed by Dr Bruce Dipple

Richard Burgess

*Nigeria's Christian Revolution: The Civil War Revival and Its Pentecostal Progeny (1967-2006)*

Reviewed by Jacob D. Dodson

Michael Welker (Editor)

*The Work of the Spirit: Pneumatology and Pentecostalism*

Reviewed by Carlos Bovell

A. T. B. McGowan

*The Divine Spiritation of Scripture: Challenging Evangelical Perspectives*

Reviewed by Patrick Mitchel

Stephen Holmes and Russell Rook (Editors)

*What are we waiting for? Christian Hope and Contemporary Culture*

Reviewed by Raymond J. Laird

David Burnett

*The Spirit of Hinduism: A Christian Perspective on Hindu Life and Thought*

Reviewed by Richard V. Pierard

John Wolffe

*The Expansion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Wilberforce, More, Chalmers and Moody*

Reviewed by Bryan A Johnson

Harold D Hunter and Cecil Robeck, Jr. (Editors)

*The Suffering Body: Responding to the Persecution of Christians*

Reviewed by J. Daniel Salinas

Al Tizon

*Transformation after Lausanne: Radical Evangelical Mission in Global-Local Perspective*

Reviewed by James Nkansah-Obrempong

Nigel Oakley

*Engaging Politics: The tensions of Christian Political Involvement*

## Book Reviews

ERT (2009) 33:4, 365-366

**Evangelical Identity and Contemporary Culture: A congregational study in innovation**

**Matthew Guest**

**Studies in Evangelical History and Thought**

**Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007**

**ISBN 978-1-84227-440-8**

**Pb, pp 263, bibliog., index**

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

Matthew Guest (Durham University) has tackled the important issue of how evangelicals respond to their cultural context in this study of the well known English Anglican church, St Michael-le-Belfry, York which was once led by the influential charismatic, David Watson. He uses a sociological approach, and employs an ethnographic method as a participating observer with further information supplied by formal interviews, questionnaires and surveys, backed up by extensive reference to local documentary sources.

Much of the sociological theory is set out in the opening chapter but there is further discussion throughout the book. The second and third chapters provide historical background on the evangelical movement in Britain (with reference also to the American scene) and the history of the church itself. The next section deals with particular aspects of the church, including its beliefs, charismatic character and ministry groups, especially the innovative 'Visions' activity and small groups (chapters 4-7). In this material, the author examines how the church has handled its

inherited evangelical traditions (spiritual diversity and charismatic practice) in the light of pressures to be more open and finds that there is 'evidence of a significant accommodation to secular modernity in attitudinal trends amongst parishioners' while at the same time, the 'public voice' of the church urges 'Christians to be set apart from the world and resist the temptations of modern life.' That is, the official direction 'endorses the "culture war" but 'views on the ground suggest a mingling of perspectives' so that boundaries between the church and its surrounding culture 'have clearly become more permeable.'

The author's main interest is to understand the sociological factors involved in this kind of a situation using this 'complex and fascinating church with a rich history' as a case study, but giving sufficient material from elsewhere to indicate that it is broad issue for evangelicalism in general. This is a commendable project revealing the heart of the church including both its positive and negative features first was undertaken around the year 2000 and revisited later prior to publication in the Paternoster 'Studies in Evangelical History and Thought' series. The author is generally supportive of the church's success as it has 'negotiated the challenges of contemporary western culture, while maintaining a strong sense of Christian community.' Indeed, it seems to be characteristic of evangelicalism (in contrast with many other traditions within the church) to engage positively with culture for the sake of mission and to be ecclesiologically innovative in the process.

Many observers would agree that it is a matter of fact that evangelicals are now



involved in 'harnessing cultural affinities' instead of 'drawing battle lines' as they might have done once (or at least, allegedly so according to the popular stereotypes). So a detailed understanding of this process and the presentation of some sociological explanations of it is likely to be valuable, wherever the reader may be, whether in England or elsewhere. However, this particular work is heavily sociological and quite detailed and comprehensive in its treatment; as such it needs to be supplemented by equally thorough-going material of a theological and spiritual kind to give a fully satisfying understanding of the dynamics of evangelicalism in contemporary society. Further historical information would help to put this current trend in better perspective because earlier evangelicals who are used as a benchmark in this study were surely not unaffected by their cultural context in the way that this work might be taken to imply.

ERT (2009) 33:4, 366-367

**The God Who Is Triune:  
Revisioning the Christian  
Doctrine of God**  
Allan Coppedge

Downers Grove, IL, IVP Academic,  
2007  
ISBN: 978-0-8308-2596-7  
Pb., pp345, Indexes

*Reviewed by David Bradnick, Regent  
University School of Divinity, Virginia  
Beach, VA, USA.*

*The God Who Is Triune* maintains that theology must begin all explorations with the doctrine of the Trinity. Since God's nature is triune, this is an appropriate and logical starting point, thus enhancing how God and God's work within the world is

perceived. Overall, a trinitarian approach will unveil a more robust picture of God's character and salvific action.

Allan Coppedge (Professor of Theology at Asbury Theological Seminary) begins his book by examining scripture, thus substantiating trinitarian doctrine as divine revelation. Although the New Testament does not set forth a robust doctrine of the trinity, its foundations are discernable. Consequently, this provides a clearer understanding of God's trinitarian action within the Old Testament. Coppedge asserts that revelation is progressive, hence the order in which God is revealed does not determine the manner in which God exists.

Next Coppedge analyzes the development of trinitarian thought within the early Church, demonstrating that a proper balance between tritheism and strict monotheism needed to be maintained. He describes theological problems within heretical doctrines and provides a summary of how orthodox trinitarianism developed. Coppedge observes that the West tended to focus upon the unity of God, while the East typically began with the multiplicity within the Godhead. Both approaches are present within the contemporary Church, yet the author is partial to the latter.

The book then goes on to address the economic and the ontological trinity, agreeing with Rahner's axiom that the economic and the ontological trinity must be congruent. Not every aspect of God can be known, but God's operation in the world will not contradict his ontological structure. Therefore, God's salvific work possesses a trinitarian framework. Each person of God may lead different divine acts, but all are always involved. No person acts independently. While analogies are helpful for understanding this dynamic, none will completely exhaust the rela-

tions within the Godhead. There will always remain a mystery to the trinity.

According to Coppedge the personal structure of God reveals a nature of holiness and love, and all other attributes of God flow from this essence. This corrects traditional Western theology that prioritizes the absolute attributes of God (aseity, spirituality, infinity, and immutability). Moreover, this avoids overemphasizing Greek philosophy, which was influential in developing the absolute attributes, and places biblical revelation in its rightful place. For Coppedge personhood must encompass 'animate life, consciousness of reality, self-consciousness of one's own identity, and self-transcendence' (p. 174). Only after God's personal attributes are understood can one fully and properly appreciate the moral, relative, and absolute attributes of God.

Finally, Coppedge demonstrates that a trinitarian theology enhances how the work of the economic trinity is perceived. He focuses upon the act of creation, the nature of creation, God's providence, and human freedom, explaining how all three persons of the trinity are active in each of these dynamics. Additionally, the author describes how a triune approach can correct what he sees as shortcomings of traditional, process, and open theology.

Overall, Coppedge presents a convincing case for beginning theology with the triune nature of God. One would be hard-pressed to determine downfalls with this approach. His book is strengthened by incorporating and appealing to a wide spectrum of Christianity, including Wesleyan, Orthodox, Reformed, and Charismatic traditions. He appropriately demonstrates that this is a theological project with ecumenical implications. However, it is concerning that little attention is given to contemporary Roman Catholic trinitarian thought. His project

may have been further enhanced by dialoging with theologians such as Herbert Mühlen, David Coffey, and Killian McDonnell.

Coppedge acknowledges his appeal to Christology in order to do theology; however, it is questionable if his approach is overly Christological in the sense that it subordinates the Spirit. Even Christology cannot be understood apart from pneumatology, particular in light of recent developments in Spirit-Christology. Consistently the author mentions Irenaeus' metaphor of the Son and the Spirit as the two hands of God, and more attention to this metaphor may bring more trinitarian balance to his theology.

Coppedge admits that this book is a new project, and substantially more work must be done in this area. Regardless, his aim to explore the benefits of such a trinitarian approach merits attention from anyone engaged in contemporary trinitarian thought.

ERT (2009) 33:4, 367-369

**Nigeria's Christian Revolution:  
The Civil War Revival and Its  
Pentecostal Progeny (1967-2006)**

Richard Burgess

Regnum Studies in Mission series  
Carlisle: Paternoster, 2008  
ISBN: 978-1-870345-63-7  
Pb., pp347, bibliog., Index.

*Reviewed by Dr Bruce Dipple, Sydney  
Missionary and Bible College, NSW,  
Australia.*

This book effectively brings together the author's personal experience in Nigeria and the results of meticulous research to provide an account of one of the significant spiritual movements of the twentieth century. The book moves beyond mere

description, however, and seeks to analyse and understand the movement by drawing on insights from the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, psychology and religious studies.

The opening chapter provides essential and clear definitions of the key terms and groupings referred to in the book, including the term 'neo-pentecostalism' that is used to describe the churches emerging from the movement being studied. A valuable chapter follows which sketches the scene in Nigeria prior to the 1967 Civil War that brought the Igbo people into conflict with the Nigerian Central Government. It is the spiritual revival amongst these Igbo people that the book then seeks to understand.

The third chapter is central to the whole book and provides a detailed account of the commencement and growth of the Igbo revival during and immediately following the Civil War. The key role of Scripture Union is analysed, particularly with regard to the instruction they gave to young Igbo Christians concerning the importance of reading and teaching the Bible. The constant study of the Bible by the Igbo Christians during the war provided them with a practical framework for the ethical and moral aspects of life, as well as the spiritual aspect. In the midst of the pain and confusion of war, the gathered converts provided a caring community and a strong sense of identity, a fact that the author takes time to explore.

The revival was very much an unstructured movement, so a separate chapter is provided to outline the emergence of the neo-pentecostal churches during and following the period of war. The author carefully considers the sociological and religious factors that influenced the initiation and development of these churches.

In a stimulating chapter, Burgess demonstrates the way the neo-pentecostal

churches were contextualized to the local situation at the conclusion of the Civil War. At the same time as being so locally oriented, they were also part of a global movement with their emphasis on the 'freedom of the Spirit'. This global element was the basis of a growing contact with USA Pentecostalism, particularly in the area of formal training opportunities. The writings of T. L. Osborne were also influential in this stage of the churches' development. In analyzing the growth of the neo-pentecostal churches, Burgess identifies amongst other elements, the impact of regular and practical Bible teaching, the place of music, similarities in worship style to traditional Igbo shrine worship, and the importance of the communal aspect of the church and its role as a surrogate extended family.

Burgess discusses three distinguishing features of the Civil War Revival that, in turn, became characteristics of the neo-pentecostal churches—(1) an emphasis on the reading and teaching of the Bible as the Word of God, (2) an openness to the working of the Spirit that allowed the development of culturally relevant expressions of worship and service, and (3) an orientation to mission. Typical of the very balanced approach of the book, he also notes three weaknesses that have developed in the neo-pentecostal churches—(1) much of the church growth is by transfer and not by conversion, (2) there is no substantial improvement in the level of morality in the churches, and (3) evangelism has become a set of activities with little impact outside of the church community.

In some ways this book is overloaded with detail, as is often the case with the adaptation of a PhD thesis. Yet, at the same time, it is the detail that brings life and relevance to the book. It recounts a story that needs to be understood, and in

the process it opens up issues relating to church planting, contextualisation, church growth, leadership development and the impact of training outside the local context. Its readership must not be limited to those from a Pentecostal background, for it deals with issues of relevance to anyone concerned for the sharing of the gospel cross-culturally.

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**The Work of the Spirit:  
Pneumatology and  
Pentecostalism**

Edited by Michael Welker  
Grand Rapids/Cambridge:  
Eerdmans, 2006  
ISBN 978-0-8028-0387-0  
Pb., pp236

Reviewed by Jacob D. Dodson, Regent  
University School of Divinity

In response to the significant variety of methodological approaches and theological assessments of pneumatology and Pentecostalism, *The Work of the Spirit* presents an ecumenical, international, and multidisciplinary collaboration between scholars who believe in the importance of academic study of the Spirit. It is not common to find a single-volume resource that enjoys such a prestigious and diverse group of contributors esteemed for their work with pneumatology and Pentecostalism in their respective disciplines. Despite the wide variety of approaches of the contributors, there is a strong coherence between the chapters of the book, which often make reference to one another in the footnotes.

The contributors of the first section of the book explore the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in biblical, historical, interfaith, and creational frameworks. Biblical scholar

James D. G. Dunn suggests that experience of the Holy Spirit, which in NT theology was connected with, though not absorbed by the person of Christ, had a large impact on the historical growth and development of Christianity. Systematic theologian Bernd Oberdorfer proposes that personal and 'field of power' models for understanding the Spirit are complementary since the Spirit serves as the realizing person of the community of the Father and Son and as the field of power revealing the Trinitarian persons in the world.

Regarding the theology of religions, Veli-Matti Karkkainen concludes that the triune understanding of God is a necessary and valuable component of interfaith dialogue. Lyle Dabney investigates the role of the Spirit as enabling humanity to participate in God's creative Word and actions in the world. Kathryn Tanner addresses the concept of the Spirit as working gradually over time in religious institutions and traditions as opposed to merely in immediate actions on the individual level.

The second section of the work focuses specifically on theological, historical, and sociological trends in the Pentecostal tradition. Pentecostal theologian Frank Macchia offers an ecumenically informed assessment of the Pentecostal doctrine of Spirit baptism, which he interprets as a manifestation of the pneumatological and eschatological dimensions of the redemptive work of Christ. The early growth of the Pentecostal movement is explored by Grant Wacker, who suggests that its success was achieved in part by charismatic leaders who balanced an 'otherworldly' mystical piety with a 'this-worldly' pragmatic approach to organizational policy and responsibility. Margaret Poloma identifies the tension within contemporary Pentecostal denominations between main-

taining the revivalist mindset of their founders and de-emphasizing certain aspects of their historical tradition in order to receive acceptance from other Christian groups.

The third section of the volume is perhaps the most innovative due to its interdisciplinary engagement of current trends in science, philosophy, and theology. The first contributor to this section, John Polkinghorne, considers the work of the Spirit in view of evolutionary and cosmological processes, which in his words may 'constitute a pneumatological account of continuous creation' and 'divine participation in the evolving fruitfulness of the world.' Also reflecting on the Spirit's work in creation, Amos Yong engages in a re-reading of the creation narratives of Genesis taking into account emergence theory and pneumatological metaphysics. Yong identifies the 'differentiation-in-unity' of the Spirit revealed in the creation accounts as a 'complementarity principle' affirming the value of the many disciplines and epistemological approaches to reality.

Donald and Anna York write about the processes undergone in several major astronomical discoveries, evaluating them in light of the 'knowledge, discernment, truth, and beneficial results' that proceed from the Wisdom of the Spirit. In the final chapter, Michael Welker contrasts Aristotelian and Hegelian 'self-referential' views of the Spirit with Jewish and Christian 'multicontextual and polyphonic' views of the Spirit concluding that the latter are more beneficial for interdisciplinary approaches to pneumatology.

In the disciplines of constructive and systematic theology, *The Work of the Spirit* will serve as a valuable resource introducing many readers to principal theological, philosophical, and scientific themes and questions associated with pneumatol-

ogy and Pentecostalism. Primarily, the book will interest readers pursuing advanced theological studies or serving as professors of theology or religious studies. The work could easily be used in seminary or doctoral-level courses. The volume does not claim to be exhaustive but succeeds in providing insight into many of the important issues falling under the scope of its broad title.

ERT (2009) 33:4, 370-372

### The Divine Spiration of Scripture: Challenging Evangelical Perspectives

A. T. B. McGowan

Nottingham: Apollos, 2007

ISBN 978-1-84414-220-2

Pb., pp229, bibliog., index

*Reviewed by Carlos Bovell, Burlington  
County College, Mt. Laurel, New Jersey  
USA*

In *The Divine Spiration of Scripture: Challenging Evangelical Perspectives*, A. T. B. McGowan throws down the gauntlet to American evangelical scholars and challenges them to seriously rethink their inerrantist doctrines of scripture, pitting an American-styled 'inerrancy' against a European-styled 'infallibility' and finding the former seriously wanting in several respects. Although Professor McGowan explains that his chief aim in the book is 'to clarify my own understanding of the doctrine of Scripture and to make a contribution to the debate among evangelicals regarding its significance for today,' he seems clearly aware that his treatise is going to ruffle very many feathers. In fact, he states this himself: 'Among evangelicals in the USA, the word "inerrancy" has become something of a sacred talisman and there is a deep sensitivity in

respect of any questioning of this word. Indeed, one might reasonably expect something of a firestorm directed against any challenge to its continued usage." And a firestorm indeed is what he should fully expect, for in successive discussions, McGowan challenges, among other things, the locus of scripture, the vocabulary of scripture, the doctrine of scripture, and the use of scripture in evangelical churches.

McGowan begins by observing that while the innovation of Reformation confessions to move the doctrine of scripture to the beginning of the theological corpus may make some logical sense, it makes no *theological* sense to discontinue the setting of scripture 'in the wider context of revelation and that revelation be firmly rooted *within the doctrine of God*' (emphasis mine). Specifically, scripture should be seen as 'an aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit in the context of God's self-revelation.' It is interesting to note that during the course of his address on what epistemological concerns might be raised by reassigning a theological locus for scripture McGowan invokes the apologetic tactics of Cornelius van Til. Subsequently, during the course of his extended affirmation that '[t]he Scriptures are God's Word and God does not mislead us,' McGowan defers to Herman Bavinck over B. B. Warfield.

The author takes issue with the traditional translation of *theopneustos* as 'inspired' (2 Tim 3.16), opting rather for the phraseology of 'divine spiration': 'The doctrine of divine spiration (inspiration) is the affirmation that at certain times and in certain places, God the Holy Spirit caused men to write books and his supervisory action was such that although these books are truly the work of human beings, they are also the Word of God. The church, under the guidance of the

Holy Spirit, ultimately came to recognize that there are sixty-six books that God caused to be written in this way over a long period of time.' Yet, to be sure, '[i]n order to avoid misunderstanding...it is better to reside the authority in God rather than in the Scriptures themselves.'

McGowan suggests, too, that the terms 'illumination', 'perspicuity', and 'inerrancy' be replaced with 'recognition', 'comprehension', and 'infallibility' respectively, explaining that each of the latter helpfully emphasizes the main role that God the Holy Spirit must play in an evangelical theology of scripture. Indeed, the main focus of the work is an extended discussion that aims to lend considerable support for McGowan's ascertainment that 'to argue that the only kind of Bible God was able to give us was one with inerrant *autographa* is untenable.'

All in all, the book addresses the importance of the Holy Spirit, the rise of liberal theology, the birth of fundamentalism, a European alternative to inerrancy, scripture's relation to ecclesial confessions, and scripture's use in preaching by ministers in the churches. There is not the space to enumerate the various considerations that seem to support McGowan's stance. Two points will have to suffice to fill out the present review.

Perhaps most pertinent to present discussions of scripture is McGowan's conviction that 'we must take seriously the Bible that God did, in fact, give us and allow the empirical data rather than theological assertion to determine our doctrine of scripture.' A conscious choice is made here to allow the phenomena of scripture to take precedence over the content of scripture (i.e., extended theological interpretations regarding its own authority) during the course of formulating an evangelical doctrine of scripture. This methodological decision will certain-

ly be disputed by many who disagree with Professor McGowan. Although the present reviewer's sympathies lie entirely with McGowan, privileging what scripture actually is above what scripture actually says (or what theological traditions say that scripture says) may be too progressive a move for McGowan's intended audience.

Second, the author's arguments against inerrancy will only be sound (to the extent that they are valid) against those inerrantists who actually hold to the premises of each of his arguments. In other words, as he tries to speak to a wide-ranging, inerrantist audience, it may be the case that prospective members of that audience will deny that they hold to certain of his premises, causing McGowan's arguments to lose their cumulative effect. That said, if you are a person who is at such a place in their faith that you are ready to take a good, hard and long look at your inerrantist doctrine of scripture, McGowan's book is for you!

ERT (2009) 33:4, 372-374

### What are we waiting for? Christian Hope and Contemporary Culture

Edited by Stephen Holmes and  
Russell Rook

Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008  
ISBN: 978-1-84227-602-0  
Pb., pp243, bibliog

Reviewed by Patrick Mitchel, Irish Bible  
Institute, Dublin, Ireland

In the opening chapter ('The Danger of Being Left Behind') Stephen Holmes candidly outlines the editors' thinking behind this book: to offer the fruits of recent academic thinking in realm of eschatology to

evangelical churches (the specific focus being Britain). These ideas are needed, he says; they are 'well-founded biblically and profoundly useful for Christian thinking and living' and offer a constructive alternative to either the popular mythology of the Left Behind series or an 'embarrassed silence' where virtually nothing is said about the Bible's teaching on End Things for fear of the sterile and unproductive debates that might follow.

The discussion proceeds in four parts: Hopeful Word; Hopeful Church; Hopeful Culture; Hopeful World. Eschatological themes are unpacked in seventeen short chapters, written at an accessible level, including some from well-known names like John Goldingay ('Eschatology in Isaiah'), Howard Marshall ('Eschatology at the Heart of New Testament Theology'), Richard Bauckham ('Eschatology in the Book of Revelation'), David Bebbington ('Eschatology in Evangelical History'), Tim Chester ('Eschatology and Mission'), Robin Parry ('Hell'), Trevor Hart ('Eschatology and Imagination') and Darrell Cosden ('Eschatology Goes to Work'). The diverse scope of these chapters, and restrictions of space, makes it impractical to discuss, even briefly, the content of every one. Instead, what follows is a flavour of the book.

John Goldingay is in characteristically engaging and provocative form as he throws out passing remarks like: 'Jesus says nothing about us furthering or extending or working for God's kingdom. Their [Israel's] job is to be faithful and let God take care of the rest'; or as he contends that the usual Christian response to Isaiah is to emasculate its message; or when he argues that it is impossible to draw up a schedule of the End because there is no way to systematise images, but also because God is in a process of

'continuous renegotiation' with human responses and so the timing of when his promises are fulfilled is variable (echoes of Open Theism here). He concludes musing whether God's eschatological judgement on 'the household of God' is embodied in the current decline of the Church in Europe and the USA. Food for thought!

Richard Bauckham's eleven pages on Revelation are a masterful summary of its theological themes and contemporary implications for the church. David Bebbington's chapter is an informative survey of the complex eschatological cross-currents swirling around within evangelicalism. He touches on the fact that geography is likely to shape one's eschatology as much, if not more, as theology. What is certain, however, is how intensely beliefs about what future God has planned, shapes and motivates Christians attitudes to their surrounding culture. In this sense, eschatology is profoundly 'this worldly'.

This theme—the contemporary significance of future hope—continues to resonate throughout other chapters. Here are a few examples: Chester's comment that 'Neglecting resurrection hope leads to weak mission and weak discipleship'; Parry's summary of how a doctrine of hell has implications for mission, the pursuit of holiness, endurance of oppression and hope in Christ; Hart's reflections that Christian hope is 'very much a matter of living expectantly in ways that transform the here and now'; Krish Kandiah's insightful suggestion (chapter 13 on 'Eschatology and Pop Culture') that the Christian's security of 'knowing how the story ends... is not to be wasted in a cocoon of self-indulgence but instead it is to form the basis of risky living for the sake of the gospel in our world today'; Cosden's observation that eschatology was 'intended to work for those of us who

spend so much of life at work'; Ruth Valerio's point (chapter 17 'Eschatology and the Environment') that the future renewal of the world 'challenges us to live our lives in such a way that we enable the rest of creation to fulfil its eschatological goal'. In short, this book could be seen as a prolonged, and often inspiring, case in support of C S Lewis's comment in *Mere Christianity* that 'If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were those who thought most of the next'.

As with any multiple author collection, some chapters are outstanding, others less so. Especially given the editors' objectives, a concluding synthesis drawing together some of the diverse themes raised, would have helped round off the discussion and give more specific direction to the reader, who is left alone to sift through a wealth of ideas and biblical reflection. Specifically, some guidance on how the historicist eschatology of the Old Testament described by Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer ('Eschatology in the Old Testament') integrates (or not) with the New Testament would have been helpful. As would some engagement with radical implications of Andrew Perriman's Preterist framework outlined in *The Coming of the Son of Man: New Testament Eschatology for an Emerging Church* (2005) and *Re: Mission: Biblical Mission for a post-biblical church* (2007). However, the strength of this collection is its diversity of subject area and practical demonstration of how an eschatological perspective transforms all of life. Scholars like N. T. Wright have often been critical of a narrow dualistic evangelical gospel. That (caricature?) is certainly not on display here—indeed there are many parallels with Wright's own, more recent, *Surprised by Hope* (2008). I recommend it—you

might find that the future breaks into your world in ways that you did not anticipate.

ERT (2009) 33:4, 374-375

**The Spirit of Hinduism: A Christian Perspective on Hindu Life and Thought**

David Burnett

Oxford, UK & Grand Rapids, Michigan USA: Monarch Books, 2006.

Second Edition

ISBN: 978-1-85424-739-1 (UK), 978-0-8254-6110-1 (USA).

Pb, pp303, Index, Glossary, Timeline

*Reviewed by Raymond J. Laird, (formerly) South Australian Graduate School of Theology, Adelaide, Australia*

This book, a revision of the 1992 edition with significant additions, is a succinct yet comprehensive introduction to Hinduism. Its publication at a time when Hinduism is experiencing a resurgence in its more aggressive forms is a welcome reminder that meaningful encounters with devotees of such a complex faith cannot be conducted with the distorted images that belligerent Hinduism would thrust upon us.

Burnett invites his readers to consider carefully the development and diversity of Hindu thought and praxis by taking the reader into the heart of this faith in an orderly and progressive unfolding of the core beliefs, values, and ethos of the amazing diversity of its forms. Thus he examines its historical development from its discernible beginnings in the second millennia B.C. through until the present day. Into this historical context is expertly woven the spiritual and ideological developments that have transformed a

purely ritualistic religion into one that engages the intellect, stimulates the imagination and warms the heart. Also examined are its endeavours to give meaning to present existence by delineating one's place in society, providing guidelines for conduct, and raising hope for the future.

Briefly but skilfully discussed in the context of Hinduism's historical-spiritual development are significant features such as sacrifice, caste, *karma* (the law of causation), *dharma* (contextual dutiful righteousness), *atman* (human soul, self), *moksha* (release, salvation), yoga and many more. These discussions, particularly the one on *karma*, are correctives to the concepts as generally understood and spoken about in the West.

A valuable feature of Burnett's coverage of the unfolding story of Hinduism is the discussion of the impact of the faith and thought of various foreign invaders, especially the representatives of Islam and Christianity. In addition, chapters on the Hindu diaspora and the global guru phenomenon bring an interesting and informative journey to a fitting conclusion.

Having taught Hinduism at undergraduate level, I suspect that this book is a compilation of lecture notes given in such a context. The excellent additions to this second edition tend to confirm this opinion. Each chapter has expected outcomes in point form inserted at the start and concludes with suggestions for discussion. Also, at the end of each chapter is a very commendable feature, 'Webwise', a section that suggests pertinent, informative and reliable websites. Furthermore, bibliographical end-notes in each chapter point to useful source materials. Not only do these features facilitate comprehension but open up possibilities for research. Other useful features include an Index, a Glossary of ten pages, and a

timeline of Indian history. All in all, these features, along with the quality of the text, make this volume a very useful teaching instrument.

The sub-title raises expectations of detailed comparisons with Christianity. Those expectations are not fully realised. On reflection, given the likely readership, I think this is a good thing as the author has taken a wise non-polemic approach to this matter. He is not afraid to make comparisons from time to time, but in the main throws that responsibility back onto the readers in the questions or topics posed at the end of each chapter, questions which he entitles 'Suggestions for interfaith discussions.' These suggestions require an adequate grasp of the content expounded in the relevant chapter, some considered thought about what the Christian faith might say about the issue, and deliberation on how that position might be presented in a spirit of grace to demonstrate the essential differences and perhaps affinities of the two faiths. These suggestions have been well thought out and cover such issues as the problem of suffering, treatment of women, moral duty, religious violence, prejudice, spiritual devotion, divine encounter, and the supremacy of Christ.

As one who has set questions for essays, exams and seminar studies for thousands of students over many years, I appreciate the work that goes into formulating questions or topics that will assist the learning process and develop the skills and character of the participants. Burnett has done a splendid job in this regard. He has managed to squeeze into three hundred small pages a remarkable amount of pertinent and digestible material together with aids sufficient to enable a viable understanding and a worthwhile ministry. This is a highly commendable book.

ERT (2009) 33:4, 375-376

**The Expansion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Wilberforce, More, Chalmers and Moody**

John Wolffe

Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006.

ISBN 13: 978-1-84474147-2.

Hb., pp272, index

*Reviewed by Richard V. Pierard, Emeritus, Indiana State University, Hendersonville, North Carolina USA*

This is the second in the five-volume series commissioned by British InterVarsity Press, *A History of Evangelicalism: People, Movements and Ideas in the English-Speaking World*. An ambitious undertaking, it draws upon several of the finest of today's mid-career Christian historians. John Wolffe, a professor at the Open University, focuses upon evangelical activism on both sides of the Atlantic in the first half of the nineteenth century, and shows how the evangelical revivals impacted society. Integrated into the account are developments as well in Ireland, British North America (Canada), the Caribbean, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. Wolffe's ability to bring together the actions of so many individuals and religious groups into a coherent narrative is breath-taking and reflects a deep knowledge of the relevant literature and recent interpretive developments for which his scholarship is well-known.

His well-written and gripping account opens with an overview of the social, political, and religious 'landscapes' of the time and clarifies that his approach to a movement usually studied in a local or national context will be comparative and international in scope. Following David Bebbington's lead, he defines evangelicalism in terms of its distinctive features of

conversionism, crucicentrism, biblicism, and activism. He identifies evangelicals by their convictions and attitudes rather than affiliations. He also grapples with what may be defined as the 'English-speaking world.' In some ways, this is the Achilles heel of the project because there was a brisk development of evangelicalism on the European continent as well. He uses the term 'English-speaking' to denote those countries where it already was or would soon become the culturally and politically dominant language, while frankly acknowledging that in these areas other languages had significant impact, such as Welsh, Gaelic, Dutch, German, French, and Maori. He is aware of the problematic situation in India, where English influence was growing rapidly, especially at the elite level.

Wolffe contrasts between the more populist and spontaneous revivals of the early years of his period and the 'new measures' revivals of Charles Finney, Lyman Beecher, and others. The latter had a more a more focused and structured character to them, were high pressure in nature, marked by frenetic activity, and often were protracted. These influences quickly crossed the Atlantic. At the same time, the revivals did not occur in a spiritual vacuum, material circumstances and events were a significant catalyst, and they were a time-limited cyclic phenomenon. He then examines the spirituality and worship modes of the evangelicals in the era, including hymnody, and explores issues relating to women and the family. A major finding is that the support of women was vital to the success and expansion of evangelicalism. Moreover, it operated both ideologically and practically to modify rather than reinforce the acceptance of separate spheres for the two sexes, and evangelical domestic and family responsibilities

actively involved men as well as women. As for the evangelicals' role in social transformation, given their view of sin it was both liberating and restrictive. In the political realm they tended to work through voluntary societies while in the campaign against slavery they turned to the legislative organs. They were concerned with Christianising national life but they viewed the growth of Roman Catholicism with great alarm.

The final chapter addressed issues of diversity and unity in evangelical expansion. Wolffe's analysis of denominational membership revealed institutional divisions but cooperation among the various bodies was quite substantial albeit superficial. Although a variety of efforts toward greater cooperation were evident, the greatest of these, the Evangelical Alliance (1846) failed to achieve the hoped for global evangelical unity. He concludes that even though the EA tried to realize transatlantic evangelical unity, the internal differences were too great and evangelicalism revealed its potential to inspire nationalism and sectionalism as well as internationalism. Still the underlying sense of shared spiritual identity remained.

ERT (2009) 33:4, 376-378

**The Suffering Body: Responding to the Persecution of Christians**  
 Edited by Harold D Hunter and Cecil Robeck, Jr.

Milton Keynes, UK, Paternoster,  
 2006  
 ISBN 1-84227-378-7  
 Pb., pp228

*Reviewed by Bryan A Johnson, Auckland, New Zealand.*

From January 20-24, 2004 the triennial

meeting of the International Charismatic Consultation convened with around fifty scholars in Salina Beach, Salina, Malta, around the theme of 'The Suffering Church'. The papers from this consultation form the content of this book, and the scope is the entire 2000 year history of the church. The editors are probably the least suited of the thirteen contributors to interact with the subject of the book as they are both North Americans who have not been part of a local expression of "The Suffering Body" as have been the majority of the other contributors.

The first section of the book is 'Theological Foundations' which did not engage me as deeply as did some of the later chapters written by those who have experienced first hand the agony of the suffering Body of Christ. Most of these writers have endured external political and religious persecution as well as internal religious persecution from other sections of the Body of Christ within their own regional and national boundaries. The pain of those centuries of suffering made my soul experience anguish for the agony the believers had endured and many times been martyred for.

The Pentecostal contributors to the book had a very recent history of suffering and martyrdom to draw from in comparison to the Catholic, Orthodox, and Mennonite perspectives. It was surprising that the great suffering of the church during the Reformation period when Roman Catholic armies waged war against Swiss and German reformers and the Catholic Kings and Queens of Great Britain burned their reformers at the stake was not recounted in this book. Regardless, the contributors do make the point clearly, that at many points in history the 'Body of Christ' suffered persecution and martyrdom at the hands of members of the same body of a different communion or theological view-

point.

The history of the persecution of the early church highlights the fact that Christians were persecuted and martyred because they did not accept or practice the traditional Roman methods of cult god worship, and veneration of the Emperor. For this non-compliance they were seen as atheists. Those periods of severe persecution followed by pauses of freedom were mechanisms the Spirit used to scatter and grow the church very rapidly.

The Christology of suffering was always in the minds of the early Christians no matter what part of the Mediterranean they called home. The further we go into our rich Christian history the more we can understand the purpose of God in *The Suffering Body* as the revelation of the love of Christ compassionately revealed to a lost and dying world.

Reading on through this persuasive book the reader will not be disappointed as the theology of suffering deepens in the writings of the contributors from Romania, the Middle East and Poland. It is interesting that those contributors from church backgrounds that date back hundreds of years have a greater theological insight into the purpose of suffering in the body of Christ. The redemptive nature of suffering, Christian transformation through suffering, and the attitude of Christians in suffering, are all gems that the reader will want to treasure from this book.

The personal suffering of Christians is developed alongside the suffering of the body of Christ and the various communions of saints in that body, and how they have been made informants against each other at various times and places in political history. This makes for soul searching reflection about our present ecumenical relationships. Those nations that have experienced many generations of suffering share the psychological consequences

of such prolonged periods of suffering. The Polish experience has produced a balanced political activism that seeks to challenge the powers of injustice. These global powers, especially evident where tyranny reigns, continue to promulgate the persecution of believers on every continent of the world.

This book has a number of printing errors, and an entire chapter has an incorrect page header. Perhaps these errors in a strange way reflect the difficulty writers have extracting accurate information from severely persecuted countries where entire armies of secret services are devoted to the suppression of dissenting voices. The Christian world only knows a fraction of what is happening at this very point in time to *The Suffering Body* because of the suppression of truth by tyrannical regimes. The book conveys the message that at various times in history despotic leaders tried to limit the public knowledge of martyrdom because more people became Christians when they saw the compassionate love of Christ manifested in the heroic lives of the martyrs. This could be their good reason for the suppression of this truth.

ERT (2009) 33:4, 378-379

**Transformation after Lausanne:  
Radical Evangelical Mission in  
Global-Local Perspective**

Al Tizon

Regnum Studies in Mission Series  
Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2008  
ISBN 978-1-60608-109-9  
Pb., pp281, Index

Reviewed by J. Daniel Salinas, Paraguay

Sider's assessment of this book being the 'best' on the subject matter pricked my curiosity. I expected thorough analysis,

rigorous scholarship, and historical prowess; there is all that and more. Tizon does not disappoint.

Evangelicals worldwide have experienced a paradigm shift in the last twenty years regarding the relationship between evangelization and social involvement. Tizon describes the process from the 'great reversal' to 'transformation theology.' He divides his presentation in four major parts—history, global dimensions, local (Filipino), and 'glocalization.' Using Lausanne '74 as a starting point, Tizon traces the global discussions up through Wheaton '83 and beyond. He shows it was not an easy ride. A 'theological battle' between the 'narrow view' and the 'broad view', 'prioritization vs. holism', and 'First World theology vs. Two Thirds World theology' posed a real threat to the unity of evangelicals worldwide.

Tizon argues that Wheaton '83 was the forum when tensions started to ease off, especially by the adoption and exact definition of the term 'transformation' to describe the mission of the church. Transformation is defined by the Wheaton Statement as 'the change from a condition of human existence contrary to God's purposes to one in which people are able to enjoy fullness of life in harmony with God.' *Mission as Transformation* became the theological grid defining a coherent missiology. It touches areas like global and local culture, economics and faith, holistic mission, and the Holy Spirit in mission.

Most of the book is on the relationship between global and local applications of the theology of mission as transformation. For the global dimensions, Tizon argues, the recovery of the biblical concept of the Kingdom of God is key for 'transformationists'. For local application, within the Filipino context, Tizon describes the historical process of his

ERT (2009) 33:4, 379-380

**Engaging Politics: The tensions of  
Christian Political Involvement**

Nigel Oakley

Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007  
ISBN: 978-1-84227-505-4  
Pb, pp204, Bibliog,

Reviewed by James Nkansah-Obrempong,  
Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of  
Theology (NEGST), Nairobi, Kenya.

Engaging politics shows some of the traditional tensions that exist in Christian political involvement. Oakley selects four prominent Christian thinkers and examines their views on Christian political engagement. In his first four chapters, he examines the work of theologians such as Augustine, Gustavo Gutierrez, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Stanley Hauerwas. He looks at three aspects of their theology: eschatology, ecclesiology, and their prophetic role. Oakley shows some similarities in their thinking but also tensions that exist in their views and approaches. He concludes this section with the assertion that Christians 'must be politically involved in the world for the betterment of humanity.'

In chapter 5, Oakley draws insights from the four theologians by showing the form our Christian political engagement might take or be. He defines the terms 'politics' and 'political involvement.' He identifies three tensions that will arise in our Christian political involvement. The first tension is that 'God's kingdom is both now and not yet.' The second is 'the church is in the world but not of it.' The third is 'the church is prophetic and embodied.' He argues that overemphasizing one side of these tensions would make either the church show concern or lack of concern in the social and political issues facing it. He warns against idola-

country and the development of a Filipino missiology that closely follows the main tenets of mission as transformation. Tizon includes political as well as religious factors that have shaped Filipino evangelicals. I am surprised how much there is in common between the Philippines and Latin America. Even though we are two different hemispheres, his description could apply to this side of the globe.

This is a strong argument to validate his thesis that the global and local are intimately interconnected. Tizon adopts the terms 'glocal' and 'glocalization' to express the 'organic and symbiotic relationship between the global and the local.' He concludes by defining mission as transformation, 'one of the most progressive missionary movements among evangelicals since Lausanne '74.' Tizon warns that a dismissal of mission as transformation by the evangelical community 'would be a travesty'.

However, even though some individuals and organizations have adopted mission as transformation, most evangelicals have ignored it. What we see in Latin America is the wide spread of other missiologies that maintain a one-sided view of the Gospel as merely spiritual. Moreover, the last few years have brought a proliferation of prosperity theologies that have nothing to do with what Tizon describes. 'Managerial' missiology, utilitarian goals, and pragmatism continue as the mainstream.

This makes Tizon's book even more pertinent and needed today. His hope that the 'mustard seed' will win against the 'McWorld' should encourage the universal church to join forces and seek first the kingdom of God and its justice for all. Definitely a must in the libraries of all believers not only transformationists.

try, by which he means, emphasizing one side of the tension so that the other side of the tension is eroded or lost completely. He points out 'Any political, or pre-political, engagement with the world,... must show that these tensions not only exist, but that Christians... must live with these tensions as they exercise their free responsibility in seeking to work out "how the coming generation is to live."

Chapters 6-10 look at contemporary issues or case studies. He applies the three tensions found in the four theologians studied and in the biblical material to the specific case studies such as poverty, slavery, love, marriage and the Church, war and peace, and the environment. His discussion on love, marriage, and sexuality is interesting. It raises some controversial and critical issues with homosexuality.

In these chapters, Oakley argues that these tensions must be maintained as one discusses these issues to avoid giving any simplistic answers to the complex political realities we face in our world. In other words, the Christian community must do everything in their power to address these issues. However, we might not be able to deal with the matters with finality. There are always aspects of our

involvement that has eschatological dimensions of the biblical teachings on these matters facing humanity that would only be fulfilled in the future.

He shows in these case studies that faith, theology, and political engagement are inseparable. He encourages Christians to be actively engaged in the political realities of our times. He asserts that non-involvement with the world is not optional for the Christian. Love must motivate Christians to engage society- the public sphere. Whatever Christian political tradition one holds, Christians must deal with matters relating to injustice, oppression, and violence found in our world in order to help reduce their effects on human suffering.

Oakley engages these complex issues in a creative and stimulating way. His insights on the issues discussed are balanced and helpful. He brings theological and biblical insights to bear in addressing these complex issues. The book is easy read.

The book would be helpful for pastors, college students, and Christians who are passionate about social justice; and are looking for ways they can be involved in addressing the complex ethical issues facing our world today.

# Evangelical Review of Theology

EDITOR: DAVID PARKER

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## Articles

ASAMOAH-GYADU, J. KWABENA Signs, Wonders, and Ministry: the Gospel in the Power of the Spirit . . . . .	32
BONK, JONATHAN The Gospel and Ethics . . . . .	47
BOYKIN, JOHN The Predestination Principle: A Bible Study . . . . .	262
CHAN, MARK L. Y. The Gospel and the Achievement of the Cross . . . . .	19
GENER, TIMOTEO D. With/Beyond Tracy: Revisioning Public Theology . . . . .	118
GENER, TIMOTEO Evangelicals and Catholics Together? Issues and Prospects for Dialogue and Common Witness in Lowland Philippines. . . . .	228
HILLE, ROLF Worship—the Source and Standard of Theology . . . . .	246
JAYAKUMAR, SAMUEL Transforming the Indian Culture of Poverty and Oppression . . . . .	139
KIM, KIRSTEEN Case Study: How will we know when the Holy Spirit comes? The question of discernment . . . . .	93
LANGER, RICHARD Niggle's Leaf and Holland's Opus: Reflections on the Theological Significance of Work . . . . .	100
LEWIS, JOHN Renewed Journey: A Study of Philippians 3:10-11 . . . . .	359
NKANSAH-OBREMPONG, JAMES Holistic Gospel in a Developing Society: Biblical, Theological and Historical Backgrounds . . . . .	196
PADILLA DEBORST, RUTH 'Unexpected' Guests at God's Banquet Table: Gospel in Mission and Culture. . . . .	62
PRILL, THORSTEN Migration, Mission and the Multi-ethnic Church . . . . .	332
ROLDÁN, DAVID A. Holistic Mission Revisited: Theological insights from Argentina. . . . .	221
SALINIAS, J. DANIEL Will Lausanne III Listen? A Latin American Inquiry . . . . .	158
SCHUTZ, SAMUEL R. The Truncated Gospel in Modern Evangelicalism: A Critique and Beginning Reconstruction . . . . .	292

TENNENT, TIMOTHY C. The Gospel in Historical Reception . . . . .	77
THACKER, JUSTIN Holistic Gospel in a Developing Society: Some Biblical, Historical and Ethical Considerations . . . . .	213
THOMSON, ALAN Bevans and Bediako: Reconsidering Text-Based Models of Contextual Theologising . . . . .	347
VAN DEN TOREN, BENNO Growing Disciples in the Rainforest: A Contextualized Confession for Pygmy Christians. . . . .	306
WANAK, LEE Jesus' Questions . . . . .	167
WRIGHT, CHRIS 'According to the Scriptures' The Whole Gospel in Biblical Revelation . . . . .	4
YATES HIBBERT, RICHARD The Place of Church Planting in Mission: Towards a Theological Framework . . . . .	316
YONG, AMOS Book Review Article: <i>Restoring, Reforming, Renewing: Accompaniments to The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology</i> . . . . .	179

## Books Reviewed

Bailey, Kenneth E., <i>Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels</i> . . . . .	286
Bock, Darrell L and Glaser, Mitch (editors), <i>To The Jew First: the case for Jewish evangelism in Scripture and History</i> . . . . .	187
Burgess, Richard, <i>Nigeria's Christian Revolution: The Civil War Revival and Its Pentecostal Progeny (1967-2006)</i> . . . . .	367
Burnett, David, <i>The Spirit of Hinduism: A Christian Perspective on Hindu Life and Thought</i> . . . . .	374
Byassee, Jason, <i>An Introduction to the Desert Fathers</i> . . . . .	282
Collins, Kenneth J., <i>The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace</i> . . . . .	273
Coppedge, Allan, <i>The God Who Is Triune: Revisioning the Christian Doctrine of God</i> . . . . .	366
Edwards, Joel, <i>An Agenda for Change: a global call for spiritual and social transformation</i> . . . . .	184
Guest, Matthew, <i>Evangelical Identity and Contemporary Culture: A congregational study in innovation</i> . . . . .	365
Hankins, Barry, <i>Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of Evangelical America</i> . . . . .	284

- Heaney, Sharon E., *Contextual Theology for Latin America: Liberation Themes in Evangelical Perspective* . . . . . 190
- Holmes, Stephen and Rook, Russell (editors), *What are we waiting for? Christian Hope and Contemporary Culture* . . . . . 372
- Hunter, Harold D. and Robeck, Cecil, Jnr. (editors), *The Suffering Body: Responding to the Persecution of Christians*. . . . . 376
- Jenkins, Philip, *God's Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis* . . . 274
- Marsden, George M., *A Short life of Jonathan Edwards* . . . . . 287
- McGowa, A. T. B., *The Divine Spiration of Scripture: Challenging Evangelical Perspectives* . . . . . 370
- Nazir-Ali, Michael, *The Unique and Universal Christ: Jesus in a Pluralistic World* . . . . 288
- Oakley, Nigel, *Engaging Politics: The tensions of Christian Political Involvement* . . . . 379
- Oden, Thomas C., *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: rediscovering the African seedbed of western Christianity*. . . . . 185
- Parsons, Mikeal C., *Body and Character in Luke and Acts. The Subversion of Physiognomy in Early Christianity*. . . . . 281
- Perriman, Andrew, *Re:Mission: Biblical Mission for a Post-Biblical Church* . . . . . 279
- Rouse, Marylynn (transcribed by), *Ministry on my mind: John Newton on entering pastoral ministry*. . . . . 287
- Sargent, Anthony, *The Sacred Anointing: Preaching and the Spirit's Anointing in the Life and Thought of Martyn Lloyd-Jones* . . . . . 276
- Sargent, Anthony, *Gems From Martyn Lloyd-Jones An Anthology of Quotations from "The Doctor"* . . . . . 276
- Smith, James K. A., *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?* . . . . . 271
- Tizon, Al, *Transformation after Lausanne: Radical Evangelical Mission in Global-Local Perspective* . . . . . 378
- Warner, Rob, *Reinventing English Evangelicalism, 1966-2001: a theological and sociological study* . . . . . 285
- Welker, Michael (editor), *The Work of the Spirit: Pneumatology and Pentecostalism* . . . 369
- Wilcox, Pete, *Living the Dream: Joseph for Today: A Dramatic Exposition of Genesis 37-50* . . . . . 191
- Wolffe, John, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Wilberforce, More, Chalmers and Moody* . . . . . 375
- Wright, Christopher J. H., *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* . 188

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